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This project argues for a new definition of community that is not grounded in the shared identity or shared history of its members. Postcolonial, and more specifically, Caribbean literary theory, emphasizes three major types of community: nation, diaspora and “folk community,” despite the fact that these types reinforce the exclusion of specific “others” based on socioeconomic, racial, and gendered differences. These notions of community also rely on static notions of history and identity that Caribbean cultural theorists (Stuart Hall, Edouard Glissant, and Wilson Harris), South Asian subaltern studies historians (Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee) and feminist theorists (Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Carol Boyce-Davies, Anne McClintock and Donna Haraway) incisively critique. Through the incorporation of these theorists in my examination of Maryse Condé’s *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*, Zee Edgell’s *Beka Lamb*, Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana*, and Caryl Phillips’ *The Atlantic Sound* I derive a definition of community in Caribbean literature as praxis, rather than a static entity or body of individuals. Reading community as praxis allows for the inclusion of the aforementioned excluded “others,” a re-visioning of historical realities, and the consequent increased possibility of effective struggle against multiple forms of oppression. It also points us toward alternative forms of community that work within and against concepts of nation, diaspora, and “the folk” to complicate, oppose, and in some cases, transcend our understanding of how these forms operate.

ALTERNATIVE COMMUNITIES IN CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

by

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To Marty Meriwether
In gratitude for your continual
faith, encouragement, love, and support

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY AS PRAXIS IN CARRIBEAN LITERATURE

The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present. The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in a continuous fashion to the immediate present. (Glissant 63-64)

In “The Quarrel with History,” Edouard Glissant delineates connecting the past to the present as an essential task for Caribbean writers. For slaves of the Middle Passage and their descendants, history is characterized by rupture; it “came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces” (62). Glissant deems “this dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all . . . a nonhistory” (62). The Caribbean writer, he suggests, must continually strive to transform this nonhistory into a viable history, because only that will lead “to the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future” (64). In his argument, Glissant specifically locates the possibilities of the future in a revelation of “a painful notion of time.” This concept encompasses not only the past as a painful temporality characterized by trauma for dispersed African peoples, but also the notion of linear, progressive time emphasized by European imperialists to justify the colonization of peoples ostensibly not as “advanced” as the Europeans (from the European standpoint, of course), and consequently unable to meet the Western

requirements of modernity. In short, Glissant claims that Caribbean subjects will claim their futures as their own only if they reclaim classification of time and the past.

I begin this chapter with Glissant's theorization of history and time because these concepts are absolutely integral to reconceptualizing community. Glissant's call for the reclamation of time and the past partially inspires my argument, but instead of positing a dichotomous relationship between history and nonhistory, or between seamless, linear time and ruptured time, I strive to recognize and acknowledge the existence of multiple temporalities and histories and how they affect our conception of communities.

Caribbean literary scholars have not yet articulated a concept of community that transcends both Glissant's "painful notion of time" and the multiplicity and movement of Caribbean identities. Nation, diaspora and images of the "folk" still permeate our theory as the dominant modes of community in Caribbean literary texts, but these forms have proved limited and indeed, as some of the works I explore reveal, destructive to the psychological and material well-being of Caribbean subjects. We need a theory of community that accounts for multiple temporalities and recognizes the flux and fluidity of identities if community is to be an effective source of sustenance or resistance from multiple forms of oppression. As Audre Lorde so eloquently states, "without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression" (qtd Weiss and Friedman 4). My study works toward an open theory of community, in that it turns away from exclusivist, identitarian ideologies that characterize many models of community in the Caribbean. I argue that Caribbean community must be conceived as praxis rather than a body of individuals or a group

defined by specific, shared characteristics. I further theorize Caribbean communities, like identities, as continually in flux, and consequently open to the influence of other subjects, ideas, histories, and, of course, possible futures.

Broadly speaking, we often think of community as a collectivity either accidentally or intentionally formed on the basis of shared values, interests, ancestry, histories, identities, culture, or geographical location (Britton 3; Lee 9). In the Caribbean, however, historical trauma resulting from the Middle Passage, slavery, colonization, economic underdevelopment and migration disrupts each of these terms. For example, how can community be grounded in the shared history of a people when their past has been characterized as “nonhistory”? What does shared identity mean in a region suffused with cultural heterogeneity, which theorists like Glissant and Antonio Benitez-Rojo highlight as the perfect ground for theorizing multiple, fluid, complex postmodern identities? And what role can “shared geographical location” play for a community of Caribbean subjects who live in the Caribbean region, but who are also dispersed throughout the globe? Clearly, the peculiar social, historical, and economic conditions that characterize the region suggest the need for an original theory of community unconstrained by these limitations.

In a study such as this, the term *Caribbean* holds the power to impose limitations on the choice of literary texts I explore. Norman Girvan points out that Anglophone Caribbean subjects tend to refer only to other Anglophone islands when they refer to the Caribbean, and that the same is true for Hispanophone subjects (par. 1). Indeed, although some recent scholarship of Caribbean literature has attempted to bring the literatures of

Hispanophone, Anglophone, Francophone and other linguistic groups within the region into productive relation with one another, there remains a powerful division between these categories. Moreover, the consideration of texts produced throughout the Afro-Caribbean diaspora in the U.S., Canada, Great Britain and elsewhere only serves to complicate the matter of identification of a Caribbean literature *per se*. For example, Caryl Phillips, the author of *The Atlantic Sound* is most commonly known as a black British writer; my exploration of his work as Caribbean diverges from this common identification of his work. My own definition of the Caribbean links with Girvan's explanation of it as "a socio-historical category . . . a cultural zone characterised by the legacy of slavery and the plantation system. It embraces the islands and parts of the adjoining mainland—and may be extended to include the Caribbean Diaspora overseas" (par. 1). In keeping with the rest of my efforts to resist exclusionary practices and locate communities in alternative spaces/times, I employ a definition of Caribbean literature as that literature which explores in-depth the social, political, economic and personal issues that result from relations to this cultural zone, whether the subjects of those relations be in South America, Southwest Louisiana, Ghana, Puritan Salem, or elsewhere.

Caribbean literary and cultural theorists tend to theorize community as a secondary concern in their discussions of identity, culture, history, subjectivity, literary form, nation, and diaspora. For example, cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues that Caribbean identities should be conceived as positionings and repositionings infused with the presence of America (*Présence Americaine*), Africa (*Présence Africaine*), and Europe (*Présence Européenne*) (133). His body of work takes identity and culture as its central

focus, rather than community. Yet, his theorization of identity illuminates how to imagine alternative forms of community and helps us to move toward the specific elaboration of a viable diasporic community.

While Hall prioritizes identity, Édouard Glissant and Wilson Harris theorize the productive possibilities of cross-cultural relationship, a possibly productive building block for the establishment of Caribbean communities constructed through difference rather than sameness. Glissant and Harris view literature as the primary site through which cross-cultural relationships can be realized. Like Glissant and Harris, Kamau Brathwaite also takes Caribbean literature as his central concern, but he argues for an original West Indian literary form that will deal with “a specific, clearly-defined folk-type community [and] will try to express the essence of this community through its form” (107). Clearly, he deems the folk-community essential to the creation of a Caribbean literary aesthetic, but form remains his central analytical focus, not the characteristics or nature of the “folk-community.”

In addition to questions of identity, culture, history and literary form, explorations of nation and diaspora abound in Caribbean theory. Indeed, these tropes comprise the most prominent models of community for scholars in the field. Yet, these theorists do not take community in and of itself as their main concern; instead, they seek to argue for the ways in which community or communities participate (or should participate) in these two dominant frameworks. For example, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Frantz Fanon argues for the creation of a truly postcolonial nation model that fully integrates the rural masses—socially, economically, and politically. His call for the centralization of the

peasantry's power attempts to reverse the colonial and bourgeois nationalist order, and he claims that without such a reversal, the new nation becomes doomed to failure. He does not actually contest the nation as a positive and productive mode of community; he simply articulates an alternative class-based power structure within the framework of the nation that will eventually lead to a form of transnationalism.

Finally, in the face of the many failures of the Caribbean nation-state in the post-independence period, theorists turned to diaspora as a propitious ground for an imagined international community. Again, however, the focus in these studies veers away from community toward notions of identity and subjectivity. In *Black Women, Writing and Identity*, Carol Boyce-Davies asserts that black women's writing should be theorized through the concept of "migratory subjectivities," rather than nationalist or Pan-Africanist paradigms. In *The Black Atlantic*, Paul Gilroy points out that notions of modernity theorized by European theorists and philosophers—such as Hegel and Marx—and the rise of the nation-state have influenced the modes of resistance (in theorization and artistic expression) that African diasporic subjects utilize in their attempts to reclaim identities/histories/citizenship/etc. Gilroy critiques essentialist black nationalism as well as the never-ending pluralism that wholly rejects similarities between the black experience in Africa, the Americas and Europe. He counters these theories with the metaphor of the "ship"—an imagined space that contains both roots and routes—to define black identity in the webbed network of the black Atlantic. His argument ostensibly addresses the diasporic community, but turns on the idea of identity rather than community itself.

In this project, I have made community—as it is theorized and/or presented in Caribbean literature—my central analytical focus. The dominant theoretical discourses of community do not suffice to address the complexities of Caribbean reality nor do they thoroughly engage with the representations of community presented in the literature. For instance, community—national, diasporic or otherwise—typically implies a notion of identity as static or stable. As with Fanon’s “rural masses,” community appears as a homogeneous, somewhat stable collective in opposition to the bourgeoisie, when in fact, cultural, linguistic, and religious differences (to name a few) may disrupt this group’s ability to cooperate in the political sphere. This elision of differences also occurs in nationalist discourses—as Anne McClintock, Carol Boyce-Davies and several others have illustrated—that ignore racial and gender differences to posit a homogenized masculine national community. Yet, as Stuart Hall explains, Caribbean identity is “not an essence, but a positioning” (132). Most of the aforementioned Caribbean scholars agree with Hall about this particular notion of identity; hence, the ongoing discussion about continual processes of hybridity, *metissage*, creolization, migratory subjectivity, roots/routes and so forth. These scholars provide invaluable insight into the theoretical import of this concept of identity. Yet, theories of community itself in Caribbean scholarship still fail to fully incorporate this view. We need a theory of community that will somehow, some way, account for the continual flux of Caribbean identities.

My theory addresses this limitation by conceiving of community itself as grounded in praxis and moments of solidarity, rather than as a stable or static group of similar individuals. Praxis indicates “the processes of mediation through which theory

and practice become deeply interwoven with one another. It is often traced back to Paulo Freire's concept of liberation as praxis—that is, the cycle of action, reflection, and action through which human beings work to transform their worlds" (Lock Swarr & Nagar 6). In the texts I analyze, praxis operates both at the textual and the meta-textual levels; that is, it is rendered through authorial representations of characters and events in narrative, but it is also rendered through the text itself as performing a type of cultural and political work that broadens conceptions of community in the material world. Thus, my analyses draw attention to the imagined work in the texts that might help us to transcend the limitations of current discourses of community, but also to the ways in which texts operate on readers and work as a form of theory.

In my attempt to move away from identity-based communities, I draw on Stuart Hall's work and the work of feminist theorists like Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Donna Haraway. Mohanty thoroughly critiques essentialist identity politics and the hegemonic postmodern skepticism that claims identity is "naïve or irrelevant." She reclaims identity as "a source of knowledge and [a] basis for progressive mobilization" and posits solidarity, "in terms of mutuality, accountability and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities" (6-7). Similarly, Donna Haraway argues for the acceptance of "permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" in the service of realizing communities based on affinity—"related not by blood but by choice" (154-55). Haraway's theory attempts to open up a space in which to "see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point" (154). This space would be an

efficacious site for realizing non-dominating, non-exclusivist, non-hierarchical, and non-oppressive communities, and it helps me to recognize such positive forms of community already extant in the Caribbean literary texts I explore.

I also draw on Glissant to bolster my attempt to conceive of identities as fluid and multiple, without falling into the postmodern trap Mohanty references. In Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, he claims Relation identity is "linked not to a creation of the world but to the conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures" and that it is "produced in the chaotic network of Relation and not in the hidden violence of filiation" (144). Relation constitutes many things: it is akin to a relationship but not quite; it is the *totalité-monde* or total world—an imagined space in which the cultures of the world come into contact without generalization or obliteration of any one of them. Most importantly, it is the process whereby individuals or cultures interact with each other without eliding difference. The notion of a relationship that works *through* rather than *despite* difference supports my efforts to construct a theory of how community can constitute a productive site of engagement among different subjects and cultures.

In addition to Mohanty, Haraway and Glissant, I also draw on Houston A. Baker, Jr.'s notion of the blues matrix and Homi Bhabha's theory of culture as an enunciatory site to advance my overarching thesis of community as praxis. Baker reads African American culture as "a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit" (3). I extend his metaphor to encompass Afro-Caribbean culture as well. If we imagine culture as always in productive transit, we must also recognize the continual movement of the community(ies)

grounded in that culture. Similarly, Bhabha's view of culture centers on its enactments, rather than culture as a stable object of study. In different ways, Bhabha and Baker decenter the subject and re-center discourses in their interrogation of culture, and this opens up new ways of conceiving not just identity, but also the workings of agency in community. Thus, these theorists help to illuminate the ways in which Caribbean subjects' agency stems directly from the community—positing a radically different notion of community than those based on Western individualist paradigms in which the individual precedes the community.

While theorizing Caribbean collectivities necessitates the incorporation of alternative identity concepts, reimagining history and temporality holds even more significance in my project. Benedict Anderson's theory of "homogeneous, empty time" aptly shows how central notions of time are in theorizing the ways in which communities come together. Glissant labels his "painful notion of time" as such because the concept of progressive, linear time constitutes a temporal vision that reinforces the Caribbean past as a discontinuum, a traumatic break, that is, as an incomplete or insufficient temporality. This ostensible insufficiency, in turn, reinscribes a limited view of the present and possible futures to be imagined for Caribbean communities in their various forms. To contest both Anderson's "homogenous, empty time," and Glissant's "painful notion of time," and replace them with a conception that allows for the recognition of alternative histories, communities, and futures, I turn to the South Asian subaltern studies scholars Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee for their novel theorizations of history and time.

Relying primarily on Marx for their theoretical framework, subaltern studies scholars critique the dominance of capitalist ideologies and modes of production embedded within the nation-state. They further attempt to historicize the nation and nationalisms from a perspective “from below,” which, in their terms, specifically signifies the peasant class. Thus, they attempt to write histories from the standpoint of laboring subjects. In *Provincializing Europe*, Dipesh Chakrabarty contests the notion of history defined solely through the relentless march of capital, and instead posits “subaltern pasts” as those pasts which disrupt the hegemony of capital. He labels these two temporalities—the history that “lends itself to the reproduction of capitalist relationships” and the history that “constantly interrupt[s] the totalizing thrusts” of capital—H1 and H2, respectively (64-66). I lean on Chakrabarty’s idea of H2 because it allows me to turn away from the debilitating theoretical limitations of H1—again, that “painful notion of time”—in locating and elaborating alternative forms of both national and non-national community.

Although Chatterjee does not examine temporal concepts in the way that Chakrabarty does, his rendering of nationalism in the colonial and post-independence period in India boosts my own contestation of the Western model of national community. In *The Nation and its Fragments*, Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalists failed to create a productive national community post-independence because they submitted to Western ideologies of sovereign subjectivity, Enlightenment reason, progress, and of course, capitalism. As a result, “autonomous forms of imagination of the community were, and continue to be, overwhelmed and swamped by the history of the postcolonial

state.” He further argues that India’s “postcolonial misery” lies “not in [its] inability to think out new forms of the modern community but in our surrender to the old forms of the modern state” (10-11). Postcolonial misery, painful notions of time, the inevitable march of capital—all of these afflictions retard our imaginations concerning the possible forms Caribbean communities can take. My argument takes up these theorists in the effort to locate the possibilities and alternative models for viable and productive Caribbean communities that I see Caribbean writers imagining through the literary texts they produce.

Although theory helps me to construct my argument, the works I explore here brought me to my conclusions about how Caribbean communities should be imagined. In short, my theory of open community grounded in various practices comes out of the representations of community that Maryse Condé, Zee Edgell, Erna Brodber and Caryl Phillips have created. All of these texts engage with what I have been calling the dominant tropes of community in Caribbean theory—nation, diaspora, and “the folk”—but they revise and reconstruct these forms in a way that rejects the identitarian restrictions embedded within them. The texts I have chosen to include here are similar in their strident contestations of historical knowledge and historiographical practices, but they are also indicative of a wide range of Caribbean, or Afro-Caribbean diasporic experiences.

Condé’s text is set long before America itself had gained independence, and in her textual traversal of Africa, Europe, and America (different spaces), and vastly different temporalities, she creates a highly fictionalized, minimally historical text that depicts the

dispersal of African diasporic subjects during a period when the slave trade thrived. Her text presents both diasporic and folk conceptions of community, both of which she problematizes and contests. Edgell's novel only incidentally addresses the African diaspora; it is most definitively a nationalist text that rejects most aspects of the Western nationalist paradigm. Brodber's novel explores the African diaspora—geographically and subjectively—but specifically through the trope of black nationalism (which the other texts barely acknowledge) and Phillips' historical fictional text, like Condé's traverses multiple temporalities and geographical spaces. Yet, Phillips' text is multi-generic, whereas Condé's is pure fiction. Thus, between the texts I examine, we see a wide range of traditions and topics; Condé is a Francophone writer, although she takes issue with Patrick Chamoiseau's directives for creating Francophone literature, and Edgell, Brodber, and Phillips are Anglophone writers—although Phillips is often identified as a black British writer. Thus, I intentionally include not only texts that disrupt dominant tropes of community in Caribbean theory, but also texts that disturb the static notion of *Caribbean* itself.

In Chapter 1, “The Sacred Tradition of Solidarity in *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem*,” I argue that embedded in Maryse Condé’s representation of the cruelty and violence that results from exclusive concepts of communities (like that of the Puritans in Salem) lies a hopeful representation of community as formed through the praxis of solidarity. The communities portrayed in the text are somewhat localized—the Puritan community in Salem, the slave community in Barbados, etc.—but I read them as indicators of the possibilities for a viable transnational model of community grounded in

resistance to raced and gendered injustice. Tituba's perpetual outsiderness allows her a form of freedom whereby she can work in solidarity with those whom she chooses, rather than incorporate into a community conceived as a "body of individuals." Typically, her solidarity manifests through healing practices, but her ultimate incarnation as a slave rebel explodes notions of nation time that relegate women to the margins, outside of history. Her outsiderness also allows her a more open worldview that inclines toward morality and social justice more easily than the worldviews borne of "insiderness" as demonstrated in the other characters. Although the narrative content here repeatedly asserts the problems of community, I read Tituba metonymically as the positive model for an open community grounded in choice and a subsequent mutual sense of responsibility toward others which, in turn, makes her a somewhat moral agent in the communities she works with.

In Chapter 2, "Flexible Community in *Beka Lamb*," I, like several other scholars, read the Lamb family as an allegorical figure of the nation. I depart from these scholars, however, in their evaluation of this community; most critical readings focus on the failures of the national community depicted in this text because it centers on the complete destruction of young womanhood in the face of classist, racist and patriarchal nationalist ideologies. These analyses seem to me to reinforce the very tropes of national community (especially shared identity, linear, progressive time, and gendered subjectivities) that Edgell works against in her text. My own positive reading focuses on the alternative communal form that Edgell posits to contest the "old forms of the modern state." Edgell makes collective mourning rituals and inclusivist social and political

praxis the basis for a model of the viable nation that successfully addresses and integrates all of its citizens, and recognizes these citizens as agents who can enact change in their worlds. Although the narrative ends in the pre-independence period, I argue that Edgell points us toward the way to imagining a national community that transcends the limitations inscribed by identity differences, and which contests the dominant Western *and* Caribbean nationalist paradigms.

In Chapter 3, “The Blues Matrix and Community in Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana*,” I argue that Brodber’s representation of African-derived cultural discourses, identified mainly through the practice of voodoo, spiritism, and, of course, the blues, illuminates an already extant cultural unity that forms the basis of a possibly productive political unity through which diasporic subjects around the globe can contest racial oppression. Although Brodber’s narrative focuses on the protagonist’s small spiritual and familial communities, each member of these communities represents a constituent body of the African diaspora (African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-European) and the protagonist, Louisiana, and her husband Reuben represent the unification of this community.

Most of the criticism about this text argues for the realization of Brodber’s spirit world as a very real zone of ontological experience. It posits voodoo as a vehicle through which alternative ways of knowing and being can be realized. While I agree with this formulation, my own interest in community requires a turn toward how community becomes enacted, and I find Baker’s “blues matrix” and Bhabha’s notion of the enunciation of culture a fruitful ground for reading community as the embodiment of a

variety of cultural practices. Thus, I argue that Brodber's representation of community occurs through discourses, and that these discourses illuminate a novel form of collective agency that is radically different from Westernized notions of community. I also re-center the material world in my reading, despite Brodber's overwhelming emphasis on the metaphysical realm, and the consequent spirit-based readings of her work. Doing so helps me to get past the critical focus on alternative epistemologies and uncover the nature and viability of her representation of community as opposed to more traditional representations of it.

In Chapter 4, "Walking Into the Face of History": Historical Difference and Diasporic Community in *The Atlantic Sound*, I argue that the narrative structure of the text, with its multiple narrators and its incorporation of subjects from various temporalities, escapes the limitations of a linear concept of history, and enacts Glissant's Relation (cross-cultural relationship that works through difference). In doing so, the structure contests Phillips's apparent cynicism about the possibilities for diasporic community. Of all the texts that I examine, Phillips' text performs most of its work at the meta-textual rather than the textual level. As a traveling subject in search of a substantial foundation for community, the narrator consistently mocks these possibilities because of national, economic and cultural differences between diasporic subjects. His pervasive doubt has become the overarching guidepost in the criticism about this text, but I take a narratological approach in order to illuminate how Phillips's text actually points toward the ways in which community manifests through writing—through the author's textual striving toward spontaneous, productive moments of Relation.

In short, I argue for a definition of community as praxis and each of the texts I examine illuminate the different forms such praxis can take. In *I, Tituba*, Condé theorizes community as the praxis of collective resistance and activism; in *Beka Lamb*, Edgell posits community as the praxis of collective mourning and political work; in *Louisiana*, Brodber imagines community as the praxis of constantly circulating cultural discourses; and, in *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips conjures community through the praxis of his own writing, which occasionally brings him to establish Relation among different cultures, histories and subjects in time.

Although my argument springs directly from my readings of these four texts in connection with historians, cultural theorists, and feminist theorists, and although my focus may appear to have an Anglophone bias (with the exception of Condé's text), the theory of community as praxis applies to other Caribbean literary works as well. Consider, for example, Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco*. *Texaco* tells the story of a Martinican grassroots community of shantytown dwellers who successfully resist the efforts of city officials to raze their unsightly, ragtag homes at the edge of the city. Chamoiseau employs the tactics of linguistic mixing (French and Creole), multiple narration, and the representation of a diverse community to reinforce the impression of *creolité* or creoleness that Celia Britton claims dominates most critical accounts of the novel (103). *Creolité* is about the mixing of cultures and languages in the formation of new identities that allow the fullest integration of the self (multiple selves) in Caribbean society and throughout the world. As Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant point out in their well-known essay, "In Praise of Creoleness," creoleness "is expressing a

kaleidoscopic totality, that is to say: the nontotalitarian consciousness of a preserved diversity” (892). The emphasis here, once again, is on identity, consciousness, subjectivity, rather than on a more productive manifestation of community, even though creoleness may provide a sound basis for such a community.¹

Most analyses of *Texaco* do focus on the positive possibilities of alternative modes of collective existence, but they still turn on concepts of identity formation. The nature of the grassroots community and how it achieves its continued survival gets taken for granted because it is the ultimate end of the narrative. Unlike most scholars, Celia Britton focuses on community in her analysis of the text, but argues that Chamoiseau’s representation of it fails in terms of its openness and fluidity. She claims the Texaco community is closed and exclusivist in relation to the city and that it is grounded in an origin myth (akin to Glissant’s notion of filiation, where roots are valued and used as the justification for totalitarian oppression of others, or Bhabha’s notion of nationalist pedagogical time, in which nationalist texts repeatedly reinscribe the nation as a community created long ago) (99). Thus, she reads failure instead of possibility into Chamoiseau’s literary depiction: “beneath the superficial multiplicity and heterogeneity of the text, there is a ‘secret order’ of unity and coherence” (100). Perhaps this reading results from her implicit stress on identity in community; she claims that creole here has become a new form of essentialist identity (99).

¹ Notably, Glissant, whose thinking obviously influences my work as well as Chamoiseau’s, criticizes creoleness and posits creolization as the continual productive process rather than a stable entity: “Creolization, one of the ways of forming a complex mix—and not merely a linguistic result—is only exemplified by its processes and certainly not by the ‘contents’ on which these operate. This is where we depart from the concept of creoleness” (90).

Applying my own methodology in an analysis of *Texaco* would of course, entail a discussion of *creolité* and diverse identities, but would go beyond this to emphasize how Chamoiseau illuminates a community that works together to protect and help one another. I would not deem it sufficient to discuss the ways in which such a diverse group comes together because of their poverty, homelessness, and social oppression, but would rather focus on how (through their collaborative efforts at guarding each other's homes, warning each other of police invasions, building and rebuilding their shacks and shanties, and so on) and why this community ultimately succeeds. Even the primary narrator's name, Marie-Sophie Laborieux, indicates the significance of work in the representation of the community both in/through her writing of multiple histories and through her active defiance of the police and city and corporate officials. Time will not allow a more thorough development of a textual analysis here, but suffice it to say that my theory of community provides a critical lens that uncovers the success, creativity and possibilities of community presented in literature where other views (such as Britton's) only see failure, dysfunction and lack.

In closing, I should point out that I recognize reading these texts against the grain as I do is a risky business. Yet, I contend that the pervasive influence of limiting tropes such as nation and patriarchy still need to be repeatedly contested, problematized, and challenged in our theory and *through our reading*. If we read a literary critique of nation as simply that and nothing more, wherein lies our hope for the possibilities that alternative forms of the nation might arise—forms that do not oppress those considered “outsiders,” like women, people of color, and immigrants? As Glissant attests, “thought

in reality spaces itself out into the world. It informs the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms, meaning, in them its risk becomes realized” (4). My project argues for a hopeful alternative to theoretical notions of community in Caribbean literature in the anticipation that this thought, too, might eventually space itself out into the world.

CHAPTER II

THE SACRED TRADITION OF SOLIDARITY IN *I, TITUBA, BLACK WITCH OF SALEM*

The model of community presented in Maryse Condé's *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* repeatedly stresses the protagonist's differences with and consequent exclusion from the communities in which she lives. The differences Condé draws between Tituba, the slaves, the Puritans, and the persecuted Jews contest any notion that Tituba views or enacts community as a form of commonality or unity. From a young age, Tituba's "witchcraft" locates her on an existential plane between the spirit world and the human world; consequently, she does not quite fit into either. One might argue that this in-between position places her as the link between the two worlds and indicates a unique plane of her particular diverse, hybrid identity, but Condé consistently invokes Tituba's separateness from both, thereby complicating such a reading. Indeed, the "I" in the novel's title not only signifies Tituba's forceful reclamation of her historical presence, but also (and perhaps more significantly) the sense of solitude that results from her peculiar connections to the spiritual and material, her life choices, the actions of those around her, and the practice of her craft. As Delphine Perret points out, Tituba "the 'witch' is isolated in groups which do not share her knowledge [;] . . . her destiny depends more on her desire [and] . . . her own choices" (652). I argue that in this emphasis on the "I," Condé intentionally reinscribes Tituba's singularity—her separateness, division and difference from all others—more than her diversity or

hybridity, and that this method paradoxically opens up a space for envisioning a novel form of unbounded, potentially moral community. Rather than emphasize Tituba's hybrid self in an attempt to show how an individual can belong to multiple communities at once, I focus on Tituba's singularity and outsiderness from the communities with which she lives and works. This analytical turn attempts to loosen the ties that bind identity to community even as it recognizes the impossibility of the task, because of course, Tituba's identitarian differences ("witch," voluntary slave, black, female, rebel) set the very terms of her outsiderness.

It may perhaps seem odd that a novel such as *I, Tituba*—in which the excluded protagonist's primary concern is to write herself back into history—would warrant inclusion in a study of community. Indeed, along with her singularity, the combination of first-person narration and the repeated egotistical claims of the narrator—"Tituba must be loved!"—testifies to a definitive focus on the individual self in this text (12). Yet, critics generally agree that the intentional destabilization of cultural value systems, identities, histories, and political views undergirds much of Condé's writing, and in keeping with their conclusions, I argue that in *I, Tituba*, this tendency leads her to locate a potential model of community in a partially isolated, atomistic protagonist who belongs to no community at all.² In my analysis, I read Tituba metonymically as Condé's theorization of an innovative form of community. Although Condé's destabilizing praxis somewhat precludes the establishment of a clearly discernible theory of community, it does present the possibilities and limitations of one. As Leah Hewitt observes of Condé's work: "[her]

² See Bécel, Hewitt, and Simmons.

narratives criticize sexual, political, and racial oppositions [and] keep all terms in play: no cliché goes unexamined, no position on either side of an opposition is left to solidify into an unquestionable truth. The truths that we find in her works are multiple, partial and provisional” (649). Because of Condé’s resistance to capital “T” “truth,” and the mutability of meaning as she presents it, critique of *I, Tituba* presents a formidable challenge. As I elaborate the ways in which Condé’s Tituba embodies “perpetual outsiderness,” “friendship,” “solidarity” and “affinity,” and the ways in which these tropes inspire collective resistance as the foundation for community, I find myself not only arguing for an oxymoronic “community of outsiders,” but also deploying the very concepts of community and identity which I mean to disavow.³ Stuart Hall has declared the need for a politics of identity that problematizes the postmodernist model of “infinite dispersal,” while at the same time is not “founded on the notion of some absolute, integral, self . . . , a politics which accepts the ‘no necessary or essential correspondence’ of anything with anything” (118). In my turn to outsiderness as the potential site for such a politics, I attempt to address this need and consider its implications for a theory of community.

Outsiderness, as opposed to commonality or unity, allows Tituba to live consciously in multiplicity and flux, to choose her associations as she sees fit, and to act accordingly. As presented in the narrative, outsiderness is a vexed term. It undoubtedly

³ In centering my analysis on Tituba’s division from the communities in the text, I tend to generalize these collectives, as in “the slave community,” “the Puritan community,” etc. Of course, internal differences abound within these groups, but an in-depth discussion of them is beyond the scope of this chapter since I argue that Tituba stands as a metonym for the model of community Condé proffers in this text. Suffice it to say that I do not imagine these groups as unified monoliths, but rather invoke their sameness as the “other” of Tituba as a site for the re-imagining of community.

contributes to the ostracization, abuse, violation and cruelty that Tituba suffers at the hands of the Puritans, the Barbados plantation owners, and Christopher, the leader of the maroons. Yet, at the same time, Tituba continually invokes the position as one that allows *her* to voluntarily act in solidarity with various others at different points in time, and more specifically, to treat her persecutors more humanely than they do her. The distinction between these behaviors directly relates to the position from which one acts. As the outsider to various communities, Tituba experiences suffering but clings to a sense of independent agency in her repeated assertion that she will not “become like them” (29). Insiders, on the other hand, cannot easily withstand the pressures to cooperate with those in the communities to which they “belong,” which explains why, for instance, Betsey Parris and her mother—erstwhile friends of Tituba—turn against her and accuse her of witchcraft. The Puritans of Salem village—historically and in Condé’s text—teach us nothing if not the destructive effects of a bounded, exclusionary community grounded in a rigidly enforced unity. Condé demonstrates how, in contradistinction to the Puritans, the refusal to immerse herself into any community allows Tituba to 1) act in friendship and solidarity through her affinity with others—even when those others work from within specific, bounded communities, 2) intentionally reject the violence and depravity enacted by certain others in those communities, and 3) fight against various forms of tyrannical and destructive power. Perhaps, Condé seems to suggest, the conscious decision to resist enclosure, sameness and unity might lead to the creation of a collectivity of perpetual outsiders better equipped to fight together against various forms of oppression and ensure the survival and potential healing of the oppressed. Conde’s text illuminates a

community that transcends racial and gendered difference, and simultaneously brings together African, Caribbean and American subjects.

My conceptions of affinity, solidarity and friendship draw on the feminist theory of Donna J. Haraway, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Marilyn Friedman, respectively. Haraway argues that “with the hard-won recognition of their social and historical constitution, gender, race, and class cannot provide the basis for belief in ‘essential’ unity” (155). Since there is nothing essential in these characteristics that bind individuals to one another, and since identities are always partial, groups (especially women) must recognize and strategically implement alternative structures of coalition in order to collectively resist domination and oppression. In Haraway’s view, such alternatives are created through a coalitional politics grounded not in identity, but in affinity, i.e. through the collective action of those who are “related not by blood but by choice” (155). Her emphasis on choice simultaneously highlights women’s agency and contests totalizing discourses about ostensibly “natural” collectivities that ignore the multitude of differences that exist within any group. Mohanty’s consideration of solidarity similarly emphasizes women’s choices; as she explains, “rather than assuming an enforced commonality of oppression, the practice of solidarity foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together” (7). Both Haraway and Mohanty stress collective political action, but Mohanty defines solidarity “in terms of mutuality [and] accountability” (7), whereas Haraway focuses more on the individual’s struggle to “see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point” (154). While affinity and solidarity hold

explicitly political connotations, Friedman's concept of friendship focuses more on women's choices in the domestic, partially apolitical sphere. Through her representation of Tituba, Condé utilizes, problematizes and plays with these models of feminist community to create an innovative form of her own.

Although I am not only concerned with feminist community in *I, Tituba*, I find these notions helpful because they stress relationships and the voluntary actions of those who choose to collaborate, rather than the supposed cohesion of a group based on their shared oppression. Condé's Tituba remains ever aware of her differences from the groups with which she lives (the Puritans, the slaves, the Jewish community, and the maroons), but a strong affinity exists between them, and this feeling inspires her to help them survive and struggle in any way she can. The concept of affinity, in particular, deemphasizes identity as the foundation for communities and highlights shared goals instead, which helps us to move toward a theory of community that incorporates a multiplicity of differences more effectively. If outsiderness allows one to act with some degree of independence, affinity allows one to work with others toward particular shared objectives. Of course, circumstances limit Tituba's choices, but they do not completely preclude her acting upon her own desires, needs, and interests within these limitations. Thus, Condé presents a complex portrait of a socially constituted self asserting some agency within a network of oppressive forces, both for her own benefit and the benefit of others.

Unlike most historical seventeenth-century Africans in Barbados (and, most likely, the historical Tituba), Condé's Tituba lives on the edge of a plantation alone and

“free” for a good part of her life.⁴ She is an orphan; at the age of seven, her mother Abena is hanged for trying to kill Darnell—the plantation owner who attempts to rape her—and her beloved adoptive father Yao commits suicide by swallowing his own tongue. When Darnell runs young Tituba off the plantation, she is saved, she claims, by that “almost sacred tradition of solidarity among slaves” (8). Thus, in the narrator’s own words, solidarity forms the ground of her very survival, even as it forms the break that initially severs her from the slave community. The slaves do not take her in themselves, nor do they bring her to another plantation; instead, they give her to Mama Yaya—a healer woman who lives alone in the woods. This action positions Tituba as an outsider and at the same time, grants her a young life of relative freedom she might never have known otherwise. Thus, Condé highlights how solidarity itself creates a form of freedom for the individual that would be unattainable through other modes of community that require inclusion or incorporation.

The model of solidarity presented here directly contests immersion or incorporation into a community. Moreover, this “sacred tradition”—the foundational act of solidarity that saves Tituba’s life—not only protects her from the violence and oppression from which the slaves suffer, but it also reinforces the line between slavery and freedom that divides them. The slaves effectively ensure Tituba’s safety by allowing her to live on the margins of the plantation; thus, solidarity here not only allows, but creates a difference that ultimately reinforces the positive ends of solidarity. When the

⁴ In her historical account of the slave woman Tituba’s life and influence in the Salem witch trials, Elaine Breslaw argues that “Tituba was just a child, somewhere between nine and fourteen years old, in 1676. While still a child she was in all likelihood sold in Barbados as a slave and subsequently brought to Massachusetts by Samuel Parris” (12).

slaves give Tituba to Yaya, they do so out of a desire to ensure her safety—a luxury none of them seem to enjoy. Subsequently, when Tituba becomes an adult, she uses her powers to heal and comfort the sick and dying. In both instances, solidarity acts to ensure safety and healing that (perhaps not immediately) mutually benefit both parties, but do not require the suppression of differences among them. Moreover, as a “free” woman, Tituba voluntarily chooses association with the slaves, demonstrating how acts of solidarity exert more pull on one’s choices than do the ostensibly natural loyalties embedded in what Friedman labels “communities of origin.”

Ironically, when Tituba becomes an adult and consciously decides to become a slave by marrying John Indian, she remains unincorporated in the slave community because the decision only serves to buttress her difference from the other slaves. Condé repeatedly reminds us that Tituba consciously chose her chains and this astonishing fact creates an even sharper, more unforgettable division between them:

The slaves who flocked off the ships in droves . . . were far freer than I was. For the slaves had not chosen their chains. They had not walked of their own accord toward a raging, awe-inspiring sea to give themselves up to the slave dealers and bend their backs to the branding iron. That is exactly what I had done. (25)

Paradoxically, Tituba’s partial autonomy leads her to enslavement and a life none of the slaves would actually choose. The choice illuminates an insurmountable difference that separates her from those who were physically forced into bondage. In constructing a “free” woman who chooses slavery, Condé makes Tituba into a perpetual outsider, yet this “outsiderness” is borne of her affinity for slaves in general, and John Indian in particular. In a time when race played a significant role in determining one’s freedom or

enslavement, Tituba does not automatically belong to the class of slaves whose only ways out of slavery's miseries are rebellion, escape and survival in hostile conditions, or death. Although Mama Yaya tells Tituba that there's no way to escape "the white man's world," Condé clearly places responsibility for re-entry into that world in her hands: Tituba struggles with herself for seven days and in the end, confesses that she "was beaten" and moves in with John Indian (19-20). By painting her protagonist's choice in this way, Condé here illustrates the complexity of the relationship between freedom and agency. Although Tituba appears to live and act independently after Yaya's death, Condé shows that the community of slaves still conditions this freedom and independence. Agency, she suggests, does not simply equate with freedom; the agency of one who stands outside of all communities remains inextricably linked to those who stand "inside."

Despite the deep rift that separates Tituba from the slaves, Condé still represents her as identifying with this particular group throughout the text. Condé's description explicitly shows how Tituba's own suffering typically inspires her acknowledgement of theirs. When she is in jail awaiting trial, she imagines escape and a return to Barbados:

I am back on the island I thought I had lost! . . . But the men and women are suffering. They are in torment. A slave has just been hung from the top of a flame tree. The blossom and the blood have merged into one. I have forgotten that our bondage is not over. They are sending us up in the air like fireworks. Look at the confetti made with our blood! (102 my emphasis)

The sheer inconsistency of Tituba's narrative voice here illuminates her simultaneous exteriority and affinity to the slave community. Her initial use of the third-person referents "the men and women" and "they" gives way to the first-person "our" and "us."

This does not, however, signify her inclusion in that community of slaves, for the salient line in this passage, “I have forgotten,” contests such a reading. Those who remain in the bondage to which she refers can never forget the *sine qua non* of their daily living conditions. Instead, Tituba’s imagined relation to the violence inflicted on the slaves establishes the type of identification that Stuart Hall defines as arbitrary closure: “the self is always, in a sense, a fiction, just as the kinds of ‘closures’ which are required to create ‘communities of identification’—nation, ethnic group, families, sexualities, etc.—are arbitrary closures; and the forms of political action, whether movements, or parties, or classes, those too, are temporary, partial, arbitrary” (117). As the language she assigns to Tituba demonstrates, Condé recognizes these closures as fleeting, but in general, she shows how members of such communities of identification do not or cannot recognize their identities or their communities as temporary or arbitrary. For characters as diverse as Mama Yaya, Yao, Samuel Parris, and Benjamin Cohen d’Azevedo, the “us versus them” dichotomy that motivates their senses of community permeates all of their lived relations and their consequent world views. No space exists in these views for the recognition of possible transcendence, disruption, or contestation of the dividing lines between different racial, class, and ethnic groups. For Tituba, however, division from the communities with which she interacts not only allows, but also forces her continual awareness of community as arbitrary and partial. Thus, she is able to identify simultaneously with the slaves across difference, recognize the destructive capabilities of white men and women like Samuel Parris and Susanna Endicott, and still refuse

entrenchment within the “us versus them” dichotomy. Through Tituba, Condé draws out the productive effects of lived awareness of arbitrary, partial community.

As Condé presents it, a moral aspect is embedded within this subjective location. When Tituba wants to take revenge against Susanna Endicott for all the humiliation she makes Tituba endure, Mama Yaya advises against it: “Use your powers to serve your own people and heal them. . . if she does die. . . you will have perverted your heart into the bargain. You will have become like them, knowing only how to kill and destroy” (29-30). This injunction reveals two common assumptions that undergird conceptions of race-based communities of identification: 1) that African ancestry necessarily signifies slaves as one’s “people,” and 2) that white men and women, collectively and individually, only perpetrate death and destruction. In Mama Yaya, Condé demonstrates how this view not only differentiates between white and black on the basis of race, but also how it translates into a form of moral equivalence wherein black men and women, by virtue of their suffering, are believed morally superior to white men and women. Of course, this worldview seems reasonable within the text, especially since Mama Yaya’s “man” and her two sons had been tortured to death for instigating a slave revolt (8). In her experience and in the experiences of many slaves—fictional and real—white men and women appear devoid of any moral values. At first glance, Tituba appears to subscribe to, and perhaps even enact, this dialectical view. Her actions seem inspired by the desire to maintain this sense of moral superiority over characters like Samuel Parris and Rebecca Nurse by refraining from perpetrating revenge against them. However, Condé’s portrait of Salem village and Tituba’s actions throughout the text actually demonstrate a

more complex, unstable and ambiguous politics of identification at work wherein neither group definitively inhabits a morally superior position. In this, she destabilizes the binaristic conception of historical race relations as black victimization/white hegemonic power, and offers a more complex picture of the way such relations played out, and their consequent effects on conceptions of morality.

After Mama Yaya offers Tituba her crucial advice, Tituba often considers the question of taking revenge or harming those who hurt her and those she loves, but always decides against it. She refuses to use her powers for evil, and this rejection often seems motivated by the dichotomy first invoked by her mentor. Yet, Condé explodes this assumption when Little Sarah—a miserable, oft-beaten slave woman—asks Tituba to help her get rid of Priscilla Henderson (her mistress). Tituba refuses, remembering Mama Yaya’s command, but Sarah retorts: “Knowledge must adapt itself to society. You are no longer in Barbados among our unfortunate brothers and sisters. You are among monsters who are set on destroying us” (68). When Tituba, troubled but still steadfast, reiterates her refusal, “the contempt in [Sarah’s] eyes burn[s her] like acid” (68). Here, Condé shows us a hint of the death, destruction and violence that Sarah would perpetrate against the white masters and mistresses if conditions allowed. Tituba’s refusal signifies that although she also lives a life of oppression and hardship, and feels a desire for revenge, she will not succumb to it. Indeed, it is because she will not adapt her knowledge in such a way as to make it equal to the cruelty enacted upon her, John Indian, Little Sarah, and others, that we recognize her outsider status as the direct motivation for her moral behavior.

Although Sarah's desire is for revenge (i.e. violence in response to violence committed against her), Condé orders the narrative in such a way as to draw a direct connection between the slave woman's understandable desire and Rebecca Nurse's absurd one. As Tituba walks home from her conversation with Sarah, Nurse asks Tituba to "punish" her neighbors for allowing their hogs to ruin her vegetable garden. Emphatically, Tituba exclaims to herself: "Oh no, they won't get me to be the same as they are! I will not give in. I will not do evil!" (68-9). Again, Tituba's use of the pronoun "they" is telling; it applies equally to Sarah and Goody Nurse and the groups—slave and Puritan—to which they belong. Thus, Condé groups them together on the basis of their violent desires, and disregards their racial and class differences. Both characters want Tituba to use her skills to harm others. Tituba ignores their entreaties, and in this way, Condé demonstrates how Tituba's sense of morality, inspired by outsiderness, transcends that of both groups, even as it is clearly dependent upon relationships with members of those groups.⁵ Although she stands apart from these communities, their beliefs and values still affect her in multiple ways. Thus, in Tituba, Condé illuminates a self that simultaneously merges the theoretical atomistic individual of liberal theory and the socially constituted self of communitarian theory, while effectively problematizing both.

⁵ In her interview with Ann Armstrong Scarboro, Condé explains that *I, Tituba* is somewhat a parody of black female writing, both in its incorporation of the invisible spirit world and in its representation of Tituba and Hester Prynne's discussion of feminism "in modern terms." Condé entreats readers: "Do not take Tituba too seriously, please" (212). Although she doesn't say so in the interview, Condé may very well be parodying Tituba's unrealistic code of ethics too; I will be the first to admit that Tituba is "too good to be true." Nevertheless, within this parodic discursive construction lie the seeds of possibility for the ways in which outsiderness can lead to an alternative theory of the link between morality and community.

Before moving on to explain how Condé problematizes these concepts, I should point out that I do not read *I, Tituba* as a literary text only. In my view, the text discursively engages with theoretical notions of selfhood, community, identity, morality, feminism, and multiple manifestations of difference. As Carol Boyce-Davies reminds us, “for Black women’s writing, it is premature and often useless to articulate the writer/theorist split so common in European discourses, for many of the writers do both simultaneously or sequentially” (35). In *I, Tituba*, the “black witch” serves as the grounding for Condé’s theorization of a community of perpetual outsiders and collective resistance, and the implications of such a theory. Through Tituba, Condé explores notions of self, community, identity and history, and her work contributes to several ongoing debates in cultural studies, feminist theory, and communitarian theory.

A key element in Condé’s engagement with theory lies in her conceptualization of the self. In arguing that Tituba’s outsiderness inspires her morality, I do not mean to represent her as a simple model of the liberal, “individualist” self—a “self—atomistic, pre-social, empty of all metaphysical content except abstract reason and will—[who] is allegedly able to stand back from all of the contingent moral commitments and norms of [her] particular historical context and assess each of them in the light of impartial and universal criteria of reason” (Friedman 189). Condé makes Tituba’s notions of right and wrong and self-reflexive evaluation of her moral commitments stem directly from the life experiences she creates for her protagonist. That is, one’s sense of morality comes from one’s social, economic, racial and historical positioning. Moreover, ideals of right and wrong are not grounded in “abstract reason,” but instead develop out of affective

relationships; Tituba tells readers that she cannot hate, she “only feel[s] tenderness and compassion for the disinherited and a sense of revolt against injustice” (151). Thus, even as I argue that she remains an outsider to the communities presented in the text, I do not read her isolation as an indication that she can ever be, “abstracted from [her] social contexts” (Weiss 163). Instead, I read her relationships as a direct influence on her sense of self, her moral sensibilities, and her daily conduct. Relationships, however, do not necessarily translate to inclusion within a community. One can have relationships that transgress the boundaries of communities of identification. In representing Tituba as one whose significant differences from others’ clearly set her apart, but who nevertheless manifests as a “socially constituted” being, Condé figuratively merges the selves that ground liberal individualism and communitarian theory. In doing so, she points to new ways of thinking about the self and community.

Consider, for example, the context in which Mama Yaya—in discussing Tituba’s desire for revenge against Susanna Endicott—initially taught Tituba to be different from “them” (29). The “them” clearly refers to white slave-owners. Tituba, however, does not read the differences between the slaves and slave-owners as unambiguously as does Mama Yaya, and this leads her to apply the same tenet in situations with various communities—for instance, the Puritans, the slaves, and the maroons. As Condé asserts in an interview with Ann Scarboro, “Tituba was doing only good to her community,” but it is impossible to tell which community Condé views as hers, especially since Tituba usually “does good” to all. In grounding her treatment of all others in Yaya’s initial command about the treatment of some others, Tituba demonstrates an aspect of choice

that, in conceptions of the self, liberal theorists take for granted (without recognizing its contingency), and communitarian theorists do not sufficiently address. Thus, Condé's theory of community is more effective in addressing the forms of agency that individuals can and do exercise within the scope of their lived social relations.

In “Feminism and Modern Friendship,” Marilyn Friedman provides an excellent critique of communitarian theory from a feminist perspective. Communitarians assert the inherent sociality of the self—a self defined by the relationships they maintain and the conditions (family, culture, nation, neighborhood) in which they live. Although many feminist theorists agree with this notion of the self, they critique communitarianism for ignoring the subordination of women within said communities. Perhaps more significantly for my own argument, feminists critique communitarians like Alasdair MacIntyre for privileging predetermined attachments in their conceptions of the self:

We all approach our own circumstances as bearers of a particular social identity. I am someone’s son or daughter, someone else’s cousin or uncle; I am a citizen of this or that city, a member of this or that guild or profession; I belong to this clan, that tribe, this nation. Hence what is good for me has to be the good for one who inhabits these roles. As such, I inherit from the past of my family, my city, my tribe, my nation, a variety of debts, inheritances, rightful expectations and obligations. These constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point. (qtd in Friedman 190)

Strikingly, although MacIntyre recognizes the multifarious nature of these identity “roles,” he still assumes that they can provide a single “moral starting point.” His argument does not account for the ways in which the moral mandates of such roles might contradict one another. This oversight brings to mind tales such as Liam O’Flaherty’s (somewhat perfunctory) “The Sniper,” wherein a Republican sniper in Dublin

unknowingly shoots and kills his “Free Stater” sniper brother. Here, the sniper’s position as a soldier in a civil war obviously conflicts with his position as brother, son, etc. and therefore troubles the entire notion of a moral starting point. There are no clear-cut “rightful obligations;” there are only multiple possibilities that call to different people in different ways. Condé shows that conflicts among these possibilities abound; for example, Tituba’s status as a slave conflicts with her status as a loving caretaker of the Parris women, her love for John Indian conflicts with her status as a free woman, and so on. Because of the conflicts attendant upon these varied social roles, Tituba cannot act without exercising choice in some form—a fact of selfhood which MacIntyre—and according to Friedman, most communitarians—tend to overlook.

Condé bolsters Friedman’s feminist critique of communitarianism by portraying Tituba as a woman who, despite suffering various forms of oppression that limit her choices, still maintains a degree of independent agency in deciding with whom she will associate. Of course, agency can never be enacted from a completely “free” subject position; even the communities that Tituba stands outside of condition her choices and behaviors. Yet, Friedman shows that this communitarian emphasis on pre-determined, involuntary associations is too limited, especially since these may be “fraught with ambiguities and ambivalences” (197). Such an emphasis limits our vision of the possibilities that exist for any social agent, notwithstanding the degree to which that agent may be considered “free.” Thus, Friedman proposes that this theory of community needs to be supplemented with a theory that stresses communities of choice because “some of us are constituted as deviants and resisters by our communities of origin, and our

defiance may well run to the foundational social norms that ground the most basic social roles and relationships upon which those communities rest” (197). Plainly, Tituba falls into this category; assigning her a clear “community of origin” is not possible. Instead, her voluntary associations come to the fore in determining her courses of action. Condé’s depiction of Tituba highlights these linkages—the same connections that Friedman links generally with “communities of choice,” and more specifically, with the notion of friendship. Yet, Condé demonstrates that friendship, as articulated by Friedman, is only a partially effective trope for re-imagining community because it supplements rather than supplants the sense of loyalty, obligation and embeddedness many feel for their “communities of origin.”

Tituba does not stand within any community, yet she maintains friendships with several others. These friendships often “counter oppressive and abusive relational structures in . . . nonvoluntary communities by providing models of alternative social relationships and standpoints for critical reflection on self and community” (Friedman 204 my emphasis). The friendships Tituba develops with Elizabeth and Betsey Parris sometimes do effectively counter the Puritanical social structures that forbid these women the pleasure and warmth of unencumbered voluntary relation that Tituba affirms as her right to enjoy. At times, friendship with these women also provides Tituba some comfort, but Condé does not shy away from exposing how, despite their friendship, the Parrises’ ties to their sociopolitical, economic and racialized community eventually lead them to join in Tituba’s scapegoating. Thus, friendship or voluntary associations alone do not suffice as a model for positive community—the particular sense of morality that

Tituba holds as an outsider, and the subsequent active resistance against patriarchal and racial oppression, are also necessary.

Condé carefully delineates how Tituba's friendship with Elizabeth and Betsey works across difference. Elizabeth and Tituba's mutual sympathies are ignited on the day they first meet. When Tituba refuses to confess at Samuel Parris's command, he strikes her, and when Elizabeth attempts to intervene on Tituba's behalf, he strikes her as well (41). Tituba declares that the blood which results from their wounds seals their alliance, and in the subsequent years, not only does Tituba entertain the women daily with stories and games, but she also saves Elizabeth's life (45), and heals Betsey in a ritual bath that concurrently purifies Tituba of the guilt from her self-induced abortion (63). Once again, Condé shows how the affinity Tituba feels for these white characters leads to a friendship that directly supports the mutual healing and survival of all three of these women. Yet, Condé also shows that this friendship in no way lessens the differences between them, nor the effects of these differences—especially those of race and class.

Condé acknowledges and manifests this division through Tituba's reflections on how all three women yearn for Barbados. In comparing their desires, she points out that while Elizabeth and Betsey long for the "life of white women who were served and waited on by attentive slaves," Tituba yearns for "the subtle joys of being a slave. The cakes made out of crumbs from the stale bread of life." These ruminations bring her to the significant conclusion: "We did not belong to the same universe, Goodwife Parris, Betsey, and I, and all the affection in the world could not change that" (63 my emphasis). In this brief passage, we see how the very luxury which Betsey and Elizabeth enjoy in

Barbados depends on their whiteness and their complicity with the subordination of slaves, how this fact locates them and Tituba poles apart, and how, nevertheless, it does not impede the love and affection they feel for each other. It also demonstrates Tituba's critical reflection on her own socioeconomic position and theirs—a deed which, not surprisingly, the Parrises do not perform themselves. Through Elizabeth and Betsey, Condé reveals how those embedded within the Puritan community and unthinkingly reliant on its social, racial and economic values, do not have the wherewithal to challenge those values when accusations of witchcraft start circulating in the village. Condé does not, however, imply that the Parris women's sense of friendship, affection and love is any less real than Tituba's. Instead, it reiterates the temporary, partial and arbitrary nature of their voluntary associations, and the still-present, but also partial, influence of their "original" community.

Stuart Hall expertly articulates the nature of these somewhat contradictory positions in his elaboration of the interconnection between identity and communities. Explaining identity and communal action as forms of discourse, he shows how communities arise from the impermanent closures of identity

Is it possible for there to be action or identity in the world without arbitrary closure—what one might call the necessity to meaning of the end of the sentence? Potentially, discourse is endless: the infinite semiosis of meaning. But to say anything at all in particular, you do have to stop talking. Of course, every full stop is provisional. The next sentence will take nearly all of it back. So what is this 'ending'? It's a kind of stake, a kind of wager. It says, 'I need to say something, something . . . just now.' It is not forever, not totally universally true. It is not underpinned by any infinite guarantees. But just now, this is what I mean; this is who I am. At a certain point, in a certain discourse, we call these unfinished closures, 'the self,' 'society,' 'politics,' etc. (117)

Hall's argument explains not only the ways in which identities come to be formed, but also how communities result from these momentary "full stops." Such communities are fragile, open, and always in flux because of the endless possibilities of discourse. Even those communities that appear to be permanent (for example, those based on kinship, geographical location, nationality, culture, language, etc.) are simply the results of a longer-lasting "full stop." This does not, however, make such momentary communities any less real. In the moment when two or more subjects stop "talking," a concrete community emerges, and it is no less concrete simply because it may not last. Moreover, the temporary and unfinished closures that result in community are signified in and through relationships (such as kinship, friendship, solidarity, etc.), and these relationships are also always contingent. This is the point of which Condé shows Tituba, as an outsider, remains continually aware, and which the Parris women—embedded within the Puritan community—tend to forget.

Holding an outsider's perspective on the nature of community allows Tituba to refrain from un-reflective and uncritical submission to any community's values. Elizabeth and Betsey thoroughly demonstrate the contingent nature of community, not only in their accusations against her but in the apparently thorough reversal of their feelings for Tituba. When Tituba tries to defend herself against Betsey's accusations by explaining that everything she did was for the child's own good, Betsey cruelly responds, "You, do good? You're a Negress, Tituba! You can only do evil. You are evil itself" (77). In that moment, unreflective association with a community clearly overpowers the love and affection that Betsey had felt for Tituba. Condé's point is that many subjects

cannot comprehend the fragility of communal ties; in Betsey's young mind, the momentary significance of every partial identification exists for all time. Yet, when Tituba is in jail, a repentant Goody Parris visits her, exclaiming, "I was misled," and explains that Betsey sends her love and asks Tituba's forgiveness (107). Betsey represents a recurrent problem in discourses and theories about community; even though her *experiences* illustrate the fragility of community, her *worldview* does not fall in line with that understanding. Tituba's worldview, however, does incorporate this knowledge and thus, highlights a more productive method for dealing with it.

In *I, Tituba*, Condé does not limit her theoretical engagement with feminist discourse to the issues—primarily represented by Tituba's relationship with the Parrises—surrounding communities of origin and communities of choice. She also addresses the problems and possibilities of a feminist solidarity that can work across racial, cultural, gendered and socioeconomic differences by directly including a novel, anachronistic, (self-proclaimed) feminist version of Nathaniel Hawthorne's well-known heroine, Hester Prynne. The theoretical conversation between the text and feminist discourse becomes apparent in the scene in which Hester and Tituba first meet. Hester sees Tituba standing chained to a wall in the passageway and tells the jailer to bring Tituba into her cell. When Hester finds out that a man gave Tituba her name, she reacts as if horrified, to which Tituba replies, "Isn't it the same for every woman? First her father's name, then her husband's?" Hester tellingly responds: "'I was hoping . . . that at least some societies were an exception to this law. Yours, for example!'" (96). In this moment, Condé blatantly critiques Hester—a figure of Eurocentric feminism—for both

her cultural naiveté and her “simplistic construction of patriarchy” (Manzor-Coats). This critique builds upon the work of feminist writers and scholars like Gloria Anzaldúa, bell hooks, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, and Donna Haraway, who point out that class and racial differences often disrupt the ostensible unity that can be established between and among Third World women or “women of color” and Western women.⁶ Hester directly applies her notion of “women” as a homogeneous category in her perceptions of Tituba, even as she simultaneously appears to acknowledge her cultural difference. The result is a parody, indeed.

Of course, Condé carefully delineates all of the misreadings, temporary distrust and periodic irritation that permeate Hester and Tituba’s relationship. These elements lead Lillian Manzor-Coats to read it somewhat negatively; when they tell each other their stories, she posits that Tituba occupies the role of the native informant—“a position most women of color have had to occupy in the U.S. in relation to their white sisters” (“Of Witches”). Moreover, she interprets their eventual separation in death as testament to the “untranslatability of the experiences of black women vis-à-vis white women [which] is beautifully captured in an untranslated—perhaps untranslatable—poetic image of Hester and Tituba on either side of an ocean over which neither can stride” (“Of Witches”). Yet, though I agree with her conclusion about the untranslatability of their experiences, I read the putative native informant scene, and the women’s friendship in general, much more

⁶ I use the term “Third World” women after Mohanty: “This term designates a political constituency, not a biological or even a sociological one. It is a sociopolitical designation for people of African, Caribbean, Asian, and Latin American descent, and native peoples of the United States. It also refers to ‘new immigrants’ to the United States: Arab, Korean, Thai, Laotian and so on. What seems to constitute ‘women of color’ or ‘Third World women’ as a viable opposition is a common context of struggle rather than color or racial identifications” (49).

positively. In fact, I read it as Condé's theorization of the most productive form of political solidarity as existing between *two* perpetual outsiders.

Condé destabilizes the power relations among women of different races and classes in such a way that, contrary to taking a “native informant” position, she has Tituba refuse to explain her life experiences to Hester. When Tituba attempts to tell her story as if it is about “a young girl,” Hester presses her for her specific story, but the former explains to readers that “something kept me from telling her” (99). Manzor-Coats overlooks this crucial line in the text, and it holds great significance for a reading of the specific ways in which Condé engages with feminist discourse. If Hester’s questions attempt to place Tituba in the position of native informant, Tituba’s refusal illustrates her own exercise of power. At the meta-textual level, Conde assigns a fiercely independent agency to the presumed “native informant.” Moreover, Condé shows that the establishment of political solidarity does not necessitate transparency or the complete understanding of one another. The “untranslatability” of Hester Prynne and Tituba’s experiences does not signify the impossibility of their working together in a common context of struggle.

While the relationship between Tituba and the Parris women effectively illuminates the problems that arise from unreflective collusion with a specific community, the relationship between Tituba and Hester Prynne shows just how healthy an actualized community of perpetual outsiders might be. Hester is exiled because of her adultery; she does not subscribe to the Puritans’ patriarchal values, nor does she abide by them. When Tituba describes the Puritan society as Hester’s, Hester exclaims, “It’s not

my society. Aren't I an outcast like yourself?" (96). Despite her parentage, her marriage, and her birthplace, Hester refuses identification or association with the Puritans. The conditions that dictate Hester and Tituba as outsiders, however, differ greatly; Hester is cast out because of her extramarital affair and subsequent pregnancy, whereas Tituba is accused of witchcraft—not least because of her race and gender. Thus, outsiderness denotes their divisions from specific communities, but also simultaneously from each other. Despite their economic and racial differences, Tituba and Hester clarify the positive results of two outcasts who work in solidarity to manipulate the Puritanical political system and ensure their mutual survival.

At first, their relationship seems similar to that of Tituba and the Parris; it is borne of a voluntary friendship that flowers even in the most adverse conditions. Yet, I contend that the different locations and contexts of these friendships illuminate the important distinction between friendship as personal/private/insular and affinity/solidarity as political and public. This is not to say that one field always necessarily precludes the other; these relations can exist in multiple sites simultaneously. As Condé presents it in Tituba's relationship with the Parris women, however, friendship cannot transcend the domestic space that Tituba inhabits with them. Once Tituba is exposed to public scrutiny as a witch, their voluntary association with her comes to an end; they cannot effectively translate their friendship into a political form of solidarity that might have kept Tituba safe from harm. In contrast, Tituba's friendship with Hester translates into the public arena of Tituba's trial and indeed, winds up saving her life. Hester teaches Tituba that if she confesses, the Puritans will not sentence her to death. She also teaches Tituba how to

confess: “Tell them about the witches’ meetings, where they all arrive on broomsticks, their jaws dripping with anticipation at the thought of a feast of fetus and newly born babies served with many a mug of fresh blood” (100). Hester’s familiarity with Puritan religious doctrine gives her the ability to manipulate their system, and she duly passes this ability on to Tituba. Thus, their friendship transforms into the grounds for a successful struggle for survival against the oppressive Puritan political regime.

Although the literal representation of Tituba and Hester’s interactions does not appear to constitute a community in and of itself, I argue that their figurative representation illuminates the possibilities of a community of perpetual outsiders working together in solidarity. At the textual level, then, Hester and Tituba represent the possibilities of solidarity and community that Chandra Talpade Mohanty attempts to envision across racial and class differences. Citing Benedict Anderson’s well-known formulation of the imagined community, Mohanty argues that, for feminism

The idea of imagined community is useful because it leads us away from essentialist notions of Third World feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliances. It is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather it is . . . the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. Thus, potentially, women of all colors (including white women) can align themselves with and participate in these imagined communities. However, clearly our relation to and centrality in particular struggles depend on our different, often conflictual, locations and histories. This, then, is what indelibly marks this discussion of . . . the politics of feminism . . . : imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but also systemic. (46-47 my emphasis)

Condé’s theory partially coincides with Mohanty’s emphasis on voluntary political links and a common context of struggle as the site for feminist community. We see this, for

example, in Hester's decision to struggle against the Puritans' racist and patriarchal ideologies by helping Tituba. Their friendship means more than comfort and affection for both of them; it means cooperative, defiant resistance of the status quo. We also see that in this momentary aspect of it, both writers reiterate Hall's vision of community as always partial, impermanent, and fragile. Yet, I stress again that Condé's construction of Hester and Tituba as outsiders (notably, Hester also implores Tituba refrain from becoming the "same as *they* are with a heart full of filth!") differentiates her theory of community as one that mandates a critical, reflective, and self-conscious worldview which successfully resists the insidious power of possibly harmful, illusorily permanent, and involuntary communal bonds (101 my emphasis). In short, Condé recalls the notion of Freirean praxis as a recursive process of action, reflection, action (Lock Swarr & Nagar 6).

Contrary to popular belief represented in the criticism, the positive and political nature of Hester and Tituba's relationship—as one that exists between two outsiders—contrasts sharply with that of Tituba and Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo. After Tituba's pardon, she remains in the prison trying to work off the costs of her 'room and board' that had accumulated during her stay. When Cohen d'Azevedo comes to appraise her, she sees "grace in his eyes" and hopes that he will buy her (121). He does come back to buy her and in the course of their relationship, they become friends, then lovers. Here again, Condé represents the positive effects of friendship and love within the domestic sphere, which eventually translates into a sense of political solidarity for Tituba, but not for Cohen d'Azevedo. Tragically, their pillow talk consists of comparisons between the

historical suffering of Jews and Africans (Tituba claims “He outdid [her] every time”), and Tituba becomes intensely interested in the question of naturalization and worshipping rights for the Jewish (127-8). When asked if she would like to convert, Tituba once again refuses incorporation into a community, despite her sympathy for the Jews (131). In contrast, Cohen d’Azevedo remains thoroughly entrenched within the Jewish diasporic community and thus lacks the critical self-reflection of an outsider. Condé once again demonstrates how inclusion in a community often disrupts one’s ability to actively work for the survival or to improve living conditions for outsiders in the public, political sphere. Even though Condé paints him as a long-suffering, historically conscious, and somewhat compassionate Jewish male character, Cohen d’Azevedo still unquestioningly contributes to Tituba’s suffering.

Because he is a wealthy Jewish merchant in Puritan Salem, most critics deem Cohen d’Azevedo an outsider like Tituba. He is “himself persecuted by his fellow townspeople for being a Jew . . . he too is a victim of oppression and is a kindred spirit” (Nyatetu-Waigwa 560). Without doubt, Cohen d’Azevedo suffers religious persecution, but as someone who fervently identifies *as* Jewish, he lacks Tituba’s ability to remain critically aware of his own oppressive actions toward others. Cohen d’Azevedo represents the paradoxical but common figure of one whose inclusion in one community explicitly results from his exclusion from another. Moreover, his own sense of the Jewish community’s collective outsiderness (along with its attendant sufferings and struggles to survive) actually generates a moral ambivalence about anyone who does not belong to that community of outsiders. Indeed, Condé points out that he and his family’s

refusal to learn English “showed how indifferent [they were] to the misfortunes of others and to anything that did not concern the tribulations of Jews the world over” (123). Cohen d’Azevedo reinforces this point when, though he declares his desire to make Tituba happy, he coldly refuses her request for freedom: “Never, never, you hear me. . . .Don’t mention it again” (128). He refuses because of Tituba’s role in allowing him to maintain contact with his beloved, dead wife, but this refusal indicates his complicity with the sexist and racist devaluation of Tituba as a slave. He never questions the overarching power structure that grants him mastery over her, and in this case, simply uses it to his own advantage.

In this sense, Cohen d’Azevedo’s personal desire overrides his recognition of the injustice that Tituba suffers as a slave. Nyatetu-Waigwa convincingly argues that Cohen d’Azevedo, Hester, and Tituba, “through their positions as victims of bigotry . . . have gained both compassion and a desire not to be reduced to the oppressor’s level” but this desire does not translate into positive action as effectively for Cohen d’Azevedo as it does for Hester and Tituba. Until he sees the destruction by fire of his home and ships and the intentional murder of his nine children by bigoted Puritans, he remains blind to the material realities of Tituba’s miserable existence. Once he endures that tragedy, though—which he views as God’s punishment for keeping her with him by force and “using the violence He condemns”—he finally grants her freedom (134). As in the moment in which Tituba remembers the collective suffering of the Barbadian slaves, Condé shows how Cohen d’Azevedo’s own trials finally bring him to recognize those of Tituba; that is to say, his personal suffering *as* an outsider inspires his affinity for and

subsequent liberation of Tituba. When he frees her, she begins her journey to active participation in the maroon community and ultimately, in a slave rebellion that leads to her death. Although freedom eventually brings Tituba to act in a role of defiant resistance against the white plantation owners in Barbados, Condé's presentation of the possibility for building solidarity between men and women here is ambivalent at best.

As questions surrounding the possibilities of solidarity between men and women in *I, Tituba* continue to vex, they cannot be severed from the question of agency in community. I have heretofore argued that Tituba's outsider position allows her to consciously choose her associations, but that these choices are contingent upon the limitations imposed on her as a black female slave in the seventeenth century. Within such limitations, her sexual relationships with men often entail the most restrictive constraints on her freedom (John Indian leads her to slavery; Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo contrives to keep her there) and on her capacity to actively fight against the white plantation owners. For example, when she tells Christopher, the leader of the maroons, that she wants to fight "the white folks" with him, he laughs at her: "Fight? You're going too fast. A woman's duty, Tituba, is not to fight or make war, but to make love" (151). Christopher epitomizes the patriarchal view (also evidenced in John Indian and partially in Iphigene) that defines women as sexual vessels and denies them historical agency.⁷ Yet, Condé intentionally rejects this simplistic perception of agency and instead renders Tituba with varying degrees of agency in multiple locations at once.

⁷ The driving force behind Tituba's narrative is to reclaim her historical presence, as she repeatedly laments the historical record that labels her "Tituba, a slave originating from the West Indies, and probably practicing 'hoodoo'" (150).

In Tituba's multiply located, but at times limited, agency in her relation to men, I argue that Condé again reiterates the fragility and inherent instability of community. Until Tituba takes up with Iphigene (a young, slave rebel in Barbados), none of her heterosexual relationships allow her to actively struggle against white male domination, despite her own feelings of solidarity with men like Christopher and Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo. Solidarity (as cooperative political resistance across gender differences) repeatedly seems to fail here, even though Tituba herself seems to view her sexual relationships as precursors to it. Yet, even though Tituba's "men" refuse or impede her role in the political context of struggle, Condé illustrates that Tituba's sexuality is not apolitical. In fact, it opens up a discursive space wherein she rewrites the pre-determined "script" of subjective formation for black women:

This script wherein subject positions seem to be fixed functioned on the basis of the assumption that the slave woman had no legal subjectivity and thus no recourse to legal or any other kind of action to counter the act of violence. Moreover, the grammar of violence which ruled and still rules this script dictates that women, as objects of violence, function under fear, becoming subjects of fear. (Manzor-Coats)

Manzor-Coats declares that Tituba understands her mother Abena's death within this grammar of violence, but refuses the role of "subject of fear" for herself. Instead, she reconstitutes herself as a desiring subject through her sexual relationships. In Chandra Mohanty's view, any analysis of Third World women's agency requires attention to the "dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and collectives and their engagement in 'daily life'" (55). In Tituba, Condé locates a form of resistance in "daily life" that is grounded in sexuality and physical pleasure. Through these practices, Tituba resists her

lovers' patriarchal relegation of her to a sexual object, and declares her own agency as a sexual subject. This form of subjectivity in Condé's novel ultimately initiates Tituba's central role in an overtly political context of struggle when she teams up with Iphigene. Even in this political context, however, Tituba manages to maintain her sense of right and wrong and her desire to refrain from unnecessary killing and destruction. This desire again places her in a position of irremediable outsiderness, even as she eventually ends up in her most efficacious political role.

As I have already illustrated, Condé repeatedly demonstrates the failure of community grounded in solidarity across gender differences with John Indian, Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo and Christopher. Typically, this failure results from the male characters' refusal to accept Tituba as a social agent with the power to enact political change. John Indian begs her to comply with the Puritans' request for confession because he does not believe she can otherwise survive, Benjamin Cohen d'Azevedo pigeon-holes her into a domestic servant/witch role and refuses her freedom, and Christopher proscribes her to the role of sexual object. Yet, Condé partially and unevenly establishes a productive model of political solidarity in the maternal/sexual relationship she draws between Iphigene and Tituba. At the end of the narrative, Condé introduces Iphigene—a young slave, a "hardened offender and nobody could tame his insolence" (159). When he is beaten nearly to death, the slaves bring him to Tituba to nurse him back to health. At first, their relationship is somewhat maternal; Iphigene sees Tituba as a mother figure. In the course of her attentions, pregnant Tituba confides to Iphigene that

she wants to bring her daughter (Christopher's child) "into a different world" (161).

Iphigene immediately rushes to her and kneels before her:

'Mother, I know by name and by plantation all those who would follow you. We only have to say the word.'
'We haven't got any weapons.'
"We've got fire. Magnificent fire that devours and burns!"
'What will we do once we've kicked them into the sea? Who will govern?'
Mother, the white folks really went to work on you! You think too much! Let's drive them out first!' (161)

Interestingly, this exchange begins with Tituba's expressed desire as a soon-to-be-mother, and Iphigene's subsequent verbal linkage between her motherhood and her political agency. Indeed, he locates her potential to lead within her role as mother, and this contrasts with her other lovers' refusal to recognize her political powers. Moreover, he requests her help as the mother of Christopher's child in getting Christopher to passively support the rebellion.⁸ Yet, in the end, he paradoxically refuses her efforts to assert that power; when he plans to burn down all the plantations, she once again questions: "The children, too, will die? Babies at their mothers' breasts? Children with milk teeth? And young marriageable girls? . . . Do we have to become like them?" (162). Iphigene brushes off her concerns and then ultimately relegates her, once again, to the world of the private/personal, telling her: "The future belongs to those who know how to shape it and, believe me, you won't get anywhere with incantations and animal sacrifices. Only through actions" (164). Tituba's maternal assignation performs two functions at

⁸ It is essential to note that Condé's maroons are actually complicit with the white planters; they are allowed to maintain their freedom as long as they inform about other possible slave rebellions (163). Thus, they do not really "resist" the colonizers, and in this rendering, Condé subverts the historical identity of maroons as heroic rebels, and further highlights Tituba's admirable difference from them.

once: it motivates Iphigene's ultimate disavowal of her political agency in the material world, and it positions her as an outsider to history—a position that Condé figuratively (and paradoxically) embraces.

From Iphigene's perspective, one moment renders Tituba's motherly aspects as the foundation for her leadership of courageous and rebellious men, but in the next moment, he disregards them as useless in the struggle. In Iphigene, Condé once again illuminates the problems that result from identity and community's nature as temporary, incomplete and based on arbitrary closure; his conception of Tituba as "mother" changes, as does his recognition of her power (Hall 117). Still true to her position of self-reflective and critical outsider, Tituba shies away from the violence that armed resistance mandates, and when she does, Iphigene ultimately rejects the possibility of her political agency—as if such agency can only ever be violent. Of course, Condé grounds this difference between them in gender, but perhaps even more importantly, she also grounds it in moral values. Despite the fact that she has pointed us toward the possibility of solidarity between Iphigene and Tituba, this heterosexual relationship also ends in the failure of community due to Iphigene's system of values. In the end, Christopher informs the white planters of the slaves' intent to rebel, and the planters, in turn, hang all of the potential rebels, including Tituba and Iphigene. Within Condé's depiction of the material world, Iphigene and Tituba's relationship can never translate into political solidarity.

Or can it? Iphigene's view of Tituba as mother recalls Anne McClintock's incisive analysis of the family, and women—particularly how, in certain nationalisms, men locate women outside of history; they figure "women . . . as inherently atavistic—

the conservative repository of the national archaic. Women were not seen as inhabiting history proper but existing, like colonized peoples, in a permanently anterior time” (359). In *I, Tituba*, Condé transforms this location—outside of history—into a productive site for Tituba’s combined political and private action. Instead of allowing the position of “outside history” to stand as a site of powerlessness within the material domain, Condé depicts it as the ultimate place for transcending the private/public, male/female divides. Indeed, although the novel overall appears to be a work of historical recovery—a correction to the white, Western history that has erased Tituba’s presence—Condé claims that “Tituba is just the opposite of a historical novel . . . I really invented Tituba” (201). At the textual and the metatextual levels, then, Condé embraces the position of “outside of history,” and at the textual level, it allows Tituba to merge forms of “feminine” private activism (i.e. caring for others, storytelling, healing, and “witchcraft”) with typically masculinized violent revolt. Paradoxically, Condé seems to argue that operating from *outside* of history enables one to create positive changes *within* history.

Condé includes an epilogue in which Tituba explains to readers how she is still effecting change in the material world:

For now that I have gone over to the invisible world I continue to heal and cure. But primarily I have dedicated myself to another task, helped by Iphigene, my son and lover, my companion for eternity. I am hardening men’s hearts to fight. I am nourishing them with dreams of liberty. Of victory. I have been behind every revolt. Every insurrection. Every act of disobedience. (175)

Here, Tituba lies behind the fight for freedom; she is the driving force and ultimate agent in each battle—big and small. These are not the words of a domesticized female who has

learned her militancy through male invitation or designation, as have Fanon's Algerian women (McClintock 366). Tituba does not help Iphigene; he helps her. Tituba acts in both worlds; as a spirit, she continues to "heal and cure," but she also claims responsibility for "every insurrection" (175). She finally is able to claim a dual agency that the white Puritan and black patriarchal social systems would not allow.

Condé's location of Tituba's dual agency in the "other world" might be read as the author's ironic commentary on the potential for community across gender difference. As in my reading of Hester and Tituba's friendship, though, I reject this negative view. Instead, I see Condé's depiction as one that pushes past the limitations of the material world to textually imagine a different space in which women and men can act in solidarity—politically—in both the private and the political spheres. As Mara Dukats so eloquently states, "*I, Tituba . . .* suggests a renewed awareness of the complexity of cultural formations and the way that the discursive features of a text actively revise, transform, and establish interrelations that in turn lead to the revaluation of power and the renegotiation of social relations" (10). In Tituba's successful transcendence of racial, class, and finally gender difference to actively perpetrate change in myriad forms, Condé models a singular individual who teaches us a new form of potentially just community.

CHAPTER III

FLEXIBLE COMMUNITY IN *BEKA LAMB*

We creoles are so different, one from the other, that it's hard for us to mix properly amongst ourselves, let alone among Carib people who have a lot more things in common. (Edgell 70)

In his comprehensive analysis of Zee Edgell's first two novels, Richard Patteson claims that Edgell "virtually founded her country's *national* literature" (4, my emphasis). The statement seems appropriate based on Edgell's renown as one of very few recognized Belizean writers, the fact that these novels address significantly influential periods in the history of Belize's fight for sovereign nationhood and independence from Great Britain, and the particularly "Belizean" nature of the characters, languages, and conflicts represented in the texts. Published in 1982, *Beka Lamb* is set during the early 1950s when Belizeans' desire for self-rule began to build collective force through labor unions and political organizations like the People's Independence Party (PIP). The 1991 novel *In Times Like These* centers on the period during the early 1980s, when Belize finally achieved national sovereignty. The development of the Belizean nation grounds both narratives, and this emphasis has resulted in primarily Jamesonian analyses of the texts as national allegories. *Beka Lamb* especially has been variously deemed a woman's rewriting of the national allegory (Gikandi 202), a text that "works on two levels" to

present “the story of a young girl’s foray into adulthood and the story of a developing nation’s foray into sovereignty” (Newson 199), and the narrative of a family that represents the nation in microcosm (Salick 108). While the subject matter and temporal setting of this novel certainly justify an analytic focus on nation, these critical accounts often fall into the trap of valorizing the Western form of nation as the form of community to which Edgell’s characters aspire. Western nationhood, Partha Chatterjee tells us, holds “the same material and intellectual premises with the European Enlightenment, with industry and the idea of progress, and with modern democracy . . . [this form] goes hand-in-hand with reason, liberty and progress” (*NT* 3). While Chatterjee and other subaltern studies historians explore the complex forms of acceptance and resistance this paradigm has met with in colonial/postcolonial countries, scholarly accounts of *Beka Lamb* tend to privilege this form of nationhood in their analysis.⁹ In doing so, they implicitly reinforce what Dipesh Chakrabarty identifies as a Westernized historicist view in which the colony is designated an underdeveloped, pre-modern country, and as such, also an *unrealized* national community.

⁹ I do not mean “privilege” as in “view positively;” rather, these critics simply presume the Western form of nation as Belize’s end goal. Moreover, this presumption is implicit rather than explicit in their analyses. For example, Suzanne Scafe sees colonial Belize as a “fragmented society perpetually on the verge of destruction” and implies that nationhood could rectify this fragmentation (27). Simon Gikandi analyzes *Beka Lamb* in a book that explores the paradox of postcolonial nations’ desire for modernity (which is, of course, linked with nationhood) and their distrust of modernity (as a construct created by European colonizers on the backs of colonial peoples). In some ways, his work connects with that of the subaltern studies group—especially Chatterjee’s—but he does not follow through on a concept of different nation formations so much as explore Caribbean writers’ vexed relationships to modernism and their textual methods in dealing with it (25).

My own reading of *Beka Lamb* invokes the work of Chatterjee and Chakrabarty in order to push against this Eurocentric prioritization of the nation which inherently devalues Belize as a national community that has not yet “arrived.” Instead of reading with an eye toward Edgell’s representation of Belize’s failures and fragmentation, I focus on the productive relationships and manifestations of community that she depicts. Edgell sets the narrative in a moment of anticolonial struggle when myriad possibilities exist for the Belizean nation. Her rendering of community thoroughly illuminates these possibilities, which she indicates must be incorporated as the foundation for a viable nation-state. What nationalists and critics need to realize, Edgell seems to say, is that the Belizean national community—in all of its heterogeneity and its various ways of coming together—provides the most solid foundation for a Belizean nation-state that recognizes and addresses all of its citizens.

Subaltern scholars have illustrated that critics generally conceive the national community as preexisting the nation-state but as also surviving in a “subterranean, potentially subversive” way when the nation-state takes over as the dominant paradigm (Chatterjee, *Nation* 236). The nation-state is the political institution in which “all the instrumentalities of state power (e.g. military and police agencies, judiciaries, religious hierarchies, educational assemblies and political assemblies or organizations) are subsumed and legitimized as the ‘natural’ expressions of a unified national history and culture” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 150). The dichotomy between the diversity of the actual group of individuals who comprise the national community (on the one hand), and the constructed unity of history and culture that justifies and undergirds the political

power of the nation-state (on the other), presents a key theoretical problem in discussions of the nation and in Edgell's text. Inevitably, the nation-state does not (indeed, perhaps cannot), represent the interests of everyone in the national community, despite nationalism's "all-too-easy identification . . . of the state with the nation and the nation with the people" (Chatterjee, *NF* 155). Edgell's Belize, like many incipient postcolonial nations, grapples with these issues of inclusivity and representation in the nation.¹⁰ In her focus on the national community and in her unique articulation of this community, she points toward the possibilities that might result from an alternative realization of nationhood for Belize.

I argue that Edgell represents the Belizean national community as grounded in collective acts of mourning, struggle, and nation-building rather than shared identity and history. This representation of community permits an openness and a permeability of boundaries that most nationalist accounts do not. The community represented by most nationalisms appears as exclusive, specific and homogeneous, while the communities that Edgell depicts allows people of differing race, class, culture, ethnicity, gender, and age to come together in various situational contexts without eliding their differences. Although such differences in Belize may seem insurmountable, as Lilla Lamb explains to her daughter in the epigraph above, Edgell's portrayal of the characters' abilities to respond to each other and work together productively demonstrates that they are not. Furthermore, in addition to creating the possibilities for the transcendence of identity differences,

¹⁰Throughout this essay, I use Timothy Brennan's definition of nation as a term that "refers both to the modern nation-state and to something more ancient and nebulous—the '*natio*'—a local community, domicile, family, condition of belonging," (45). Thus, "nation" incorporates both concepts of the nation-state and the national community.

Edgell's praxis-based community (when it manifests) can variously (although only temporarily) overcome other familiar divisions between male/female, public/private, colonizer/colonized and history/memory that proliferate in modern forms of the nation. The task for Belizean nationalism, Edgell's text indicates, is to somehow incorporate the notion of community-in-flux into their production of the nation. As Chatterjee notes, "formal institutions of the state, based on an undifferentiated concept of citizenship, cannot allow for the separate representations of minorities. Consequently, the question of who represents minorities . . . constantly threatens the tenuous identity of the nation and the state" (112). Although Edgell does not provide a clear answer as to how this might be rectified (the narrative ends long before Belize gains independence), she points toward the positive effects of communities constructed through collective action, and more specifically, the healing and inclusion that results from them. Finally, in illustrating that a productive, participatory form of community can only manifest situationally or momentarily, Edgell challenges both Benedict Anderson's well-known formulation of the nation constructed through homogeneous, empty time and the Eurocentric historicism that relegates colonies to what Dipesh Chakrabarty labels "the waiting room of history." She also constructs a nationalist text that somehow circumvents Homi Bhabha's theorization of time in nationalist texts as performative and pedagogical (208-9).

Beka Lamb tells the story of the young, middle-class, black Creole Beka, her family, and her best friend Toyce Qualo. Toyce and Beka are constructed as near opposites: Toyce is abandoned by both parents and raised in poverty by her Aunt Eila, and as a result, she becomes determined to raise herself up through education and hard

work. Aunt Eila and Toycie, who figure as two single, poor women, contrast sharply with Beka and her family; Beka is comfortably raised not only by her parents Bill and Lilla, but also by her political activist paternal grandmother, Granny Ivy. Moreover, at the opening of the novel, Beka performs poorly in school and lies constantly. As the plot progresses, these characters become much more ambiguous as Toycie becomes pregnant by her '*pania* boyfriend Emilio Villanueva and Beka stops lying and works hard to eventually win an essay contest at school.¹¹ Indeed, Toycie's pregnancy, and her consequent ostracization and expulsion from school eventually culminate in her partially self-inflicted death, whereas Beka's supportive family, teachers and friends help guide her to reach her utmost potential. Throughout the text, Edgell infuses this apparently localized and personal sequence of events with the concurrent political narrative of Belize's anticolonial struggle and national development. Both narrative progressions allow Edgell to incisively critique patriarchy, colonialism, classism and nationalism, even as she challenges these institutions by positing alternative communities, constructed through praxis, at both the personal and the political level.

Edgell activates her primary critique and re-imagining of the nation through gender by stressing Toycie and Beka's familial lives. To be sure, class and race also play their roles, but Toycie's demise stems from the sociopolitical effects of her pregnancy while Beka's survival results partially from the powerful matriarchal influences in her life. For example, when Bill Lamb tries to argue for Toycie to be allowed to stay in school, Sister Virgil rejects his plea, claiming "we believe it is entirely up to the modesty

¹¹ '*pania* is a Belizean colloquial term for a Spanish Creole person.

of the girl to prevent these happenings” (119). Toycie’s expulsion results in her rapid psychological decline; she eventually winds up in an asylum. Beka, on the other hand, has Granny Ivy as an example of a woman who has survived despite unwed pregnancy and single motherhood. When the matron at the asylum tells Eila, Ivy, and Beka about how desperate young girls become to marry the boys who took their virginity—so desperate, in fact, that they are willing to forgive “bad treatment”—Ivy responds: “I wish some of them knew what I know. . . It’s sad if you lost your virginity unmarried and to the wrong man, but if you lose it, you lose it. There’s no need to degrade yourself” (135). Ivy embodies the explicit rejection of those dominant patriarchal values that so effectively conspire to destroy Toycie. Moreover, the differences between Toycie’s and Ivy’s worldviews hold great significance for how we read Edgell’s depiction of community, and the consequent possibilities that this form of community entails.

In order to hone in on the positive effects of Edgell’s alternative form of community, an explicit distinction must be made between the dominant values to which Toycie subscribes and the unconventional values that Ivy holds. Indeed, I argue that this distinction allows us to better understand why Edgell makes Toycie self-destruct even though the elder Ivy has already survived the same predicament. Suzanne Scafe distinguishes between the “colonialist discourses of religion and education that define women’s sexuality as the root of chaos and sin” (29), and the Belizean community’s view which remains “remarkably resistant to these dominant discourses” (31). As one who has internalized the colonialist values, Toycie consequently sees no way to rectify her situation except through marriage to Emilio or the continuation of her education. Ivy, on

the other hand, rejects these discourses, and her life and later actions provide an alternative “model of womanhood . . . defined by hard work and a commitment to collective and individual responsibility” (Scafe 31). Although Toyce and Ivy’s outlooks appear as simple differences in principle between two characters, they metaphorically constitute the limitations inherent within Western paradigms of the nation, and the possibilities that might result from alternative models, respectively.

Even though Scafe acknowledges the Creole community’s resistance to colonialist discourses, she still concludes that “the Creole community is vulnerable to the charge that fragmented family structures result in broken individuals and impede the material progress of the community as a whole” (31). She implies that it’s because of Toyce’s fragmented family and the failure of the broader community to educate her about sex that she eventually winds up “broken.” In this reading, Scafe exhibits an implicit privileging of Western nationalism’s emphasis on material progress, while at the same time she reinforces the trope of the patriarchal, nuclear family as the necessary basis and symbol of the modern nation. As Anne McClintock explains, “nations are symbolically figured as domestic genealogies” and this family trope is important for nationalism because “it offers a ‘natural’ figure for sanctioning national *hierarchy* within a putative organic *unity* of interests” (358 original emphasis). Inevitably, as McClintock, Carol Boyce-Davies, and others have noted, such a constructed hierarchy and unity disregards people like Toyce—young, black, female and poor. Allegorically, however, Edgell’s illumination of an alternative family structure that mobilizes to save Toyce in her time of need indicates how collective action can be a more positively productive

framework for small communities and nations to successfully resist conforming to the Western nationalist paradigm, a paradigm which thereby excludes and harms many of its citizens. As Chatterjee notes, “the cultural history of nationalism, shaped through its struggle with colonialism, contained many possibilities of authentic, creative, and plural development of social identities that were violently disrupted by the political history of the postcolonial state seeking to replicate the modular forms of the modern nation-state” (156). In Edgell’s text, Toycie signifies this desire to replicate the modern nation-state and the destruction it causes, while Granny Ivy, and perhaps the entire Lamb family, embody the possibilities of community that turns away from this form of nationhood (with its exclusivist ideologies) and toward an active and activist model that comes together to struggle for social justice.

The Lamb family treats Toycie like “one of their own;” she goes on vacation with them every year, performs housework and cares for Beka’s brothers alongside Beka, Lilla and Granny Ivy, and she and Beka have the type of loving yet contentious relationship more common among sisters than friends. While Gikandi and Scafe have already discussed Edgell’s emphasis on women in both this family and the community, no critics have delineated Bill Lamb’s role in these collectivities.¹² This gap perhaps results from the fear of reinforcing a male-dominated family/nation construct through the critical recognition of the father figure’s patriarchal power—a construct that Edgell decidedly contests by showing how men and women come together to try to save Toycie. Instead of disregarding men in her alternative model, Edgell posits a male character that recognizes

¹² See Gikandi (201), and Scafe (31-32).

the consequences of gender inequity and does what he can to alleviate them. Bill tells Sister Virgil that “[Toycie] alone is not to be blamed for this accident,” and emphasizes the injustice of the fact that “Mr Villanueva’s son will not be expelled from school” (119). He then offers to “personally see to it that [Toycie’s pregnancy] does not become a scandal,” if Toycie is allowed to return after giving birth; and he explains that “families without resources [like Toycie’s] have no strings to pull when their children get in trouble” (119). Edgell’s father figure recognizes and works on behalf of Toycie to struggle against the effects of gender and class injustice, rather than uses his position to perpetrate it for his own benefit (as Emilio does). At the same time, Lilla, Beka, Ivy, and, of course, Eila, attempt to counter the effects of injustice through their loving support of Toycie. Although this may seem to reinforce the notion that men belong in the public sphere and women in the private, Edgell belies this assumption elsewhere by showing Ivy, Eila and Beka’s participation in the political sphere. Unfortunately, Bill, Eila, Lilla and Beka’s efforts to save Toycie ultimately do not succeed within the confines of the narrative; first, because it ends while Belize remains under colonial rule, and second, because Toycie herself surrenders to the colonial, patriarchal, ideologies that devalue her very self. Yet, by showing how men and women can work together to struggle against destructive inequities in both the public and private spheres, Edgell elucidates how community-as-praxis might create a more productive framework for community than the solely male-dominated nationalist model.

One might argue that Bill’s speaking on behalf of Toycie simply replicates the relationship of women to men in the typical nation construct, whereby women are

incorporated into the nation indirectly through their relationships to men (McClintock 358). Again, though, the temporal setting of the novel becomes an important factor since the colonial system—represented by Sister Virgil and the Villanueva family—refuses to recognize Toycie in her own right. Bill’s own sympathy for Toycie and his efforts to contest the dominant powers indicate how his vision might, upon independence, be incorporated into a more gender-equitable form of nationhood. Indeed, his worldview is grounded in a philosophy of mutual interdependence; Beka tells Sister Gabriela that Bill “feels the whole world depends on the whole world” (116). Actuating such a vision in the construction of the nation, Edgell indicates, would angle collective action toward the recognition and inclusion of excluded groups and individuals in communities, and roundly reject the nation paradigm in which “the promise of national emancipation [is] fulfilled . . . by the forcible marginalization of many who were supposed to share in the fruits of liberation” (Chatterjee *NF*156). By centralizing women’s roles in the nation, and also constructing an alternative “male” discourse of community, Edgell creates a model that does not exclude men or women simply on the basis of gender.

Edgell’s rendering of community as collective social and political action does not only account for the transcendence of typically disruptive gender and class divisions, but also succeeds in overcoming racial and cultural divisions. Moreover, this model of community does not only operate through the allegorization of the nation through the Lamb family. Edgell’s Belize City, and the many characters she brings in to populate it, represents another diverse, yet smaller community. Her constitution of this group and their interactions also plays a prominent role in how she re-figures community through

praxis. *Beka Lamb*'s narrator describes Belizean society as incredibly diverse. Belize City, we are told, "was a relatively tolerant town where at least six races with their roots in other districts of the country, in Africa, the West Indies, Central America, Europe, North America, Asia, and other places *lived in a kind of harmony*" (11 my emphasis). At St. Cecilia's, a priest looks at his students and sees "each face, almost every one a different shade of black, brown or white" (88). This level of diversity in such a tight-knit community makes it difficult to distinguish peoples on the basis of cultural, racial, and linguistic differences. Like the real Belize, the heterogeneity of Edgell's Belize makes it impossible to characterize the population without oversimplifying. As the sociologist Nigel Bolland points out, in Belize "an examination of particular cultural characteristics, such as language and religion, shows that these attributes overlap and cut across ethnic and racial distinctions, thus uniting as well as distinguishing people in different ethnic groups throughout the country" (Bolland 45). Notably, both Edgell and Bolland's representations show how people can unite as well as divide across such heterogeneity, and this point is central to recognizing the flexibility of Edgell's community in *Beka Lamb*.

The primary scene in which Edgell brings together unlikely members of the community occurs when Toycie attempts to commit suicide.¹³ In addition to Beka and Ivy, the scene includes National Vellor—a prostitute of East Indian descent with no family and no education—and a British soldier who figures metonymically as the

¹³ Edgell leaves the cause of Toycie's fall from the bridge unknown, therefore neither confirming nor denying that it was a suicide attempt. I read it as such particularly because Edgell has Eila ask: "Toycie gone to that bridge over and over. How you think she managed to fall down? I can't think of a way she could fall unless she was dizzy" (129).

colonial power. Upon finding Toycie, National jumps in the water and drags her out, essentially saving her life. She then runs to the Lamb home for help; Beka and Ivy follow, and the British soldier ties a tourniquet round Toycie's head, and drives her along with Granny Ivy to the hospital (126-7). Prior to this moment, Edgell clearly positions National and the British soldier as outsiders in this neighborhood; Lilla describes National as a "half-crazy coolie woman" (5) and warns Beka not to speak to her, and Bill Lamb tells his mother that "hatred of British colonialism unites us now" (96). The collective effort to save Toycie, however, temporarily unites these disparate individuals, which illustrates Edgell's model of community as actional and unmitigated by the identity differences that disrupt other, more traditional concepts of community.

Edgell's rendering of the praxis that brings the British colonialist, the East Indian prostitute, and the black Creoles together to save Toycie illuminates the ways in which non-identitarian, spontaneous communities can work toward the survival of a single individual. Indeed, it also shows that the lines between one individual and another, or an individual and her community, are tenuous at best. Throughout the text, National Vellor and Toycie's roles shift and change situationally, thus showing the shifting nature of both identity (at the literal level) and the community (at the figurative). Indeed, when Beka takes a last look at National before she runs to find Eila, "Vellor's face melted into Toycie's, Toycie's face merged into Vellor's and then Vellor became Toycie" (128). Beka's vision reinforces Stuart Hall's theorization of identity as a positioning rather than an essence; and Edgell implies that, in order to thrive, community must somehow, some

way, account for these changed and changing positionings (in all of their heterogeneity) (132). Theorizing community through praxis points us toward the way.

If we read Toykie as one representative of the nation, then in coming together to save her, the characters are, in a sense, coming together in an attempt to revitalize the body of the nation devastated by the ravages of patriarchal colonialism. Notably, Edgell grants primary agency in this restoration to National, the most marginalized of all these characters. Moreover, Edgell provocatively christens her as *the* representative citizen of the nation. Perhaps even more controversially, Edgell includes the British soldier in her momentary community—a soldier who appears to stand for the colonialist values that have so thoroughly contributed to Toykie’s demise. Yet, in this particular scene, the soldier’s actions—his dressing of Toykie’s wound and driving her to the hospital—are curative; figuratively, they indicate that the new Belize will likely need to incorporate some of the characteristics of the modern modular nation, even if on a need-based, changing and changeable basis. As Partha Chatterjee has shown in the case of India, and Simon Gikandi has shown in the case of Caribbean writing, postcolonial countries and their subjects cannot completely break from the project of modernity embedded within colonialism and the Eurocentric model of the nation-state (26; 201). Edgell’s inclusion of the British soldier concedes this point, but turns toward the positive potential in this fact, rather than the negative. Of course, readers might interpret the fact that Toykie *eventually* dies as an indication of this diverse community’s failure to revive the nation, but I would counter that in this particular moment, Edgell elucidates success from their cooperative efforts, not failure. Indeed, it is only when Eila removes Toykie to the

countryside, away from the community represented in the narrative (despite the pleas of the Lamb family to keep her in the asylum so they “can personally see to her”), that she dies (140). Thus, Edgell highlights the healing aspects of community through praxis within this particular sequence of events.

Edgell not only illuminates alternative forms of community within the text, she also constructs the text in a way that propagates community at the level of the meta-text. Toycie’s death serves as the impetus of the entire narrative. Eila cannot afford an actual wake for her niece, so Beka decides that she will “keep wake” for Toycie herself by remembering everything that preceded and culminated in Toycie’s death. These memories comprise the narrative content. Beka learns how to “keep wake” in the first place by attending Greatgran Straker’s (her maternal great-grandmother—the woman who raised Lilla) own wake—a significant event that occurs midway through the narrative. As Judith Misrahi-Barak points out, the text highlights “the wake not only as a ritual of death but also as a celebration of self-knowledge and community” (par. 1). Indeed, Edgell’s drawing of this scene illuminates a spontaneous hodge-podge of people from the community that come together specifically in the act of collective mourning. I assert that this wake imparts Edgell’s most complex and significant depiction of a praxis-based community which challenges and complicates nationalism’s homogenizing, essentializing and pedagogical tendencies.

As an elderly woman, Greatgran Straker was known by many, yet Edgell marks her funeral as typical both in terms of participation and impact:

All along the route from Aunt Tama's house on Manioc Road, down Water Lane, where many bars were situated, and over the swing bridge, people lined the street sides . . . *Anyone* could spare the time, stopped whatever they were doing to watch the funeral go by. It was a custom. It was important to know who had died, under what circumstances, to whom the person was related, and who the mourners were following the hearse, and why they felt the need to attend this particular funeral. There were few events that commanded the total attention of the community as much as a passing funeral. Its size was commented upon, and the life story of the deceased, whatever was known of it, whispered from person to person. *It was more than a funeral they watched. In a way, it was a small lesson in community history, and everyone for those minutes was a diligent scholar.* By and large, most people preferred to forget the time that had gone before. But on certain occasions, and especially at the funerals of the very aged, through the use of *innuendos and euphemisms*, a feeling was communicated, and this was understood. (62-3 my emphases)

In this scene, Edgell explicitly emphasizes the spontaneity of a community that comes together not on the basis of shared identities (she offers no indication of age, race, class, or gender of these mourners and onlookers), nor on the basis of a constructed, nationalist history (she posits “community history” expressed through equivocating language) but to perform the work of mourning together. The scene illuminates a web of interconnection—expressed through conversation, shared presence, and reflection—that flows through and from Greatgran Straker, while it also presents an alternative paradigm of historical understanding to that of Western nationalisms. While Edgell’s counter to nationalist historical discourse may appear similar to the division between the inner, private world and the outer, political world that Chatterjee traces in the case of Indian nationalism, I argue that it actually goes part of the way in contesting that simple division as well.

In his examination of anti- and post-colonial nationalism in India, Chatterjee has argued that in the case of India, nationalists resisted Western modernity by “constitut[ing]

a new sphere of the private in a domain marked by cultural difference: the domain of the ‘national’ was defined as one that was different from the ‘Western’” (75). Thus, cultural difference allowed Indian nationalists to claim sovereignty over their familial and spiritual lives, and to locate nationalist sentiment in the private sphere, long before nationalism became a public political ideology. Yet, while this conceptualization of the national community accounts for the agency of colonial Indian subjects, in the period of independence, it mandates exclusion of certain groups, values and worldviews: “The new subjectivity that was constructed here was premised not on a conception of universal humanity, but rather on particularity and difference: the identity of the ‘national’ community as against other communities” (75). Because of its inherent exclusions, this nation form fails to successfully integrate all Indian subjects—especially women. As R. Radhakrishnan points out,

The nationalist subject in its protagonistic phase of history (as against its antagonistic phase when the primary aim was to overthrow the enemy) has to break away from the colonial past, achieve full and inclusive representational legitimacy with its own people—the sub-spaces and the many other forms and thresholds of collective identity (such as the ethnic, the religious, the communal)—and fashion its own indigenous modes of cultural, social and political production in response. (85-86)

Chatterjee and Radhakrishnan both emphasize the exclusionary practices of identity-based nationalism, and Radhakrishnan stresses the necessity of inclusive representation in an alternative, specifically feminist nationalism. In the funeral scene, Edgell quite explicitly neglects to articulate the identities of those who participate; she alternately describes them as “anyone,” “the people,” and “the community.” In a narrative otherwise

rather detailed in its delineation of ethnic particularities and the possible divisions that result from them (for example, in its depiction of National Vellor, or in its focus on the tensions between Spanish Creoles and black Creoles, etc.), Edgell here refuses to link collective mourning to some form of common identity. Instead, she emphasizes the act of mourning; the conversations, the remembering, the learning, and so on. Though it may be argued that the narrative overall posits Beka—young, black, and female—as the model of the Belizean national subject, Edgell’s various depictions of how community comes together through praxis, primarily work toward inclusivity. In this specific episode of collective action through mourning, Edgell resists nationalism’s attempts to specify some form of original, authentic, identity, and instead shows a community-in-flux that resists appropriation by the male-dominated nationalist paradigm.

Edgell not only resists nationalism’s appropriation of identity here, she also problematizes its potential appropriation of history. History, Maryse Condé explains, “is something official. Memory is in the mind of the people” (548-49). While *Beka Lamb*—and indeed all of the primary texts in this project—works to contest history through the recreation of memory (as Condé defines it), a danger arises in simply posing one form of historical knowledge against the other. As Radhakrishnan points out, the nationalist division of history and memory (in conjunction with the division between “inner” and “outer”) relegates non-modern, non-historicist forms of knowledge and ways of being in the world to a location “outside of history.” He explains that “The locus of the true self, the inner/traditional/spiritual sense of place, is exiled from the processes of history while the locus of historical knowledge fails to speak for the true identity of the nationalist

subject” (85). In other words, nationalism, thus far, has been unable to incorporate both history and memory, and consequently has failed to fully integrate its subjects. While Edgell’s privileging of community history in the funeral scene seems to coincide with this problematic division, her other episodic accounts of political action (independence rallies, speeches, etc.—discussed in more detail below) demonstrate her attempts to integrate both forms of knowledge—history and memory—within the entire body of the text. Indeed, by representing community as praxis in both the private and public realms of experience, Edgell not only blurs the line between them, but she also contests the dominant tropes of historical national time. More specifically, she circumvents the limitations of what Dipesh Chakrabarty labels Eurocentric historical time, and poses an alternative to what Homi Bhabha has identified as the performative and pedagogical notions of time usually found in nationalist texts.

Dipesh Chakrabarty attempts to challenge the hegemonic force of Eurocentric history by positing two histories, which he divides into History 1 (H1) and History 2 (H2). According to him, Western historical discourse posited a historical timeline that placed Europe at a spatial and temporal distance from the lands they colonized. Imperial powers like Britain, France and Spain stood furthest along the timeline—not least because they already held the status of sovereign, modern nations. Colonized countries in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, on the other hand, were denied independence and national sovereignty on the grounds that they were, by Western standards, uncivilized and un- or under-developed economically (14). To the colonial desire for independence and national sovereignty, European nations replied “not yet;” in Chakrabarty’s terms, this

relegated them to an “imaginary waiting room of history” (8). Chakrabarty’s work illustrates how the Eurocentric conception of modernity propagated colonialism, and it directly relates to Chatterjee’s analysis of why nationalism presumes the Western modular form of nation as its end goal. Yet, Chakrabarty centralizes capital as the key aspect of modernity and nineteenth-century progressivist conceptions of history: “this . . . universal and necessary history we associate with capital . . . forms the backbone of the usual narratives of transition to the capitalist mode of production. Let us call this history—a past posited by capital itself as its precondition—History 1” (63). H1, he explains, is that past that “lends itself to the reproduction of capitalist relationships” (64). Clearly, Edgell’s representation of the community at Greatgran Straker’s funeral does not belong to this history. Indeed, shortly before the procession begins, Beka overhears a woman telling her companion that, “‘Old Mother Straker was one of the last. Not too many left now of the old people that remember things from the time before. They young ones aren’t interested. All they think about is picture show, motor car, party and clothes’”—in other words, all the trappings of capitalist production (62). The gathering and collective remembrance of the “time that had gone before” seems to oppose the values of the “young ones,” but this dialectical reading does not recognize Edgell’s efforts to show how they are each intertwined.

The funeral embodies what Chakrabarty would call a manifestation of H2. Chakrabarty reads Marx’s notion of H2 as those relations in the past “that did not necessarily look forward to capital” (64). Chakrabarty further elaborates his own theory of H2 as those pasts which

enable the human bearer of labor power to enact other ways of being in the world . . . They are partly embodied in [a] person's bodily habits, in unselfconscious collective practices, in his or her reflexes about what it means to relate to objects in the world as a human being and together with other human beings in his given environment. (66)

Edgell's incorporation of both history (H1) and memory (H2) throughout *Beka Lamb* illustrates the inextricability of these "pasts." Indeed, Chakrabarty's own argument claims that "History 2 does not spell out a program of writing histories that are alternatives to the narratives of capital . . . History 2 is better thought of as a category charged with the function of constantly interrupting the totalizing thrusts of History 1" (66). In the broader trajectory of Edgell's narrative, the funeral scene reads as an instance of H2 disrupting what many critics deem the narrative's linear progression toward capitalist development, independence, and statehood. The problem with this reading, however, is that it partially coincides with the Eurocentric valuation of progressive, linear time.

Edgell's rendering of community as praxis, especially in the funeral scene, presents more of a challenge to H1 than Chakrabarty's H2 does, specifically because it does not privilege community as the trope of one form of history or the other. Since Edgell's community arises through collective work, it is dispersed through time situationally; it does not solely inhabit H1 or signify H2. Indeed, Edgell's formulations of community in this text permeate both the public and private spheres at different times. To imagine that the funeral only represents H2 disrupting the linear narrative of H1 is to

deny the people the very historical agency that Edgell underscores in this scene, and which they maintain in both realms of history.

Edgell further challenges common conceptions of agency and history in the funeral scene by rendering the community's history as somewhat inarticulable yet understandable—a form of knowledge the communication of which must be mediated through euphemism. I argue that this peculiar euphemistic discourse and expression of memory instantiates—in Homi Bhabha's terms—yet another form of resistance to the nationalist paradigm of community. In his influential essay, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative and the Margins of the Modern Nation," Bhabha contests the concept of homogeneous, empty time as the temporal form that helped construct the nation, and theorizes instead a "double time" that he discerns in nationalist texts—speeches, novels, histories, etc.. In such texts, "the people" are continually constituted as historical objects of a nationalist pedagogy *and* as the subjects of contemporary, performative nationhood. In simpler terms, nationalism teaches the "nation-people" in pedagogical time to "remember" their ostensible originary, shared past. Pedagogical time consolidates the nation as a unified collectivity already constituted *long ago*. In performative time, the people are repeatedly made to understand that they, in the present moment, constitute the "prodigious, living principles" of the contemporary nation. Thus, the performative moment(s) consolidates the nation through repeated emphasis on the collective in the present (208-9).

In exposing nationalist time in this way, Bhabha argues that scholars can better discern the gaps that allow for detection of the ways in which the people resist or subvert

the nationalist paradigm. Applying his theory to *Beka Lamb*, we can see how, in the Belizean people’s refusal to openly discuss or fully articulate the past (evidenced in the quoted passage above), and in their refusal to conceive their history in a pedagogical form, they embody this resistance to nationalist pedagogy. By depicting a community that refuses to name/define/describe its histories, yet somehow communicates those “small lessons” among themselves, Edgell opposes nationalist pedagogy with an alternative pedagogy dispersed through the people’s praxis (the act of mourning) rather than nationalist discourse.

Edgell’s representation of the community’s pedagogical methods here partially coincides with Jean-Luc Nancy’s philosophy of community—particularly in its seeming verbal inexpressibility. On the subject of community, Nancy contends that “perhaps, in truth there is nothing *to say*. Perhaps we should not seek a word or a concept for it, but rather recognize in the thought of community a theoretical excess (or more precisely, an excess in relation to the theoretical) that would oblige us to adopt *another praxis* of discourse and community” (25-6 original emphasis). Edgell’s elucidation of community as praxis, and that community’s inability to directly articulate itself as community (in both the text and the metatext) intersects with this particular element of Nancy’s philosophy. Although Nancy’s overarching conception of community deals more with universal notions of humanity, subjectivity, and existence than with the local, historical and political problems that interest Edgell and the subaltern studies scholars, Edgell’s representation of death and its attendant rituals in Belize City demonstrate her “both/and”

approach to imagining and discursively rendering a novel form of community that transcends current nationalist and theoretical limitations.

Finally, on the subject of time and history in community, critics might presume Edgell's alternative pedagogy as located in some apolitical, ahistorical space—irrelevant to the dominant paradigm of nationhood (i.e. history, H1, nationalist time, etc.)—because it primarily addresses “domestic work” or the “domestic space.” As Anne McClintock explains, patriarchal nationalisms relegated such domestic efforts to a site outside of history (39). Yet, I assert that in their refusal to engage in direct discourse at the funeral, the mourners refuse to propagate nationalist time; thus, this refusal also constitutes a political act. I stated earlier that Edgell's community as praxis permeates both the private and personal spheres; in this instance, it does both simultaneously. It would be difficult to construct a more powerful argument against nationalisms that proliferate Western historical theories of progress, and critics who read Edgell's Belize in terms of its “unrealized dream” of nationhood. The necessary elements are all here, Edgell seems to say; the nation must somehow appropriately channel them.

While the funeral constitutes an example of how Edgell interconnects the personal with the political by positing community through praxis, she also delineates the material, political work that brings the community together intermittently throughout the text. Almost all of Beka's family, friends and teachers participate in the imaginative and material work of building the nation. Granny Ivy and Miss Eila are active members of the PIP and often bring Beka to rallies and meetings. Although Granny Ivy and Beka's parents, Bill and Lilla, each take different positions on the debate about whether Belize

should gain independence from Britain and become its own nation or federate with other West Indian nations, they all spend time, energy and effort in discussing the problem of nationhood and teach Beka to do so as well. Indeed, Beka and Toycie have an abbreviated debate about national rights among themselves (36); Beka aspires to become a politician (45); and she participates in an essay contest about the history of Belize that metaphorically writes the nation. Each of these characters represents the different desires, values, and worldviews of the Belizean people, but these differences do not impede their collective fight for independence. Thus, Edgell again shows how community through praxis actually comes together across and through very different political points of view.

Edgell's theory of community offers a lesson for that "political discourse of the 'modern' kind which insists that these collectivities have a fixed, determinate form, and [that] if there are several to which an individual can belong, that there be a priority among them" (Chatterjee *NF* 223). Since the Lamb family represents the country in microcosm, and their political differences do not require elision or prioritization in order for them to work together for independence, Edgell's text contests the nationalist emphasis on homogeneous identities and unity as unnecessary (Salick 108).

Notably, *Beka Lamb* incorporates this form of identity-based nationalist discourse as well, if only to demonstrate its forcible construction, and consequent severe limitations. At a political rally where the people are protesting the devaluation of the dollar, possible federation with the West Indies, and the governor's dissolution of the city council (among other things), a PIP leader implores his audience:

What have we got left? National unity, my people, that is what we have left. Let us *present* a united front to the world. We must *show*, as was said in the memorial, that a poor, suffering, homeless, undernourished people can stand together until our not unjust demands are met. National unity, shoulder to shoulder. (108, my emphasis)

By employing these particular verbs, the speaker implies that national unity can only ever be a presentation—a show meant for the rest of the world—not an actuality. His speech exemplifies the performative moment in nationalist time. In the narration of the Belizean nation, with its incredible racial, ethnic, and class diversity, the very idea of unity needs continual discursive iteration not least because it so clearly belies the day-to-day realities of Belizean life. Too many cultural, social, and economic factors impede the possibility of continuous shared interests or goals among *all* of its citizens. Moreover, the exclusion that unity necessitates is possible only in the political imaginary; for example, in Belize's coat of arms—an illustration of “two black men, bare to the waist” (8)—which elides the presence of women, Spanish Creoles, Caribs, East Indians, and all the other peoples that comprise the nation. The national symbol necessarily overlooks these groups because representation of a flexible and inclusive community within the nationalist imagination seems virtually impossible.

Edgell’s text, as I have shown, insistently works toward bridging divides between forms of temporality, history and knowledge; the national community and nationalist thought; and the identity differences (class, gender, ethnicity, etc.) of people in a diverse society. It also works toward the full inclusion of marginalized figures (like Toycie and National) in the narrative representation of the nation. While the articulation

of such inclusion occurs on a figurative, allegorical level in Edgell's drawing of the events surrounding Toycie's life and death, she also illustrates it literally through Beka's experiences at St. Cecilia's Academy during the academic year in which she suffers the loss of Toycie. In fact, I argue that Edgell's representation of community as praxis holds implications not only for the Belizean nation, but also for the relations among this nation and others—including, and not insignificantly—Great Britain.

Undoubtedly, Edgell paints a thorough picture of how this colonial power has oppressed and exploited the people of Belize. At the aforementioned PIP rally, another speaker explains to his listeners that they have been “the most subservient subjects in the entire British Empire” and that “over the centuries colonial exploitation took and is taking abroad the little wealth we possess, leaving us impoverished and destitute” (107). Thus, Edgell shows how the ideologies and the material actions of the colonial power converge to keep Belizeans from gaining political, social and psychological (in Toycie's case) independence. Yet, just as the national community cannot be conceived as homogeneous, static, or fixed, neither can the individuals who comprise the colonial power.

In her drawing of Sister Gabriela as the dialectical other of Sister Virgil, Edgell shows that community through praxis can even transcend the political boundaries of the nation. For example, Sister Gabriela, as an instructor at the academy (though she is American, not British, she still represents the colonizers' institution), demonstrates the principles of Edgell's community through the collective work of healing. In order to circumvent the limited curriculum mandated by the London examinations, Sister Gabriela

organizes a school-wide essay contest seemingly about “The Sisters of Charity in Belize,” but which is actually meant to bring the contestants to “understand a little more about [their] country and about [them]selves” (94). When, after Toycie’s death (and Beka’s consequent prolonged absence from school), Sister Gabriela goes to the Lamb home to collect the essay, she draws the entire family out of their grief and depression by requesting their help with a medley of folksongs to be sung for the Mother Provincial when she visits. Sister Gabriela understands the Lambs’ sorrow and grief at Toycie’s death, and she clearly assigns the folksong task to Beka in order to help draw her out of her depression. This strategy succeeds overwhelmingly, as “all that afternoon . . . the little group sat there humming tunes, trying to decide which ones were best for the occasion. Granny Ivy . . . forgot all about the smelly dishcloth over her shoulder as she reminisced about folksongs she used to sing, as a girl, before time” (162). The Lambs’ spirits drastically improve after this visit; Beka decides to go back to school, and Granny Ivy and Lilla become re-energized by it. The episode may at first appear to sustain an interpretation in which the colonial subjects perform a cultural rite for an ethnographic American nun in preparation for a larger community performance before an even more important imperial figure. Yet, the community that we witness here illustrates how Sister Gabriela’s chosen course of action improves the Lamb family’s psychological and emotional well-being. This is not to be taken lightly; the nun definitively holds a position of power in the Belizean society—especially over Beka, the metaphorical representative of the nation. Yet, like Bill Lamb in his petitioning for Toycie, Gabriela does not use this position to harmful effect. Instead, her work, and the work that she inspires Lilla, Ivy,

and Beka to perform brings about the family's healing, while at the same time it lends itself to the important work of building the nation that these women deem so important.

The folksongs that the women sing read as nationalist texts created by the nation-people rather than nationalist ideologues. Moreover, the domestic space in which this scene occurs, coupled with its emphasis on women, illuminates how Edgell's representation of community through praxis takes a specifically feminist form. Radhakrishnan has argued that in Indian nationalism's splitting into an "outer vision" that remains "hostage to the Enlightenment identity of the West," and its "inner vision" which "is effectively written out of history altogether. . . Woman takes on the name of a vast inner silence not be broken into by the rough and external clamor of material history" (85). Metatextually, this scene breaks that silence and demonstrates not only women's central role in maintaining historical knowledge, but also in creating history through their collective work.

Finally, Edgell's most substantial rendering of community as praxis lies in her representation of writing, both in terms of Beka's participation in the essay contest and in terms of the memories that Beka psychically writes which constitute the narrative itself. Jean-Luc Nancy explains the centrality of writing in the expression of community: "only a discourse of community, exhausting itself, can indicate to the community the sovereignty of its sharing . . . This is nothing other than the question of *literary communism* . . . something that would be the sharing of community in and by its writing, its literature" (26 original emphasis). Nancy's emphasis on the necessity of discourse, together with his explanation of community's inexpressibility (because of its constant

flux, I would argue, though Nancy rationalizes it differently), demonstrate the necessity for both Edgell and Beka's writings of the nation.

Gikandi argues that Beka's participation in the essay contest exemplifies her struggle to "establish her identity within the social order of colonialism (represented by the school) and the *as yet unrealized* dream of national culture (expressed by her grandmother and other nationalists), . . . [and] . . . draws our attention to the difficulties of forging new identities and expropriating colonial modernism and its discourse" (220, my emphasis). The contest indeed represents Beka's effort to come to terms with her place and course of action in the midst of personal and political turmoil, but it is surprisingly therapeutic work. She finds "consolation, for the death of Great Grandmother Straker, and for Toykie's absence, by working at something beyond her natural capacity" (151). Moreover, the thinking and writing work that Beka puts into writing this essay establishes a link between the lives of marginalized women, the "disjointed" oral narrative of Mr. Rabatu—who was present when the nuns first arrived in Belize City—and the academic history she gets from the nuns and the librarian. Though we do not know what, of all this information, she incorporates in the essay, Edgell connects Beka's writing process to an oral history (which she recites to herself, and of course, to readers of this text) about the "illegitimate" women she knows, and their "illegitimate children": "on this street, Miss Flo had a daughter named Miss Glory and Miss Glory had Miss Ruby. . . and now she has three daughters. Then there's old Miss Boysie in the alley and she has a daughter named Miss Prudence . . ." (145). By demonstrating Beka's consciousness of these women, Edgell indicates that her protagonist's figurative writing of the nation will

contest their continued marginalization. Beka's work, rendered collectively as memory work performed by her various sources, re-members the community and all of its disparate parts. Thus, Edgell depicts a writing of the nation that incorporates marginalized subjects, and illustrates to readers that such inclusion is absolutely central to a viable nation model.

Strikingly, Beka wins the essay contest, despite Granny Ivy's continued warnings. She tells Beka "You are wasting your precious time trying to win that fool-fool contest. What I am telling you is important. . . and I am weary telling you over and over again a 'pania, bakra or expatriate will win! Who ever heard about any black girl winning so much as a pencil at that convent school?" (151).¹⁴ Ivy's admonitions illustrate that though she does not subscribe to colonialist values, she may be resigned to the dominance of colonial power—at least until she reaps the rewards of independence. With the fact that Beka wins the contest, however, Edgell implies that her writing of the nation's history—the inclusionary practices that allowed it to happen, and the inclusionary practices she performed in writing it—will be the foundation upon which a successful nation-state might effectively come to fruition.

On her walk home from school after winning the essay contest, Beka runs into her father's brother, Uncle Curo. When he tells her that some of the nationalist leaders had been arrested, she asks, "is this the end of everything then, Uncle Curo?" and he replies, "The end, pet? Belize people are only just beginning!"(167). His response indicates an openness toward the future that is full of possibility and hope, a temporal space in which

¹⁴ "bakra" is a colloquial term for a white person.

community might be conceived in all of its flexibility and different forms. It also indicates Beka's interconnection with the people; the essay contest and the completion of her grieving for Toycie mean that Beka is also "just beginning" and it is this image that leaves readers optimistic about Beka's Belize.

While Beka performs the work of writing the nation within the text, her memories also constitute work in the metatext. Like the collective mourning at Greatgran Straker's funeral, the narrative brings readers together with Beka in the effort to mourn Toycie. Although the narrator is not Beka, her memories and experiences focalize the entire text. Moreover, Beka's conscious reconstruction of Toycie's life through memory acts as her way of "saving" Toycie—rescuing her from patriarchal, classist, racist narratives of the nation in order to reincorporate her in Beka's own writing of the community and the nation. Roydon Salick claims that the narrative of Toycie's life serves as a metatextual answer to the question Beka often asks Granny Ivy: "What woulda happen to me before time?" (114). He further claims that Toycie is Beka's alter ego who "dies so Beka can live, so that Beka can achieve self-motivated, hard-won success" (109). I see no evidence for such a directly causal link between the one girl's life and the other's death. Instead, I read the two as the simultaneous (not consequential) deconstruction and reconstruction of the national narrative. In Salick's analysis, death imparts a division between the girls, when in fact, the narrative itself as a mourning ritual instantiates Nancy's principle of death in community: "Community is always revealed in the death of others; hence it is always revealed *to* others" (Nancy 15, my emphasis). Edgell's narrative reveals Toycie's death to us, as readers; it also reveals the mutual

interconnection between Toycie Qualo (the unsuccessful nation form), Beka Lamb (the possibly successful form), and the other members (citizens) of the community.

Chatterjee emphasizes the vital necessity of both deconstructing nationalisms complicit with Eurocentrism, and of carving out a different space for a nationalism that “could fashion its own epistemological, cognitive, and representational modalities” (Radhakrishnan 85). In her representation of Toycie’s end, Edgell thoroughly tears down the Western modality of nationhood—exposing all of its dangers, hypocrisies and their destructive effects—but in Beka’s wake for Toycie, the narrative metatextually reconstructs the Belizean nation as an inclusive, flexible and productive nation form that includes women, prostitutes, children, and the poor, in the political, social, and familial spheres. The way Edgell represents this community posits it as a comprehensive and effective alternative to the totalizing and repressive nationalist discourses of the West. Chatterjee argues that Indian nationalism or any non-Western nationalism that mimics this liberal-elitist form typically fails to speak for its people. Beka—a black Creole, female child—differs extremely from the imagined white adult, male sovereign subject of Western nations. In Chatterjee’s explanation of anticolonial nationalisms, he shows how they construct an essential “inner” identity that severs itself from a national identity, which, for the sake of independence, conforms to Western ideologies. In *Beka Lamb*, Edgell creates her new form by rendering Beka—a clear example of a nation’s putative “inner identity”—as *the* national protagonist. While in most nationalisms, the “inner self is not allowed to take on a positive hegemonic role as the protagonist or agent of its own history,” Beka’s nationalism situates her as the narrator of a nation that effectively

represents “its own reality and its own people” (Radhakrishan 88). Edgell creates a nation that successfully merges the inner and outer identities of the nation-people.

In Belize’s anticolonial period multiple possible answers exist for the questions “What is *our* nation?” or “What will *our* nation be?” By conceiving community through praxis and thereby bridging divides between heterogeneous subjects, private/public realms, masculine/feminist discourses, nationalism/national community, and history/memory, Edgell provides a creative framework through which the nation-state might begin to effectively incorporate the national community (in all of its diversity) during the post-independence period. To avoid the exclusions that result from nationalist creations that take on Western modular forms, Edgell’s text elucidates the productive framework of coming together through collective action. Since the narrative ends long before Belize achieves independence, she does not illuminate how, exactly, this theory of community might be put into play in the consolidation of the nation, but the task she sets is for the nation to somehow comprehend the national community as in flux, flexible, grounded in praxis, and dependent upon situations and contexts. This task is not imaginary; it is one that the text shows should be created in the realm of political, economic and social realities in Belize and other Caribbean nations. Unfortunately, some sixty years after the anticolonial period, nations throughout the world have yet to heed this call.

CHAPTER IV

THE BLUES MATRIX—CULTURAL DISCOURSES AND COMMUNITY IN ERNA BRODBER'S *LOUISIANA*

Of all the texts I examine here, perhaps none presents as radical a representation of community as Erna Brodber's *Louisiana*. Like the other works discussed in this project, *Louisiana* revises or reimagines history (and other institutionalized knowledges, such as anthropology) and indicates this revision as a necessary precursor to recognizing productive communities. Like Maryse Condé, Brodber prioritizes spiritualism and ancestral knowledge, and like Zee Edgell, she presents a community primarily grounded in women and women's work. Moreover, her central concern with unifying subjects of the African diaspora links with Caryl Phillips' search for the possible connections that might exist between such subjects. Perhaps most importantly, Brodber's community in *Louisiana*, as in the other texts, is always in-flux; it circulates, transforms, re-circulates and extends itself in different forms and through different characters. Yet, despite these similarities and others, Brodber's representation of community renders subjectivity and agency quite differently than these other works. While all of the other texts show individual subjects who come together through work, collective action, solidarity, affinity, or the processes of Relation, Brodber's text makes community, formed through discourses and cultural practices, the precedent for both the subject's self-knowledge and the consequent agency that stems from such knowledge.

Most critical accounts of *Louisiana* comment upon Brodber's textual remembrance of the diasporic community, though none take her rendering of community as their primary interpretive focus. In her monograph on Brodber's work, June Roberts reads *Louisiana* as the figurative marriage between the theories of Marcus Garvey and W.E.B. DuBois, and simultaneously the biographies of (conservative) Zora Neale Hurston and (radical) Brodber herself (215-18). Though she stresses Brodber's positive revisioning of Hurston's life, and the many examples that illuminate DuBoisian or Garveyist thought, she suggests that Brodber's text (indeed, all of her work) strives toward the unification of the African diaspora. She rightly asserts, "connection to the ancestral past, continuity in the present, and *unity in the future* constitute Brodber's ideological mission" (218 my emphasis). Like Roberts, Angeletta Gourdine recognizes Brodber's unification project as grounded in her combination of disparate ways of thinking, although Gourdine focuses on the fusion of "fiction, science, anthropology and religion . . . [as an] alternative discourse that challenges . . . historical and anthropological representations of black individual and community experiences" (139). Gourdine's argument centers on the linkage between anthropology and fiction in this text, and "the interdependence of student/studied" (141). Her concentration on Brodber's alternative discourses and ways of knowing bears similarity to Patricia J. Saunders' focus on how Brodber constructs alternative ways of knowing *and* being that link with the collective consciousness (158). Lastly, Denise deCaires Narain focalizes "the woman's body . . . as a vessel or vehicle for the powerful delivery of the word which can 'reborn' the black diasporic community" (114). While these critical accounts stress different elements of

the novel and the theoretical work it performs, they all find Brodber's polyphonic narrative structure significant, and they seem to agree that conjure or African spiritism comprises Brodber's "organizing aesthetic" (Roberts 216).

In my analysis of *Louisiana*, I also read African conjure work, the multivocal narrative structure, and the fusion of different forms of knowledge as key strategies in Brodber's theory of community. Yet, instead of reading the novel solely through the trope of spiritism or voodoo, I turn toward Houston Baker's notion of "the blues matrix" as another important framework for understanding how Brodber's community operates. Blues, folk and jazz music play a central role in the lives of the main characters and in their return to roots; thus, a theoretical lens grounded in blues culture opens up elements of the text that the voodoo trope alone does not. Houston Baker asserts that "Afro-American culture is a complex, reflexive enterprise which finds its proper figuration in blues conceived as a matrix . . . a point of ceaseless input and output, a web of intersecting, crisscrossing impulses always in productive transit" (3). I assert that in *Louisiana*, Brodber portrays this blues matrix as the cultural repository of the collective's historical, social, affective, and political knowledges, and that these knowledges form the necessary foundation for a positive and productive diasporic political unity. I do not pose this metaphor over or against Brodber's spiritualist emphases; instead, I see the psychic spirit work in the novel as one of those "impulses" at work within the matrix.

I further argue that the tropes of translation, transcription, voicing and multivocality in the narrative stress discourse, rather than the individual subject, as the possible site of agency. Brodber's literary theory of subjectivity and community

exemplifies what Baker describes as “language (the code) ‘speaking’ the subject. . . . [A process whereby t]he subject is ‘decentered’” (1). Through her depiction of Ella Townsend/Louisiana’s possession—which happens to be initiated through a folk song—Brodber shows how the voices that possess her protagonist bring Ella/Louisiana to a new understanding of self as a communal being, which, in turn, brings her to a new comprehension of agency created through community. This agency manifests through both Ella’s healing work and through her meticulous recordkeeping of the different histories she gathers as a medium and an anthropologist. This knowledge then recirculates in the form of the narrative itself. Finally, and perhaps more specifically relevant to Baker’s blues matrix, Brodber demonstrates that the music Ella’s husband Reuben performs and records proves to be yet another cultural discourse that, combined with Ella’s transcriptions, inspires his burgeoning political activism and eventual participation in the African independence struggles of the 1950s. In short, Brodber’s community manifests through the praxis of cultural discourses that are always already in circulation, and the recognition of which make up the necessary basis for political unity, agency and freedom from oppression for African diasporic subjects throughout the globe.

Brodber’s depiction of the African diaspora rejects the notion of it as a collectivity which “stands in a hierarchically subordinate relation to the nation or homeland, regarded as ‘the bastard child of the nation—disavowed, inauthentic, illegitimate, and impoverished imitation of the originary culture’” (Gopinath qtd Braziel and Mannur 8). In *Louisiana*, the diasporic community, represented through its forms of knowledge and its cultural discourses, serves as the source of collective power and

agency for its individual members. Moreover, Brodber posits diaspora as the most productive site for the recognition of multiple histories and temporalities. In *Theorizing Diaspora*, Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur describe a prevailing metaphor for diaspora as Janus-faced; the “gaze [that] is simultaneously directed both forward and backward, [which] suggests a certain temporality; the figure at once looks to the future and the past” (9). Brodber’s text shows how this double-vision illuminates not only the differing pictures of the past, but also how it embeds the possibility of multiple futures.

The plot of the novel is deceptively simple. It begins in 1936 with the journey of Ella Townsend—Columbia graduate student in Anthropology—to St. Mary, Louisiana at the behest of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Works Progress Administration (WPA). She is provided a tape recorder (very new technology at the time) and engaged to interview a matriarchal community figure, named Mammy (Sue Ann) King, in order to record the story of “the blacks of South West Louisiana” for the national archives.¹⁵ Brodber depicts Ella as a complete outsider to the community not least because she is steeped in a “capitalistic individualism that is unmistakably American. She prides herself in her career, her financial independence and her ability to support herself . . . [and her] project, too, is rooted in western notions of knowledge based on secular and rational empiricism” (Khokher 39). Mammy King—Brodber’s representative of the rural African American community—slyly resists this outsider’s attempt to appropriate the community’s history

¹⁵ The Federal Writers Project, which was only one component of the WPA, “included studies on such topics as architecture, science for children, and American Indians. Among the most important are oral history archives created by FWP workers, including priceless archives like the Slave Narrative and collections of folklore. . . Among many other participants in the FWP were Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Studs Terkel, John Cheever, Saul Bellow, Margaret Walker, Arna Bontemps and Zora Neale Hurston” (Adams and Goldbard).

for governmental purposes. Shortly after Ella's arrival, Mammy dies and at her funeral, Ella has visions and goes into convulsions. The black community in this rural parish, including Ella's soon-to-be-husband Reuben (also a student of Anthropology), recognizes this as a transfer of souls.

At first, Ella's scientific training leaves her skeptical, but when she unexpectedly hears Mammy's and other *unrecorded* voices (including her own) on her tape recorder, she begins to believe. Soon thereafter, she and Reuben move to New Orleans where, under the guidance of psychic Madame Marie, Ella regularly "converses" with the deceased Mammy King and her "spirit-sister," the deceased Afro-Caribbean, Lowly (Louise) Grant. The venerable sisters symbolize two *seemingly* distinct cultural traditions within the African diaspora that take root in Ella. They also signify the voices come to draw Ella into the cultural collectivity—the blues matrix—and through which she eventually becomes Louisiana. Ella's immersion here simultaneously brings her to an understanding of her own personal past too, as her psychic activities allow her to remember the forgotten Jamaican grandmother—her "one sure link with love"—who raised her but died when Ella was just three years old (90). Through her discussions with Mammy and Lowly, through her supplementary readings of the past for West Indian and African American men, and through her social scientific recordkeeping, Ella merges multiple forms of knowledge that signify the diasporic community as a nexus of cross-cultural and metaphysical relations.

The move to Louisiana figuratively represents Reuben's and Ella's return to the cultural roots that form the foundation of Brodber's viable community. I must stress that

she highlights these cultural roots not as those “terribly sterile clichés[:] . . . customs, traditions, and costumes” that Frantz Fanon claims result from the intellectuals’ “painful, forced search” for roots, but as a living tradition that influences and is influenced by those who enact them (158). In Homi Bhabha’s terms, Brodber depicts culture as enunciative rather than epistemological. The epistemology of culture “tends toward a reflection of its empirical referent or object” and “is locked into the hermeneutic circle, in the description of cultural elements as they tend toward a totality” (255 original emphasis). That is to say, the epistemology of culture turns culture into an object—as do Fanon’s imagined intellectuals—and disavows the possibility of recognizing alternative sites of agency for historical subjects. The enunciation of culture, on the other hand, “attempts repeatedly to reinscribe and relocate the political claim to cultural priority and hierarchy (high/low, ours/theirs) . . . [it] is a more *dialogic process* that attempts to track displacements and realignments that are the effects of cultural antagonisms and articulations” (255 my emphasis). Bhabha claims that focusing on how culture gets enacted rather than how it is reflected provides a “process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience” (255). Like Baker, Bhabha focuses on discourse(s) as the site for such enunciative practices. This argument not only provides a theoretical framework for understanding Brodber’s representations of culture, but it also suggests a reading practice for the audience of this text.

Although Brodber herself stresses the diasporic connections between Afro-Caribbean and African American cultures, the narrative underscores that diasporic subjects conceive them as different. Thus, the characters distinguish between Mammy’s

culture and Lowly's. For instance, shortly before Mammy's death, the dying woman describes Lowly's Jamaican culture to Ella: "They have brass bands but not as good as ours; they have mento, flat footed shuffle like ours; they have pukkumina, that's what they call getting the power . . ." (20). Although the descriptive language here works to draw out the similarities (Brodber's point), the pronoun usage ("They," and "our") demonstrates that the characters perceive these cultural practices in national terms, *vis a vis* Jamaica and the U.S. In her depiction of how Ella begins to listen and transcribe the taped voices, Brodber demonstrates that the social scientist who previously perceived cultures as epistemological objects, begins to recognize them as enunciatory sites instead:

"Let go", I heard myself say to myself. I let go and was all ears. I listened. I heard the song of the first lady. I back-tracked and back-tracked until the words were clear. . . But whate'er the melody the tune and the lyrics were unmistakably familiar. That last time I had heard them I had collapsed. That was something else to think of—the collapse. But let me leave me out of this and get the obvious down on paper, I commanded myself. *Upon the hill, the rising sun. It is the voice that calls me home.* They had sung that at Mammy's funeral. And according to this lady it was sung at her funeral which had taken place somewhere else. That was extraordinary. I would have to meditate on that. (50-51)

Clearly, Brodber stresses listening here, confirming that the recognition of enunciatory practices requires an adjustment in one's "reading" strategies. Moreover, the ability to observe the "extraordinary" similarities between both the songs and the funeral rites demonstrates Bhabha's dialogic process in the enunciatory framework; rather than prioritize one culture over the other, we instead see equitable similarities between the two. Reading through Bhabha/Brodber's suggested lens, we also see how the cultural discourses in circulation here resist objectification as well as hierarchization. Moreover,

by emphasizing the voices' singing, storytelling, and mourning, Brodber portrays cultural practices as ongoing enunciatory processes. In doing so, she decenters the subject—Ella—and recenters the voices and practices that illuminate alternative forms of agency.

Brodber stresses that these alternative forms of agency do not only manifest through discursive practices; they also appear in the body of Ella as a figurative repository of several cultures, and as a conduit for the renewal of those cultures. This rendering of Ella's experience, specifically, shows a somewhat more literal decentering of the subject. Initially a firm representative of scientism, rationality and individualism, the discourses Ella "hears" or becomes immersed in gradually transform her into Louisiana—a vehicle for the community's voices. Brodber carefully elucidates the pain and fear attendant upon this process for such a Westernized subject. During the very first 'conversation' between Ella, Mammy, and Lowly, Ella does not quite understand what happens. As she narrates, "There is no doubt at all in my mind that . . . I said those words that are foreign to me and I sensed that I was a party to conversation between others. I was more than just frightened. I was shaken to the roots" (33). While this fear eventually dissipates, the processes of soul transference and prophesying represent such a violent break from Ella's prior sense of self and world that Brodber portrays them as physically traumatic; Ella goes into convulsions, screams in pain, and over the fifteen years of waiting for Mammy and Lowly's stories, her health gradually declines. Then, upon finally hearing those tales, she dies. The violence of these experiences, I argue, allegorizes the movement of the subject from an individualist position to a collective one.

Recognizing one's collective being proves a significantly difficult process, which may be the reason why so many diasporic subjects today cannot or will not do it.

This decentering of the subject also points toward the possibilities for the ongoing processes of culture and for understanding its multiple histories. Both Ella's cultural work and the histories that her protagonist translates and transcribes manifest in a continual circular process that encompasses the attainment or employment of psychic abilities, a (sometimes concurrent, sometimes subsequent) new understanding of self, and a contribution to others' (individually and collectively) efforts to understand themselves and others. The resulting sense of what Melvin Rahming labels "cosmic interrelatedness" is reinforced in the men for whom she "reads," and they, in turn, strengthen her sense of interconnection as she psychically follows them across the sea.¹⁶ Through these recurrent processes, Ella as a figurative cultural site herself instantiates cultural openness and flux that recalls Wilson Harris's theory of cross-cultural imagination.

Because of her experimental and abstract narrative style, Brodber has been compared to Harris (Narain 97), and Harris himself, in a critique of *Myal*, has lauded her approach as one that "penetrates surfaces and raises unsuspecting edges of light and dark" ("LM" 92). As the editors of his famous critical book point out, however, "Wilson

¹⁶Interestingly, Brodber highlights women as the workers and men as the benefactors—in both the spiritual and material sense. Only women perform psychic readings, which Houston Baker describes as common in black women's writing; "The spirit work that is imaginistically projected by afro-American women's expressiveness is, I think, like what is called by the religion of voodoo *The Work*" (qtd in Roberts 216, original emphasis). Brodber does not show Ella reading the pasts of any other women than her spirit-sisters; she only reads for the West Indian and African American men who board at the boarding house. Moreover, the sisters played a more significant role in the Garveyist movement for which they worked than did Silas (Mammy's husband). Thus, the women perform both the spiritual healing work and the political organizational work, a representation through which Brodber illuminates the powerful and necessary roles women played throughout history.

Harris is . . . a writer whose primary concern would seem to be with the ‘reality’ of *language* itself, rather than reflecting directly material or political relationships . . . The splendors, limits, and ironies of *consciousness* are Wilson Harris’s great concerns” (Baker and Blassingame xi, original emphasis). In his introduction to *The Womb of Space*, Harris claims that his “primary responsibility lay with the elaboration of gateways into the largely submerged territory of the imagination” (xix). Brodber’s construction of *Louisiana* partially coincides with Harris’s theoretical inquiries, but she does not allow herself the luxury of disregarding material relationships, since the material conditions of black diasporic people ground her entire body of work. Indeed, most of the histories Brodber relates in this text recount slave rebellions, labor strikes, and other historical but unknown acts of resistance against the dominant white powers. Nevertheless, the cross-cultural imagination that Ella represents initiates the historical knowledge that, as we will see, remains absolutely essential to an effective diasporic political community.

Harris endorses the cross-cultural imagination as the most viable site for new forms of community

The paradox of cultural heterogeneity, or cross-cultural capacity, lies in the evolutionary thrust it restores to orders of the imagination, the ceaseless dialogue it inserts between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs or bridges of community. (WS xviii)

Ella becomes the “intuitive self,” Louisiana, through her conversations with the venerable sisters and her psychic readings; and the consequent understanding she gains from them serves as the force behind the expansion of her own imagination. For example, she

defines herself as “the link between the shores washed by the Caribbean sea, a hole . . . I join the world of the living and the world of the spirits. I join the past with the present. In me Louise and Sue Ann are joined. I am Louisiana” (124). As a figure of the cross-cultural imagination, Louisiana represents a deeply interior experience of collective agency at the psychical/spiritual/cultural level. She also represents the ways in which this experience of collective agency depends primarily on the collective, rather than the self. As she listens to the voices from within, she tries to seek out their experiences, but the effectiveness of this ability depends upon the collective and not her own desire. Her individual desire, agency, and acts, then, are subordinated to the power of the collective group.

The voices Ella hears symbolize both the collective consciousness and the spiritual discourses that partially relay this consciousness. Brodber repeatedly stresses Ella’s lack of power and control here. For instance, after one of Mammy’s stories, she attempts to “hear” more: “There was nothing after this. I touched, I pushed, I stroked, focused and projected myself but there was nothing” (83). Though Ella cannot fully exercise control over these processes, Brodber makes clear the dependent relationship between conjure work and the collectivity. Without the sisters, Madame Marie, Reuben, Marie’s boarders and so on, Ella would not be able to perform her work—not only as a spirit worker, but as an anthropologist and historian. Her readings plunge her into a new understanding of communal existence that departs from “the twin axes of scientific rationality and the politicized ideology of power and control . . . [and instead] revolves . . . around the exigencies of spirit . . . a consciousness inclining towards the full

manifestation of its cosmic interrelatedness” (Rahming n. pag.). Interrelatedness becomes the obvious condition of her existence and her explorations of this highly populated ground brings her to a novel understanding of self as dependent upon, and grounded within, the community.

In *Louisiana*, Brodber underscores the fact that this interrelatedness always already exists among the diasporic community, whether one realizes it consciously or not. She incorporates the line “Ah who sey Sammy dead” from the Jamaican folk song “Sammy plant a piece of corn” as the initial force behind Ella’s possession. The first time Ella hears it, it comes through as her own voice on the tape recorder (mixed with Mammy’s and Lowly’s voices), though she claims that “nowhere was that phrase in my consciousness at the time” (31). The folk song works here just as the blues song does in Baker’s conceptualization:

The blues song erupts, creating a veritable playful festival of meaning. Rather than a rigidly personalized form, the blues offer a phylogenetic recapitulation—a nonlinear, freely associative, nonsequential meditation—of species experience. What emerges is not a filled subject, but an anonymous (nameless) voice issuing from the black (w)hole. (5)

Though Ella hears her own voice say the words, the song itself comes from that collective consciousness somewhat unfamiliar to her; it does not spring directly from her individual(ist) consciousness. Significantly, the song had been sung at the funeral of her grandmother (though she had forgotten this); thus, Brodber shows that collective consciousness resides within the individual whether the individual realizes it or not. As the speaker of the song phrase, and as a spiritual medium, Ella signifies Baker’s “blues

voice.” She becomes not only the representative, but also the conduit of the collective’s experiences. Brodber’s text shows how Ella becomes embedded within the constantly circulating cultural, social, historical, political and private knowledges of the Afro-Caribbean/African-American community, and eventually how those knowledges lead to the extension and strengthening of that community.

Histories become the mode of knowledge through which Ella most significantly extends this diasporic community. Brodber’s depiction of the stories and histories that Ella translates and transmits forcefully challenges the notion that they can ever be conceived of as static or stable. All aspects of the diasporic community—its knowledges, forms, and processes—remain continually in-flux. Like Baker, Brodber stresses nonlinearity and nonsequentiality, and thus, her rendering of histories challenges the Western historical model of linear progression. Her narrative strategies also disrupt and revise traditional conceptions of black nationalism, Pan-Africanism and negritude, which, according to Carol Boyce-Davies, define themselves in a “static, essentialized, nativized, flawed, historical context” that does not suffice to represent the dispersed peoples of the black Atlantic (50).¹⁷ In highlighting the mutability of various forms of knowledge, Brodber offers another response to Fanon’s argument that the return to African cultural traditions runs the risk of constricting present and future possibilities because it looks to a

¹⁷ Boyce-Davies’ *Black Women, Writing and Identity* and Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* are two well-known critiques of the emphasis on “roots.” These texts counter attendant notions of immobility and static history with an emphasis on movement and the circulation of ideas, knowledge and culture through voluntary travel and of course, forced migration. In the former, Boyce-Davies posits migratory subjectivity as the appropriate designation for black women’s experiences throughout the diaspora; in the latter, Paul Gilroy employs his famous roots/routes metaphor to account for both aspects of contemporary black subjectivity. Brodber herself offers a different metaphor for black subjectivity, but one that nonetheless counters the notion of roots as a simple return to an idealized past.

past that is “irrelevant to the present” (161). In this statement, Fanon imagines the past as a time period that holds no bearing on the present, as if some sort of dividing line exists between the two temporalities. Brodber turns this notion on its head by illustrating not only that the past continues to influence the present and the future, but also by showing how knowledge about the past, as it is conceived through the discipline of traditional history or historiography, remains severely limited. In order to understand the past(s) and its continual relevance in the present and future, one must remain open to the various forms such understanding can possibly take.

As I stated earlier, Louisiana’s prophesies strikingly do not foretell the future; instead, they manifest as visions of the past: “I am a soothsayer, yes, but one who looks behind, sees and will see the past. I see that clearly” (106). Allegorically, her conjure work recovers and reconstructs the omitted personal and social histories of diasporic subjects which are either too painful for individuals to remember or too complex to be consciously and discursively rendered. Dipesh Chakrabarty labels such histories “subaltern pasts,” which he defines as those narratives of the past that are “subordinated by the ‘major’ narratives of the dominant institutions” (101). One such history is that of Mammy’s mother, who was killed as a result of her labor organizing in 1878. The tale itself is multiply narrated; Mammy reports the story to Louisiana, not only through her own voice, but also through the voice of her grandmother, who, at times, incorporates the words of the white masters:

Til now nobody seen the body, they tell me. Nobody know if that be the woman lynched down in Louisiana that have this state with Mississippi flying off to Chicago city. “Certain people”, my Grandma say, “too sure that ‘strange woman’

throw she own self in the river. ‘Ain’t she been acting strange ever since she been back here Vinnette’”—Grandma name Vinnette—“big Massa, Massa Findlay, Massa Findlay wife say, the works overseer say.” My Grandmother say she say “Hmmmmmm” and hold her belly tight. (113)

In the way she structures this story, Brodber demonstrates the overwhelming power that the dominant white discourses exert over the black matriarch’s options and abilities for expressing herself, even within the confines of her own family. Straightforward accusation of those responsible appears impossible; it can only be implicitly expressed through the subtle phrase, “certain people.” Moreover, the information that Mammy’s grandmother gleans from those words tells her all that she wants to know, and reading the dominant culture in this way becomes one type of knowledge that she imparts to Mammy, and which Mammy imparts to Louisiana through the telling of the story. Thus, all at once, in this brief account, we learn the sanctioned history (a ‘strange woman’ drowned herself); the unsanctioned but obviously more accurate history (she was murdered); the approximated affective history that results from it; the ways in which these histories are constructed (through the discourses of the white men and women and Mammy’s grandmother); and the ways in which these histories can never be articulated in their entirety. Yet, even though they cannot be articulated, Brodber clearly demonstrates that they *can* be understood as Louisiana and ostensibly, Brodber’s readers, can discern something akin to what actually occurred.

Brodber repeatedly draws attention to the fact that such understanding is an absolutely essential aspect of forming a viable diasporic political community to struggle against oppression and abuse. Yet, it stands as only one of many necessary elements. By

making Louisiana a social scientist who, even after years of work as a psychic, insists on recording the historical data she receives and attempts to corroborate it with the dominant historical record, Brodber shows the need for historical knowledge in all of its myriad forms. When Louisiana goes in search of information at the library about the caneworkers' strike, Mammy laughs at her, but she nevertheless finds information about an 1878 "Disturbance in the canefield" in which women took "leadership roles" (139). She tells Mammy, "What your granny felt, what your mother felt, what you felt cannot be told any better than you have told it" (139), and the conveyance of Mammy's story resonates with Louisiana's earlier realization that "Feeling is knowing" (116). Yet, affective knowledge alone remains ever incomplete. Houston Baker asserts that "in practice, histories are always limited by ideology. Catalogs [of historical elements] are not merely constituted. They are instituted . . . on the basis of ideologies" (25). Brodber's portrayal of Louisiana's method points toward the way in which one might circumvent the limitations of these ideologies, by gathering information in Historical (yes) but also affective, rational, spiritual, and experiential forms.

In her depiction of Louisiana's library research to corroborate Mammy's story, and in her own multiple authorial positions as fiction writer and historian, Brodber typifies what Edouard Glissant calls the necessary "creative approach" to history for a people with a "nonhistory" (61-62). For Glissant, nonhistory does not signify that African diasporic peoples lack a history in the Hegelian sense. Instead, he defines it in his discussion of Caribbean historical consciousness, which "came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation and explosive forces. This dislocation of the

continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all, characterize what I call a nonhistory” (61-2). In this conceptualization, Glissant powerfully maintains the existence of those histories that had been said not to exist, but he also shows that the re-establishment of the continuum is vital “to the formation of community” (63). As Louisiana works at reconstructing the history of the caneworkers’ strike (and the longshoreman’s strike organized by Mammy) through what she gains from history books and what Mammy tells her, she exemplifies this vital link. Her psychic knowledge informs her academic historical work, making her research and discovery more representative of reality than one or the other would be alone.

Brodber’s both/and approach to narrating histories not only increases the store of historical knowledge; it also rigidly contests those dominant historical discourses that suggest the powerlessness and passivity of black diasporic subjects descended from slaves. In addition to her mother, Mammy’s grandfather, and her grandmother’s second husband, Ramrod, were both killed for challenging their white owner, and as I pointed out earlier, Mammy herself helped organize the New Orleans longshoreman’s strike. These forgotten events in American history (Houston Baker distinguishes the American historical situation from that of the Caribbean), result from what Baker terms the “economics of slavery”—a mode of production and system of thought which “promoted the dehumanizing plunder of African labor, [while] it also produced a corollary southern mythology of the ruling class” (27). Baker shows how this dominant ideology forced authors such as Gustavus Vassa (author of the *The Life of Olaudah Equiano*), Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs and others to negotiate their existence, and eventually their

freedom from within this ideology. In *Louisiana*, Brodber shows not only how diasporic subjects negotiate within this social structure, but also how they work to contest it.

Baker's identification of the economics of slavery as a limiting ideology in American history correlates to Dipesh Chakrabarty's theory of the history of capital, or what he calls H1. According to Chakrabarty, dominant historical discourses reflect "the universal and necessary history we associate with capital. It forms the backbone of the usual narratives of transition to the capitalist mode of production" (63). Such discourses—typically associated with academic disciplinary history—reinscribe capitalist modes of production as the ultimate end goal for the nation-state. They also tend to elide the complex realities of a subject's life practices, since they read historical subjects as simply "bearers of labor power" without taking into account the many "other ways of being in the world" (66). In terms of slavery, H1 implicitly boosts the view of African diasporic subjects—such as those presented in Brodber's text—as slaves and the descendants of slaves, without articulating the myriad ways in which they contested, resisted and forcefully struggled against the plantation system.

Notably, most of the histories Louisiana gains from her discussions with Mammy center on labor strikes and other forms of protest that never made it into the history books. In these narratives, slaves and descendants of slaves indeed become the subjects of their own histories. For example, Mammy describes her grandfather's reaction to learning that he is a slave after he attempted to run away. His master catches him and tells him, "'You be bought and paid for. You have no right to go off as you please.' Bought and paid for by somebody else! Dear Jesus, bought and paid for. Have no self!"

(82). Brodber relays the narration here as if Mammy repeats the words her grandfather thought or said, though there's no way she could have heard them because he died before she was born. The discourse here reflects the historical experience of the collectivity rather than the individual; many slaves, even the descendants of slaves (as Mammy shows) experienced the shock of recognition of the self as property. Moreover, this story, which ends somewhat unsurprisingly with the lynching of "Grandpappy," contains an astonishing twist: "Massa Sutton so shame, he do away with himself. Do away with himself. And that never happen before neither. He and Grandpappy move together from they small" (83). Returning to Chakrabarty's thesis, one can see how this particular history would be subsumed by H1. The historical discourses that reinforce capitalist modes of production cannot recognize or articulate the affective relationship between what it deems an owner and his property, but the spiritual discourses or unrecognized voices of histories can.

A danger exists, Vasant Kaiwar points out, in placing too much theoretical weight on the power of such alternative historical discourses to work toward the end of oppression and injustice. He asserts that

Chakrabarty strives mightily to argue that the real roots of oppression in . . . the Third World . . . lie in a rampant Eurocentrism and historicism, not in income inequalities, mass poverty, patriarchy, the exploitation of labour, or the manifold oppressions of the state. The struggle is displaced onto the level of discourse. (191)

In my own view, both oppressive and exploitative material practices, and the discourses that reinforce the "logic" behind those practices, need recognition and contestation in the

material and theoretical sphere. As Brodber conveys the collective experiences of Mammy, Lowly and others, she also shows the necessity for a both/and approach to resistance; the histories that Louisiana collects narrate the actual material struggles against oppression that occurred in the past; and, as narratives, they also contest the oppressive effects of dominant histories.

Textually, Brodber's contestation of these multiple forms of oppression occurs not only through the revisioning of history, but also through a revisioning of the possible future(s). Brodber makes Louisiana a soothsayer who only reads the past; she cannot foresee the future. In so doing, she creates a sense of openness and possibility for the future deemed vital to the viability of the diaspora as a political community. The representation of Louisiana's soothsaying rejects the notion of predetermined futurity, leaving an open space/time for people to "write" their own futures. In Chakrabarty's terms, Brodber's picture of the future as an open space explicitly shows how readings of the past directly influence those possible futures. As Chakrabarty points out, the teleology of H1 "has to subjugate or destroy the multiple possibilities that belong to H2 [subaltern pasts]" (65). In demonstrating a discursive openness toward the future, Brodber underscores the agency of diasporic subjects to create their own realities—based on the knowledge they attain through historical memory and cultural forms/processes. In the structure of the text, it also resonates with the images of Louisiana as a "hole," and Baker's blues matrix as the "black (w)hole," delineating a powerful linkage between open-ended histories and the open, inclusive nature of the community.

If opening up the relationship between the present and past leads to a consequential opening of the future, Brodber stresses that multiple knowledges are essential for the collectivity to create a future in which diasporic subjects will be politically empowered and free. Knowledge in all its myriad forms serves as the single most crucial motivator for revolution in the text. Brodber instantiates this in Mammy's narration of her grandfather's experience

My Grandpappy was a thinking man but he ain't know no word called 'slave.' He be thinking though and Massa Sutton he always be raising questions with him: "Moses," Massa Sutton he like to say, "Wish I was you. Nothing to worry you. . . I gotta be wracking my brain. . . where to get that better price. . . It is a hard life Moses." Come the day Grandpappy say, "Only difference Massa Sutton, you sleeps on the featherbed and I's on the moss. . . With that one saying the learning start." (81)

Remarkably, this passage orders events in such a way as to posit experiential knowledge as the *precursor* to learning, and affirmation of that experiential knowledge as a precursor to conscious knowledge and protest, which actually replicates the broader trajectory of the plot as represented by Louisiana, whose psychic abilities manifest before she knows what to do with them, and whose experiences through these abilities bring she and her husband Reuben to a conscious understanding of the African diaspora's political past, which, in turn, brings Reuben to political participation in the contemporaneous independence struggles in Africa.

Light-skinned and biracial, born in the Congo but raised in Europe, Reuben longs for a sense of connection with other African diasporic subjects. In New Orleans, he finally finds "that little capillary that was to take him right back to the tall oak he was

trying to find in his Congo, in the heart of Africa. . . Reuben had found black men” (52).

Undoubtedly, these black men signify the community Reuben has been searching for, but Ella’s description is only partial, for when she elaborates, she explains that “the little capillary” also brought him to her, and to black music.

He was strutting, strumming, learning to jazz and get acquainted with the blues. Not that he was a total stranger to these two latter, for he had met them in Europe and had ferreted [them] out in New York. But these products there were processed. In this Louisiana canefield sounds and styles were coming hot out of the oven. He was feeling them in the making, was there at their conception. The man was being made anew. (53)

Through Reuben, Brodber invokes Baker’s blues matrix even more forcefully than she does through Ella. First, because Reuben plunges specifically into this creolized “music that celebrates organized discord, community, harmony in discord, and individuality all at once” and becomes a new self as a result (Roberts 263). His collective agency manifests partially through his own eventual production of jazz and blues recordings. Yet, even more importantly, Reuben also plays the role of the blues singer in Baker’s metaphor. Blues singers, Baker asserts, serve as translators. They “offer interpretations of the experiencing of experience . . . [and] produce polyvalent interpretations encoded as blues. The singer’s product . . . constitutes . . . a robust matrix, where endless antinomies are mediated and understanding and explanation find conditions of possibility” (7). In the narrative structure of the text (which I discuss further below), Reuben serves as the penultimate translator of Ella’s life work; although she is the most prominent translator of the narratives in the text, it is his voice we hear last in the narrative overall. Thus, he not only participates in the recirculation of cultural bodies of knowledge through music, but

he also discursively propagates the historical and spiritual knowledges found through Ella's work. More importantly, however, his final translation occurs through the translation of the self as a politicized subject, symbolizing what I deem Brodber's ultimate argument—that the comprehension of the preexistent community's cultural forms and historical experiences directly initiates the sense of political unity that might result in effective resistance against social, racial, economic and political oppression for diasporic subjects.

The key aspect of the blues singer's translational work, in Baker's theory, lies in that subject's ability to find conditions of possibility in the matrix through which he operates. Reuben's condition of possibility becomes organized resistance but only after he "translates" Ella's ultimate text. Indeed, the literal act of translation links with Brodber's drawing of Lowly's translation from life to death; "you can see from every angle. And I tell you. What a sight!" (10). Armed with the knowledge gleaned from his and Ella's experiences, Reuben exclaims, "Protest is all about and our people are making their discontent known. Is this my community? Have I any business in this? I am hearing of Kasavubu and Lumumba. . . I am beginning to think that I must put down my spade in the Congo. . . That would be an extension of the community" (166). Once again here, Brodber suggests the image of the rhizome—the rootless root—spreading throughout the black Atlantic. As Brodber depicts it, Reuben's attainment of cultural and historical knowledges initiates his sense of belonging in the community, which in turn brings him to actively protest oppression and injustice and to work toward the extension of the community by fighting against these forces.

Through Reuben's end, Brodber elucidates the absolutely crucial possibility of political resistance which she deems essential for the diaspora, but she also introduces a gendered division between the political and the ostensibly personal. Cynthia James claims that "*Louisiana*. . . can be considered a work that fulfills . . . [the] call for visibility and recognition for the black West Indian immigrant woman in America, particularly between the World Wars" (154). While I agree that the political actions of Mammy, Mammy's mother, and Lowly take center stage in this text, the portrayal of Louisiana and Reuben—in comparison to that of Mammy, Silas and Lowly—appears problematic. Between the threesome, Silas recognizes the women as the hardest workers: "'The work', they say, 'Gotta do the work' . . . And I just a mere man could not resist them" (148). Indeed, Lowly and Mammy perform both the psychic/spiritual work correlative with Ella's and the political organizational work correlative with Reuben's, but a clear division of labor exists between Ella and Reuben. They represent respectively what Partha Chatterjee calls *ghar and bāhir* or the home and the world, in which "the world is external, the domain of the material; the home represents one's spiritual self, one's true identity" (120). Chatterjee points out that Indian nationalists during the colonial period, "gave this division special significance. . . [they] asserted that [the European power] had failed to colonize the inner, essential identity of the East, which lay in its distinctive, superior, spiritual culture" (121). As Louisiana rules over the home and nourishes her ties with the spiritual world while Reuben handles all worldly matters, the difference between their marriage and Silas and Mammy's hints at a historical explanation. Marcus Garvey's movement represented an imagined black nation, and Silas

and Mammy felt they belonged to it; thus, the home/world dichotomy became unnecessary. No colonial or neocolonial power threatened their nationalist identities in this specific nation-space. With the end of the movement, and the lack of protection from that nationalist structure, however, black men and women may have perceived the need to once again divide the spiritual from the material, reinforcing the separation of these two realities. This division, Brodber shows, damages both the psyche and the politics of diasporic subjects.

Within the structure of the text, Brodber contests this division by making Reuben's activism an extension of Ella's work and by delineating Ella's insistent plea to hear not only Mammy and Lowly's histories, but also Silas's. When the venerable sisters are making their preparations for Louisiana's arrival "home," she proclaims: "Let it be told. . . I shall not go until I have made a closer acquaintance with one or more of the fathers" (141). Their response is that Silas "helped to make things happen" (141). Louisiana deems this response unacceptable, thereby demonstrating Brodber's refusal to allow the displacement of one exclusion (women's historical work) with another (men's historical work). At first glance, this gives the appearance of reinforcing the masculinist emphasis in Pan-Africanist discourses as Carol Boyce-Davies describes it: "what is asked of women in some of these nationalist discourses is that they accept their own oppression as given . . . to allow race-based discourses, i.e. Black/male discourses, to exist" (51). Yet, as in the aforementioned quote by Silas, his voice tends to confirm and support the powerful roles the women played rather than draw attention to himself. Thus, through the depiction of these multiple relationships, Brodber again displays a both/and approach

to gender in the political viability of the community—ensuring that her feminist revisioning of community does not become exclusivist in that way.

Finally, the narrative structure of *Louisiana* also exemplifies the text itself as a type of blues matrix through which discourses and practices circulate, transform, and extend the diasporic community. Originally commissioned as a scientific historical contribution to the U.S. government's state-sanctioned archives, the text instead becomes a communal work of creative nonfiction—merging science, “high science” (i.e. spiritual work), ethnography, and personal narrative. Its multi-genre structure resonates with that of *The Atlantic Sound*, as both Phillips and Brodber work toward the reconnection of the diaspora through the incorporation of multiple voices, experiences and styles of narrative. As the main body of the text incorporates the narrative of Louisiana's life and the lives of those who “possess” her, it depicts the communal and historical knowledge gained from the experiences represented in the book. Yet, Brodber inserts several mediating texts which include an ‘editor's note’ to Louisiana's manuscript and a letter from Reuben for those editors. These mediating texts demonstrate the diffusion of the community's cultural, spiritual, and historical knowledges and ways of knowing throughout the diaspora and beyond (to those intellectual audiences of black history and literature). It also projects outward toward an open future in which these forms of knowledge might serve as the ground for a unified, politically empowered diaspora to come into being.

The novel opens with an editor's note, dated March 1978, which explains the arrival of an anonymous manuscript (titled *Louisiana*) at a small black women's press. After verifying the existence of its primary narrator Ella Townsend, whom they discover

was a Columbia graduate student of Anthropology, they publish it with very little editing (4). They also write that the inclusion of Reuben's letter as an epilogue signifies their entrance into the "community of the production" of the text, and that with the money earned through sales of the book, they will establish a fund for the study of "commonalities in African America and the African Caribbean in the period between the World Wars" (4-5). All at once, this note signals the academic circulation of Louisiana's and the others' personal narratives and collective histories, the black communal construction of the text, and an offer of financial support for the continuation of part of Louisiana's project (i.e. the unification of members of the African diaspora). As the manuscript circulates among an audience of interested readers, the knowledges exposed therein also travel, thus reiterating the expansion and extension of these discourses. Notably, the editor's letter ends with an indefinite call to action: "Our press extends the chain of hands. Join us" (5). This "end" directly illustrates the extension of the community through black textual production. As readers learn about voodoo, the strikes that have been relegated to footnotes in history books (and the individuals who organized them), the New Orleans of the early-middle twentieth-century, and of course, Garvey's astounding influence, the cultural and historical knowledge embedded in the text projects outward to reinvigorate the present and the future of African diasporic peoples.

Brodber's organization of the text, like the content, definitively shows that cultural knowledge, and the understanding of self that accompanies it, must precede the comprehension of lived/living histories. This explains why Louisiana waits nearly twenty years to finally gain access to the history of Mammy that the WPA had expected her to

acquire. Louisiana's plunge into the cross-cultural world of spirits, her self-discovery, and her learned openness place her in the most appropriate mind frame for proper reception of Mammy's history. Brodber's portrayal exemplifies the process of literary reading as Gayatri Spivak articulates it

A training in literary reading is a training to learn from the singular and the unverifiable. Although literature cannot speak, this species of patient reading, miming an effort to make the text respond, as it were, is a training not only in poiesis, accessing the other so well that probably action can be prefigured, but teleo-poiesis, striving for a response from the distant other, without guarantees. (532)

Within the text, Louisiana's patience as a conjuror and transcriber replicate this process of Spivak's literary reading. Yet, even more importantly, Brodber requires her own audience to mimic this sequential process of immersion into cross-cultural and communal knowledge, followed by patient waiting and "listening" to the other stories the venerable sisters tell. As Spivak makes clear, this type of literary reading teaches educators and students how to learn "from below," which represents a significant aspect of her vision of global social justice. As Brodber activates the narrative organization to inspire her own readers to learn from below, she employs the text to promote the vision of social justice that undergirds her activist and historical work as well. Moreover, as a written text which might still be read, thirty, forty, fifty years from now, this promotion of social justice becomes a continual progression that somewhat answers Spivak's call for the continued renewal of this type of work: "The pedagogic effort that may bring about lasting epistemic change in the oppressed is never accurate, and must be forever renewed" (529).

In *Louisiana*, Reuben articulates the primary lesson readers learn when they finally do “learn from below.” As Louisiana dies, he hears her sing

Different chords, different tunes, different octaves. Sheer jazz. One sound. From one body. A community song: It is the voice I hear, I hear them say, come unto me . . . Louisiana, my wife, Ella Kohl, the former Ella Townsend, was smiling and singing. She was going over the rainbow’s mist with her knowing smile. I know now what she knows: Mammy would not tell the president nor his men her tale for it was not hers; she was no hero. It was a tale of cooperative action; it was a community tale. We made it happen. (161)

In the cooperative efforts of Mammy, Lowly, Silas and the other political workers in their day, and in the combined works of Louisiana and Reuben’s translation and transcription, the text enacts the construction of the community through alternative and multiple discourses and histories. The multiple voices with different chords, tunes and octaves emanating from a single body allegorizes the form of community that Brodber promotes throughout—internally diverse but singing (!) together. Those voices as text call out to present and future generations to fulfill the political unity that must precede the effective resistance against injustices that I read as the ultimate end of Brodber’s theory of community.

CHAPTER V

“WALKING INTO THE FACE OF HISTORY”: HISTORICAL DIFFERENCE AND DIASPORIC COMMUNITY IN *THE ATLANTIC SOUND*

In an oft-cited interview with Maya Jaggi, Caryl Phillips explains his literary engagement with history: “you subvert people’s view of history by engaging them with characters. I don’t think you subvert it by arguing schematically about ideas” (115). Phillips’s oeuvre reflects his continual engagement with notions of identity, belonging, loss, and home in diasporic populations, and his desire to subvert history stems from the understanding that history—as a discipline and as a form of cultural knowledge—plays a significant role in the exclusion and marginalization of diasporic peoples throughout the world. While the concept of a diasporic community grounded in the shared experience of dispersal attempts to unite the descendants of peoples scattered by the Atlantic slave trade, Phillips shows the impossibility of constructing such a community without a more thorough and complex understanding of identity and historical difference. In *The Atlantic Sound*, he demonstrates how differences in class, nationality, geographical location, culture and experience cannot be wholly supplanted, and thus end up reinforcing the exclusion and marginalization of certain peoples that the African diaspora is meant to counteract. At the same time, he illustrates how theories of diaspora—despite their specific attempts at transcending the limitations of nationalism and establishing a global collectivity—still mostly rely on the problematic trope of community as a static and closed *entity*. In his exploration of this notion, Phillips points out the necessity for a more

inclusive and open form of community that fosters acceptance of the myriad differences that exist among Africans, African-Americans, Afro-Caribbeans and others. In short, he attempts to move toward a community that does not subsume individual beings within a generalizable whole, but instead incorporates difference as a foundational element in its actualization.

While many critics read the text as Phillips' refutation of the possibility of establishing a global diasporic community, working toward the creation of such a community seems one of his major motivations for writing. In an interview with Stephen Clingman, he explains that he writes because he no longer wants anyone to suffer shame because of their complex historical, religious, racial and cultural identities (135). His work as a writer attempts to obliterate this shame, for himself and others, through the creation of a global community to which all black diasporic peoples might feel a sense of belonging. Although Phillips' critique is overtly political, the form of community that he struggles toward appears to be profoundly personal—a form that will aid in the fullest development of the self in all of its plurality, and through relation with others. As *The Atlantic Sound* illustrates so well, however, establishing such a community will prove impossible without some understanding of the contradictions, ironies and complexities of historical intercultural contact and how these affect contemporary individuals and experiences.

Because identity and belonging are deeply embedded within a particular view of history and a rudimentary emphasis on origins, Phillips's project requires several strategies at once: the revision and rewriting of histories and a contestation of historical

knowledge itself, a continual focus on the shifting, unstable nature of identities, and a discursive grappling with both the limits and possibilities of community. In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips employs all three strategies simultaneously by utilizing a multi-generic form—poetry, fictionalized history, historiography and travel narrative—to establish novel connections between past contexts, situations and individuals and the present. Notably, although the Vintage International paperback cover categorizes the book simply as “history,” most of the critical work about it either wholly ignores or briefly glosses its historical aspects. David Ellis, Maria Lourdes Lopez Romero and Elena Machado Sáez discuss Phillips’s discursive engagement with history, but only as support and/or contextualization for their larger arguments about black British writing, travel writing and neocolonial subjectivity, respectively.¹⁸ Other scholars have thoroughly addressed Phillips’s revision and re-membering of seemingly disparate and disconnected histories in fictional works like *Higher Ground* and *The Nature of Blood*, but not in *The Atlantic Sound*.¹⁹ Yet, Phillips’s self-proclaimed desire to subvert history permeates this text and serves as the fulcrum on which rests his literary theorization of diaspora.

Although the book seems to stress the limits to establishing a viable diasporic community—as many reviewers and critics have noted—I argue that this emphasis paradoxically suggests some possibilities for transcending those limits.²⁰ Phillips

¹⁸ See Ellis’s “‘Transatlantic Passages’: Lamming, Phillips and the Course of Black Writing in Britain,” Lopez Romero’s “Travel Writing and Postcoloniality: Caryl Phillips’s *The Atlantic Sound*,” and Machado Sáez’s “Postcoloniality, Atlantic Orders, and the Migrant Male in the Writings of Caryl Phillips.”

¹⁹ See, for example, Andrew Armstrong, “Bloody History! Exploring a Capacity for Revision. Exploring History in Wilson Harris’ *Jonestown* and Caryl Phillips’s *The Nature of Blood*” and Stephen Clingman, “Forms of History and Identity in *The Nature of Blood*.”

²⁰ See David Ho, Vivian Nun-Halloran, Darryl Pinckney and Elena Machado Sáez.

painstakingly delineates many of the problems that arise from inter- and even intra-cultural contacts in an attempt to discover a productive way to transcend these problems. Though he never clearly outlines an alternative model, he does show how a better understanding of difference can facilitate a community formation like that which Jean Bethke Elshtain and Christopher Beem describe as a “‘we’ [that] also enables these same persons to separate themselves and to recognize one another in and through their differences as well as what they share in common” (37). Moreover, I argue that critics who read Phillips as completely cynical about the development of diasporic community conflate Phillips the narrator and Phillips the (implied) author. Sáez argues that Phillips’s historical hyperconsciousness produces a “pessimism about humanity and the future of equality within a new world order” (19). While Phillips the narrator indeed seems cynical about diasporic subjects’ shallow and often contentious relations, the author Phillips structures the book in a way that highlights spontaneous moments of affective or cognitive connection between the narrator, the people he meets, and the readers of *The Atlantic Sound*. Distinguishing between the author and narrator and scrutinizing the authorial construction of the text renders a less cynical reading of the diaspora than most critics, and Phillips the narrator, seem to allow. It also allows for the recognition of Phillips’ development of community through the praxis of writing.

The Atlantic Sound’s form, narrative structure, and historicity render productive moments of Relation—as Édouard Glissant theorizes this concept—in which individuals and their historical experiences establish connection to each other through difference rather than commonality. Relation, Glissant explains, cannot correspond with the English

term relationship; it is the way individuals, cultures, and temporalities connect with each other and the totality-world (*totalité-monde*), without obliterating differences through generalization (27). In this context, Relation serves as the possible mode or method—the stepping-stone—for creating a viable collectivity that incorporates difference as well as similarity among its members. Phillips's text manifests several elements of Glissant's theory: a narrator engaged in errantry (voluntary uprooting in search of the other), a rejection of filiation (the desire for legitimate and legitimating origins); an acceptance of the opacity of other individuals and cultures; and finally, a conception of understanding as “giving-on-and-with” (*donner-avec*) or yielding to others' cultural and subjective knowledge rather than trying to “grasp” or “take” that knowledge for one's own benefit (the connotations of the French *comprendre*). Each of these elements works together with the others to contest the boundaries inherent within closed, static communities.

While Phillips's text does not serve as a complete correlative representation of Glissant's Relation, it does illuminate the many failures and only fleeting successes of Relation that even sometimes occur between individuals in vastly different temporal locations.

Attention to historical discontinuity, or what Dipesh Chakrabarty calls historical difference, allows Phillips to construct these moments, which may eventually proliferate among contemporary diasporic subjects and aid in the formation of a collective social group positively grounded in and through difference.

The Atlantic Sound follows Phillips (the narrator) as he journeys to several cities throughout the geographical triangle of the slave trade—from Guadeloupe to Liverpool, England; Accra, Ghana; Charleston, South Carolina; and finally to the Negev desert in

Israel. Each destination inspires Phillips's ruminations on the familiar but still vexing questions of diaspora identity, belonging, and home. In the first chapter, "Atlantic Crossing," the narrator travels by banana boat to Dover with the ship's German captain, Burmese crew, four German passengers, an American named Kevin and an English couple, Charles and Mavis. The trip is long, lonely and excruciatingly boring, yet Phillips intentionally isolates himself from everyone else on the ship. At dinner, he refuses to allow Kevin (who would like to escape from the arrogant and overbearing Charles and Mavis) to sit at his table because for Phillips, having his own table enables him to cling to his sanity (14). Later in the voyage, he begins to stay in his room all day and emerge only at night to wander the decks and smuggle food from the kitchen—"a small price to pay for the peace of mind that solitude bestows upon [him]" (19). Although his fellow passengers cannot be classified as subjects of diaspora—they travel of their own free will, and have not been forcefully or otherwise dispersed from their homelands—his interactions with them set the tone for each of the remaining travel narratives in the book. Phillips is cynical, distant, and judgmental of everyone around him; he adopts a detached and critical rhetorical stance that, for the most part, lacks any semblance of emotive identification with others (Machado Sáez 19). Yet, metatextually, these travels represent Phillips's efforts to better learn and understand his own and others' experiences of dislocation and ongoing negotiation of the slave trade legacy. Thematically, the triangular trip, painstaking historical research and interviews with Ghanaian, British and Guadaloupean men and women manifest Phillips's attempts to go toward others, to connect with them in some way; thus, to see him solely as the critical

bystander is to ignore the sociopolitical and cultural work of the text and its author. Instead, Phillips enacts what Kobena Mercer has labeled, “critical dialogism,” a critical representational process which “has the potential to overturn the binaristic relations of hegemonic boundary maintenance by multiplying critical dialogues *within* particular communities and *between* the various constituencies that make up the ‘imagined community’ of the nation. At once articulating the personal and the political, such dialogism shows that . . . black identities are plural and heterogeneous” (257 original emphasis). Phillips’ text, despite its apparent skepticism, works to overturn the “binaristic relations” that Mercer references here.

The Atlantic Sound depicts Phillips as a world traveler in search of understanding in this ostensibly postcolonial world. His desire to learn and understand through travel links with Glissant’s notion of errantry—a foundational element of Relation. Errantry is a sacred type of wandering, not for conquest, discovery or invasion, but in order to plunge the depths and chaos of totality. Because Glissant’s theories deal primarily with poetics, errantry does not equate with actual travel; rather, he defines errantry as a way of thought which “silently emerges from the deconstructing of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, *from difficult, uncertain births of new forms of identity that call to us*” (18 my emphasis). While *The Atlantic Sound* textually represents Phillips’s actual travels, the book illustrates errantry primarily through its narrative structure and chapter titles. As Zara Bennett argues, the dissonance between the chapter titles and their content aptly illustrate the difficulty and uncertainty of new identity forms which Phillips continually strives toward (11). For

instance, in “Homeward Bound,” on a flight to Elmina, a Ghanaian businessman, Ben, asks Phillips, “Where are you from?” Although Phillips half-heartedly attempts to explain his situation to the man (who perfunctorily concludes that Phillips is going “home” to Ghana), he repeats the phrase “No, I am not going home,” twice with italicized emphasis to his readers (125). The chapter titled “Home” is ironically set in Charleston, South Carolina—a city Phillips has never actually lived in, and “Exodus,” describes the permanent settlement of the Hebrew Israelites—voluntary African-American exiles—in the Negev desert. In designating the unknown, “Home,” and the settled, “Exodus,” Phillips intentionally disturbs national identities and pushes them toward the creation of something new. Moreover, in his exploration of situations so foreign to his own—Ben’s “rootedness,” and the Hebrew Israelites’ confidence in their endeavor, among others—Phillips demonstrates his desire to take up the problems of the other—another essential component in the thought of errantry (Glissant 18).

The scene in which Phillips repeats, “No, I am not going home” also illuminates his personal rejection of Africa as putative homeland—a rejection more thoroughly theorized in “Homeward Bound,” his account of Panafest at Elmina. Phillips intentionally highlights every phrase or incident that contests the myth of Africa as home for dispersed African-American, black British and Caribbean subjects. As Bénédicte Ledent points out, Phillips recognizes how easily this myth might lead to intolerance, and he is particularly wary of the cultural tourism that “fails to make tourists aware of the very system of oppression it is supposed to denounce or at least oppose” (203). At one point, Phillips overhears an African-American woman at Panafest expressing her concern

that she does not have the right currency with which to buy a Coke. In Phillips's words, "then she remembers herself, and in the spirit of family unity she states that, 'in New York we don't take cedis so we gotta make the effort. You know, one blood, one family'" (171). The homeland, the sacred root(s), and the familial unity idealized by Pan-Africanist thinkers appear in this moment as the woman's resigned acceptance of her inability to purchase an American consumer product. This brief episode incisively illustrates the return to roots as a fallacy grounded in simplistic notions of identity and history, while it also demonstrates that such a fallacy obstructs the necessary foundation for real collective unity.

Despite his criticism, Phillips clearly recognizes and understands the desire for roots. When he reflects about Ben, the stranger he met on the plane to Ghana, he admits: "I envy his rootedness" (126). Yet the very desires (for rootedness and a homeland) that ostensibly unite diasporic peoples more often wind up dividing them, because all of their differences cannot be subsumed by this single shared desire. Furthermore (and perhaps paradoxically), though this desire ends up being one of the primary elements in the legitimization of the community, it actually points up the lack of substance in this foundation for the community. Glissant elucidates this problem in his discussion of how Western communities—through the process of "filiation"—endeavored to legitimate their existence through genealogies that trace back to a mythic or epic individual (Alexander, Ulysses, etc.). Filiation is a circular process, whereby the "retelling (certifying) of a 'creation of the world' in a filiation guarantees that this same filiation . . . rigorously ensues *simply by describing in reverse* the trajectory of the community from its present to

this act of creation” (47 my emphasis). There are no actual grounds for viable community in this process; the origin story is essentially an effect that becomes a cause through narrative.²¹

While Glissant focuses on Western myth, Phillips’s narration of Panafest shows that the desire for legitimacy and rootedness also proliferates in diasporic subjects (including himself). Though the point of origin for the diaspora is a homeland—rather than an individual and the bloodline that follows—it still practices the same type of exclusion and “hidden violence” as nationalism, religious myth and other community origin stories. Phillips hints at this hidden violence, which results from the fact that “no myth ever provides for the legitimacy of the other,” when he describes Ben’s staunch refusal to accept that Ghana/Africa is not the author’s home (Glissant 49). Reading Phillips *only* as a member of the dispersed African family, which he admittedly is, Ben refuses to recognize any other aspects of Phillips’s complex and irreducible identity(-ies)—an act that metaphorically destroys parts of Phillips’s self.

Identity tends to play a major role in the construction or destruction of diasporic community, and in many ways Phillips struggles against this. Stuart Hall makes the

²¹ In his study of modern literary criticism, Edward Said posits affiliation—i.e. association among people that “takes validated nonbiological social and cultural forms”—as a partial but insufficient counter to filiation, “the closed and tightly knit family structure that secures generational hierarchical relationships.” He warns that affiliation sometimes reproduces the old filiative structures, and it can “easily become a system of thought no less orthodox and dominant than culture itself. . .[a] process of representation [that] . . . reinforce[s] the known at the expense of the knowable.” An important task for the critic, then, is “to recognize the difference between instinctual filiation and social affiliation, and to show how affiliation sometimes reproduces filiation, sometimes makes its own forms. . . . [because] critical systems—even of the most sophisticated kind—can succumb to the inherently representative and reproductive relationship between a dominant culture and the domains it rules” (20-4). Caryl Phillips’ body of work clearly reflects this struggle to break from the filiative order and create new systems, and I would argue that readers of his work who only recognize his cynicism fall into the trap of reading him through the filiative lens. Thus, it is not just Phillips as critics of society, but also readers as critics of his text who might reinforce this closed structure.

important argument that diasporic cultural identities are always unstable, grounded in place, time, history, narrative, and culture. Moreover,

Like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways that we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (131)

Hall’s assertion clarifies the instability not only of identities, but of histories, and thus the instability of communities created around these constructs. This observation continually bears out in *The Atlantic Sound*. Consider for example, Phillips’s interview with Dr. Mohammed Ben Abdallah. Ben Abdallah, a playwright, intellectual and proponent of Pan-Africanism, “insists [that Pan-Africanism] is a simple concept which involves the solidarity and cohesion of all Africans and people of African descent” (144). And although he blames the destruction of the African “family” on European imperialism, the simplicity of the Pan-African concept becomes rather more complicated when he explains, just a short time later, that Ghanaian schoolchildren are taught about slavery “with the understanding that those sold into slavery were not always that good, and that in some respects they got what they deserved” (148). Without any sense of irony, the scholar articulates his faith in the “simple concept” of African diasporic unity, and then just as plainly accounts for one major reason why such unity is realistically impossible. Pan-Africanism’s one-dimensional theoretical foundation makes the philosophy inherently contradictory. These contradictions impede the possibilities of actually

establishing a community that can incorporate difference and similarity simultaneously without forcing its members to subsume the former to the latter.

Phillips further debunks the myth of past African unity by including a passage by Frederick Douglass about “the savage chiefs on the western coast of Africa, who for ages have been accustomed to selling their captives into bondage, and pocketing the ready cash for them” (143). Contesting supposed racial solidarity, Phillips repeatedly shows how other aspects of identity disturb this imagined unity. The African businessman John Ocansey stands as one case in point. In 1881 Liverpool, he develops a solid friendship with Mrs. Lyle, his white British landlady, based on mutual respect and identification along class and religious lines: “What concerned Mrs. Lyle was one’s station in life” (53). Yet, he is disgusted by a poverty-stricken African-American man “whose dirty clothes and pungent breath announced that he was clearly existing at the lowest levels of society” (79). Ocansey reflects this fundamental axiom of Phillips’s work: diasporic community can never be effectively established on the basis of common identification markers like phenotype, nation, geography, religion, class, or gender because, as Stuart Hall reminds us, these are only “unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” (131). Since these markers continually change, identification can serve as a disruptive or a unifying force, and sometimes both simultaneously, for no matter how many ways subjects might identify with each other, the facts of human existence show that there will always be countless ways in which they do not. To achieve some semblance of community, diaspora theorists like Phillips must somehow, some way, take all of these issues into account.

In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips primarily problematizes identity by providing meticulously detailed historical accounts that complicate and often forthrightly contradict a generalized, universalist notion of capital “H”-istory—and particularly the histories of diasporic subjects. He insists on highlighting those specific historical facts that explicitly show the impossibility of establishing one single historical truth (for, as Hall points out, the narratives of the past continually change). As Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur point out, theorizations of diaspora

should not be divorced from historical and cultural specificity. Diasporic traversals question the rigidities of identity itself—religious, ethnic, gendered, national; yet this diasporic movement marks not a postmodern turn from history, but a nomadic turn in which the very parameters of specific historical moments are embodied and—as diaspora itself suggests—are scattered and regrouped into new points of becoming. (3)

In many ways, Phillips’ text heeds this call. His historical work converges with the project that the subaltern studies group has set for themselves: narrating history from below. One motivating force behind incorporating histories from below is to make the discipline of history as democratic and inclusive as possible. Dipesh Chakrabarty explains that an “explicit aim of *Subaltern Studies* was to write the subaltern classes into the history of nationalism and the nation, and to combat all elitist biases in the writing of history” (102). Put another way, subaltern studies methodologies aspired to make subaltern peoples the subjects, rather than the objects, of their own histories.

Though decidedly non-nationalist in his own work, Phillips partially participates in the subaltern studies project. *The Atlantic Sound*’s inclusionary form relates the anecdotal histories of several relatively unknown figures and imaginatively explores their

myriad (and sometimes perplexing) expressions of agency. He includes the stories of the aforementioned John Emmanuel Ocansey, an African merchant's son who in 1880 sailed from the Gold Coast in order to reclaim a debt owed to his father by a Liverpudlian commissioning agent; Phillip Quaque, who, for nearly 50 years, was simultaneously employed as an educator of "the Negroes on the Gold Coast" *and* as the chaplain to the British slavers who lived at Cape Coast Castle; and Judge Julius Waties Waring—a Charleston judge who became a social outcast both for his scandalous divorce and remarriage to a woman from the North, and for his famous court decision in favor of black voting rights. The way Phillips narrates these little-known histories, which often simultaneously encourage and rebuff what Machado Sáez has termed "emotive identification," provides readers with a much more nuanced and complex understanding of the figures who lived during these times. It also highlights the limits of traditional historicization.

Although Phillips employs the same inclusive practices and disruption of the grand narratives of (H)istory, he differs from the subaltern studies group in two ways. First, his work is concerned with transnationalism and experiences of diaspora rather than nationalism, and second, his imaginative narrative methods diverge somewhat from the historical materialist methods of the subaltern studies approach (despite these historians' explicit contentions with certain elements of Marxist thought). These specific differences yield insights into the problems that arise in narrating what Chakrabarty calls "subaltern pasts," while at the same time, they indicate how Phillips's praxis of creative literary

historiography might be a necessary and important supplement to the discipline of history in creating a viable diasporic community in the present.

In Chakrabarty's critique of history as an academic discipline, he explains that history's privileging of the secular and the rational limits its abilities to narrate ways of being in the world that do not conform to these worldviews. He illustrates the problem well in his analysis of Ranajit Guha's history of the 1855 Santal rebellion. When asked why they rebelled against British colonists and non-local Indians, the Santal leaders told their interrogators that their god Thakur told them to (Chakrabarty 102-3). Their perspective, Chakrabarty explains, grants agency not to themselves but to Thakur, a position that a secular, academic historian cannot simply accept at face value. The Santals' view implicitly confounds Guha, who must strive for a "rationally defensible" narrative strategy and thus ends up "assuming a critical distance from that which he is trying to understand" (103). The rationally defensible strategy for reading these subjects, therefore, is inherently limited. It does not provide historians the ability to "stay with heterogeneities without seeking to reduce them to any overarching principle that speaks for an already given whole" (107). Chakrabarty argues that in order to struggle against this tendency, historians must simultaneously historicize and refuse to historicize. They must be able to examine the irrational in all of its multiple forms, and somehow not allow it to be subsumed by the rational "whole." I assert that Phillips's multi-genre narrative form embodies the most effective strategy for doing so.

In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty's own strategy for performing this work lies in his analysis of Bengali social life, oral and written literary texts, and the crucial

distinction between the public and private. While this strategy effectively integrates the heterogeneous life-worlds so vital to his historical project, his voice—the voice of the historian—still remains at the forefront and thus cannot transcend the critical distance he sees in Guha's account. Caryl Phillips, on the other hand, in his melding of the fictional with the historical, the past with the present, and the irrational with the rational, manages to bring readers closer to his historical subjects by partially erasing the narrator's presence. His text often plunges the reader into his historical figures' experiences without any clear narrative mediation. For instance, when he visits Sullivan's Island, which had been a holding site for many African slaves, the narrator's voice suddenly but smoothly *almost* becomes that of the slaves:

I watch a fishing boat, its nets hoisted high above its head, kicking up a playful surf as it slowly purrs its way home. Sullivan's Island is an eerie and troubled place. Flat, marsh, grassland. An arrival in America. Having crossed the Atlantic in the belly of a ship. An arrival. Here, in America. Step ashore, out of sight of Charleston. To be fed, watered, scrubbed, prepared. To be sold. Back home, a similar climate. Different vegetation. Different birds. Family. (257-8 my emphasis)

Though this excerpt obviously begins with Phillips's investigative “I,” that voice first gives way to a disembodied observer, and then finally to the (still yet) disembodied voice(s) of African(s), who can only relate to the site of disembarkation through their previous experiences of home and family—experiences to which Phillips himself has difficulty relating. This method places readers more directly in touch with his subjects' experiences. In short, Chakrabarty narrates *and* analyzes and explains the heterogeneous life-worlds elided by History; his views mediate the connection between readers and his

historical subjects. Phillips the narrator, though, *sometimes* disappears and allows the confusing, fractal, and contradictory actualities of his subjects' existence to come to the fore, inspiring a deeper form of experiential understanding in his readers.

This extensive explanation of Phillips' con- and di-vergences with the subaltern studies approach brings us back to the overarching question of what role these might play in establishing diasporic community. First, Phillips articulates the day-to-day experiences of people like John Ocansey, Phillip Quaque, and even his Ghanaian guide Mansour (discussed further below) in order to make the diasporic community more inclusive in its representation. This inclusion, by no means radical, fits in with historiography's commitment to democratic practices and thereby attempts to make the diasporic collectivity more democratic as well. Second, by highlighting these figures' conflicting loyalties and affiliations, along with their underlying identity politics, Phillips exposes many of the barriers that keep the diasporic community from becoming a viable collectivity that can work together to fight those forces of economic, social, and political oppression that still abound today. Yet, democratic praxis and meticulous, informed critique are not enough to actually make diaspora a more feasible paradigm for community. And if readers try to find any clear delineation of a productive model in *The Atlantic Sound*, they will surely be disappointed, because the philosophy that permeates this text persistently resists teleological definition. I argue, however, that despite these limitations in the content of the book, Phillips's form and structure offer incomplete and imperfect (but still vital) hints about what is needed to effect a diasporic community that simultaneously enriches the individual self, and the community as a whole.

Phillips maintains that for “outsider” writers, form always presents the ultimate challenge (*NWO* 293). In *The Atlantic Sound*, he employs the disruption, multiplicity and inexplicability most commonly associated with postmodern fictional texts. This postmodern form effectively portrays not only the fluidity of the community through differing voices, but also the fluidity and instability of the narrator’s position within or outside of the community. The first section consists of abrupt transitions from the first-person travel narrative to an almost poetic introduction to the historical African figure of William Narh Ocansey, John’s adoptive father. The remainder of the book follows suit, and the juxtaposition of postmodern narrative with poetic language and historical content disorients readers, most significantly because postmodern narratives are almost antithetical to traditional historical discourses. Although Eric Hobsbawm illuminates the ways in which the historical past is *not* continuous with the present, and exposes the constructed nature of historical “facts” embedded within certain traditions, he also recognizes (like Chakrabarty) that the disciplinary practices of history necessitate, at least in part, some faith in the reality of historical “facts.” He points out that “postmodernism has fortunately not gained as much ground among historians as among literary and cultural theorists and social anthropologists. . . [it] throws doubt on the distinction between fact and fiction, objective reality and conceptual discourse. It is profoundly relativist” (271). Although, as we have already noted, such relativism creates many problems for historians attempting to narrate the past in a comprehensible way, Glissant expounds on the crucial necessity of honing in on these relatives instead of submitting to history’s generalizing tendencies. For Glissant, this necessity far exceeds the simple

inclusion of minority histories which does not, by itself, contest the “totalitarian intolerance” of generalization, whereby “the other is assimilated, or else it is annihilated. That is the whole principle of generalization and its entire process” (49). In order to oppose the totalizing forces of generalization, imaginative (figurative) contact must occur—a process of Relation in which “the totality of relatives [is] put *in touch* and told” (28 my emphasis). Here, not just in the telling but more specifically in the type of contact he formulates between figures, stories, and time periods, is where Phillips makes his most significant contribution in the imaginative and discursive creation of diasporic community.

The most salient aspect of *The Atlantic Sound* is the diversity that characterizes Phillips’s subjects. More often than not, these subjects are loosely, rather than closely, related, and the text is unique as “history” precisely because of this looseness. To wit, few professional historians would include their Ghanaian tour guide’s life story in a work that also conveys the experiences of an African merchant in 19th-century Liverpool. The linkage between contemporary and historical figures formally signifies the disruption of linear time so essential to history’s valuation of causality (and consequently, filiation), and establishes contact between radically different individuals, even in very different temporalities. While Phillips’s incorporation of numerous past and present relatives may not seem particularly revolutionary from a textual perspective, when read through Dipesh Chakrabarty’s theorization of subaltern pasts, it becomes an essential and unique element in Phillips’s presentation of Relation through form. Subaltern pasts “remind us [of the] relation of contemporaneity between the nonmodern and the modern, a shared and

constant ‘now,’ which expresses itself on the historical plane but the character of which is ontological” (Chakrabarty 112). In simpler terms, they are those elements of the past that remain “present” in any moment of historical time because contemporary subjects can intuit them from their own experiences. They are embodied by a person’s “reflexes about what it means to relate to objects in the world as a human being and together with other human beings in his given environment” (66). If individuals in the present can recognize them but not wholly co-opt them, then they serve as very specific and real exemplars for the processes of Relation. Phillip Quaque’s story is a case in point.

Phillips develops Quaque’s history by including Quaque’s actual letters alongside his own analysis of the African-born and English-educated missionary. At first glance, Quaque’s narrative might be read as yet another instance of the difficulties of achieving Relation or establishing a sense of community. Phillips the narrator seems ambivalent, if not downright critical of this African man who “went so far as to call [the Africans’] language a ‘vile jargon,’” and who “never once expressed moral outrage at the indignities that were being visited upon fellow Africans” (180). He cannot understand how Quaque could “nowhere . . . make reference to his feelings about his ‘brothers and sisters’ in the dungeons beneath his feet” (179). Just as in his representations of Panafest and the banana boat voyage, Phillips seems cold, distant and cynical here. Yet, as a human being able to comprehend the psychoaffective difficulties Quaque must have faced on a daily basis, Phillips the author reaches out—across historical time—in search of this particular subaltern past, which he knows must exist but which cannot be represented or discovered through typical historiographical methodology. The reality of these feelings cannot be

verified through historical research, data or documentation, but because he recognizes their vital importance to understanding the diasporic world, he tries to push past these discursive limitations. In the attempt, he experiences the frustrating but productive, from Glissant's perspective, realization of Quaque's opacity.

Glissant presents opacity as the conception of human behaviors as irreducible, non-transparent and fractal. Opacity, as an element of Relation, contains a significant ethical tenet: "I thus am able to conceive of the opacity of the other for me, without reproach for my opacity for him. To feel in solidarity with him or to build with him or to like what he does, it is not necessary for me to grasp him" (193). Phillips the narrator seems unaware of opacity's integral significance; he tries to get past it by analyzing one of Quaque's final letters, which he believes signifies "the ambivalence, pain and pathos . . . of loss. Loss of home, loss of language, loss of self, but never loss of dignity. However . . . his tone still betrayed a glimmer of optimism and the courage of restraint" (180). On the whole, this analysis, following as it does Phillips's critique of Quaque, and addressing Quaque's final cryptic missive, seems arbitrary at best and erroneous at worst. Readers cannot assume Quaque's feelings of loss or optimism as definitively as Phillips does from the letter:

The state of this unsuccessful mission, I had formerly had some hopes of its growth, but at present on the face of things bears but an indifferent aspect. I have my doubt of its increase unless a new change should take place for the better. I could wish to say more on this topic, but I write much in pain and time fails me. . . excuse the scrawl as I have no time to lose. But beg leave to inform the Society that within these few years, I have buried two and fifty persons and baptized eleven children. Prayer regularly every day in my room and on Sundays some of the gentlemen do attend. I hope to be more explicit in my next, should God

permit me my health. Accept of my sincere and hearty wishes prayer for your health and continuance. (180)

Phrases like “I could wish to say more” and “I hope to be more explicit in my next” highlight that which Quaque has not said. Although Phillips the narrator concludes a great deal about what Quaque’s words represent, the inclusion of the letter demonstrates the impossibility of rendering Quaque or his feelings transparent and thus helpfully articulates the realities of opacity. Glissant characterizes this as an inevitable aspect of any written text: in writing, “the text passes from a dreamed-of transparency to the opacity produced in words” (115). Neither Phillips nor his readers can transcend the limits of Quaque’s chosen words. Moreover, Phillips as author orders this section in such a way as to refute any teleological understanding of Quaque’s motives, emotions or behaviors. His judgmental preconceptions are followed by his ambivalent reading of Quaque and at the end Quaque’s own voice, essentially forcing readers to accept and perhaps even learn to value his opacity and thus, the opacity of others. Metatextually, he puts readers “in touch” with Quaque’s opacity, and textually, he does the same for Mansour, Judge Waring, Dr. Ben Abdallah and all the rest. As Phillips ends with Quaque’s own perplexing words, and no further explanation, in this way, he makes Quaque the narrator of his own history, and shows how Relation—perhaps only briefly and incompletely—emanates through the structure of *The Atlantic Sound*.

According to Glissant, with the recognition of opacities comes the realization that understanding, rather than representing a type of closure or securing of subjective information, paradoxically manifests through an openness toward others. Through the

knowledge of opacities, people may learn to “give up the old obsession with discovering what lies at the bottom of natures” and instead realize that “what is here is open, as much as this there . . . This-here is the weave, and it weaves no boundaries” (190). The lived openness of Relation transpires through individual recognition of others by “yielding” or “giving-on-and with” them (as Betsey Wing translates it from French). The process through which Phillips’s chronicle of Quaque eventually makes way for Quaque’s letter manifests this type of “giving-on-and-with” solely through structure—the text itself yields to Quaque’s discourse. A more salient instance occurs in the text’s—not necessarily Phillips’s—changed relationship (partial Relation) to Mansour, the Ghanaian man who drives Phillips around during Panafest.

Early during his stay in Ghana, Mansour asks Phillips to write a letter vouching for him as a traveler to the U.S, inciting Phillips’s anger: “Here before me was a man who had served time in a British prison for being an illegal immigrant, asking me to help him to become an illegal immigrant in the United States.” Phillips ends the exchange by telling Mansour, rather noncommittally, that they could discuss his situation at another time (139). Several days later, and quite inexplicably, Phillips decides to hear Mansour out and see if he can help him (154). There is no causal explanation for this turn, and thus it discursively refutes the teleology that typifies Glissant’s boundaries. Furthermore, while the narrative content never discloses how Phillips goes about helping Mansour, the text itself yields to Mansour’s narrative, set off in a later, separate section of the book titled with his name. This section relates Mansour’s trials and tribulations as a Ghanaian immigrant in Britain. Notwithstanding the narrator’s now familiar criticism and

incredulity—he ends the section with “Is he really asking me for money? Mansour, who has not even bothered to apply for a job since returning to Ghana. . .Able-bodied, smart Mansour, presenting himself as ‘third world’ victim”—the text itself opens up to Mansour’s story as yet another “relative” that deserves to be told (198-9). The rather significant difference between the text’s “giving-on-and-with” Mansour’s story, as opposed to Quaque’s, lies in the fact that the instance of Relation with Quaque occurs textually across historical time, while Mansour’s occurs contemporaneously with the narrator’s account of his own lived experiences. While concluding that the contemporary instance of Relation occurs *as a result of* the historical instance would go against the anti-teleological, anti-linear and anti-generalizing reading I offer here, these ostensibly historical and contemporary instances do link up in some way. In fact, Chakrabarty’s notion of the ontological, shared and constant “now” of non-modern and modern subjects helps to articulate just how they relate—through the recognition of affective histories which cannot be known, appropriated or taken hold of, and the translation of that knowledge into Relation’s necessary openness toward others.

Phillips has explained that his engagement with the past stems from his desire for people “to accept the fact that moving across these old lines in a personal way *is* the way forward, *is* the only thing that we have” (Clingman 136, original emphasis). For Phillips, recognizing the complicated existence of the past within the present is just as essential to changing society (the role of the writer as he sees it) as the ability to understand his contemporaries. In the articulation of his own historical project, Chakrabarty advances one way of moving forward as

To see the modern as inevitably contested, to write over the given and privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections that draw sustenance from dreamed-up pasts and futures where collectivities are defined neither by the rituals of citizenship nor by the nightmare of “tradition” that “modernity” created. There are of course no (infra) structural sites where such dreams could lodge themselves. Yet they will recur . . . (46)

In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips provides a structural textual site in which these dreamed collectivities can and do take hold through emotive identification, and/or feelings of solidarity and the simultaneous acceptance of opacity between vastly different subjects, and across time and space. Skeptics might deem the narrative form a poor alternative to more concrete worldly institutions, but Glissant illuminates how the textual recurrence of these dreams can space themselves out into the world, informing “the imaginary of peoples, their varied poetics, which it then transforms” (1). A transformed imaginary infused by opacity and the processes of Relation, will eventually lead to the consolidation of a diasporic community that allows individual selves—with all their private, complex and irreducible characteristics—to flourish and thus, to enhance the community’s ability to nurture and protect them.

At the very end of *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips visits the settlement of the Hebrew Israelites, African-American transplants to the Negev desert who claim to have created a society completely free of social ills like drug addiction, crime, homosexuality and cancer (!). As in the other travel accounts he conveys in this text, he appears critical of this group of about two thousand transplanted African Americans. For example, his imagery resonates with the idea that this ostensibly closed society suffocates him: “This is not air. I left behind air in another place. I begin to drip, to accept my fate. I am among them. I

want to know why they are here” (268). Of course, the Israelites live in the desert, but his brief stay begins to feel not only physically, but also psychically stifling. Interestingly, he represents the views of these people as simultaneously different and similar to his own. The Hebrew Israelites, like Phillips, remain cynical about the possibilities for diasporic unity throughout the globe, which is why they enact a literal return to Africa in order to establish an actual unified community. Yet, unlike Phillips, this cynicism initiated their intentional break from the rest of the world, a turning away and closing off—in other words, an explicit rejection of the possibilities embedded in Relation. His own attempts to reach out and understand them (and others), however, once again embody the hopeful process of errantry, whereby he “plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access” (Glissant 20). The results not only yield a reading of Phillips as enacting Relation through errantry, but also demonstrate the impossibility of the closed society; for this society, he shows, remains open to the influence of other cultures despite its stated mission.

Phillips repeatedly highlights this ostensibly African society’s “failure” to actually represent African culture, in their dress, “This is not African dress; this is not local dress; this is the costume of a culture I do not understand” (268), in their behavior, “They are American girls. Except they have never visited the United States” (270), and in their music, “Soul. Light jazz. African-American music” (269). In doing so, he articulates the ways in which the return home inevitably manifests as yet another process of Relation among the different cultures of the diaspora. Although his representation of the closed society the Hebrew Israelites attempt to create represents what Glissant labels

a totality “in danger of immobility,” he actually hints at the positive interactions of African-American, African, and Afro-Caribbean cultures in this space (171). For instance, at the New World Passover celebration, where the Hebrew Israelites celebrate their escape from “the great captivity,” a young woman sings Bob Marley’s “Redemption Song,” “The international anthem of the African diaspora. High in the hills of Jamaica. On the coast of Brazil. In Brooklyn. In every major city in Europe. And now here in Israel” (272). Of course, it seems logical that the work of Bob Marley—a descendant of African people—would be treasured in the Israelite community; yet, the identification of this song as a culturally international text definitively highlights culture as an ongoing, creolizing process. “Relation is movement,” Glissant argues, and this fact belies the social closure and putative stability of the culture imagined by the Hebrew Israelites (171).

Finally, Phillips’ own reading of this closed society in relation to the rest of the world thoughtfully renders his sympathy with their desires to create such a society, while simultaneously addressing their ideological folly

You were transported in a wooden vessel across a broad expanse of water to a place which rendered your tongue silent. Look. Listen. Learn. And as you began to speak, you remembered fragments of a former life. Shards of memory. Careful. Some will draw blood. You dressed your memory in the new words of this new country. Remember. There were no round-trip tickets in your part of the ship. Exodus. It is futile to walk into the face of history. As futile as trying to keep the dust from one’s eyes in the desert. (275)

The Hebrew Israelites’ folly lies not only in their miscomprehension of cultural realities, it also results from their misunderstanding of historical realities. The historical facts of

African dispersal instituted by the slave trade cannot be refuted. Yet, this historical knowledge is always inherently limited and therefore can never be sufficient to ground the creation of a contemporary unified diasporic community—across historical and subjective differences. Metaphorically, walking into the face of history signifies the refusal to recognize history’s multiplicity, instability, and continual presence in the present—all of which are necessary to instantiate Relation in, with, and through others in the contemporary world. *The Atlantic Sound*’s poignancy in rendering these truths explicit testifies to Phillips’s efforts to create an open global diasporic community, and thus also belies the skepticism and emotive distance readers so often take for granted in his work. Instead of embodying the cynical outlook of its narrator, *The Atlantic Sound* represents the difficult, painful, but undeniably hopeful work of striving toward Relation with others to create an open, flexible and viable diasporic community.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: THE PRAXIS OF READING COMMUNITY

Many scholars and writers have contested the use of “post” in “postcolonial studies” as a prematurely celebratory view of the sociopolitical and economic realities of the contemporary world. In *Postcolonial Studies: A Materialist Critique*, Benita Parry provides an excellent overview of the critique of this prefix found in the works of Anne McClintock, Laura Chrisman, Ella Shohat, and Arif Dirlik (among others).²² In brief, these critics contest the singular European view of time and history embedded within the term “postcolonial” and its conception of colonialism—its processes and remnants—as a matter of the past, and therefore, a justification for “ignoring the contemporary actuality of global politics within a capitalist world-system” (57). In my own view of postcolonial theory, such incisive critique is absolutely essential to the critical evaluation of contemporary processes of globalization and neo-colonialism that continue to reinforce economic, gendered, racial, nationalist, and other forms of oppression throughout the world. Nevertheless, critique as a mode of contestation only brings us part of the way in successfully contesting the persistent dominance of patriarchal, capitalist and racist value systems that permeate relations between developed and developing countries. We also need to create (or consciously recognize others’ creations of) value systems that become viable alternatives to our current modes of thinking and ways of being in the world. The

²² See Chapter 4, “Signs of the Times.”

term “postcolonial,” as I see it, then, not only embeds all of the limitations so thoroughly explored by the abovementioned critics and many others, but it also represents the end goal—the dream that drives (or should drive) the work of postcolonial writers and scholars. This end goal certainly drives both my analyses of the literary texts I have examined in this dissertation and the development of my theorization of community as collective action, praxis, and discourse.

As I stated in my introduction, postcolonial and Caribbean theorists tend to take the terms of community for granted in their more specific theorizations of identity, writing, nationalism, diaspora, history, and cross-cultural relationships. By honing in on the nature of the communities represented in Caribbean literary texts, I uncover the ways in which such texts have answered the call for the creation of alternative paradigms to national and diasporic communities, and I show how the literature complicates current theories of identity and history. Carol Boyce-Davies has argued that “for Black women’s writing . . . it is premature and often useless to articulate the writer/theorist split so common in European discourses for many of the writers do both simultaneously or sequentially” (35). I concur, and further argue that the literary texts I examine here (even Phillips’) go further in theorizing new potential models of community than do the theoretical texts themselves. Perhaps this is so because literature plays out in the realm of the imaginary; its possibilities are not limited by the rationalist and empiricist emphases embedded in theory. Such a conclusion certainly appears valid in the face of works like *Louisiana* and *I, Tituba*. Literature also offers multiple levels of interpretation and signification at once, which better allows for the *simultaneous* deconstruction of old ways

of thinking and the creation of new modes of thought. Consider, for example, *Beka Lamb*, in which Zee Edgell challenges Eurocentric historicism and complicates Chakrabarty's theory of historical time and multiple theories of nationalist time, all while creating an alternative model for a national community. Such an undertaking would prove perhaps more difficult in a theoretical text, but here, as in the other primary works, the literary form becomes the more fruitful site for writers to theorize and scholars to recognize original ways of experiencing and imagining community. Thus, I believe that Caribbean and postcolonial scholars should read literature not only as a poetic form, but as a form of theory in and of itself.

Because of their articulation of complex theoretical ideas in imaginary contexts, I further argue that Caribbean literary texts demand a praxis of reading which focuses on their creation and production rather than critique and deconstruction. I take up this reading praxis in the spirit of theorists like Wilson Harris, who continually attempts to focalize the positive connections and cross-cultural relationships embedded in literary forms, and Homi Bhabha, who strives to recognize the ways in which colonial and neo-colonial subjects assert agency within an overwhelming structure of hegemonic power that denies them agency at every turn. Thus, my reading practices may not be particularly new, but they contribute new insights into the nature of forms of community, and advance the current critical discussion about national and diasporic forms of community in postcolonial and Caribbean theory.

In this dissertation, this method of reading has led me to my argument that communities depicted in Caribbean literature can and should be conceived differently

from the understanding of community as grounded in some form of identity—whether that be nationalist, Afro-diasporic, classist, racial, gendered, etc.—or shared history. Critics have already articulated the brilliant challenges that Caribbean writers raise against Eurocentric historicism; sovereign subjectivity; notions of coherent, stable identity; emphases on reason as the only valid way of knowing; and of course, on capitalist production as the only means of progress. Collectively, however, we have yet to articulate the ways in which these challenges lead writers to unique representations of collective existence and survival. Our critical focus, then, should explore the ways in which Caribbean, and indeed, postcolonial literature illuminates the coming together of groups through solidarity, cooperation, relationships, and communal discourses, and how these modes in some ways allow for the transcendence of harmful limitations (violence, injustice, exclusion, obliteration, etc.) enforced by more traditional models of community. I do not contend that such alternative communities are totally void of these dangers; instead, I argue that praxis-based communities are less susceptible to them. I also emphasize that the theorization of community as cooperative action, participation, and collective struggle inherently stresses the agency of Caribbean literary subjects, which in turn, drives our imagination toward the recognition of actual Caribbean subjects' agency in the world.

By theorizing community as a praxis or discourse rather than what Sue Im-Lee calls “a body of individuals,” the scholarly conversation moves beyond the necessary, but somewhat repetitive discussions of Caribbean or creole identities and into an exploration of how these play out in original forms of national and diasporic community. Thus, we

are able to see how Condé’s community of perpetual outsiders decreases the significance of identity in community, which serves as a formative basis of both nation and diaspora forms. Similarly, Phillips’ structural emphasis on Relation rejects the national and cultural divisions that the narrator obsesses over in his musings about diasporic community.

As I have shown throughout my study, conceiving community as action simultaneously participates in the critique of “capital H” History that is the central focus of subaltern studies scholars and Caribbean theorists like Glissant, redirects our focus in the literature toward the little-known, minority histories that get overlooked in dominant historical discourses, and posits modes of community that reject “shared history” as their foundation. It also allows for further critique of certain postcolonial paradigms of historical thought; for example, as in Edgell’s problematization of nationalist pedagogical time. Thus, although my exploration of community pushes toward new ways of imagining community itself, such an exploration inadvertently discovers Caribbean writers’ innovations in postcolonial historiographical thinking as well. This, I must note, is the authors’ innovation and not mine, but my theory of community helps to expose it. In short, theorizing community as praxis has implications for discussions of nation and diaspora, Caribbean identity, and postcolonial historical thought. It also exerts a powerful influence on what we can decipher and learn from Caribbean literature, even beyond the texts I discuss throughout this project.

Finally, my exploration of community here has inevitably led me to further questions about the nature of how communities are gendered, the differences between the

projects of male and female authors, and the ways in which their representations of community differ or seem similar. In my exploration of these literary texts, I discovered that Edgell, Condé and Brodber, to varying degrees, work toward a heterogeneously gendered, inclusive model of collective praxis, but I cannot say the same for Phillips' *The Atlantic Sound*. The women authors here include male subjects who inhabit non-traditional roles in their alternative imagined communities, whereas Phillips barely acknowledges the voices of female subjects. This is not to say that Phillips does not include female subjects in his other work, but simply that he does not do so in this text—a text that I am reading as an attempt to re-connect the diasporic community. This problematic gendered exclusion raises questions about the viability of his construction of an alternative diasporic community. Indeed, from the work of these authors, the onus seems to be on women writers to imagine a space for community in which men and women work together to overcome social injustices. This is a problem that raises urgent questions for me, such as what is the nature of collective action among men and collective action among women? Do these forms differ or are they similar? What is the significance of these differences or similarities in the forms that productive, alternative communities can take? And in whose view or according to whom? These are questions the answers to which would contribute a more thorough methodological approach to the theory of community as praxis, and further advance discussions of community in Caribbean and postcolonial theory on the whole.

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