



UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL DE CÓRDOBA

FACULTAD DE LENGUAS

MAESTRÍA EN INGLÉS CON ORIENTACIÓN EN LITERATURA
ANGLOAMERICANA



**The Construction of Memory and Power Relations in
Elizabeth Nunez's *Prospero's Daughter*, Andrea Levy's *The
Long Song* and Joanne Hillhouse's *Oh Gad!***

Trabajo de tesis

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Córdoba, abril de 2019

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Abstract

As explained by Aleida Assman, the last two decades of the 20th century saw the development and consolidation of memory research, a diverse field including “neuronal, medical, and psychological as well as literary, cultural, social, and political studies” that investigate “how we live by our memories, how we are haunted by them, how we use and abuse them” (210). The boom in memory studies results from a widespread interest in the revisiting of the past generated, among other factors, by the postcolonial situation in which humans that have been deprived of their indigenous history and culture are trying to (re)write their own narratives and memories (210-211).

The present thesis centers on the Anglophone Caribbean – where formal colonialism began to disappear in the 1960s – and aims at exploring the construction of memory as represented in a selection of three novels published by Caribbean women writers in the 21st century. These are Elizabeth Nunez’s *Prospero’s Daughter* (2006), Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song* (2010) and Joanne Hillhouse’s *Oh Gad!* (2012). The initial hypothesis of this study is that, in the corpus under consideration, memory is represented as a contact zone permeated by struggles between cultures in asymmetrical power relations. It is creatively constructed in multiple spaces and practices, and results from the attempt to (re)write Caribbean identities.

In relation to the theoretical background supporting the analysis, this study is grounded in a selection of categories which includes Michel Foucault’s and Anibal Quijano’s theories of power, both based on the conception of power as a dynamic relationship involving conflict and struggle –, Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of the contact zone and Stuart Hall’s theories of cultural identities in general, and of Caribbean cultural identities in particular. The discussion of memory is anchored in Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory, Nora’s definition of the *lieux de memoire*, Jan Assman’s distinction between communicative and cultural memory, and Paul Ricoeur’s analysis of the pragmatic dimension of memory, among others.

Acknowledgements

I wish to express my deepest gratitude to María José Buteler and María Alejandra Olivares for their careful guidance, their insightful comments and invaluable support. I would also like to thank Mónica Cuello, Mercedes Fernández Beschtedt, Viviana Fonseca, Paola Formiga, Zoraida Risso Patrón, Lucía Valls, Ma. Angélica Verdú and Magdalena Zinkgräf for their generous help and continuous encouragement.

I am deeply grateful to my parents, Stella and Abel, and my sisters, Marianela and Carolina, for always being there and making sure I had the time and energy to continue writing. I owe special thanks to Matías, my partner, for his endless patience and support, for helping me find the time to work on my thesis and not lose focus. Thanks to my son, Vitto, for his joy and happiness.

General Introduction

As explained by Aleida Assman, the last two decades of the 20th century saw the development and consolidation of memory research, a diverse field including “neuronal, medical, and psychological as well as literary, cultural, social, and political studies” that investigate “how we live by our memories, how we are haunted by them, how we use and abuse them” (210). The boom in memory studies results from a widespread interest in the revisiting of the past generated, according to the author, by the following processes: the digital revolution that created more efficient ways of storing and circulating information, the fall of the so-called “grand narratives” at the end of the Cold War, the disclosure of the sealed archives of the former Communist countries – which provided a new basis for the rereading of history –, and the post-traumatic situation after the Holocaust and the two World Wars. Most importantly for the purposes of this investigation, the strong interest in the past was also partly stimulated by the postcolonial situation in which humans that have been deprived of their indigenous history and culture are trying to (re)write their own narratives and memories (210-211).

The present thesis centers on the Anglophone Caribbean – where formal colonialism began to disappear in the 1960s – and aims at exploring the construction of memory as represented in a selection of three novels published by Caribbean women writers in the 21st century. These are Elizabeth Nunez’s *Prospero’s Daughter* (2006), Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song* (2010) and Joanne Hillhouse’s *Oh Gad!* (2012). Set in different moments of the Caribbean history, the three texts revolve around and develop in the Caribbean. It must be noted that, even though the novels represent the cultural, historical, political and socioeconomic realities of three different islands, namely Trinidad in the case of *Prospero’s Daughter*, Jamaica in Levy’s novel and Antigua in *Oh Gad!*, this analysis starts from the assumption that the islands form a submarine unity¹, and thus their cultures and histories are intimately related.

¹ The concept of the submarine unity was first proposed by Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite and subscribed by Martinican Edouard Glissant, who in a presentation titled “The Quarrel with History” (...) integrates the Antilles as part of the same historical movement and culture (Bonfiglio 34).

The initial hypothesis of this study is that, in the corpus under consideration, memory is represented as a contact zone permeated by struggles between cultures in asymmetrical power relations. It is creatively constructed in multiple spaces and practices, and results from the attempt to (re)write Caribbean identities. The analysis of the texts, then, focuses on the interrelations between memory, power and cultural identity by exploring the spaces and / or practices where the construction of memory is anchored in each of the novels, the cultures and histories involved in these constructions, and the impact of the exercise of memory on Caribbean subjectivities.

As regards the methodology used, this investigation offers a comparative analysis of the corpus anchored in the post-European model of comparative literature. Such a model, as explained by Susan Bassnett, moves beyond the parameters of Western Literature and societies and repositions itself within a planetary context (3). It reconsiders questions of cultural identity, the literary canon, and the political implications of cultural influence, rejecting the ahistorical nature of formalist approaches. According to Bassnett, the act of comparing happens during the reading process itself, rather than being set up a priori by the delimitation of the selection of specific texts, as in the case of the French model. Comparative literature is here considered as a method of approaching literature, “one that foregrounds the role of the reader but which is always mindful of the historical context in which the act of writing and the act of reading take place” (9-10).

From this approach, the novels will be analyzed as contemporary representations of Caribbean past / present realities, and read in the light of the power struggles permeating the histories of Europe and the Caribbean, or the colonizer and the colonized. The interrelations between power, the writing of memory and Caribbean subjectivities will be first explored in each of the novels, observing both the thematic and the narrative levels, and then, compared.

In relation to the theoretical background supporting the analysis, the present study is grounded in a selection of categories which includes, in general terms, the concepts of power, memory, cultural identity and the contact zone as articulated by authors of Caribbean, Latin American, (Afro-)American and European origin. The discussion of power, for example, combines Michel Foucault’s and Anibal Quijano’s theories, both based

on the conception of power as a dynamic relationship involving conflict and struggle. Mary Louise Pratt's definition of the contact zone will be a central category from the first to the last chapters, for memory, language and identity will be read in the light of Pratt's concept. Apart from this, Stuart Hall's theories of cultural identities in general, and of Caribbean cultural identities in particular, form the basis for the discussion of Caribbean subjectivities in non-essentialist terms, and their (re-)articulation in the field of representation through the (re)writing of personal and collective histories. The discussion of memory is anchored in a wider selection of theories, among them, Halbwachs' concept of collective memory, Nora's definition of the *lieux de memoire*, Jan Assman's distinction between communicative and cultural memory, and Paul Ricoeur's analysis of the pragmatic dimension of memory, among others.

The theoretical framework is developed and explained in the first chapter. The second chapter offers a critical analysis of Nunez's *Prospero's Daughter* by considering the instrumentalization of memory in the context of the European colonization of the Caribbean, and, conversely, the multiple uses of memory as a strategy to resist oppression. Chapter Three deals with Levy's *The Long Song*. The discussion here focuses on the interrelations between individual and collective memories, and the (re-)writing of memory as a strategy to resist colonial oppression and assert Caribbean cultural identity. The fourth chapter presents an analysis of Hillhouse's *Oh Gad!* centered on the protagonist's search to re-create her own cultural identity, which leads her to revisit and resignify the collective memories of the Afro-Antiguan community. Chapter Five resumes the main aspects discussed in relation to memory and power in a comparative analysis of the representation of memory in the three novels. The last chapter delineates the conclusions reached on the basis of the analysis of the corpus.

Chapter I. Theoretical Framework

1. Power

Considering that the aim of the present study is to explore the (re)construction of memory as a practice that develops in the context of power struggles among different groups in the Anglophone Caribbean – namely the colonizer and the colonized –, one of the main categories to address the analysis of the corpus is precisely the concept of power. Following Michel Foucault, I will refer to power as a dynamic network of relationships that inevitably imply resistance and conflict. Foucault’s multi-layered analysis of power is grounded in the argument that the operations of power in modern Western societies cannot be explained on the basis of the juridical conception of power, in which power is defined as a “right possessed by individuals that can be transferred to others through a juridical act” (*Defender la sociedad* 26)². Such a conception fails to account for the myriad of power relations beyond the boundaries of the state institutions regulating life in modern societies.

In Foucault’s view, power “exists only as exercised by some on others, only when it is put into action” («The Subject and Power» 340) and it should be understood as a relationship between individuals or groups. Power relations constitute modes of action by means of which an individual acts on the actions of other individuals with the purpose of regulating, controlling or limiting their behavior. The individual on whom power is exercised must necessarily be acknowledged as a free individual whose responses both challenge the power of the dominant group and at the same time prompt them to strengthen their position.

Given that the exercise of power invariably triggers some kind of confrontation, Foucault’s analysis consists in observing different forms of resistance in order to scrutinize the dynamics of power relations from a bottom-up approach. He identifies three types of power struggles: those against ethnic, social and economic domination; those against the kind of exploitation that separates individuals from what they produce; and those against the subjection and the submission of subjectivity («The Subject and Power» 331), which is

² All the bibliographical sources in Spanish have been translated into English by the author.

identified by Foucault as the type of struggle that prevails in contemporary Western societies.

The conception of power as struggle will provide a basis for the discussion of memory as a practice pervaded by conflicts in which opposite processes develop: memory is manipulated by the hegemonic groups to silence the oppressed, while at the same time, through the rewriting of memory, those who find themselves in a powerless position seek to regain control over their colonized selves. The struggle against the subjection and submission of subjectivity is particularly relevant for this study since the (re)construction of memory is interpreted as a strategy adopted by the colonized to re-appropriate their own subjectivities by subverting hegemonic constructions of Caribbean identities and creating empowering narratives of their own realities.

The project to control and produce subjectivities was conceived in Western European societies in the context of the creation of the state, a form of political power that combines totalizing and individualizing practices. The latter originate with a technology of power Foucault denominates “pastorship” or pastoral power. First developed by the Hebrew religion, the theme of pastoral power was incorporated by Christianity during the Middle Ages. By the 18th century, the theme of pastoral power had been refunctionalized by the modern state, adapted through a process of secularization and adopted as a set of strategies that enabled the state to collect information concerning both individual citizens and the population as a whole. The objective of pastoral power was no longer to guide souls towards salvation but to guarantee “salvation” in this world by providing security, protection against accidents and healthcare. The figure of the shepherd was replaced by a multiplicity of agents who became involved in the exercise of pastoral power, such as schools, hospitals, the family and the police, among others.

The institutions of the modern state, agents of pastoral power, emerged as centers devoted to the systematic training of individuals through disciplines, defined by Foucault as “methods which [make] possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which [assure] the constant subjection of its forces and [impose] upon them a relation of docility-utility” (*Discipline and Punish* 137). Initially, disciplines were aimed at increasing levels of individual obedience and productivity in subjects who were considered to deviate

from the norm, such as orphans, criminals and the insane. These subjects were isolated to receive some kind of treatment that would correct their behavior. In institutions like hospitals, schools, factories and prisons, ways of conduct were controlled through the manipulation of time and space. Space was organized into a hierarchy of enclosed areas and functional sites where the circulation of individuals was highly regulated to avoid disorder and undesirable encounters. The distribution, rhythm, duration and repetition of activities were also highly regulated to make individuals more efficient in their movements.

One of the mechanisms created to reinforce disciplinary power was a system of surveillance that permanently observed individuals along the training process. Disciplinary institutions were built in such a way that every room was accessible to the eye of an observer whose task was to ensure individuals would act as expected. Disciplinary power was “both absolutely indiscreet, (...) since by its principle it [left] no zone of shade and constantly supervise[d] the very individuals who [were] entrusted with the task of supervising; and absolutely ‘discreet’, for it function[ed] permanently and largely in silence” (*Discipline and Punish* 177). The systematic observation of individuals also consisted in administering different types of examinations, like school and medical tests, to assess and keep a record of the changes undergone by individuals.

In the 18th century, disciplinary techniques transcended the boundaries of disciplinary institutions giving rise to the disciplinary society, which resulted from complementary processes, such as the substantial increase in the number of disciplinary institutions and the implementation of disciplinary techniques in other existing institutions. Its emergence coincided with and partly stemmed from the consolidation of capitalism as a socioeconomic system. With the transition to capitalism, it became essential to develop a system in which all individuals were controlled and classified into the categories of normal / abnormal to ensure the sustained growth of production and profit (Foucault «El poder, una bestia magnífica» 36). Developed to produce docile bodies – bodies “that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (*Discipline and Punish* 136) – disciplines served the purposes of rectifying the faults of those labelled as “abnormal”, apart from increasing the productivity of those who fit the category of “normal” individuals.

The colonial world outside Europe was inevitably affected by these developments in the dynamic of power for, as stated by Foucault, “from the 19th century onwards, Western³ systems of thought, political structures, and economic mechanisms became universal due to the violence of colonization, at least they often took universal dimensions” («El poder, una bestia magnífica» 31). The development of disciplinary power was highly profitable in the context of colonialism since it was used as a tool to train colonial subjects into submission. As a matter of fact, in the novels under discussion in this thesis, we will observe an array of disciplinary techniques employed by colonizers to subjugate Caribbean peoples, to drive them to accept the presence of colonizers on the islands as legitimate, and to coerce them into forgetting personal and collective truths.

The European manipulation of local truths and memories during the colonization of the Caribbean will be discussed here as one of the main strategies in the subordination of Caribbean subjectivities given that, according to Foucault, in modern Western societies, power structures are perpetuated through the construction and naturalization of truths that profoundly influence worldviews, perceptions and values. Foucault conceives the notion of truth as a fabrication aimed at sustaining power. In his own words, “truth isn’t outside power: (...) truth isn’t the reward of free spirits, (...) nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. It is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power”(«Truth and Power» 72-73). While all societies have their own “policies” to regulate the production and circulation of truth, in modern Western societies, truth belongs to the realm of scientific discourse. In the context of the Caribbean realities represented in the corpus, it is often in the name of science that a plurality of perceptions and world views different from the Western paradigm of knowledge are discredited by the hegemonic group. Conversely, it is for the purpose of struggling against the subjection and submission of their subjectivities that the Caribbean subjects represented in the corpus seek to (re)construct their individual and collective memories.

Considering that the thesis that guides this study is that the construction of memory is motivated by the desire to subvert the power of the hegemonic group through the re-

³Foucault’s use of the term “West” denotes the region situated between the Vistula and Gibraltar, the north of Scotland and the south of Italy («El poder, una bestia magnífica» 31).

creation of Caribbean identities, it is essential to consider the political implications of Foucault's theory of power. According to Edgardo Castro, in relation to politics, action and commitment, it has been claimed that Foucault's analyses disarticulate any possibility of resistance, rendering political action intrinsically fruitless. The line of reasoning behind this criticism can be summarized as follows: if Western modern societies have been invariably permeated by "an omnipresent, seemingly inescapable power" (15) that produces individuals, qualifies, classifies, and regulates their behavior through dividing practices in order to reinforce the power of the dominant group; if "both knowing subjects and truths known are the product of relations of power and knowledge" (Rouse 107); is it possible for subjects to liberate themselves from oppressive power relations? (How) can power be resisted?

In an interview with S. Hasumi, Foucault refers to these interpretations of his works as paralyzing. In response, he claims that power relations are constantly open to resistance, as stated at the beginning of this discussion, and it is because of this real possibility of resistance that the dominant groups seek to consolidate their power. His works, he argues, foreground the dynamic nature of power as a network of fully reversible relations characterized by constant struggles and confrontations in all relationships involving the power of one individual or group over another («Poder y saber» 77).

It is in the dynamic character of power relations that lies the opportunity for oppressed groups to criticize power and offer resistance. Nevertheless, as explained by Joseph Rouse in his analysis of the interrelations between power and knowledge in the work of Foucault, while considering the possibility of resistance, the author does not acknowledge the existence of a sovereign or ultimate truth that will ensure the liberation of the oppressed or legitimize certain struggles over others (115). All acts of resistance are situated in a web of permanent conflict and struggle in which they inevitably clash with other interests and positions within the complex network of power relations permeating modern societies.

Considering that Foucault's theory of power centers mainly on European contexts, and that the novels under analysis revolve around Caribbean experiences, I will also resort to Anibal Quijano's analysis of the dynamics of power in the context of Latin America in

particular. In his conceptualization of power, Quijano proposes that at the end of the 15th century, with the conquest of the Americas, the world saw the emergence of a new type of global power which still prevails, to which he refers as modern / colonial / Eurocentered / capitalist power, and which is defined as:

a space and a net of social relationships of exploitation / domination / conflict structured around the struggle to control the following areas of social existence: 1) work and its products; 2) nature and its production resources; 3) sex, its products and the reproduction of the species; 4) subjectivity and its material and intersubjective products, including knowledge; 5) authority and its instruments, particularly those of coercion, to ensure the reproduction of that pattern of social relationships. (“Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social” 289)

On the basis of this definition, it must be noted that, like Foucault, Quijano understands power as a net of relationships among individuals or groups which are characterized by the constant presence of conflict and struggle. He asserts that individuals may occupy different power positions at different times and / or in different contexts, and qualifies power relations as dynamic, always open to new forms of conflict, resistance and change.

Quijano, however, concentrates especially on the power relations that took shape with the colonization of the Americas and the emergence of the Eurocentered, capitalist, modern / colonial world. The process of colonization entailed the appropriation of the environment and its resources, the bodies of the colonized, who were exploited as labor force and, in the case of women, as breeders. The colonial process also consisted in the appropriation of non-European subjectivities, cultures and worldviews, and it involved the destruction of the memories of the oppressed, which were written in the environment, in their communal and individual histories.

Modern / colonial power is structured around two axes. On the one hand, it is based on a system of social exploitation centered on the hegemony of capital. On the other, it is grounded in a structure of domination built on the concept of race, described by Quijano as an artificial construction of phenotypic differences – like skin color – as physical

manifestations of biological differences. Modern / colonial power classified the world's population into superior / inferior and "assigned dominant / superior Europeans the attribute of 'white race', while subordinated / inferior non-Europeans were qualified as 'races of color'" («Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social» 318-19). The racialization of difference was employed by European colonizers not only to legitimize the subjugation of non-Europeans in the name of civilization but also to justify their exploitation in the capitalist world system. It is interesting to note that Quijano establishes a parallelism between the colonizers' abuse of non-white communities and their predatory attitude towards the natural world because the exploited comprised colored subjects, considered inferior by nature. Racism and nature are thus inherently related («Colonialidad del poder y Des/Colonialidad del Poder» 14).

The classification of peoples into a hierarchy of races was justified by the notion that the different races found themselves in different stages of evolution. White Europeans considered themselves the most advanced in the evolution of the human species, as they belonged to an enlightened civilization perfected by the use of reason. As explained by Quijano in "Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina" (2000), the myth of Eurocentered modernity dictated that the non-European peoples in the world would follow the same path of evolution, which was a unidirectional, homogeneous process and necessarily implied the movement from a primitive state to the condition of modernity reached by central-North Western Europeans.

As we will observe in the analysis of the corpus, despite the fact that the emancipation of Caribbean colonies brought formal colonialism to an end, Caribbean subjectivities are still oppressed by the modern / colonial / Eurocentered power which came into being in the late 15th century. To explain this phenomenon, Quijano draws a distinction between two complementary but independent processes: colonialism and coloniality. The former denotes the direct political, economic and sociocultural domination of European colonizers over non-European colonized communities. This type of domination ended in South America in the early 19th century and disappeared from Africa, Asia and the Caribbean during the postwar period with the independence of former colonies. In contrast, the coloniality of power, which is still deeply rooted in Western societies, refers to the processes by means of which cultural colonization was achieved, the construction of a

hierarchy of races was naturalized, and colonized peoples were persuaded to believe in their own inferiority. Coloniality is the type of power that Caribbean characters struggle against in the novels of the corpus. Even when formal colonialism has been eradicated, Caribbean characters still fall victim to a system that marginalizes them and treats them as intrinsically inferior subjects. It is the coloniality of power that the characters in the novels seek to transcend and subvert in their path towards empowerment and decolonization through the rewriting of memory.

Coloniality of power was first achieved by means of epistemic colonization, which implied the repression of non-European “modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification” (Quijano «Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality» 169). In this respect, it is possible to identify a significant point of convergence between the theories of power selected for this analysis: both Quijano and Foucault refer to truth and knowledge as artifacts produced by groups in power, thus challenging the modern belief in an ultimate Truth. Both identify scientific discourse as the source of knowledge that produces, reinforces and legitimizes asymmetrical power relations in the modern Western world.

Quijano argues that the Western paradigm of knowledge was built on a certain view of the subject of cognition – conceived as an individual with the capacity to reason – and his⁴ relationship with the external world, an entirely knowable and definable entity that was completely separate from the subject. The category of subject was reserved for Europeans, who construed different others as primitives lacking in rationality, and thus, as objects to be known by the rational man. The European equation of cultural difference with biological inferiority precluded intercultural dialogue and the exchange of knowledge between the European culture and other cultural groups.

The concept of epistemic colonization as the cornerstone of the coloniality of power is useful to examine the processes through which Caribbean traditions, histories and truths were repressed in the colonial context owing to the fact that they undermined – or simply did not fit into – the paradigm of rational knowledge. This notion will also be foregrounded in the interpretation of the (re)construction of memory as an exercise that enables

⁴ The subject of cognition was construed as white, male, European and heterosexual.

Caribbean subjects to challenge the coloniality of power not only by disarticulating naturalized conceptions of identity and cultural difference, but also by taking alternative approaches to knowledge as “an intersubjective relation for the purpose of something, not a relation between an isolated subjectivity, and that something” (Quijano, «Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality» 173).

2. Memory

The consideration of power struggles is a fundamental pillar in the study of memory, especially if memory is analyzed as a construct by means of which different subjects or groups seek to appropriate the terms in which the past is represented. In point of fact, the construction of memory works as a strategy through which the position of individuals or groups can be perpetuated, resisted and / or rearticulated within the intricate web of modern / colonial / Eurocentered power.

The present analysis of memory will be based on an array of theoretical concepts and positions, all of which are grounded in the common view that memory is a practice anchored in the present through which we interpret and assign meaning to the past. It implies recalling past situations and events in order to re-create them in the light of present contexts. This study then assumes that, as expressed by Paul Ricoeur , “memory is representation, in the twofold sense of re-: turning back, anew” (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 39).

Although I will examine individual processes of recollection, the analysis of the corpus will focus on the memories that are socially constructed and preserved in the interaction with the community. Due to this, one of the central theoretical categories for the analysis is the concept of collective memory, which was introduced by the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs in the first decades of the 20th century, and is still widely used in memory studies. Halbwachs proposed that “memory depends on the social environment” in the sense that it is as members of a group that we remember the past (*On Collective Memory* 37): it is in the contact with others that we recall, discuss and complete past impressions. As a matter of fact, if we are for some reason separated from a group, the body of memories shared gradually disappears unless we are able to think and

remember as part of the group to which we once belonged, placing ourselves in the group's viewpoint and employing the conceptions shared by its members (*The Collective Memory* 26).

Halbwachs defined individual memory as a part or an aspect of collective memory. He located individual recollections at the intersection of different collective memories given that, as members of several social groups, individuals take part in different collective memories. Even when the bond with a group brings some sort of stability to the way the past is remembered, the changes in our social context, connections and the groups we identify with imply adopting new positions and perspectives which have a direct impact on our recollections.

While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember. While these remembrances are mutually supportive of each other and common to all, individual members still vary in the intensity with which they experience them. I would readily acknowledge that each memory is a viewpoint on the collective memory, that this viewpoint changes as my position changes, that this position itself changes as my relationships to other milieus change. Therefore, it is not surprising that everyone does not draw on the same part of this common instrument. In accounting for that diversity, however, it is always necessary to revert to a combination of influences that are social in nature. (*The Collective Memory* 48)

In each individual mind, memories are organized on the basis of what the author denominates the social frameworks of collective memory, i.e. "the instruments used by the collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society" (*On Collective Memory* 40). Together with language, "the most fundamental framework of collective memory" (*Los marcos sociales de la memoria* 104), time and space operate as frameworks for the preservation and transmission of memories and traditions within a group. With respect to temporal frameworks, Halbwachs argues that each group organizes time in their own singular way, arranging it in terms of seasons, rituals or celebrations that contribute to the assertion of

their identity and the evocation of collective remembrances. Each group invests time with contents that “offer the individual consciousness a framework within which to arrange and retrieve its remembrances” (*The Collective Memory* 127). Collective memories are also arranged in terms of the spatial framework, for the habits, memories and histories of a group are also inscribed and preserved in the environment surrounding them. Extraordinary events in the history of a group never fail to alter their relationship with the space they inhabit: whether a monument, for example, is built or destroyed, the experiences of the group are invariably encoded in space in ways that often remind the group of the changes they have experienced.

The function of time and space as social frameworks will be central in the analysis of the processes through which individual histories and collective memories are re-created in the novels under consideration. The European colonial power, apart from imposing a certain organization of time and activities, often modified the environment, confined Caribbean communities to certain areas and forced changes in the ways they related to the land and territory. These changes in the organization of time and space exerted a devastating impact on the frameworks of collective memory and thus contributed to the deterioration of the memories of Caribbean communities. Precisely, the re-appropriation and / or the re-signification of time and space enables the Caribbean characters and narrators in the corpus to recall, reconstruct and preserve their common past.

Several authors have elaborated on the notion of collective memory to clarify or expand on Halbwachs’ theory. Among these, Jan Assman⁵ developed the concept of cultural memory, which will be useful in the context of the present analysis. Given that Halbwachs devoted attention neither to the transmission of values and traditions within a cultural group nor to cultural identities in general, Assman proposes to break Halbwachs’ concept into the categories of communicative and cultural memory, thus including the cultural sphere that Halbwachs excluded from his study («Communicative and Cultural Memory» 111).

Communicative memory is associated with everyday communication. It is characterized as spontaneous, disorganized and reaching no farther back than eighty years.

⁵ Jan Assman initially developed the concept together with Aleida Assman.

Cultural memory, on the other hand, is a kind of institution whose transmission requires learning and education. It has its specialists, those who are trained to participate in its preservation: teachers, scholars, artists, priests, shamans and rabbis, among others. This implies that the transmission of this type of memory is “never strictly egalitarian”, as it is structured in ways that often prove elitist (J. Assman, «Communicative and Cultural Memory» 116). While certain members devote themselves to the teaching of cultural memory, it is an obligation for all the group to acquire cultural memory since this type of knowledge has two functions: “the formative one in its educative, civilizing and humanizing functions and the normative one in its function of providing rules of conduct (J. Assman, «Collective Memory and Cultural Identity» 132). In other words, cultural memory not only creates an image of a shared origin but also regulates modes of behavior and interaction within the group.

Cultural memory is a crystallization of the group’s cultural identity. It is “exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that (...) are stable and situation-transcendent”, such as “dishes, feasts, rites, images, stories and other texts, landscapes, and other ‘*lieux de memoire*’” (J. Assman, «Communicative and Cultural Memory» 111). These objects function as reminders of the past and also as carriers or figures of memory that ensure the transmission from one generation to the next. As cultural memory is objectified, it works as a reconstruction of the past made on the basis of, on the one hand, the figures of memory and, on the other, the ways in which these are assigned meaning, criticized, valued or silenced by each contemporary context.

The analysis of the corpus will explore the phenomenon of cultural memory as an area permeated by power struggles between a cultural memory that Caribbean peoples have received from the metropolis – manifested, for example in canonical literary texts, genres and official historical accounts – and other emergent cultural memories that are consolidating within Afro-Caribbean groups. I argue that *The Long Song*, *Oh Gad!* and *Prospero’s Daughter* challenge the cultural traditions promoted by the empire through its institutions and participate in the decolonization of Caribbean cultural memories through

the construction of new “*lieux de mémoire*”⁶– or sites of memory –, invested with meanings, values and histories of their own.

As conceived by Pierre Nora, the “*lieux de mémoire*” denote sites where memory “crystallizes and secretes itself”(«Between Memory and History 7) and include material places (such as monuments, memorials and sanctuaries), commemorative ceremonies, emblems, historical personalities and institutions, to name a few («La aventura de *Les Lieux de Mémoire*» 20)⁷. A site of memory has a material, a symbolic and a functional facet, and it can take different shapes ranging from a physical object to an abstract notion. In Nora’s words, “*lieux de mémoire* are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration” («Between Memory and History 18). As a matter of fact, the concept can be applied to almost any object or situation so long as it condenses the will to remember, for the most fundamental purpose of a site of memory is to stop a community from forgetting.

It must be noted that the constitution of a site of memory inevitably implies power relations which determine the choice of what aspect of the past to commemorate, how and where to commemorate it. In “El lugar de la memoria. A propósito de monumentos (Motivos y paréntesis)”, the Uruguayan poet, essayist and researcher Hugo Achugar claims that any representation of the past inevitably silences not only alternative forms of representation but also the perceptions of the past of different others (155). In his analysis of Nora’s *lieux de mémoire*, he proposes the following:

Nora’s “site of memory” must be accompanied by another notion which, apart from considering the site of enunciation, should include the enunciation itself and account for the position from which it is enunciated. Understanding a site of memory as a symbolic of geo-cultural space is not enough unless the pragmatic aspect of the enunciation is observed, taking

⁶ This concept was developed by French philosopher Pierre Nora in his three-volume collection *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, published between 1984 and 1992.

⁷ Even though the author created the concept to refer specifically to the history of the French nation and explicitly warns about the risk of applying it to the study of the history of other European nations («La aventura de *Les Lieux de Mémoire*» 26), the concept has been used in several studies dealing with the analysis of the sites of memory in Latin American and the Caribbean. See, for example, Myrna García Calderón’s *Espacios de la memoria en el Caribe Hispánico insular y sus diásporas* (2012).

note of the ideological context in which the enunciation is constructed. (160-61)

Achugar also suggests that it is essential to rethink “the time of memory”, which covers past, present and future in the sense that “memory is constructed in the battlefield where the present debates the past as a way to build the future” (161). This author questions and completes Nora’s concept by approaching the sites of memory as statements made by an agent in a given context and with a particular intention, and contextualizes the agent within the web of power relations. Following Achugar’s proposal, the analysis of the *Lieux de mémoire* will devote special attention to whose memories are concerned and whose are contested or placed under erasure in the construction of Caribbean sites of memory represented in the corpus.

The complex interrelations between memory and asymmetrical power relations are also considered by Paul Ricoeur in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, where he discusses memory from a variety of angles. Even though his study is based on the proposition that the effort to recall is invariably motivated by a search for faithfulness, this does not ensure the reliability of memory as a source to learn about the past. His pragmatic approach to memory sheds light on the extent to which memory can be used as a means to naturalize asymmetrical power relations. As expressed by the author, the vulnerability of memory results from “the absence of the thing remembered and its presence in the form of representation. The highly problematical character of this representative relation to the past is laid bare in its essence by all the abuses of memory” (57-58). In other words, it is because recollection produces a representation of the past that memory can fall prey to different types of manipulation.

Ideology is, according to Ricoeur, the key issue underlying the instrumentalization of memory. He defines ideology as a process aimed at legitimizing a given order or system of power through the distortion of reality and the regulation of symbolically mediated action. The ideological instrumentalization of memory is achieved through the manipulation of the ways in which the past is represented. Any representation of the past is based on a narrative configuration of events and situations. The selection of participants, the roles and characteristics these are assigned, the incidents included and omitted, and the

emplotment of events are some of the aspects of any narrative that can be easily altered with the purpose of legitimizing a given ideological position.

The instrumentalization of memory is inextricably linked with the manipulation of cultural identities in the sense that, by promoting a certain narrative configuration of the past and thus regulating the perception of past and present realities, the ideological process molds cultural identities. Through the imposition of a narrative on the origin of a given community, the selection of cultural symbols to be celebrated and events to be commemorated or forgotten –, a community can be educated to naturalize a given construction of their own history. Inevitably partial and incomplete, these fabrications of the past enhance the image of certain groups while diminishing or excluding others, consequently shaping the ways in which cultural groups perceive themselves and others. As expressed by Ricoeur,

imposed memory is armed with a history that is itself “authorized”, the official history, the history publicly learned and celebrated. A trained memory is, in fact, on the institutional plane an instructed memory, forced memorization is thus enlisted in the service of the remembrance of those events belonging to the common history that are held to be remarkable, even founding with respect to the common identity. The circumscription of the narrative is thus placed in the service of the circumscription of the identity defining the community. (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 85)

Throughout the analysis of the novels, the present study will investigate the ways in which the narratives of the past are altered by the colonizer to justify the colonial enterprise. Following Ricoeur’s assertion that “narratives (...) are at the same time the occasion for manipulation through reading and directing narratives, but also the place where a certain healing of memory may begin”(«*Memory and Forgetting*» 9), the strategies developed by Caribbean characters and narrators to resist the Truth imposed by the hegemonic group will also be considered. These strategies include, for example, the re-signification of certain dates and spaces, the re-appropriation of the Caribbean past through the revision of historical accounts, the deconstruction of essentialisms imposed by the metropolis, and the production of Caribbean sites of memory. Memory is exercised by the

oppressed to subvert the abuses perpetrated by the hegemonic groups by re-configuring the narratives of their own past.

Ricoeur also addresses the issue of memory from an ethico-political approach. From this perspective, he claims that all communities have the moral obligation to remember the lessons learnt by the previous generations and transmit the meaning and significance of past events to the generations to come. Hence the duty to remember links the interest in the past as a source of wisdom with the construction of a future in which the mistakes of the past are not repeated («Memory and Forgetting» 9-10). At the same time, the moral duty of memory is to do justice, not just to the self but to others, to the ancestors who helped shaping the world we are part of, and especially to the victims.

However, memory can also be abused in the name of justice. On the one hand, the proclamation of an obligated memory implies the manipulation of memory to raise consciousness about the past in the name of the victims' demand for justice. "Inveigling the silent word of the victims in this way", according to Ricoeur, "makes use turn to abuse" (*Memory, History, Forgetting* 90). On the other hand, Ricoeur also considers that the obsession with commemoration can easily lead to the abuse of memory in that commemorations often "attempt to fix the memories in a kind of reverential relationship to the past" («Memory and Forgetting» 9). Hence, while commemorations often have a healing function and seek to bring justice to those who were part of a common past, the abuse of commemorative festivals is an opportunity for the abuse of memory.

The ethico-political aspect of memory will illuminate the analysis of the constructions of memory in the novels as practices aimed at healing the wounds of racism, slavery and colonialism, and preserving Caribbean shared histories. At the same time, this study will observe the critical deconstruction of rituals or commemorations established by hegemonic groups which are empty of meaning to those whose past they invite to remember.

3. Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is closely related to memory in that it is constructed, among other

aspects, on the grounds of a community's narratives of a shared past, shared traditions and experiences. The memory of a past in common unites individuals as part of a cultural group, creating a sense of belonging. At the same time, it differentiates them from other peoples and their histories. Most importantly, the revisions or reconfigurations of the ways shared memories are represented might trigger changes in the configuration of cultural identities.

The impact of the rewriting of memory on cultural identities will be analyzed on the basis of Stuart Hall's views, which, in general terms, can be framed within the postmodern position that identities are plural, dynamic and invariably open to change. Such a position emerges as a reaction against the concept of the Cartesian subject, a construction of the modern era that represented the self as a unified, coherent entity characterized by an essence that made each individual unique. This conception of identity as a fixed inner core provided each human existence with a sense of continuity in that individuals were born with an essence – or identity – which remained stable throughout their lives.

The universal truths established in the context of modernity came under scrutiny in the second half of the 20th century in the context of postmodernity. The ruptures in the discourses of modern knowledge gave rise to the position that postmodern identities are characterized by the loss of a stable sense of the self, even when subjects often seek to construct a narrative of their own identity to give it a sense of continuity. As a result of the de-centering of the Cartesian ego, the subject is seen as assuming “different identities at different times, identities which are not unified around a coherent ‘self’” (Hall, «The Question of Cultural Identity» 598). Identity is redefined as an ongoing, unfinished process of *identification*: it becomes a question of how subjects position themselves with respect to the ways in which they are represented in the cultural systems surrounding them. As explained by Hall, “instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact”, we should think of it “as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside representation” («Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 51).

On the basis of the shifts in the conception of the subject, Hall draws a distinction between the essentialist and non-essentialist views of cultural identities. On the one hand,

cultural identity might be understood as “one, shared culture⁸, a sort of collective ‘one true self’ hiding inside the many other, more superficial ‘selves’, which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common” («Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 51). In this sense, cultural identity represents an unchanging essence that defines a people and provides them with a stable system of shared codes to interpret the world. There is, however, a non-essentialist conceptualisation of cultural identities as dynamic constructions produced through the subject’s positioning with respect to the representations of the shared past and present realities of the cultural group they belong to. Rather than a fixed essence, cultural identity is

a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being’. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something that already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities (...) undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous ‘play’ of history, culture and power (...) Identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. («Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 52)

The essentialist view of cultural identities played a central role in the social movements of the postwar period: it allowed the black diasporas in North America and the Caribbean, for example, to restore the continuities linking their histories as communities with common roots in Africa. The process of cultural colonization and its long-lasting effects are better explained, however, in non-essentialist terms considering that it was through the circulation of certain systems of representation that the colonized were socialized into consenting to their own subordination to European cultures.

The colonial project construed colonized subjects as “others” by means of the formation of the discourse of “The West and the Rest”, in which European cultures were positioned as the standard against which other cultures, their histories, ecologies and patterns of development were measured. The difference of these other societies and cultures

⁸ Within the field of cultural studies, the concept of culture is currently understood as a set of practices through which the members of a group produce and exchange meaning. Culture concerns the ways in which subjects interpret the world and assign meaning to the people, objects and events around them (Hall, «Introduction to *Representation. Cultural Representation and Signifying Practices*» 3).

was conversely established as the standard against which the West's achievement was measured (Hall, «The West and the Rest» 187). Given that identities are always constructed through, not outside difference, and that they function as points of identification only because of their capacity to exclude (Hall «Introduction: Who Needs Identity?» 4-5), the construction of “the West” as the pinnacle of human achievement was possible only in relation to different others who were construed as undeveloped and uncivilized by means of so influential a discourse “that it had the power to make Caribbean people see and experience themselves as “other” («Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 52).

The non-essentialist conception of cultural identity raises the possibility of fluidity and change, which is particularly significant in the case of cultures that were silenced and subjugated through colonization. From this perspective, the process of decolonization implies much more than the mere recovery of the collective memories and traditions lost as a result of colonization. It implies deconstructing the hegemonic constructions of Caribbean cultural identities to adopt a new positioning with respect to the hegemonic culture and to articulate new representations of Caribbean cultural identities.

The view of cultural identity as always open to change is pertinent in the context of this study given that it supports the view that, far from being a fixed reality, the shared history of a community can be constructed differently depending on when, for what purpose and from which perspective it is re-created. This view is consistent with the conception of memory as a (re)construction of the past which is inevitably permeated by power struggles. In point of fact, the analysis of the corpus will approach the rewriting of memory as an exercise through which the European representation of Caribbean subjectivities is dismantled, and thus enables the characters to develop new positionings with respect to their own past, present and future.

Even though the hegemonic construction of Caribbean cultural identities represents non-Europeans as a unified, homogenous group, black Caribbean experiences are framed by two vectors: similarity/continuity and rupture/difference (Hall, «Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 53). The peoples of the African diaspora share the collective memories of colonization, transportation, migration and slavery, which unify the different communities across the linguistic, cultural and religious differences that set them apart. To account for

the dynamic nature of cultural identities and the interplay of continuity / rupture in Caribbean identities in particular, Stuart Hall proposes that these should be understood as the combination of three presences: *Présence Européene*, *Présence Africaine*, and *Présence Americane*. The first “belongs irrevocably to the ‘play’ of power, to the lines of force and consent, to the role of the *dominant*, in Caribbean culture” («Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 56). Associated with exclusion, expropriation and with the representations that position Caribbean subjects as the inferior *Other*, this aspect of Caribbean identities is no longer found in a pure state, but in creolized traditions. *Présence Africaine*, on the other hand, is “the site of the repressed”, “the unspeakable presence in Caribbean culture” (55), a home to which there is no return. This presence was silenced through the process of dehumanization African peoples suffered during the experience of slavery. It still surfaces, however, in the tales told to children, in Caribbean music and religious practices, for example. *Présence Americane* condenses a history of displacements: that of the Awaraks, the Caribs, the Amerindians and the African diaspora. But it also constitutes the point where different cultures, origins and histories have converged, where differences, assimilations and syncretisms have been negotiated.

The analysis of the corpus will seek to observe the shifts in these presences and whether their roles within Caribbean cultural identities are modified by the active exercise of memory on the part of the characters. This study will investigate whether the characters engaged in the rewriting of memory are able to achieve an insight into the European presence as one relegating them to a subordinate position and whether its deconstruction triggers the exploration of the other presences in Caribbean cultural identities.

4. The contact zone

Due to their nature as dynamic constructions permeated by power struggles between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized, both the representation of memory and the (re)articulation of cultural identities will be considered as contact zones, a concept developed by Mary Louise Pratt in the context of her analysis of the genre of travel writing and the ideological functions it served within the European imperial project from the 18th to the late 20th century.

Pratt borrows the term “contact zone” from the field of linguistics, where “contact language” denotes languages that flourish among speakers from different native languages who need to communicate with each other frequently. As used by Pratt, the “contact zone” refers to “social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (*Imperial Eyes* 4). The concept of contact zone differs from notions like “colonial frontier” in the sense that, while the idea of a frontier implies a center with respect to which the margin is established, the contact zone foregrounds the interactive nature of colonial encounters, which was historically hidden by colonial discourses through the construction of an image of dominant cultures as guiding others towards progress and civilization without being influenced by the contact with their cultural traditions and practices. In the words of Pratt,

a “contact” perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and “travelees,” not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power. (7)

The encounters, the opportunities and the struggles of the contact zone have been configured in the arts through certain forms of representation, like autoethnographies⁹, bilingualism, parody, denunciation, imaginary dialogue and vernacular expression, among others («Arts of the Contact Zone» 37). In the analysis of the corpus selected for this study, the exercise of memory is approached as a contact zone where different cultures and alternative representations of the past enter into a critical dialogue. The rewriting of memory is interpreted as an activity which allows the characters whose histories are tinged by colonialist ideology to revise and subvert naturalized constructions of their own past, racial stereotypes and deep-rooted prejudices about Caribbean identities. It is in the struggles of the contact zone that the Caribbean characters grow to develop their own cultural memories.

⁹ Pratt defines autoethnographic texts as those in which “people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” («Arts of the Contact Zone» 35)

Chapter II. *Prospero's Daughter* and the De/Re-construction of Memory

1. Introduction

Elizabeth Nunez's *Prospero's Daughter* (2006) opens with a police investigation. English Doctor Peter Gardner has accused Carlos Codrington of trying to rape his daughter, Virginia. The detective in charge of the case, Inspector John Mumsford, interviews the subjects involved in the case and puts Carlos under arrest, though he is eventually claimed innocent. As the story progresses, the lives of the characters are developed in a narrative that problematizes the nature of asymmetrical power relations among characters belonging to different cultures.

Carlos Codrington is the son of an Afro-Caribbean father and an English-African mother who lived on the island of Chacachacare, located at a short distance from Trinidad. After losing his parents at a very young age, Carlos is left under the care of the housekeeper, Lucinda, who has a daughter called Ariana. One day, after a fierce storm, Doctor Peter Gardner and his daughter appear in the house offering to repair it in exchange for lodging. Soon after Lucinda's death, Gardner proclaims himself the legitimate owner of the house. From this moment onwards, all the characters find themselves in a position of subordination with respect to Gardner.

The novel is arranged in three sections narrated by different voices. The first one – “The Englishmen” – contains five chapters told by an external narrator that renders the perspectives of Inspector Mumsford and Peter Gardner. Highly critical of the Englishmen's beliefs and social prejudices, this narrator invites us to examine the legacies of European colonialism on the islands. While Mumsford and Gardner do not have a section of their own, Carlos and Virginia do have a central role as narrators: Carlos is in charge of the second section, and Virginia, of the third.

Prospero's Daughter metaphorically rewrites the European conquest of the Caribbean and inscribes it, paradoxically, in the context of the revolutionary struggles for the independence of Trinidad. The clash between the anti-imperialist fervor among the Trinidadians and the symbolic colonization of Carlos' house on Chacachacare foregrounds the extent to which the hierarchical power relations between the culture of the colonizer and

that of the colonized have outlived formal colonialism in the Caribbean. In the microcosm of Chacachacare, Carlos, Ariana and Virginia represent the colonized since, in different ways, they all suffer Gardner's oppression. Gardner, on the other hand, embodies the figure of the colonizer, considering that he displaces Carlos from his own house and uses the land - and its inhabitants - for his own benefit. The parallelism between Gardner and the figure of the European colonizer is clearly established by Carlos when he expresses that Gardner acted "as if he thought he had discovered us, as if before his arrival we had not existed at all!" (123), evoking the European representation of the conquest of the Americas in terms of the discovery of a New World.

This chapter presents a critical analysis of *Prospero's Daughter* concentrating particularly on the constructions of memory, its uses and abuses in the power struggles among the characters on Chacachacare, whose positions are to be read in the light of the intertwined histories of Great Britain and the Caribbean.

2. Colonization and the manipulation of memory

2.1 Displacement

Coloniality was essentially the creation of a set of states linked together within an interstate system in a hierarchy where those at the very bottom were the formal colonies. The hierarchy of coloniality manifested itself in all domains – political, economic and cultural –, and it has survived the end of formal colonial relations since it continues in the form of a socio-cultural hierarchy of European and non-European (Quijano and Wallerstein 550). It is important to understand, as explained by the authors, that all the states in this interstate system were new creations that emerged with the European discovery and conquest of the so-called "New World" – from those at the top to those at the bottom.

The stories narrated in the novel develop in a context where the coloniality of power is deeply rooted and the idea of race is confused as a constitutive element of the materiality of social relations and of the very individuals participating in those relations (Quijano, «Colonialidad del poder y Des/Colonialidad del Poder» 4). Among other aspects, the privileged socioeconomic position of English characters evidences the coloniality of power permeating the Trinidadian society. Inspector Mumsford, for example, moves to Trinidad

influenced by the promise that he will improve his class and station in life, for “in the colonies every Englishman is a lord” (11). As a matter of fact, when he reflects upon the benefits of living in Trinidad, he finds himself thinking that, despite his struggles with insects and the weather, he does live as a lord now: “housekeeper, cook, chauffeur, gardener, a house with three bedrooms, an English car with leather seats, tennis and ballroom dancing at Country Club, tea at four at Queen’s Park Hotel, golf at St Andrews, yachting down the Grenadines” (12). Mrs. Burton, the English lady in charge of Virginia when she is sent to Trinidad, also enjoys the benefits of having migrated from England to the Caribbean. She earns a living as an interior decorator without formal training in that profession, for being English is the only credential she needs to build a successful career.

The classification of individuals into different “races” is closely related with the division of labor on the island. While the positions of authority within the colonial administration are occupied by European subjects, most Caribbean characters are shown working as servants, drivers, gardeners, sailors and fishermen, for example. In this sense, the socioeconomic context depicted in the novel recreates the dynamic of modern / colonial / Eurocentered / capitalist power, with whose consolidation in Latin America and the Caribbean “the new identities created on the basis of the category of race were associated with different roles and positions in the new global structure of labor. Race and the division of labor were structurally associated, mutually reinforcing the other” (Quijano, «Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina» 204).

Gardner perpetuates the colonality of power by articulating a discourse that entitles him to dominate Carlos, Ariana and Virginia. Gardner, in Carlos’ words,

had equated himself with God and made us Lucifer: Ariana and me. I say Ariana and me because at that moment he was holding Virginia close to his chest. Because, as he told us about the lesser and the greater angels, the ones closer to God when Lucifer had fallen, he made it clear that though Virginia, like us, must obey him, she was better than us. Her place, he said, was on the second tier of the pyramid, ours on the last, firmly on the bottom, my place slightly above Ariana’s. (138)

Gardner's construction of himself and the community on Chacachacare is based on the fiction of a Eurocentered racial pyramid configured on the binary opposition white / black, where the former denotes superiority and civilization and the latter, inferiority and underdevelopment. Gardner insists on explaining cultural difference in natural terms, positioning himself as the epitome of the evolution of the human race while relegating others to a subordinate position. Ariana and Carlos are treated as brutes and savages, as primitive individuals who, like children, give no thought to the consequences of their actions.

The colonial discourse articulated by Gardner seeks to regulate their own representation of themselves and has a profound impact on their cultural identity, considering that cultural identities take shape within the field of representation depending on the way we position ourselves – and are positioned – with respect to others. As expressed by Stuart Hall in «Who Needs Identity?» (cultural) identities are

the point of suture, between, on the one hand, the discourses and practices which attempt to 'interpellate', speak to us or hail us into place as the social subjects of particular discourses, and on the other hand, the processes which produce subjectivities, which construct us as subjects which can be 'spoken'. Identities are thus points of temporary attachment to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us. (5-6)

By dictating the terms in which Ariana and Carlos are to read themselves in relation to the “race” of the colonizer, Gardner gives shape to a reality where their subordination is not only legitimate but also in their best interest.

The process of colonization on Chacachacare begins when Gardner starts making repairs to the house after the storm. He cuts down the trees around the house in case the next storm brings them down, thus modifying the garden according to his own views. By the time Gardner completes his job, Carlos realizes that

not a single one of the trees my father had planted was left standing: not the coconut tree, the breadfruit tree, the chataigne tree, or the avocado tree, and not one of the fruit trees, neither the plum, orange, grapefruit, sapodilla, soursop nor the mango trees that were in our yard.

As each tree went down, the fruits I loved tumbling to the ground when the branches were lopped off, I bawled as if my life itself were threatened. (111)

With the falling of each of the trees, it is not Carlos' life that is threatened, but the memories of the life with his parents. His father was a poet and a descendant of African slaves. His mother was born in Algiers to a wealthy European family and raised by an Algerian nanny who taught her about her god, her language and her people's struggles during European colonization. She left her parents and headed towards the Caribbean after she started suspecting they were implicated in the sudden disappearance of the black man she was dating. Both of Carlos' parents, in one way or another, witnessed the harmful effects of modern racism, colonization and slavery. The collective memory of Carlos' family is thus marked by histories of oppression and the struggle to attain freedom.

After losing his parents, Carlos becomes the preserver of the family's collective memory, made up not only of his own experiences, but also of the stories he received from them and from Lucinda, who often "reinforced the bits [he] remember[ed]" (119). His house and the garden function as frameworks of collective memory which help keep and retrieve the family's shared past. As expressed by Halbwachs, each aspect of the place inhabited by a group has a certain meaning intelligible only to the members of the group, each portion corresponding to different aspects of the life, values and structure of the group (*The Collective Memory* 130). The rooms in the house as well as each of the trees in the garden evoke childhood memories. Due to this, when Gardner sets out to destroy Carlos' garden, it is not just his property that is attacked but the collective memory of his family / community as well.

After Lucinda's death, Gardner starts introducing changes in the house. His first measure is to burn the bed of Carlos' mother, saying that "there was something bad in the bed" and he had to destroy it for the sake of those who lived there (116). The act of burning the bed is highly symbolic since Gardner forces Carlos to witness the destruction of the bed in an act of assertion of his authority. Besides, that bed was his mother's resting place and, according to what his parents told him, the place where Carlos had been conceived, which turns it into a symbol of his origin. As it is the bed where Carlos sleeps now, the destruction of the bed is also the beginning of Carlos' displacement.

The burning of the bed is accompanied by the manipulation of Carlos' representation of the past. Gardner curses his mother and calls her "a slut (...) for lying down with a black man" (116). He continues the attack on Carlos' memories by revisiting the story of how his parents met. In Gardner's account, his mother is transformed into a party girl hired to amuse sailors and thrown into the ocean when they grow tired of her. The instrumentalization of Carlos' memory is motivated by Gardner's resolution to destroy the image of his parents and of himself as part of a community, apart from depriving him of the possessions inherited from his mother.

Carlos' family memories are further destabilized by the installation of electric light in the house. While Gardner celebrates this innovation as a means to improve their standard of living, Carlos explains the oil lamps evoked the memory of the animals his father brought to life with his hands at night when they played together, and also recalls the sweet noise of the rain falling on the Delco that collected rain water and pumped it into the house for domestic use. These memories begin to vanish with the absence of the physical objects that functioned as reminders of the past.

Carlos is aware that Gardner makes changes in the house to erase his memory. He appropriates his parents' bedroom, gives Carlos' bedroom to Virginia, Lucinda's to Carlos, and Ariana is moved to the playroom. The reorganization of the rooms in the house reinforces the segregation of the inhabitants and their classification in a racial hierarchy where those who occupy the rooms at the back are treated as a less developed "race". The new arrangement of space – together with the distribution of activities in time – can also be read as a means to discipline individuals and ensure their obedience in Foucault's terms. Gardner's analytical construction of time and space management ensures productivity, prevents "dangerous" communications among individuals and weakens bonds of friendship or solidarity. It is, in other words, intended to control their bodies and subjectivities, and to disrupt the construction of collective memory, as it is only in the contact with the group that individuals can keep the memories of the past alive.

2.2. Education and cultural memories

Memory, in general terms, is intimately connected with identity. Cultural memory, in particular, has a central role in its concretion since it preserves "the store of knowledge

from which a group derives an awareness of unity and peculiarity” (J. Assman, «Collective Memory and Cultural Identity» 130). Its transmission is central for the instruction of the members within the group in relation to the group’s values, standards and codes of conduct. In contrast with communicative memory, as Aleida Assman explains, cultural memory is an explicit, homogeneous and institutionalized top-down memory (215). It is transgenerational and thus necessarily mediated, founded on material representations like libraries, museums and monuments, as well as various modes of education. The transmission of cultural memory, in the words of A. Assman, requires inventing

techniques of transmitting and storing information, which is deemed vital for the constitution and continuation of a specific group and its identity. Monuments perpetuate historical events; exhibitions and musical or theatrical performances create continuous attention for the canonized works of art. (221)

In the novel, through Gardner’s instruction, Carlos becomes immersed in British cultural memories and faces the threat of cultural imposition, since his education is based on the assumption that Carlos lacks a culture, a history and a cultural memory of his own. The first lesson Gardner teaches him is about “the right of his people, their manifest destiny, to rule the world” and their mission to bring civilization to the rest of cultures (162-3). Gardner’s version of history suppresses, among other aspects, the histories of the original peoples and the European genocide against them, as well as the atrocities committed during the slave era. His account reproduces what the Argentinian philosopher Enrique Dussel refers to as “the fallacy of developmentalism” in his article “Eurocentrism and Modernity” (1993), that is, the belief that the path of Europe’s modern development must be followed unilaterally by every other culture, where development is taken as an ontological, and not simply a sociological or economic, category (68). The view of history constructed by Gardner implies, then, that the Caribbean insertion into world history is triggered by the European conquest of the islands.

Gardner also teaches Carlos about British literature, concentrating on canonical authors like William Shakespeare, John Milton and John Keats, among others. He initiates Carlos into music by introducing him to Beethoven, Chopin and Mozart. Carlos grows to

recognize the instruments played and develops a taste for classical music. By instructing him on the classics of European art, Gardner fosters the naturalization of Western values and traditions in view of the fact that canonical works are, precisely, crystallizations of Western cultural memory. In the context of the unequal power relations between the British and Caribbean cultures, the acquisition of British cultural memory implies the silencing of his own: the colonization of his past and his cultural identity. It can be asserted, then, that the figure of Gardner functions as a symbol of the European presence which is, according to Hall, endlessly speaking Caribbean identities, dictating their representations of the world and of themselves.

The manipulation of Carlos' cultural memory contributes to the process of epistemic colonization – in Quijano's terms –, aimed at discarding aboriginal knowledge and intellectuality by installing Eurocentrism as a universal perspective on knowledge. The European education Carlos receives is anchored in a Eurocentered hierarchy of cultures. The construction of knowledge is thus permeated by power relations, despite the illusion created by modern / colonial / Eurocentered power that knowledge exists outside national, gender or racial power struggles (Walsh 42).

Epistemic colonization is represented in the novel through the opposition of Gardner's and Carlos' conceptions of the relationship between human beings and the environment. To Gardner, nature suggests imperfection and disease. He equates nature with the state of primitiveness, and assumes that while “primitive man accepts life the way Nature has presented it to him (...), the civilized man uses his brain to make the world better” (149). Gardner's views embody the philosophical legacy of the Enlightenment: they reflect the belief in reason as a human capacity that can correct the alleged flaws of nature and lead towards progress. It must be noted that the doctor is characterized more than once as a reflection of Mary Shelley's Victor Frankenstein. Like Shelley's doctor, Gardner is determined to challenge the laws of nature to achieve control over life and death.

Prospero's Daughter foregrounds the clash between the Western paradigm of knowledge as domination (Zaffaroni 99), embodied in Gardner's views, and Carlos' positioning with respect to the environment. His relationship with nature is inherited from his father, who often reminded him that “the island where we lived belonged first to the

flora and fauna we found here” (113). Carlos seeks to live in harmony with the natural world, and is aware of the interdependence of all beings in the ecosystem. His father’s effort to teach him to love and respect nature brings Carlos in direct opposition to the views of the doctor, who dismisses his ecological difference as a sign of his barbarianism. According to Patricia Ferrer-Medina, in the context of the colonial encounters in the Caribbean, cultural differences between aboriginal and European peoples were first described as differences in relation to the distance between individuals and their environment, such a distance being the result of the European interpretation of the degree of human control over the environment (100).

In imposing his own culture as a model and his own conceptions of the world as if they had a universal validity, Gardner rejects the possibility of an intercultural dialogue in the contact zone and positions himself as a subject whose cultural purity remains untouched by the contact with difference. He considers himself entitled to represent others in his own terms and instrumentalizes their memories for the sake of his own interests. When confronted with Gardner’s colonial power, Carlos suffers displacement from his own house. His collective and cultural memories are manipulated. Ariana and Virginia are also colonized, though in a different way: Gardner claims their bodies as his own property.

2. 3. Silenced Memories

The novel revisits a different facet of colonization which is the sexual abuse of women. During the slave era, as explained by bell hooks,

white male slave owners wanted enslaved black women to passively accept sexual exploitation as the right and privilege of those in power. The black female slave who willingly submitted to a master’s sexual advance and who received presents or payments was rewarded for her acceptance of the existing social order. Those black women who resisted sexual exploitation directly challenged the system; their refusal to submit passively to rape was a denouncement of the slave owner’s right to their persons. They were brutally punished. (27)

In *Prospero’s Daughter*, Ariana’s situation echoes the realities of black enslaved women in the plantations. Soon after Gardner’s arrival, Carlos begins to notice Ariana’s

visits to his bedroom at naptime. Every day, during those two hours, Gardner forces Ariana to have sex with him. The abuse begins when Ariana is a nine-year-old girl. For many years he blackmails her, and persuades her to believe he has the evidence to prove her guilty of robbery. By forcing himself upon her, Gardner subdues Ariana and practically turns her into his own property. He denigrates her, and, probably out of shame, Ariana isolates herself from Carlos and Virginia's company. Even though Virginia is not aware of her situation, she cannot help but notice the changes in Ariana:

It became more and more difficult for me to turn a blind eye to the gloom that seemed to have settled over her. Permanently, it appeared to me. (...) There were times I came upon her sitting in the kitchen, her eyes downcast, twirling a strand of her thick, black hair absentmindedly around her fingers. She seemed to be in another world. (250)

Ariana protects Virginia from her father's perverse sexual desires until she turns fifteen years old. A few days after her birthday, her father starts sexually assaulting Virginia as well. Gardner's violation of these women breaks their will by depriving them of the sovereignty over their own bodies. His behavior is highly reminiscent of that of the white European male colonizer, whose political aim in raping black women was "to obtain absolute allegiance and obedience to the white imperialistic order" (hooks 27).

As a narrator, Virginia tells that remembering her father's sexual abuse proves a torture. Even though this traumatic experience haunts her memory, she is afraid of remembering. She keeps her father's violations a secret until Ariana confesses that she too has been a victim of rape for a long time now and knows the causes of Virginia's anxiety about the pain in her throat. It takes just a few words for Ariana to hint and Virginia to understand that Gardner has repeatedly raped both. Both women repress their memories of violence and refrain from verbalizing their experience until they have this conversation, where none overtly names Gardner's crime. In this sense, Gardner manipulates their representations of the past: the suffering he inflicts upon them is too painful to be put into words, and the doctor probably counts on their silence about the act of rape due to its traumatic nature.

In the case of Ariana, Gardner's actions are legitimized by colonialist discourse, which construed black women as having an excessive sexual appetite. These constructions "not only deflected attention from the racialized and sexualized violence inflicted by white men, but also made sure that (...) black women's victimization through sexual violence remained utterly invisible" (Mardorossian 25). The nature of the identities imposed on black women and their representation as promiscuous legitimized and also naturalized the abuses they suffered and the violence exercised upon them.

Virginia's condition as a white English woman leaves her, in Gardner's view, in a different position. As explained by Evelyn O'Callaghan, in the colonial context, white women in the Caribbean were construed according to the Victorian standard of femininity: "a virtuous woman in the nineteenth century was, if not a virgin, a respectable matron subject to her husband (...) White women were supposedly completely fulfilled in nurturing domesticity and motherhood, and so refined that sexuality was repulsive" (28). The figure of the "Angel in the House" was praised for her purity, which contrasted with the promiscuous character of black women. This stereotype is introduced in *Prospero's Daughter* through Gardner's concern with Virginia's "virgin knot". He takes pride in being the guardian of her "jewel" and preserving her virginity until the day she marries, which exposes the hypocrisy of this character.

By accusing Carlos of rape, Gardner blames Carlos for the crime he himself has committed. In a clear manipulation of the narrative construction of events, Carlos' declaration of his love towards Virginia is taken by Gardner as the excuse to finally ban him from his own house and send Virginia away to Trinidad, where she will be free of his abuses. None of the police inspectors hesitates to judge Carlos guilty, probably owing to the fact that Gardner's accusation is anchored in a colonial construction of black masculinities in terms of "the myth of the oversexed black male body", a representation which "would also serve to justify violence against black men" since "fraudulent rape charges were routinely invoked as grounds for lynching". In this context, rape was "irremediably configured as the violation of white women by black masculinity" (Mardorossian 25).

The sexual exploitation of Ariana and Virginia together with the claims about Carlos' lascivious behavior are directly related to the instrumentalization of memories. Following Ricoeur's study of the pragmatic dimension of memory, it can be stated that, by diminishing a group in relation to a dominant other, and by persuading the oppressed of their own inferiority, (cultural) identities can be manipulated. The novel exposes the ways in which the figure of Gardner / colonizer seeks to manipulate other subjects' representations of themselves by creating certain constructions anchored in the discourses generated by the group in power.

3. Memory as Resistance

The struggle against colonial power is fleshed out in the novel's structure and in the arrangement of voices. The first section renders Mumsford's and Gardner's perspectives, and offers a glimpse into their colonial attitude towards the island and its community. The second and third sections, however, voice the processes through which Carlos and Virginia grow to develop their own representation of themselves, their past and present realities, to transcend the limits imposed by Gardner in their quest for self-empowerment. In this respect, *Prospero's Daughter* offers resistance to Gardner's / the colonizer's attempt to appropriate others, their territories, bodies and subjectivities.

It must be noted that resistance to colonial oppression begins in the very first section through the figure of the external narrator, who takes a critical distance from the way Gardner and Mumsford relate to the Caribbean. The narrative voice reconstructs the different stages in the colonization of Trinidad: the island was first occupied by the Spanish, who invited the French to develop the island in 1777, and was later invaded by the British in 1797. In the 18th century, the small island of Chacachacare, whose name derives from "chacacha", the Amerindian word for cotton, was turned into a thriving cotton plantation. Once the plantation lost its initial strength, the island became a seaside resort for the sons and daughters of plantation owners, and was later established as a leper colony under the responsibility of the Dominican nuns. The disease of leprosy, as explained by the narrator, is imported by the British into the Caribbean:

It was greed that caused the epidemic. Slavery had been abolished and the Africans, scarred by nightmares of the horrors of the plantation, had fled to the cities. Left with no workers to cut the sugarcane, process it into sugar, and ferment the juices into alcohol, for which they had developed an addiction, the British ranked the slums of their continental colonies in the east. Five acres of land after five years, they promised, if the workers wanted to stay, or passage back home. Thousands came from India. They came with the disease. (19)

The narrator challenges the hegemonic construction of colonialism as synonymous with progress by denouncing the perversity of the imperial machine, designed to satisfy the desires and feed the addictions of the dominant group. Furthermore, it highlights the impact of the colonial enterprise on Caribbean people and ecosystems by exposing the extent to which the organisms (including animals, plants and disease) that travelled with Europeans to the colonies – together with the plantation system they established – altered the landscapes and contributed to the decimation of indigenous peoples, their foodways, flora and fauna (DeLoughrey 266).

By asserting that Inspector Mumsford knows little about the history of Chacachacare, the narrator hints that its own external perspective exceeds Mumsford's limited views. This anonymous voice shares with the narrators of the second and third sections the interest in problematizing the partiality of the views and accounts promoted by the imperial culture. In Carlos' and Virginia's sections, it is evident that every time Gardner disdains Carlos and his people or manipulates the representations of the past, even when the characters avoid confronting Gardner, perhaps to escape punishment, their silence is most of the times filled with insurgent thoughts. For example, Carlos narrates a scene where Gardner heavily criticizes Eric Williams, the leader of the Trinidadian struggle for independence, and asks him "if the British left, how would the darkies know how to run the government?" In his thoughts, Carlos answers "*If the British left? We would be rich*" (180).

When Gardner launches the project to teach Carlos about the classics of European art and literature, Carlos finds a way to relate to European cultural memory without diminishing his own culture or relinquishing his rights as the legitimate owner of the house.

His strategy consists in identifying with the rebellious characters in the texts he has read, with those who refuse to submit to the authority of more powerful others. In this way, he keeps the memory of his struggle against Gardner alive. Given that there are moments when Carlos finds himself feeling grateful towards the doctor, loved by him, and thus on the verge of forgetting his lies, he relies on the texts he reads with Gardner to remind himself that he must have the courage of his convictions. From Hall's perspective, it can be said that his strategy consists in choosing his own points of identification to resist Gardner's attempt to control his subjectivity.

One of the traditional texts often mentioned by Gardner to support his teachings is the Bible. Gardner quotes it to explain reality as God's creation in the attempt to naturalize differences. Carlos is particularly drawn to Genesis, and in terms of this myth he reads his relationship with the doctor. Gardner, as suggested by his surname, adopts the role of the creator of Paradise, metaphorically speaking, and, when Carlos declares his love for Virginia, he is expelled from "The Garden". At that point Carlos identifies with Adam, as we can observe in his conversation with the monk hosting him in Trinidad:

"Adam is my hero," Carlos said.

The monk blushed. "He was a sinner, my son."

"Eden is a European myth meant to keep servants and slaves in their place," Carlos said.

Mumsford cleared his throat.

"Had Adam remained in the garden, he would not have been his own man," Carlos said. (88)

Carlos re-signifies the figure of Adam as a man who chooses truth, knowledge and freedom over the alleged perfection of paradise. Carlos / Adam is allowed to stay in "The Garden" so long as he remains obedient and accepts his own situation of silence and inferiority with respect to his Creator. His expulsion from "The Garden" happens the moment he defies Gardner's rules by seeking his own happiness, which motivates his interpretation of Genesis as an artifice that has been used to perpetuate unequal power relations.

In this way, Nunez's novel offers a critical rewriting of "The Book of Genesis" through parody as understood by Linda Hutcheon. This author conceives parody as a critical reworking of the past. It is a type of repetition with distance that reveals discontinuity at the heart of continuity and difference at the heart of similarity. Hutcheon qualifies parody as double-coded in the sense that it paradoxically incorporates and at the same time challenges that which it parodies (11). This strategy has been widely used by the "ex-centric" or marginalized groups that seek to revise and respond critically to the dominant white, European, patriarchal and / or heterosexual discourses that have relegated them to a position of inferiority. As explained by the author, "parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak to a discourse from within it, but without being totally recuperated by it" (36).

Carlos as a character reads / writes himself, his own past and present realities in the language of parody: he profits from the education he receives from Gardner and at the same time engages in the critical deconstruction of Western world views, values and accounts of the past. In the case of "The Book of Genesis", Carlos observes the ways in which Adam and Eve's expulsion of paradise has been used to reinforce power structures and simultaneously finds himself in the figure of the sinner, thus reinterpreting the myth as a tale of empowerment and liberation. His rereading of the Genesis evokes the relationship between Trinidad and the so-called Mother Country in the early 1960s, where the Trinidadian struggle for emancipation was regarded by the British a sign of their ungratefulness.

Carlos also appropriates Shakespeare's *The Tempest* as a text in the light of which to regard his own reality and position himself as resisting oppression. He assigns each of the characters in the house a name borrowed from the play on the grounds of their (power) relations with the rest. He sees Prospero in Gardner, as he too wears a cloak and reads his books when he works with his flowers in the garden. Carlos calls Virginia Miranda, and refers to the man Gardner would like his daughter to marry as Ferdinand. His own identification with Caliban is most explicitly stated when he confronts Gardner by saying "Thou didst prevent me; I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans'. Caliban's words. And yet what I meant to say to him was that I loved her [Virginia]. That one day I hoped to marry her, to have children with her" (216). Like Caliban, Carlos is the legitimate owner of

the house / island. He is enslaved by Gardner / Prospero, who takes advantage of his knowledge of the island and engages in the project to “civilize” him.

The relationship between Prospero and Caliban becomes a metaphor of Carlos’ relationship with Gardner: it helps him remember Gardner’s abuses and keep the struggle for his own house alive. He positions himself as resistant to hegemonic constructions of himself and his people by identifying with the figure of Caliban. This character represents his determination to rebel against the authority of Gardner / colonizer, his interest in learning from him and using that knowledge for his own purposes. In Carlos’ parodic revisiting of *The Tempest*, then, Caliban becomes the protagonist; he is neither a devil nor a monster, but a black man subverting colonial power. Caliban’s anger echoes his own, and it is channeled when he curses Gardner, much in the same way as Caliban curses Prospero.

Apart from re-creating himself through the critical revision of certain canonical texts, Carlos finds a way to resist Gardner’s oppression and subvert cultural imposition in his relationship with poetry. His father’s poetry becomes a refuge that brings comfort and “let[s] [him] dream even in waking hours” (149). It is his legacy, a crystallization of his experiences and those of his people, and thus an expression of Caribbean cultural memories. Carlos relies on these poems as the source of knowledge about the collective memories of his community, their values and traditions.

When Gardner starts making changes in the house, Carlos hides his father’s texts to preserve them. On the basis of Hall’s views, such an act symbolizes the silencing of the African and American presences in his cultural identity in a context where the European presence, embodied by the doctor, seeks to control his subjectivity. Gardner represents the European presence in Caribbean cultural identities, that which “in terms of colonialism, underdevelopment, poverty and the racism of colour (...) has positioned the black subject within its dominant regimes of representation, like colonial discourse («Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 56), assigning roles and stereotypes that reduce their identities to fixed essences.

As a matter of fact, in what seems to be an allusion to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*¹⁰, Carlos explains how he learns to wear a mask over his face, at first to please Gardner, and then to deceive him. In relation to this, he says:

I did not want my face to register my anger when my blood churned from something he said or something he ordered me to do, or to reveal the loathing of my heart when, forgetting his oath, he called me his savage. I wanted him to feel secure in his presumptions, convinced of his superiority over me and people who looked like me. For he had much to teach me and I was eager to learn. I made a bargain in my mind: in exchange for knowledge, I would let him presume. (163)

Carlos' deceiving appearance, the silent rebellions that break out in his mind and are concealed during his childhood can be perceived as a central theme in one of his poems, which is presented to the reader when Gardner peruses it before tearing it to pieces. The first stanza reads "To walk silently // in the forest, // and not shake a leaf, to move // and not disturb a branch" (72). Carlos hides his rejection of Gardner's power in order that it passes unnoticed until he is ready to confront him and face the consequences.

The open defiance of Gardner's authority begins when Carlos offers to help Virginia continue her studies in spite of his decision to end her formal instruction. Carlos and Virginia begin to meet in secret. Ariana covers them and, in exchange, she receives some time for herself when she is free of her duty to teach Virginia how to do the house chores. The three of them start acting in concert for the benefit of all.

Many of the canonical texts Carlos studies become the subject of his lessons with Virginia. They discuss the classics not only in relation to their literary value but also as cultural artifacts produced in a given context and by a certain culture. They engage in the practice of memory by revising the accounts of the past they have learnt from Gardner, and completing them with the knowledge that Carlos has received from his family. Carlos explains European colonization, for example, from a perspective the doctor has silenced: "My father's people came in chains. (...) before a single African touched these shores, there were Amerindians. Almost every last one of them wiped out by smallpox. (...) The

¹⁰ C.f. *Macbeth* Act I, Scene v.

Europeans brought disease with them that killed nearly all the Amerindians” (189). Together, they thoroughly revise what they have learnt from Gardner and ponder upon the power relations permeating the histories of Europe and the Caribbean.

By sharing with Virginia what his parents taught him, and what he has learnt from his father’s poems, he not only preserves the family’s memory but acknowledges and integrates Virginia as a member of the community for, despite her father’s efforts to persuade her of her Englishness, Virginia feels at home in Chacachacare. Their meetings are motivated not only by the desire to learn but also by the will to remember, which turns these meetings into a site of memory, one whose most fundamental purpose is, in Nora’s words, “to stop time, to block the work of forgetting, to establish the state of things, to immortalize death, to materialize the immaterial” («Between Memory and History» 19). Apart from the material and functional aspects, these study sessions have a symbolic dimension in that they become a secret ritual: the moment when Carlos and Virginia can speak their minds, bring the past into question openly, and re-construct themselves as equals outside the boundaries imposed by Gardner’s racial hierarchy.

The texts they read together are also sites of memory. On the one hand, Gardner presents Carlos with these texts as part of the patrimony of civilization, approaching them as crystallizations of European history and a condensation of Western culture. In their meetings, however, Carlos and Virginia revisit such texts as tokens of the silences and omissions of the West, as manifestations of the ways in which the culture of the colonizer manipulated the representations of the past to hide genocidal violence in the context of conquest and slavery. They recover these texts and resignify them as condensations of the asymmetrical power relations between Europe and the Caribbean.

The alternative constructions of the cultural patrimony of the West, in general terms, as a site of memory can be understood in the light of the fact that, according to Nora, “*lieux de memoire* only exist because of their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications” (19). The deconstruction and re-creation of the meaning of the sites of memory can also be observed in Carlos’ critical appropriation of the disobedient characters in *The Bible* and *The Tempest*, as he turns these texts into sites of memory which prevent him from

forgetting the injustices of the past and help him articulate his own construction of reality in a context where Gardner / colonizer exercises symbolic power over him by constructing him as a brute, a savage and a slave.

Carlos and Virginia erect new sites of memory when they are in full possession of the house after Gardner's suicide. They introduce some changes to the house: they remove the air conditioning, and Carlos has a carpenter restore the carvings of birds and flowers on the tops of the interior walls that his father designed and Virginia's father destroyed. In this way, Carlos pays homage to his parents' legacy and the family's collective memory is again anchored in the house as a framework of memory.

In the garden, Carlos and Virginia plant fruit trees again but at the same time decide to keep some of Gardner's flowers, as narrated by Virginia:

We have kept many of Father's flowers. Bougainvillea still blaze across the pillars on our front porch, orchids still climb the gray stumps of coconut tree trunks dug into graveled beds in our backyard. Under the shade of the greenhouse, we still grow anthuriums. But Carlos has restored the white orchids to the tree in the cove, where they belong.

We have fruit trees – mango, plum, grapefruit, orange, sapodilla, pomme cythere, chennetes. The chennette tree was the first Carlos planted, the first of the fruit trees my father had cut down. Every foot it grows, Carlos says, diminishes the memory of his pain. (310)

Carlos and Virginia transform the garden into a *lieu de mémoire* evoking the memories of their past. The preservation of the doctor's flowers suggests that Gardner's colonial presence has left a mark that cannot be erased. His flowers stand in the garden as symbols of the years they spent under his domination, as reminders of the physical and symbolic violence he exercised against them. They coexist, however, with the newly planted fruit trees, which represent the desire to keep the memory of Carlos' origins alive. The mixture of native plants and artificial flowers at the same time represents the contact zone Carlos and Virginia inhabit, where European and Caribbean cultural identities in their multiplicity mix and clash, where the histories of subjugation, displacement and resistance coexist in a new configuration of the environment.

It is in the garden that Carlos and Virginia remember Ariana and the courage with which she defended Carlos when he was accused of rape. They conclude that her decision to tell Mumsford about Gardner's sexual abuses is what liberated the three of them from his oppression. In the end, the reconstruction of memory is what allows the three characters to break free from the oppression of Gardner / colonizer. In the case of Carlos, the moment he claims the house as legitimately his, he acknowledges the history of his family in the house of Chacachacare as well as the battles he has fought in silence against his colonizer, thus asserting his identity as a subject with a voice of his own. Ariana's decision to confront the trauma of rape in an interview with Mumsford, on the other hand, results in the freedom she longs for; and Virginia's final decision to confess that she was sexually abused by her father helps her heal the traumatic memories of the past. The reconstruction of memory, then, proves a means to personal and communal empowerment in a narrative that represents memory as a contact zone where alternative constructions of the past constantly struggle.

Chapter III. The Song of my Life: Resisting the Colonization of the Past in *The Long Song*

1. Introduction

The preservation and transmission of collective memories constitutes a central pillar in the formation of cultural memory and identity. The way the past is remembered, however, might change from one generation within a community to the next, as explained by Achugar. The selection, emplotment and narration of the events recollected might vary according to age, apart from class, ethnic and gender differences. When they are appropriated by younger generations, the lived memories of the elderly can be subjected to new readings and interpretations, they can be misinterpreted or deliberately forgotten (143).

Andrea Levy's novel revolves around the transmission and appropriation of memories in the family of the protagonist, July, who is born a slave in the plantation owned by John Howarth and inherited by his sister, Caroline Mortimer. The novel relates July's experiences as a house slave, and revisits the greatest slave revolt in Jamaica – the Baptist War – and the abolition of slavery. The text is narrated by July herself. Out of the desire to remember and share her life experiences with her son and the future generations in her family, she writes an autobiographical account that is later accompanied by a foreword and an afterword written by her son, editor and publisher, Thomas Kinsman.

The analysis presented in this chapter explores the multiple uses and constructions of memory that clash in the novel. We will observe the ways in which, apart from reconstructing the silenced memories of the Afro-Caribbean community, *The Long Song* problematizes the very nature of memory and the extent to which it is subjected to power struggles. We will also examine the strategies through which the writer portrayed in the novel manages to take a critical distance from hegemonic constructions of Caribbean histories and identities.

2. Between Individual and Collective Memory

The interrelations between individual and collective memories have been the subject of considerable debate in the last decades. Following A. Assman, individual memory, the “medium for processing subjective experience and building up a social identity”, is not necessarily private and is always built up in the interaction with significant others (213). Memories are constructed, retrieved and revised in the context of an affective community, and this includes memories that are experienced individually. As stated by Halbwachs, even in the case of the memories we keep to ourselves, “we often replace our remembrances within a space and time whose demarcations we share with others, or (...) we also situate them within dates that have meaning only in relation to a group to which we belong” (*The Collective Memory* 54).

Andrea Levy’s novel presents the reconstruction of memories as a central theme, for the novel revolves around the writing process of an elderly woman, July, who writes the story of her own life during the slave and post slave eras in Jamaica. Her account foregrounds the porous border between individual and collective memory through the reconstruction of her own experiences in the light of her relationship with an affective group, that is, the Afro-Caribbean community from the plantation of Amity. Her recollections are anchored in the shared memories of her group, considering that the most significant moments in her life are in many cases represented through the accounts of other witnesses who help her broaden her perspective and fill in gaps. When she recreates, for example, the unexpected encounter with her mother in the slave village, she reports a variety of accounts of how her mother, Kitty, reached and saved her from being shot by her father and overseer, Tam Dewar. By putting all the accounts together, the narrator not only presents a broader picture of the incident in question but also exposes the process of construction of her memories, for in the multiplicity of accounts provided by the community she finds a picture of herself and of her mother that helps her complete the scenes she recalls.

At the same time, the events narrated in her tale are representative of the realities of the black community in general. The rewriting of her own life story helps her confront the painful events of her past and reconstruct the cultural trauma of slavery. As seen by Ron Eyerman, cultural trauma

refers to a dramatic loss of identity and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group of people that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While it may be necessary to establish some event as the significant “cause,” its traumatic meaning must be established and accepted, a process which requires time, as well as mediation and representation. (2)

For enslaved African communities, the forced migration to the “New World” entailed dislocation, displacement and the loss of human dignity. The enslavement of African peoples implied a process of dehumanization that began on the slave ships when they were branded with a hot iron, stripped of their clothing and systematically tortured. These traumatic experiences aboard the ships were the initial stage in the transformation of free human beings into slaves. Also central in their preparation for the slave market was the dispersement of communities and the destruction of a common African language and heritage (hooks 18-19).

Although African subjects and their descendants developed new cultural attachments within the plantations, since they “had sufficient common experiences to enable them to cooperate in the New World in fashioning new customs and traditions which reflected their African background” (Franklin 28), their attempts to re-create the bonds with the community were often thwarted by the dominant group so as to shatter any kind of unity among them. Levy’s narrator sheds light on the ways in which slavery disrupted the social fabric of Afro-Caribbean communities, as she depicts many of the divisions created by the ruling group to weaken their sense of belonging and of a shared past. Her narrative provides a glimpse into the prejudices of certain groups against others within the enslaved community. These were aroused, on the one hand, by the nature of the roles they fulfilled: house slaves, labelled as idle by those working in the plantation, looked down on field slaves and were not welcome in the slave village. Their skin color, on the other hand, was the basis for their classification into a racial hierarchy. Although the lighter or darker pigmentation of their black skins did not really make a difference to the white, dominant group, lighter-skinned slaves considered themselves superior to darker others. The belief that a lighter skin would grant them a better position in society was deeply ingrained as a

result of the coloniality of power, which had a profound influence on the way they perceived themselves and others. In the modern / colonial / Eurocentered context portrayed in the novel, Afro-Caribbean subjects have naturalized the racial hierarchy imposed upon them, which is, following Quijano, a discursive construction developed and circulated by the dominant group to legitimize their power over the colonized.

These classifications in terms of race, role and status within the plantation fueled the competition among black subjects, setting one against the other, and prevented them from feeling identified as part of the same group, thus hindering the development of their collective memory. The rivalry between community members can be observed in July's relationship with Molly, one of her fellow house slaves. Despite being victims of the same types of violence and suffering the same forms of oppression, they see each other as opponents. When the narrator refers to her relationship with Molly, she explains that Molly resents her because, when chosen as Caroline's maid, July "rob[s] Molly of easy work" and "[goes] from being a filthy nigger child – used only to working in the fields – into the missus's favoured lady's maid, who boast[s] her papa to be a white man even though it [is] Molly that [has] the higher colour" (44). These lines display the multiple divisions imposed upon the black community and at the same time expose the extent to which the desire to reach the privileged position of their white masters brought them into constant conflict.

The attack against the collective memory of Afro-Caribbean communities was also evidenced in the breaking-up of families under slavery. In Levy's novel, Kitty is taken from her mother soon after her birth, and loses her own daughter, July, when Caroline chooses her as her maid. July's daughter, Emily, is taken from her when she is a baby. This chain of separations prevents the members of the family, and the community in general, from developing their collective memory and, consequently, consolidating their identity as part of a group. Besides, it breaks down collective resistance to oppression considering that, as explained by Patricia Hill Collins, families, among other community organizations, are important locations where safe discourse potentially can occur, that is, where subjects can speak freely. These safe spaces are prime locations for resisting domination (100-101).

The relationship between Kitty and July is also symbolically interrupted by Caroline when she resolves to call July Marguerite, changing the name she received when "Kitty

softly whispered the word July into her (...) ear and July [she] became” (17). By refusing to acknowledge July’s name, which brings her into existence, Caroline symbolically deprives her of her identity, her origin and the bond with her mother. At the same time, while giving her a new name, she performs a colonial act where “the naming, the representing and the claiming are all one” (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, 33).

Caroline’s manipulation of July’s name and identity echoes the colonial attempt to control, determine, and thus appropriate Afro-Caribbean subjectivities through the practice of stereotyping, a form of symbolic violence by means of which one group has the power to represent another in their own terms. According to Hall, stereotypes reduce people to a few characteristics which are simplified, exaggerated and represented as fixed by nature. They divide the normal / acceptable from the deviant / unacceptable, and expel everything that does not fit. The creation of stereotypes is permeated by power struggles and aimed at the maintenance of a given social order («The Spectacle of the Other» 257-59).

Popular representations of racial “difference” during slavery stereotyped black individuals as naturally born for and predisposed to servitude, and simultaneously as unwilling to work in ways appropriate to their nature and profitable for their masters. They were also construed as simple, primitive and lacking in culture (Hall, «The Spectacle of the Other» 244). In *The Long Song*, when Caroline Mortimer meets July’s mother, the field-slave Kitty, she asks her brother “is it a woman?” (33), equating her own race with humanity and referring to Kitty as an object or animal, as shown by the use of the pronoun “it”. Her brother praises Kitty’s physical strength, and encourages Caroline to touch her strong legs as if she were cattle, reassuring Caroline that she will not bite her. Mr. Howarth claims she is naturally fit to labor the fields, and jokes that “when negro women bend over in the field their breasts droop and dangle so much they look to be a beast with six limbs” (34), making the parallelism between black women and animals explicit.

White colonial systems of representation dehumanized and defeminized black women in ways that legitimized their abuse and exploitation under slavery. The representation of black women, Beverly Guy-Sheftall argues, revolved around two main stereotypes: black women were disgustingly lustful as well as exceptionally unfeminine: they simultaneously attracted and repelled (23). Their representation as lewd and oversexed

was based on European narratives that portrayed African women copulating with apes. By asserting the link between black women and apes, these representations dehumanized black women, and construed them as the antithesis of white women, associated with purity, chastity and virtue (21).

Although on several occasions July undergoes objectification, her account exposes the abuse of black women mainly through the figure of her mother, a woman who suffers a life of ruthless exploitation. The text opens with a scene that shows Kitty being raped by the Scottish overseer Tam Dewar. Some years later, when John Howarth takes July from her, he argues that July “would be taken soon enough anyway. It will encourage her to have another. They are dreadful mothers, these negroes” (35). These lines reveal that Kitty’s body and sexuality as well as her offspring are under white control, besides foregrounding the construal of black women as the opposite of the Victorian woman and her alleged maternal instinct.

Through the exercise of memory, July not only revisits but also defies the hegemonic attempt to reduce and control Afro-Caribbean subjectivities by vividly portraying her relationship with the last overseer in Amity, Robert Goodwin. While seduced by Robert, July consents to a relationship with him and finds pleasure in the experience. The lingering image of Kitty in the middle of Tam Dewar’s “little intrusion” at the beginning of the narrative contrasts with the scenes where July has intimacy with Robert, where she is shown as playful and as openly requiring the types of contact from which she derives most pleasure. In a context where black bodies are defined and exploited by European colonizers, July’s account then is doubly subversive in that it voices the private suffering of the women in the enslaved community and at the same time represents a different reality, in which an Afro-Caribbean woman discovers the meanings of sexual pleasure.

July’s reconstruction of the past transcends the stereotypes imposed on her community by foregrounding the multi-faceted nature of Afro-Caribbean subjectivities. In this way she restores their dignity, to quote Ziauddin Sardar, who argues that for black subjects,

[d]ignity is not located in seeking equality with the white man and his civilization: it is not about assuming the attitudes of the master *who has allowed his slaves to eat at his table*. It is about being oneself with all the multiplicities, systems and contradictions of one's own ways of being, doing and knowing. It is about being true to one's Self. (vii)

Levy's narrator represents the hardships of life under slavery, exposing the devastating effects of torture, exploitation and dehumanization. But she avoids reducing black subjects to victimization by depicting the small acts of resistance that helped them challenge the authority of the dominant group to become their own masters. Together with the struggles for the abolition of slavery, which eventually led to their formal emancipation, these acts are shown as central in the process of empowerment. For example, July narrates that

her missus's favoured punishment was to strike July sharply upon the top of the head with her shoe. Although hopping and hobbling, the missus could chase July around the room for several minutes to deliver her blow. At these times July would jump, weave and spin to avoid her. For she knew that soon the tropical heat would so exhaust the demented fatty-batty missus that she would fall upon her daybed in a faint of lifelessness. (49)

July knows Caroline's weaknesses and how to exploit them to escape punishment. Younger, quicker and more agile than her Mrs., she uses her own strengths to outwit Caroline. This humorous scene where a mischievous nine-year-old July pokes fun at Caroline, however, is followed by an account of the first time she sticks a needle into the back of July's hand, inflicting the first of many wounds she is yet to suffer. July, then represents her own suffering and resilience as well as her cleverness and her sense of humor; she rewrites herself as a victim and a fighter, thus defining her own self in the plural.

July's representation of the past revisits the hegemonic construction of Afro-Caribbean identities to re-write them in non-essentialist terms. In a constant oscillation between the individual and collective past, the reconstruction of her memories empowers July and her community by restoring their dignity and inscribing their existence beyond

fixed stereotypes. Her text, like the novel by Andrea Levy, contributes to the process of “we” formation (where “we” is never fixed by nature) through the articulation of the collective memories of a community paradoxically brought together and dismembered by the institution of slavery. Such a process is involved, according to Eyerman, in the resolving of cultural trauma (14).

3. Memory and power struggles

Entailed by the European conquest of the Americas, the process of epistemic colonization was based on “the pretension that the specific cosmic vision of a particular ethnic should be taken as universal rationality”, which implied the ambition to impose “a provincialism as universalism” (Quijano, «Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality» 177). The process of decolonization from modern / colonial / Eurocentered power thus requires challenging and deconstructing Eurocentrism and Western, colonial narratives in their epistemic, social and cultural dimensions with the purpose of decolonizing the categories, the classifications and the modes of thinking that guide our perceptions of reality and the world in general (Zubillaga 82).

The writing process at the center of *The Long Song* dramatizes epistemic (de)colonization, for it presents two opposite processes: the editor / publisher’s attempt to colonize July’s text by imposing restrictions based on the tenets of Western rationality is confronted by the author / narrator’s desire to rewrite herself and her memories against and beyond these tenets. In writing her own story, July seizes the right to represent herself and the experiences of her community in her own terms, shifting her own position from being one who is “said” by the European colonizer to that who claims the right to represent her own reality.

Thomas’ perception and evaluation of her account are derived from the education he receives as a child and an adult. Thomas is adopted as part of the experiment carried out by the Baptist minister James Kinsman and his wife, whose mission concerns “the salvation of the savage”: “he [the minister] believed that even the blackest negro could be turned from sable heathen into a learned man, under his and God’s tutelage” (144). When the family returns to London, they take Thomas with them. At the age of fourteen, he starts working as

an apprentice at Mr. Linus Gray's printing house. Mr. Gray provides him with lodging and instruction into the trade of print. As an apprentice, he grows to excel as a reader. He joins Mr. Gray's Club for Mutual Improvement, where he discovers liberal thinkers like John Locke and Thomas Paine, as well as the romantic poets. Thomas goes through a process of intellectual emancipation which drives him to a critical reevaluation of his religious education and eventually to the decision to convert to deism.

The education Thomas receives is clearly Eurocentric. He incorporates Western rationality as a universal paradigm of knowledge, while acquiring at the same time the cultural identity of the colonizer. The African and the American presences in his identity are silenced as he naturalizes the hegemonic culture as his own. In Homi Bhabha's terms, Thomas is trained to become a mimic man as a result of "the colonial desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite*" (381). The discourse of mimicry, says the author, is constructed around an ambivalence, as it produces its slippage, its excess, its difference. Such an ambivalence oscillates between mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite- and menace - a difference that is almost total but not quite (386). Thomas is almost the same as a British gentleman, but not white.

After he inherits Linus Gray's company and all his property, Thomas returns to Jamaica to start his own business. The narrator hints that even with a first-class education and all the necessary resources to set up his own printing office, due to the effects of blatant racism, Thomas does not prosper in England. He also has to fight the racism ingrained in the Jamaican society, where due to the prevailing modern / colonial / Eurocentric power structure, a black man owning his own business does not fit the racist division of labor or the stereotypical construction of Afro-Caribbean identities. According to the narrator, Thomas' difficulties attracting clients are due to the fact that

no white men of business upon this island would condescend to employ Messers Kinsman & Co. How does a black boy come to dress and speak like a white gentleman? These English merchants and planters asked while sipping coffee within their clubs. How does a Hottentot with not even a drop of white blood within him find himself a proprietor of a print office? (301)

July's resolution to share her life experiences is an opportunity for Thomas to learn about his family history. His collaboration as an editor and publisher contributes to July's empowerment in that it makes it possible for her text to reach a wider audience in a context where the production of literature is almost entirely in white, male hands. Throughout the process of supervision and correction of his mother's manuscript, nevertheless, Thomas represents the gaze of the colonizer. His expectations about the content, genre and style of July's autobiographical account have been shaped by the study of European history and literature. His formal education, his role as editor / publisher and his gender – considering that the patriarchal society where the story develops regards women as intrinsically inferior to men – leave Thomas in a position of authority with respect to his barely literate, destitute mother. As his mother, however, and the author of her own life story, July also wields power. Permeated by the conflicts between mother / author / narrator and son / editor / publisher, July's writing process turns into an arena where both claim sovereignty over the construction of her memories.

The power struggles between author and editor are evidenced in the novel's structure and the arrangement of voices. July is the author of the text, though Thomas writes the foreword and the afterword, thus introducing and giving closure to her narrative. This structure echoes that of slave narratives, which contained "one or more prefaces or introductions written either by a white abolitionist friend of the narrator or by a white amanuensis / editor / author actually responsible for the text", who guaranteed the veracity of the events narrated and the reliability of the narrator (James Olney 50). In the foreword to the novel, Thomas justifies his authority as the editor by claiming that he is "considered by many – be they black, white or coloured – to be one of the finest printers upon this island", whose "particular skill is an ability to find meaning in the most scribbled of texts" (2). By introducing July's tale in this way, he assumes responsibility for the novel's content; by reappearing in the afterword, he reminds us he has been there all along, supervising and correcting his mother's account. The fact that he authors both the foreword and the afterword reveals the desire to control the messages conveyed by this mother by, on the one hand, creating a certain image of the author / narrator before the narration begins and, on the other, by foregrounding the aspects of the tale he considers deserve further

comment. Despite Thomas' impulse to fix the meaning of, and thus colonize, her tale, July develops a wide array of strategies to exceed the limits imposed by her son.

The choice of a medium for her narration triggers the first struggle between mother and son, members of two different cultures, one rooted in the oral tradition; the other, in the written word. In point of fact, July speaks Jamaican creole, or nation language in Kamau Brathwaite's terms¹¹, a language that emerges in the oral tradition as a result of the combination of the imperial language and the African languages spoken by the slaves. As expressed by Brathwaite, in the Anglophone Caribbean, "the poetry, the culture itself exists in not a dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word, it is based as much on sound as it is on song. (...) The noise that it makes is part of the meaning, and if you ignore the noise (...) then you lose part of the meaning" (271). For the writer trying to capture the tones and musicality, the gestures and the expressions used in oral speech, says Jamaican poet and novelist Opal Palmer Adisa, the written word proves a corrupting medium, for it fails to represent the multiple meanings that can be transmitted only in performance or through the spoken word. Besides, writing gives stories a permanence in which the spontaneity and flexibility of oral speech are lost (162).

Due to all this, as a means to express herself, writing proves constraining for July. Nevertheless, she finds her own ways to infuse her text with traces of orality. Along her narrative, she uses standard English most of the time, though her own language, historically construed as inferior, often intrudes into her narration, especially when she becomes annoyed. Jamaican creole also appears every time the narrator reports the content of July's thoughts or speech, and the exchanges with or among the members of her community. In these passages, her writing preserves the grammar of Jamaican creole and exploits spelling for the purpose of recreating its sounds.

The narrator challenges the permanence of the written word and turns her recollections into a flexible construction by correcting herself, for example, or introducing changes. At several stages, July tries to bring her account to a close or tells the reader a lie

¹¹ As defined by Brathwaite, Nation language is "the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and laborers, the servants who were brought in by conquistadors" (260).

so obvious that her son immediately requires the necessary corrections. After narrating her mother's hanging, for example, she briefly refers to the celebrations that took place the night when slavery was abolished, and then ends her narrative abruptly saying "I can go no further! Reader, my story is at an end. Close up this book and go about your day. You have heard all that I have to tell of a life lived upon this sugar island" (141). This sudden ending probably results, on the one hand, from the pain caused by the loss of her mother, and on the other, from the fact that while referring to these celebrations, she lies to the reader, as revealed later. Eventually, motivated by her son's inquiries, July ends up resuming the narration.

As seen in the excerpts above, the narrator constantly addresses the reader to guide the reading process, to give an instruction or to seek an opinion. The reader is once and again drawn into a conversation with the narrator, and becomes involved in the narrative as an accomplice, a witness and a judge. One of the most intimate conversations with her reader is presented in chapter XXIV, which reads as follows:

Reader, I must whisper you a truth. Come, put your ear close to this page. Lean in a little closer still. For I am moved to speak honestly regarding the last chapter you have just read. Are you listening, reader? Then let me softly impart to you this fact. This is not the way white men usually behaved upon this Caribbean island. (207)

By checking whether the reader is "listening" attentively, and saying she will now "speak" honestly and "whisper" a truth, July suggests that her narration is approached as a conversation with her readers and demands an active role from them. This aspect of the narrative becomes relevant considering that, according to Brathwaite, the oral tradition is a form of total expression in that it "makes demands not only on the poet but also on the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the poet makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where the meaning truly resides" (273). July thus overtly invites her audience to participate in what could be seen as a communal process of meaning construction, in which her son also participates.

Apart from the medium, another aspect of July's narrative that brings author and editor into conflict is her perception of the history of her community. Given that his mother lived through the Baptist War and the eventual emancipation of the slaves in Jamaica, Thomas expects her account to delve into these historical processes, which are, in his view, key events in the history of the Jamaican people. While reading the text, however, he discovers she has little to say about the outbreak of the Baptist War. Her experience of the rebellion is centered on the moment when the Christmas dinner given by Caroline is abruptly interrupted by two men dressed in militia blue who claim that "the negroes are burning the plantations in the west" as they summon Mr. Howarth and the other planters in the room to join the militia immediately (75).

The moment Thomas realizes such a scene evokes the night when the Baptist War broke out, he immediately begins to "blast [his mother] with fierce commands". He asks July to explain where the firing of the plantations started, and requires details about the leader of the rebellion, Sam Sharpe. Thomas advises she should make it clear "how every negro believed themselves to have been freed by the King of England; how they had promised to do no more work until that freedom was felt" (77). He also suggests she "must be sure to add how the noise of the shells and horns being blown at Old Montpelier and Shettlewood Pen did manage to frighten off the militia" (77). Despite his indications, all July can say about that night is that

when those fires raged like beacons from plantation and pen; when regiments marched and militias mustered; when slaves took oaths upon the Holy Bible to fight against white people with machete, stick and gun; when the bullets sparked like deadly fireflies; and bare black feet ran nimble through grass, wood and field – at Amity, the loudest thing your storyteller could hear was Miss Hannah gnawing upon the missus's discarded ham bone. (79)

This passage foregrounds the clash between different representations of the rebellion. The description of the boldness of those fighting to end slavery resonates with Thomas's voice, that of an informed reader familiar with the historical conflict starting on the night of December 24th, 1831, in Jamaica. July's account, however, renders the

perception of the majority that remained in the plantations, for whom the conflict passed almost unnoticed.

The contrast between these two perspectives of the Baptist War highlights the elusiveness of the empirical past – whose representation is inevitably partial and subjective – as well as the distance between the Western construction of history and the experiences of the Afro-Caribbean community. In late 19th-century Jamaica, the Afro-Caribbean community lacked a history of their own, one based on “forms of shared knowledge and collective identification and participation” where “‘history in general’ is reconfigured into a particular and emotionally charged version of our history, absorbing it as part of a collective identity” (A. Assman 216). The Afro-Caribbean community is a people with a nonhistory, in Edouard Glissant’s terms. Given that their “history is characterized by ruptures and (...) began with a brutal dislocation, the slave trade”, their “historical consciousness cannot be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment”. The dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all is what Glissant calls a nonhistory (62-63).

Afro-Caribbean nonhistory was colonized by the Western construction of History as a linear, chronological progression. Rooted in Enlightenment rationality and deeply Eurocentric, such a totalizing view of History was imposed on marginalized groups, silencing their own trajectories and perceptions of the world. Levy’s novel thematizes the processes of cultural imposition and epistemic colonization through the struggles between mother and son. His comments, questions and corrections are aimed at unveiling the ultimate truth about her past life. He demands a thorough reconstruction of the past and compels her to complete her account by clearing up ambiguities, filling in gaps and correcting any sort of lie or “inaccuracy”. In other words, Thomas intervenes in his mother’s narrative to make it fit the Western construction of History: objective truth, factual information and a detailed chronology of events are what he requires from his mother as an author and narrator.

July writes an account that problematizes the notions of truth and objectivity, however, and resists epistemic colonization by challenging the principles of Western rationality. Her metafictional tale – which “self-consciously and systematically draws

attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (Waugh 2) – deliberately exposes the writing process as a construction molded by her own needs and views, abandoning any pretense of objectivity. The writing process is laid bare, for example, through her reflection upon the scene chosen to open her tale, considered inappropriate by Thomas; through the inclusion of her arguments with her son about the writing process and the presentation of different endings placed under erasure, among other aspects. The metafictional quality of her narrative dramatizes a concern with the nature of memory as a representation of the past anchored in the present which is inevitably bound to the interests and circumstances of the one who remembers.

The subjective quality of memories is often emphasized through the inclusion of an array of perspectives in the reconstruction of past events. At certain points, the narrator comments on the difficulties she has trying to discover a truth that proves unattainable by saying, for example, that “[w]hat happened (...) has been told in so many ways by so many people – (...) some who were not even born into the world yet – that it is hard for your storyteller to know which version to recount” (130). This aspect of July’s narration, previously referred to in the discussion of the interrelations between individual and collective memories, serves to highlight the singularity of each perception and each narration of the past. In this multiplicity of truths about what happened, the ideal of an ultimate truth becomes an illusion.

July’s narration constantly blurs the boundaries between reality and imagination, which not only foregrounds the imaginative reconstruction of the past as central to the process of recollection but also turns her into a quite unreliable narrator. Although in the foreword Thomas affirms that the novel revolves around the story of his mother’s life, July / narrator refuses to acknowledge the narrative is based on her own life experiences. Indeed, when she omits the birth of her first son in her account, Thomas’ questions about the circumstances of his own birth lead to the following exchange:

‘Mama,’ he says to me, ‘do not take me for a fool. This is the story of your own life, not of your creating, I can see this.’

‘No it is not,’ I tell him.

‘It is,’ him say.

‘It is of my making,’ I tell him.

‘It is not – it is of your life lived,’ him tell me.

‘Oh no, it is not.’

‘Oh yes, it is.’ (142-3)

Their exchange comes to an end without the statement that she is actually writing the story of her life: “I must do as my son bids”, she explains, “else I may wake to find my valise (...) placed outside the gates of this house” (143). Though she often pleads with the reader to believe her, her narration oscillates between her claim that she is writing a piece of fiction and the emotions aroused by her recollections. These ambiguities in relation to the empirical referent of her narration reappear, for example, when the narrator refers to herself as “July” and to Thomas as “my son” in the same sentence, both preserving and violating the ontological boundaries between the level of narration and the level of action, accepting and denying her own involvement in the tale narrated.

Due to these ambiguities in the author’s relation with the protagonist, July’s text defies generic classification. What her son requires is a traditional autobiography, that is to say, a text where July (author and narrator) writes an entirely faithful account of her life during the slave and the post-slave eras in Jamaica. Considering that, according to Philippe Lejeune, “[i]n order for there to be autobiography, the author, the narrator and the protagonist must be identical”(4-5), July’s tale challenges the conventions of the genre due to the author’s contradictory impulses to identify with and distance herself from the protagonist. Her account problematizes the essentialist conception of the self that underlies traditional autobiographies, which are based on the assumption that the self is a coherent unit whose essence remains stable along an individual’s life. Consequently, its history and development can be reconstructed and explained in a linear, chronological fashion. Such a conception of the self is questioned by July through the confusion created over the unified identity of the triad author / narrator / protagonist in a text that is and is not an autobiography as traditionally conceived. Besides, as explained in the previous section, in a colonial context where Afro-Caribbean identities have been reduced to stereotypical constructions imposed by the hegemonic group to reinforce their inferior position in

society, transcending essentialist definitions of her own self constitutes a key strategy for the narrator to resist colonial oppression.

Following Lejeune, the autobiographical pact is coextensive with the referential pact, which implies that autobiographies are “referential texts: exactly like scientific or historical discourse, they claim to provide information about a “reality” exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of verification” (22). July, as the author and narrator of the text, deliberately breaks the referential pact by suppressing information, uncovering her own lies and narrating events that can only be a product of her imagination¹², apart from problematizing the existence of an ultimate truth by representing the realities of the past in the plural, as subjective constructions, as explained above. Thus, in her narration, she constructs her own self around contradictions, ambiguities and a multiplicity of truths that challenge hegemonic systems of representation. Her text can then be considered, in Hutcheon’s terms, a parody of the canonical genre of the autobiography, one that revisits and subverts its conventions.

July’s narrative resists colonization at a formal level, then, by exploiting a canonical genre and its epistemological assumptions. Apart from this, at the level of meaning and content, Levy’s author revisits the cultural memory of the dominant group, particularly in relation to the hegemonic representation of slavery, in order to deconstruct it and create a new site of memory – her long song – aimed at crystalizing the histories, perceptions and experiences of her own community. In the white British cultural memory, slavery exists “not so much as several hundred years of the sordid and despicable degradation of African peoples, led by slaving nations such as Britain” but is instead construed “solely around the benevolent notion of abolition (cast as a good deed reflective of the British people’s love for justice and fair play)” (Chambers 294). This appears to be the image of slavery acquired by Thomas in his contact with the culture of the colonizer. By focusing his attention on the processes that brought slavery to an end, Thomas uncritically repeats hegemonic representations of the Afro-Caribbean experience, which downplay the abuses perpetrated against non-European others while giving prominence to the role of the British as their liberators.

¹² July narrates events she could not have witnessed in any way. She relates, for example, the horrors and injustices witnessed by John Howarth as a member of the militia during the Christmas Uprising.

Contrary to Thomas' expectations, July's account unveils aspects of the past of the Afro-Caribbean community that have been concealed by hegemonic historical accounts, for it proves that the abolition of slavery failed to have a real, immediate impact on the lives of black individuals. The changes suffered by the Afro-Caribbean community at the plantation of Amity under the authority of Robert Goodwin shows that their living conditions actually worsened after slavery was abolished, apart from exposing the hypocrisy of the British interest in the freedom and dignity of black individuals.

When Robert Goodwin is first employed as an overseer, he unsettles Caroline with his claims that "negroes are simple, good fellows" and that England (...) "that great, noble Christian land of ours, must be cleansed of the abominable stain that slavery placed upon it" (167). After their emancipation, however, when the workers stop working on the cane fields to devote themselves fully to their own produce, he tries to force them to stop working on the provision grounds by increasing the rent for their houses and the land they farm. He argues that he has taken this measure for their own good: "all of you lived too long as slaves (...) to really understand what is now in your best interest" (242), he says, which shows he is willing to respect their freedom and dignity on condition that they continue working as they did before. When the community decides not to pay the rent for the provision grounds or the houses, Robert pays a gang of white men to shoot their animals, destroy their possessions and burn the provision lands to the ground, which triggers the exile of the community in search of a new land where they can be truly free. They settle down on an empty field and start working the land and building a new village. Their newly achieved freedom finds them in utter poverty, defending themselves from the daily harassment of the planters.

By fostering the commemoration of the abolition of slavery as a landmark in the history of the Afro-Caribbean community, the dominant culture instrumentalizes the memories of the oppressed, fabricating a site of memory for them. July's tale, however, contributes to the construction of an Afro-Caribbean cultural memory, one that recalls and preserves the shared memories of her community, voicing their nonhistory, in Glissant's terms. By disclosing the power struggles with her son, she transforms her own account into a contact zone where two cultures in an unequal power relation struggle to appropriate the terms in which the past is represented. July's text voices the European presence in her

cultural identity, exposing the processes of cultural imposition and epistemic colonization her community has suffered, while simultaneously displaying her own strategies to resist oppression by transcending the limits imposed by her son, both in relation to the form and content of her text. Though the writing of her long song, July thwarts Thomas' attempt to colonize her text while at the same time shatters the silence to which her community was condemned.

Chapter IV. Rewriting Homes in *Oh Gad!*

1. Introduction

In the increasingly interconnected world of the present, where “the processes of so-called free and forced migrations are changing the composition, diversifying the cultures and pluralizing the cultural identities of the old dominant nation-states, the old imperial powers, and indeed of the globe itself” (Hall, «Diasporas, or the Logics of Cultural Translation» 7), the clear-cut distinction between pure and impure cultures, identities and languages, once construed as a pillar of colonialist discourse, becomes untenable. In all its complexity and contradictions, the globalized world is characterized by the flourishing of borderlands of all kinds, considering that, according to Gloria Anzaldúa, these are “physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other, where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy”(i).

The borderland between different cultures and their collective memories is a central theme in Joanne Hillhouse’s *Oh Gad!* This novel revolves around the clash of the different cultural identities inhabited by Nikki, the protagonist, whose quest for a place that feels like home leads her back to the Caribbean island of Antigua, where she was born. Her mother’s death triggers not only the decision to return to Antigua but also the sudden reappearance of memories of her family, her life on the island and her migration to the United States. In the middle of an identity crisis, she returns to present-day Antigua as a stranger to her own family and community, and ends up plunging into collective exercises of memory in a context where remembering becomes a key strategy to assert Afro-Antiguan cultural identities in the struggle against cultural and economic oppression.

This chapter presents an analysis of the multiple levels of memory represented in the novel, concentrating particularly on Nikki’s search to rewrite her own self into her family’s collective memory, which at the same time leads to the revisiting of the past in the light of the cultural memory of the Afro-Antiguan community. The study of Afro-Caribbean cultural memory will be based on the consideration of an array of sites of memory, some of which are shown in the process of construction as new crystallizations of the shared past.

At different stages, the present discussion will explore the abuse of memory as a means to perpetuate the racial hierarchies established by modern / colonial / Eurocentered / capitalist power and, conversely, its use as a strategy to resist the invisibilization and displacement of the black community.

2. Re-membering Selves in Translation

The peoples in the Caribbean “are all from somewhere else”, as stated by Hall in an interview with the specialist in Caribbean critical thinking Annie Paul: “the people who belonged here were stamped out by the Spanish conquistadores within a 100 years. Everybody else comes from somewhere else: the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the English, the Africans, the Lebanese, the Indians” (*The Ironies of History* 39). Caribbean cultures have developed as a result of a complex process of cultural translation or hybridity, a term which “defines the combined and uneven cultural logic of the way so-called western modernity has impacted, through conquest and forced migration, on its peripheries, since the onset of Europe’s globalizing project” (Hall, «Diasporas» 3).

The peoples in the Caribbean were forced into cultural translation in the context of deeply asymmetrical power relations. Consequently, the logics of cultural translation in the Caribbean must always be read, according to Hall, in the context of colonization, slavery and racialization, which were central in the construction of the modern, capitalist, Eurocentered world that emerged in the late 15th century («Diasporas» 4). Colonization, on the one hand, was an act of power and domination, as well as an enterprise to master the various forms of difference it encountered, while destroying or suppressing those who resisted the exercise of its will to power. The discourses of race, on the other hand, explained social and cultural differences in genetic terms on the basis of the visible signifiers of the body, such as skin color and body-type. Through colonization and racialization, then, the cultures, histories and temporalities of the colonized were subordinated to the ways of European civilization. They have, however, “continued to exist while being violently yoked together – and at the same time refusing simply to become ‘the same’” (5).

Hillhouse's *Oh Gad!* portrays the multiple cultural translations experienced by Nikki. At the age of three, she is sent to the United States, where she is to be raised by her father, the Antiguan-American Professor Winston Baltimore, who promises to “mak[e] something' out of her” (8), that is, to offer a life in which she will have more opportunities to study and develop professionally than in Antigua. Her childhood is marked by the Professor's “punishing daily tutorials in how to wash the island off her” (8). Nikki is compelled to naturalize a construction of her Antiguan origin as an undesirable part of her own self that is to be suppressed through education to facilitate her assimilation to the dominant American culture. As she grows up, she learns to repress the memories of her Caribbean background, with its plurality of histories and cultures.

Given his status as her father and a Professor who has built a successful career in the U.S., Winston Baltimore is entitled to assume full responsibility for his daughter's education. Nikki's memories suggest the range of disciplinary methods, in Foucault's terms, used by her father to mold her into an American citizen. He designs a demanding reading schedule and administers regular examinations. By training her in the rules of etiquette, her father teaches her to incorporate gestures and manners deemed appropriate in her context. She learns to value and defend her personal space and distance herself from others, avoiding physical contact, which becomes evident when she returns to Antigua and finds herself intimidated by the island, for “here everything was so uncomfortably close, everyone so *familiar*” (7). The project to “wash the island off her” is completed by Nikki's physical distance from the island, which contributes to the estrangement from her mother and her community.

The education provided by Professor Baltimore metaphorically silences Nikki in more than one way. On the one hand, given that it is oriented towards the development of her intellect and rationality, it paralyzes her spiritually and emotionally; she learns to suppress her own emotions in the world her father creates for her, where there is no room for feelings or affection. On the other, her father insists she must learn to “speak properly” (8), that is, she must speak standard English. He teaches her grammar and pronunciation to eradicate all the traces of Antiguan creole from her speech. The forced acquisition of the standard code distances Nikki from the Antiguan community for, as she grows up, she can barely communicate with or understand them. Besides, considering that language

constitutes “the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ become established” (Bill Ashcroft *et al.* 7), the obligation to acquire the standard code is central to the process of cultural imposition her father subjects her to.

By educating her into certain modes of behavior and interaction, besides “correcting” the way she speaks, the Professor forces Nikki out of the process of cultural translation and into the assimilation to the mainstream culture. The training she receives through discipline derives in the subjection and submission of her subjectivity (Foucault «The Subject and Power» 331): her father instrumentalizes her memory to silence her Caribbean cultural identity. In fact, the traumatic memories of his own past shape his life and attitudes. The presence of a mother who hated Antigua as much as her own poverty, together with a life in the U.S. marked by discrimination result in the Professor’s desire to erase all traces of the Caribbean from his daughter’s (and his own) memory and identity. In other words, everything he teaches her is most probably aimed at protecting her from social exclusion.

Her mother’s funeral confronts Nikki with the fact that she is a stranger to her family. There is a whole world of shared recollections, experiences and traditions unknown to her due to the detachment from her family. As argued by Halbwachs,

to be aided by others' memory, ours must not merely be provided testimony and evidence but must also remain in harmony with theirs. There must be enough points of contact so that any remembrance they recall to us can be reconstructed on a common foundation. (...) That reconstruction must start from shared data or conceptions. These are present in our mind as well as theirs, because they are continually being passed back and forth. This process occurs only because all have been and still are members of the same group. (*The Collective Memory* 31)

As a woman who has assimilated to the American mainstream cultural identity, she has incorporated different values, perspectives and conceptions, and thus, reads the world differently. She lacks the common grounds necessary to participate in her family’s collective memory. Her use of the English language also contributes to her exclusion,

especially considering that language is a key framework for the preservation and reconstruction of collective memories, as asserted by Halbwachs when he expresses that “[p]eople living in society use words that they find intelligible: this is the precondition for collective thought” (*On Collective Memory* 173). Even after spending two years in Antigua, and having learnt to handle Antiguan creole (to the point of sometimes speaking creole herself), Nikki often perceives that the meanings conveyed by creole speakers elude her. As explained by the narrator, the way people speak in Antigua “was, in fact, one of the things that still kept her outside the community; the way people said without really saying, knowing that the meaning was clear, if you were truly a part of things. If you weren’t, then it wasn’t yours to know anyway” (367).

Her return to the island triggers a strong urge to remember, to reconstruct the story of her family, of her relationship with her mother and father. It is on the island that Nikki plunges into the process of cultural translation, for she dares explore the hybrid, plural nature of her cultural identity and to re-create the multiple presences she was educated to forget since early childhood. The changes in her positioning with respect to her family and their shared past enable Nikki to rewrite her cultural identity, considering that, as explained by Hall,

culture is not a voyage of discovery and certainly not a return journey. It is not an archeology. It is a production. What the ‘detour through our pasts’ does enable us to do is, through culture, to produce ourselves anew, as new kinds of subjects. It is therefore not a question of what our traditions make of us so much as what we have made of our traditions. Paradoxically, our cultural identities lie ahead of us. We are always in the process of cultural formation. («Diasporas » 7)

The figure of her mother plays a vital role in Nikki’s re-articulation of her past and present realities. She regularly visits her grave and talks to her mother, something that seemed “impossible in life” and becomes “like manna in death” (227). Her visits to the grave become a ritual which allows her to heal the relationship with her mother and elaborate on the traumatic experiences of her own past. As a matter of fact, Nikki construes Mama Vi’s grave as a private site of memory; in Nora’s terms, a condensation of the will to

remember, constituted by the interplay of a material, a functional and a symbolic dimension («Between Memory and History» 19). The grave, marked out by the headstone Nikki buys for Mama Vi, functions as a site to mourn her and, at the same time, to break the silence that always kept them apart. This site of memory has a symbolic aura for Nikki as it grows to symbolize a new relationship with her mother, who becomes a strong presence after her death.

At her mother's funeral, Nikki is reunited with family and neighbors who also contribute to her reconstruction of the past. Marisol is a key character in this sense. Soon after Nikki arrives, when some of her closest relatives are still reluctant to trust her, Marisol invites her to remember. She introduces herself as "a kind of an unofficial village archivist" (39) and offers her own recollections and the pictures she has preserved from the days Professor Baltimore spent on Antigua. She is the one to give her the only photograph Nikki sees of her mother, one that was taken by her father and exhibited at the local museum. The picture evokes the memories of "the way my [Nikki's] hand felt in hers [Mama Vi's] the first time I came back to Antigua... the feel of her hands in my hair... plaiting... tying a ribbon... powdering skin" (122). Marisol helps Nikki re-knit herself and her own story, making her "feel like she was part of the fabric of things" (192), and in this sense, she plays a vital role in the re-articulation of her cultural identity.

Together with Mama Vi and Marisol, other characters become involved in Nikki's search. Fanso, for example, helps her understand – or at least accept – Audrey and her choices. Audrey herself, who often reminds Nikki of Mama Vi and, in point of fact, is the one who has assumed Mama Vi's role and responsibilities, opens up and talks about the story of the family and the meaning of "life for women from the mud" (216), that is, for the pot makers in her family. In an argument with Nikki over the way Audrey treats people, Audrey tries to explain her own reality in the following terms:

'Everybody have me laka some witch, ar you na t'ink me lose nutten? Why you t'ink me ha fu bury he [Tones] quick? Bury Mama quick? 'Cause me ha fu make haste go on. Is me one Belle and Colombus have'. (...)

Her tone was fiercer, though still whisper soft, when she continued, 'And for what; everything just get tek way in the end. The boy you raise as your own.

The boyfriend you thought was your own, who prefer your retarded sister to you. Because she was pretty and you was just tuff. That's life for women from the mud'. (216)

Women from the mud, as Nikki learns from her sister, are tough, fierce and strong, besides being the pillar of their families, whom they support emotionally as well as economically. They have a great capacity for resilience and live a life where there is little time for feeling, introspection or grief – which does not make them insensitive – and where their efforts are never rewarded.

As argued by Halbwachs, “each family has its proper mentality, its memories which it alone commemorates and its secrets that are revealed only to its members. But these memories (...) are at the same time models, examples, elements of teaching (...) that express the general attitude of the group (*On Collective Memory* 59). Considering that Audrey receives the tradition of pottery making from her mother and grows into a woman from the mud following her steps, by describing her own reality, she offers Nikki a glimpse into the experiences of the women from different generations in her family. Her sister helps Nikki grasp the family's traditions and views of the world, and she gains an insight into the common ground on which Audrey and Mama Vi understood each other without needing to talk. Nikki relates Audrey's world views to the ones she was raised to acquire, while at the same time realizing “how ill-equipped she was to assess Audrey's life, her choices, her mistakes” (217). As Audrey opens the door to the family's collective memory, Nikki becomes further involved in her own process of cultural translation, acknowledging her own distance from Audrey's world and embracing it as her own.

Nikki's reconstruction produces changes not only in her own identity but also in her family members. Her return revives memories that have been forgotten for long, like Mama Vi's affair with Professor Baltimore, the pain caused by the loss of Nikki, the sexual abuse suffered by Belle in her early youth and the birth of her son, raised by Audrey as her own. Nikki's questions about the shared past draws the family into the reconstruction of individual and collective memories, triggering the recollection of traumatic events, those aspects of the past that “linger unresolved” and can alter the “psychological, biological and

social equilibrium to such a degree that the memory of one particular event comes to taint all other experiences, spoiling appreciation for the present” (Vickroy 11-12).

As explained by Barbara Danneels from the perspective of Freudian theory, given that traumatic memories acquire their haunting quality because of their categorization in the brain as visceral sensations and visual images, trauma can be overcome by narrating traumatic memories, thus transforming those sensations and images into words. Along this process, often called the “talking cure”, it is essential for the narrator to be listened to and for the story to be transmitted to a meaningful audience (11-12). In *Oh Gad!* Nikki plays the role of the listener while others – Fanzo, Audrey, Carlene and Professor Baltimore, for example – narrate their stories, which sometimes begin in response to her questions; and others, simply as a result of their own need to process the past. Healing is thus transformed into a collective process since, in the rewriting of her life story in translation, Nikki is aided by others to partake in their collective memories. Conversely, by engaging in the exercise of memory, she helps them heal their wounds and come to terms with the painful events of the past.

Following Hall’s view of cultural translation, it must be noted that Nikki’s self-reconstruction develops in the context of asymmetrical power relations between the cultures she inhabits and is, therefore, inevitably permeated by power struggles. These are waged against Professor Baltimore, who constantly interferes in her search to manipulate her memory and perceptions of the past. After she moves to Antigua, he gives her the personal journals he kept during the summer he spent in Antigua doing research for his doctoral thesis. The pages written by the Professor shed light on Mama Vi’s life story, her temperament and her outlook on life, apart from portraying the relationship between her parents. In this sense, her father contributes to her reconstruction by providing valuable information unknown to the rest of her family.

His notebooks, however, prove a dangerous source precisely because they present the Professor’s prejudiced views and his own subjective evaluation of Mama Vi’s realities as a woman, a pot maker and the head of the family. The questions and statements recorded in the journals reveal the extent to which his perceptions are tinged by his own prejudices and preconceptions. For example, when he asks Mama Vi “[d]idn’t you ever want to be

anything else? Leave Antigua, even? Do something with your life?” (179) his questions expose the view that staying on the island implies doing nothing with one’s life. He equates the island with lack of progress, assuming the universal validity of the Western conception of progress. In the transcription of the same conversation, he interprets Audrey’s mistreatment of Fanso as the result of her own frustration and accuses Mama Vi of allowing Fanso “to be treated the way he is because you [Mama Vi] can’t stop thinking about his father” (182). Besides, after Belle abruptly delivers the child no one seemed to know she was carrying, he condemns Mama Vi for not reporting the boy who raped her to the police.

As illustrated by these examples, then, as an observer of Mama Vi’s life, he judges her reality from his own cultural standpoint; while the woman’s perceptions of the world are anchored in her own cultural identity, apart from her socioeconomic background. By insisting that Mama Vi should act differently in relation to the situations in her family, the Professor tries to impose his own values and interpretations of the world upon hers. Similarly, by giving Nikki his personal journals soon after she is reunited with Mama Vi’s family, he influences her perception of the family members and their shared past. This becomes evident, for example, in the harshness of Nikki’s judgement on Audrey when, after Tones’ death, she reminds her that he was actually Belle’s son. While reflecting on the cruelty of her own words, Nikki concludes that “maybe it was the still fresh words from her father’s diary; her feeling, like him, that nobody, least of all Audrey, had looked out for the childlike Belle against someone who was essentially a sexual predator” (215). Eventually, as Audrey opens up, Nikki realizes she is a stranger to her sister’s life, and is in no position to judge her past, her choices and her reasons.

If culture is understood as a set of practices concerned with the production and exchange of meanings between the members of a group, which depends on its participants ‘making sense’ of the world in broadly similar ways (Hall, «The Work of Representation» 2), the Professor’s ethnocentric judgement of the family at Sea View Farm and his intention to control Nikki’s perceptions of the past can be interpreted as an attempt to colonize cultural differences. Nikki, however, grows to defy cultural imposition throughout the process of re-creating herself in Antigua. After she receives the journals, the reader is presented with excerpts from her father’s text and then the references to the journals

disappear. Considering that, though narrated by an external narrator, the events in the novel are presented from Nikki's perspective, the inclusion of the different passages from the journal can be claimed to echo Nikki's reading process and the selection of the excerpts she finds most meaningful or significant. While the Professor numbers his entries and presents a detailed, chronological narration of his observations and experiences at Sea View Farm, the novel's narrator presents, for example, the thirtieth entry of the Professor's journal in Chapter XXII. Chapter XXIII introduces the twenty-first entry; Chapter XXV, the twenty-ninth entry; and Chapter XXVII resumes the thirtieth entry again. On the basis of this arrangement, it is possible to observe, then, how Nikki critically appropriates the material, discarding, skipping or perhaps forgetting the aspects she is less concerned about, altering the chronology of the entries and combining them according to her own reality in a process whereby her father's views no longer mold her own.

The inclusion of the journals in the novel's structure suggests, on the one hand, the nature of any reconstruction of the past as a selection, combination and resignification of the textualized remains of the empirical past (Hutcheon 97). Their sudden disappearance, on the other, indicates the moment when, after delving into her father's memories, Nikki is ready to continue re-constructing her identity in the light of her own perceptions. Through the intermittent presence of the Professor's journals, Hillhouse's novel foregrounds two opposite processes: the Professor's instrumentalization of Nikki's memory during her childhood is contrasted with the stage in which an adult Nikki, who has lost and found her(new)self in cultural translation, resists cultural imposition.

It must be highlighted that the chapters in *Oh Gad!* are arranged into different parts or sections introduced by Antiguan proverbs. Rooted in popular wisdom, these proverbs are directly related to Nikki's experiences in Antigua: they anticipate the ways in which the story unfolds, apart from hinting at the lessons Nikki is to learn in the relationship with her family and the community. The fact that her experiences are clustered around Antiguan proverbs suggests the extent to which she grows to read herself, her past and present realities on the basis of Antiguan collective memories, in which the proverbs are anchored, apart from foregrounding the revaluation of the community's world views and traditions.

3. Sites of Memory and the Re-Creation of the Past

According to Halbwachs, “what makes memories hang together is not that they are contiguous in time: it is rather that they are part of a totality of thoughts common to a group” with whom we have (had) a relation (*On Collective Memory* 52). Through the participation in different milieu, like the nation, a religious community, the family or a group of acquaintances at work, individuals become involved in several collective memories. Very often, the different groups share memories of the same facts: these memories can be placed within many frameworks, which result from distinct collective memories. In *Oh Gad!* the reconstruction of her life story invites Nikki to explore the memories of her family’s shared past, and through these, to revisit the past of the Afro-Caribbean community in Antigua. While recreating the bond with her family, she finds herself immersed in the shared histories of the ethnic group to which they belong, for the story of her family is anchored in communal histories. The memories of the people in her family contribute to keeping alive the collective memory of the Afro-Antiguan community, which lives in, helps evoke, and simultaneously transcends individual recollections.

It is mainly through the tradition of pot making that the overlap between the collective memory of Nikki’s family and that of the Afro-Antiguan community is foregrounded. Once widely practiced by the women in Antigua, though slowly disappearing due to the increasing popularity of gas stoves, pottery making is part of the Afro-Antiguan heritage. It is a tradition that is thought to have been imported from West Africa and has been preserved since the slave era. According to specialist Desmond Nicholson, it is believed that in the 18th and 19th centuries, small groups of enslaved Africans practised the craft, making “some of the conical sugar moulds or pots of clay used for draining molasses from raw sugar for its improvement” (432-33). The production of pottery for sale or barter emerged later as a result of the plantation industry. In the decades following the emancipation of enslaved peoples in Antigua, the establishment of villages over different parts of the island led to a marked increase in commerce. As explained by the author,

with a greater demand for household utensils, and the need to earn a living, a folk pottery cottage industry sprang up at Seaview Farm. It started there

since a suitable clay was available and on the other side of the village, an ample supply of red ochrous earth for use as a slip was to be found. (436)

The histories of the Afro-Antiguan community are condensed into the tradition of pottery making, considering that it flourished as a means of survival in a context characterized by white, colonial oppression. As a transgenerational practice handed down from one generation to the next, it constitutes a crystallization of their cultural memory, or a figure of cultural memory in J. Assman's terms. The tradition of pottery making is characterized by its distance from everyday realities, since it is structured around "fateful events of the past" – namely the forced migration and enslavement of African communities in this case – "whose memory is maintained through cultural formations (texts, rites, monuments) and institutional communication (recitation, practice, observance)" («Communicative and Cultural Memory» 129). It must be noted that, amid epistemic colonization and the systematic repression of beliefs, ideas, images, symbols or knowledge that were not useful to colonial domination in the so called "New World" (Quijano, «Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality» 169), pot making was one of the practices that enabled Afro-Antiguans to keep their heritage alive.

As portrayed in Hillhouse's novel, pottery making has, on the one hand, a normative function in the sense that it is a central pillar in the development of rules of conduct and modes of behavior within Mama Vi's family and the Afro-Antiguan community in general. On the other, it fulfils a formative function (J. Assman, «Collective Memory and Cultural Identity» 132), since it is a practice through which the young are educated to acquire world views and values regulating life in the community. For instance, it is through pot making that Mama Vi teaches her offspring the philosophy of "the knowing in the doing" (392), which suggests that the craft is learnt by means of hands-on involvement with the clay, without the need to give or receive explanations. Mama Vi's philosophy is anchored in a certain mode of knowing the world that conceives experience as the privileged site for the acquisition of knowledge about the craft – and the world in general. Furthermore, this tradition is based on the construction of knowledge as a form of interaction between subject and object in which both are placed at the same level, rather than in a hierarchical structure, as in the Western paradigm, where knowledge is a form of domination. Mama Vi's views become evident when she explains to Professor Baltimore in one of their interviews that

“we [pot makers] build a relationship with the soil over the years. It know us, we know it” (195). Through their exposure to the practice of pot making as a figure of memory, Mama Vi’s family, and the Afro-Antiguan community in general, preserve the beliefs, assumptions and values on which this cultural practice is based.

Nikki learns about this tradition from her elder sister, one of the few women still practising the craft on the island, and from some of the reports in Professor Baltimore’s journals. The pot making tradition helps her re-construct herself, her relationship with her mother and the histories of their ancestors. It is a tradition that sheds light on the already hybridized nature of Nikki’s Afro-Antiguan self. The novel’s title foregrounds the centrality of this site of memory to Nikki’s process of cultural translation by establishing a parallelism between Nikki’s identity and the fragility of pots. As explained by Mama Vi, pottery must be left to dry “in de shady, not in the sun; ‘cause it will crack. It fragile, see. One slip, foops, and that’s that. That’s why some people call it ‘Oh Gad!’” (195). The fragility of the pots symbolizes Nikki’s identity, articulated in a context where her memory is manipulated to eradicate the island from her, to suppress the aspects of her past that connect her to Antigua. Her mother’s death is the “slip” – in Mama Vi’s words – that triggers not only her collapse but also the search to heal her wounds, to give voice to those aspects of her cultural identity she has forgotten, to remold herself through the exercise of memory as a woman in translation.

Apart from the folk tradition of pottery making, Nikki comes into contact with other objectivized forms of Afro-Antiguan cultural memory, like the Antiguan carnival, a celebration held between the end of July and the beginning of August in commemoration of the emancipation of slavery in Antigua. Together with the parades, the costumes worn and the live performances, calypso music is one of the protagonists of this celebration, as revealed by Nikki’s brother when he explains that “[r]ound this time o’ year nothing ‘tall more important than calypso. Not politics. Not *picknee*. Not church. That thing you breathin’, that’s calypso. And we don’t make joke when it come to our air; after all, is life” (46). Calypso music dates back to the 19th century and flourished in the southern and eastern Caribbean islands in the 1950s. The genre deals with social and political issues that are approached through allusions and an ironic or mocking tone; it is characterized by a peculiar use of the language, as singers-poets not only exaggerate local speech patterns but

also incorporate Spanish, creole, and African phrases (Encyclopaedia Britannica). Calypso, then, is a crystallization of the diasporic, hybridized nature of Afro-Antiguan cultural identities.

Hillhouse's novel shows Nikki participating in carnival season twice along the novel, and it can be argued that the changes in her cultural identity are revealed by the way she relates to this traditional celebration. At the beginning, she joins in the celebrations merely as a tourist, as an individual external to the local customs and cultural memories, as expressed by the narrator in the passage below:

[t]he calypso show was the only major show left on the carnival season, a season of pageants and parades that slipped in a blur for Nikki. She'd gone with Jazz to some of the shows, sometimes with Tones and Carlene, Fanso and, once or twice, Antoinette. Not much of it had registered, however, and Nikki had only made the effort to ensure Jazz got a bit of fun out of the trip. (45)

In contrast, in one of the final scenes of the novel, the narrator portrays a different Nikki joining the last parade of the carnival season, dancing to the music and feeling "alive! She laughed, and unexpected tears joined the rain, wetting her cheeks. She laughed more before pulling away and joining the frenetic jumping" (410). The contrast between these two scenes condenses the changes experienced by the character, and how she grows to position herself as an American-Afro-Antiguan woman who inhabits the borderland between different cultural identities.

It must be highlighted that Hillhouse places the protagonist of her novel in an ambiguous position in relation to the community's cultural heritage, for Nikki eventually becomes involved in an investment project that poses a threat to the very Afro-Antiguan cultural memories she learns to value as her own. Kendrick Cameron, a top local businessman of Scottish descent, offers her to participate as a consultant in the development of a project on Blackman's Ridge. Once a sugar plantation, as evidenced by the old sugar mill and other ruins, the place is chosen by Cameron as the perfect location where to establish a spa for "European and American money people always having some kind of breakdown, especially the famous ones" (136). According to Cameron, the land is owned

by the government, and, while some of it has been leased to local farmers, “for the most part, it just sitting there doing nothing, waiting for somebody with big pockets to do something with it” (137).

The Afro-Antiguan community that inhabits Blackman’s Valley has a different perception of the territory. They have farmed the land for generations and preserved their subsistence economy on the basis of agriculture. To the community, Blackman’s Valley is a sacred land: it is the land of their ancestors, where the memories of subjugation and enslavement are inscribed. In Halbwachs’ terms, their territory works as a social framework of the collective memory of the Afro-Antiguan community, a key instrument for the reconstruction and transmission of the shared past. One of the sacred sites in the area is the old slave dungeon, a place of torture for black people on the island. An elderly local farmer called Tanty offers Nikki an insight into the history of the dungeon as she explains the following:

‘Bakkra would stick them in there as punishment’ (...). ‘I imagine it feel like being buried alive: all manner of insect, hardly any air, and just the darkness. When I was little, I was afraid to go there; thought ghost was in there. My Tanty, she said the spirit of them that dead there might still be lingering, but I was from their blood and they wouldn’t do me no harm. She said we mus’ respect it and remember. We mustn’t play there. That wasn’t no place for play. It was to stay so, so we could remember how neaga people suffer in dis country’. (155)

In Nora’s terms, the dungeon has been construed as a site of memory out of the desire to remember, to stop time and block the work of forgetting («Between Memory and History» 19). The material, symbolic and functional aspects of this site of memory are anchored in the Afro-Antiguan experience of slavery. The dungeon symbolizes the pain and desolation of the community and has been transformed into a place to pay homage to those who died and those who survived. This site of memory, a pillar in the cultural memory of Afro-Antiguans, has also been preserved as a trace of the mixed histories of white and black peoples on the island, the unequal power relations permeating these histories, and the violence perpetrated upon the black community under white rule.

In “Invention, Memory, and Place” (2000), Edward Said refers to memory as a malleable artifact that contributes to the creation of what he calls “imaginative geography – the invention and construction of a geographical space (...) with scant attention paid to the actuality of the geography and its inhabitants” (181). According to the author, the colonial experience is permeated by “the unending cultural struggle over territory, which necessarily involves overlapping memories, narratives, and physical structures” (182). Due to this, the colonized peoples of the world “whose past and present were dominated by outside powers who had first conquered the land and then rewrote history so as to appear in that history as the true owners of that land” have “felt it necessary to narrate [their] own history” (184). Hillhouse’s novel foregrounds, through the clash between two different constructions of Blackman’s Valley, the extent to which the representations of memory and place can be – and have been – manipulated to articulate, consolidate or perpetuate asymmetrical power relations between different cultures. The invisibilization of the community can thus be read as a colonial act aimed at appropriating not only their land and labor force but also the memories and cultural identities attached to their territory.

Nikki’s job as a consultant in Cameron’s project implies mediating in the conflict with the community at Backman’s Valley, who firmly reject the creation of the spa – or the “hedonistic playground for the filthy rich” (201) – in the Valley. When the local resistance to the project begins, Nikki undertakes the “task of coming up with a plan that saved the people’s land and the relics of their past while fulfilling his [Cameron’s] vision” (169-170). She proposes “blending the project on the Ridge with the existing ruins and agrarian culture in the Valley, rather than conquering and destroying. The dungeon, roughly midway between Ridge and Valley, she felt, need not be affected at all” (174). Her plan, however, fails to settle the conflict, for the farmers are aware that ““where one business pop up, others nuh far behind; soon after that, nothing left to farm”” (254).

While Nikki’s proposal might be oriented towards creating a dialogue between different geographies – in Said’s terms –, and even when it does not require destroying, her plan still implies conquering the territory. The claims that the project will offer economic benefits to the community by providing employment and that farmers will be compensated for land losses reveal Cameron’s positioning as the owner of the territory as well as the relegation of the black community to a position of subordination, economic dependence

and exploitation. The “development” of the area implies the imposition of the Western model of socioeconomic progress to the detriment of the Afro-Antiguan community, whose world views, values and interests are ignored. Nikki’s proposal is anchored in the Western construction of development, which operates, according to the Colombian anthropologist Arturo Escobar, as a mechanism of discursive control as well as an agency of economic management, based on the assumption that the Western values it inculcates are universal, and characterized by “a top-down, ethnocentric, and technocratic approach” in which people and cultures are treated as ‘abstract concepts, statistical figures to be moved up and down [at will] in the charts of ‘progress’” (qtd. in Huggan and Tiffin 28-29).

In the middle of the conflict over the project on the Ridge, Tanty offers to organize a pilgrimage to the old slave dungeon, arguing that

it would help those who couldn’t see or understand what all the fuss was about; it would help them understand the sacredness of the place. The way Tanty saw it, the land at Blackman’s Valley and up to the Ridge was washed in the blood of her ancestors, people who had survived the worst one person could inflict on another, and deserved their temples like the great gods and ancient pharaohs. (240)

Articulated as a site of memory inviting Antiguan to remember, the pilgrimage to the old slave dungeon takes place overnight and ends on Emancipation Day. During the night, a drum call is played, there are dub-poetry performances and Tanty’s granddaughter, Sadie, narrates the history of the dungeon, paying homage to Antiguan martyrs and heroes. That night, Nikki connects with time and place as construed by the Afro-Antiguan community, as social frameworks of collective memory that keep the past alive. She undergoes a deep mystical experience when, in the hours before dawn, she

came back to herself as if from a blissful dream. She caught snatches of it, being inside the dungeon, of not being afraid, though shadows and light, ancestral spirits, danced across the jewel-like stones along the cave wall, Tanty’s voice reminding her that she was from their blood and they *wouldn’t do her no harm*. (261)

Engulfed by the memories evoked by the dungeon at dawn on Emancipation Day, Nikki identifies with the community, their histories and struggles, which are also her family's and her own. Her participation in Cameron's project, however, leaves her in an ethically ambivalent position. Nikki and her team support the pilgrimage as an "act of friendship meant to illustrate they were all really on the same side" (251). They take advantage of Tanty's initiative to win public approval for the developments to be introduced in the area. Indeed, the construction begins after the pilgrimage, which succeeds "in cooling the tempers as the bulk of protestors [backs] off" and the "government [loosens] the reins" (265). From this angle, Nikki (ab)uses the practice of memory for her own purposes as a mediator trying to solve the conflict between Cameron's company and the farmers at Blackman's Valley, even when she suspects that, in the long term, they will probably end up being displaced from the Valley.

When Cameron's project is in full bloom, the Ridge is re-signified as a new site of memory for the Antiguan community at the same time that the building erected there is set on fire. As she sees the flames, Nikki recalls Tanty's voice telling her how black villages flourished on the island after the emancipation of enslaved peoples, "but bakkra bu'n dem out, make sure neaga people know dem place" (413). The moment Sadie realizes Tanty is nowhere to be found, everybody understands she has been the one to put an end to the struggles over the territory. Her sacrifice symbolizes a new beginning for her community as well as the assertion of their right to the land and their heritage.

Joanne Hillhouse's novel, then, presents us with a character who, throughout the process of re-creating her own cultural identity as an American-Afro-Antiguan woman, ends up discovering the fundamental contradictions between the "development" of the island and the preservation of Afro-Antiguan memories, traditions and cultural identities. She is welcome by the black community at the Valley and becomes a witness to their refusal to be once again silenced and displaced by the ruling elite. Through Nikki's experiences, *Oh Gad!* foregrounds the crucial role of memory in the construction of cultural identities and in the struggles against oppression in the modern / colonial / Eurocentered / capitalist world of the past and the present.

Chapter V. Looking Back: A Comparative Analysis of the Representation of Memory

1. Introduction

The Caribbean is, in general terms, a contact zone, a space of colonial encounters “in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (Pratt 6). The contact zone manifests itself in the interplay of the American, the African and the European presences in Caribbean cultural identities (Hall, «Cultural Identity and Diaspora» 55), as well as in Caribbean languages, literatures and other cultural productions, where Western standards clash with vernacular traditions. It can also be observed in the representation of collective memories, where the long histories of colonial oppression and Caribbean resistance converge. Indeed, the representation of memory can be read as a contact zone in itself, permeated by cultural conflicts in the context of modern / colonial¹³ power relations.

The three novels under analysis in this study explore the tensions underlying the practice of memory in the Anglophone Caribbean, rendering memory as a form of representation exploited for political purposes. The present chapter offers a comparative study of the ways in which memory is (ab)used in the context of the power struggles portrayed in the novels. The discussion focuses on the interrelations between memory and power, and is structured around two central aspects. The first section explores memory from a pragmatic approach and compares the multiple uses of memory rendered in each of the texts. The second is concerned with the forms of representation through which Caribbean collective memories are articulated in each of the novels.

¹³ As explained by Quijano, in spite of the fact that political colonialism has disappeared, the relationship between the European culture and the others continues to be one of colonial domination. It is not only a matter of the subordination to the European culture, in an external relation, but also a question of cultural colonization, which does not come to an end with the elimination of colonialism («Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality» 169).

2. A Pragmatic Approach to Memory

Although, in general terms, the three novels explore the nature of power relations between the cultures of the colonizer and the colonized in the Anglophone Caribbean, these are presented differently in each text. In the case of *Prospero's Daughter*, the cultural clash entailed by colonization is metaphorically rendered through the experiences undergone by Afro-Caribbean Carlos and Ariana. These characters are confronted with an English doctor who displaces them from their own territory and tries to subordinate them, together with his own daughter, to his white / English / patriarchal authority in a story that rewrites European conquest and colonization in the context of the Trinidadian struggle for independence. In *The Long Song*, the representations of memory are also anchored in the struggles between colonizer and colonized, though from a different angle. While Carlos's fight is oriented towards recovering his own territory, July belongs to a community that has been displaced and enslaved. Set in the 19th century, *The Long Song* depicts the Caribbean experience of slavery, exploring the harmful effects of racism and dehumanization. In both novels, the rewriting of memory is part of the resistance against the colonial system, which exercises symbolic violence through the imposition of stereotypes and the racialization of differences.

Oh Gad! centers on the struggles for self-definition and for the preservation of the Afro-Caribbean heritage in a world where formal colonialism has disappeared, but Caribbean peoples are still oppressed by modern / colonial / Eurocentered / capitalist power. Even though political power is no longer in European hands, and government positions are in many cases occupied by black subjects like Hensen Stephens, the socioeconomic order on the island of Antigua has been maintained. The decisions of the ruling class are dictated by the interests of a capitalist elite who are mostly of European descent, like Kendrick Cameron. In such a context, as expressed by Tanty, ““when money ah change hand, (...) and big people ah flex dem muscle, laka smadee na exist. Smadee come laka masquita, dem clap dem han' together so, and out you lights, and you na even see de blow a come”” (379). *Oh Gad!* offers a picture of the Caribbean today and explores the practices of memory in the context of power relations that continue relegating vernacular cultures to a subordinate position, culturally and economically; whereas

Prospero's Daughter and *The Long Song* foreground the (ab)uses of memory during the colonial era.

From a pragmatic approach, considering that “the exercise of memory is its use; yet use includes the possibility of abuse” (Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* 57), it can be observed that the three novels under consideration revisit Caribbean memories through the contrast among multiple representations of the past produced for different purposes. Memory is abused as an instrument for the subjugation of the oppressed through the manipulation of the past in such a way that it serves the interests of the dominant group, thus perpetuating asymmetrical power relations between cultures. Hillhouse’s protagonist, for example, grows up surrounded by Professor Baltimore’s construction of her mother as an absence, and of Antigua as a “stain” to be removed from her cultural identity. Through Nikki’s personal search, the novel also represents hegemonic attempts to diminish the cultural heritage of the Afro-Caribbean community in Antigua and to dismiss their bond with Blackman’s Valley as insignificant. In *Prospero's Daughter*, Gardner rewrites the story of Carlos’s parents to position himself as a savior. Here, the manipulation of memory aims at justifying the displacement of the native community and imposing hegemonic constructions of race and gender to ensure obedience to “colonial rule”. *The Long Song* revisits the colonial representation of black subjects as non-humans lacking in a culture or a history of their own, as well as the European construction of difference as inferiority.

In the novels by Nunez and Hillhouse in particular, discipline plays a central role in the instrumentalization of memory. The regulation of gestures and movements in space (Carlos’ displacement from his parents’ bedroom, Nikki’s distance from Antigua), the organization of activities round a tight schedule (everyday house chores in the case of Carlos and Ariana, lessons to be learnt in the case of Virginia and Nikki) and constant surveillance are some of the techniques to subdue the “colonized”, metaphorically speaking, and to transform them into docile bodies. Disciplinary techniques play a minor role, however, in the subjugation of the black community in Andrea Levy’s novel, probably due to the central role of physical violence under slavery.

From a pragmatic angle, memory also constitutes a means of resistance against the manipulation of Caribbean pasts and subjectivities, though it must be noted that each of the

novels renders different types of memory exercises serving this purpose. *Prospero's Daughter*, for example, centers on space as a social framework of collective memory, since the novel examines the (re)configurations of space as a key strategy to preserve shared memories. Carlos and Virginia's desire to remember the past is inscribed in their rearrangement of the house and the garden, where the memories of Carlos' parents are found alongside the traces of Gardner's colonial rule in a peculiar mixture of plants and colors that results from the colonial experience. Apart from this, Nunez's novel foregrounds the (re)reading and (re)writing of literature as privileged practices for the reconstruction of memories. Throughout his critical revision of canonical texts, Carlos deconstructs colonial discourse to contest it from within through the resignification of the western canon as a site of Caribbean cultural memory. Carlos' identification with the "sinners" in the texts (Adam and Caliban, for example) constitutes a strategy to assert his identity and reaffirm his position as an "Other" who will subvert the colonial order to recover the territory that is rightfully his. Reading his father's poetry and writing his own poems enable Carlos to keep his past and cultural heritage alive amid the colonial world engulfing him.

In *The Long Song*, writing is also presented as a central practice in the reconstruction of memory and as a means of empowerment. July writes Afro-Caribbean experiences into history by creating a narrative in which individual traumas are resignified as part of a common history of oppression under colonial rule. The writing of her tale contributes to the healing of the cultural trauma of slavery and enables her to revisit and transcend stereotypical representations of Afro-Caribbean subjectivities in a narrative that foregrounds her community's capacity to re-create themselves. Through writing, she defies not only the white, colonial order but also her son / editor's attempt to control – or "colonize" – her reconstruction of the past.

In Hillhouse's *Oh Gad!* the practice of memory as a form of resistance has to do not so much with the recovery of the silenced voices of the Caribbean community, but with the preservation of their cultural heritage in a context where Afro-Antiguan cultural memories are threatened by the work of forgetting in different ways. On the one hand, *Oh Gad!* represents the experiences of first and second-generation emigrants who lose contact with the histories and traditions of the Antiguan people, thus leaving the island behind. On the other hand, the novel problematizes the clash between development – in western terms –

and the preservation of the Afro-Antiguan heritage. For example, with the popularization of gas stoves, the craft of pottery making, especially of coal pots, slowly begins to vanish. Sooner or later, the craft Mama Vi learnt from her own mother and shared with Audrey is doomed to disappear, and with it, a part of the cultural memory of the Afro-Antiguan community. Apart from this, the capitalist investments to develop the island pose the risk of new displacements for the Afro-Antiguan community, threatening to destroy their bond with the territory and relegating them to a position of invisibility. From the angle of Halbwachs' theory, the dispossession of their land implies the destruction of space as a framework of collective memory. In this novel, empowerment resides in the determination to remember, to make others remember, and to preserve sites of memory like the old slave dungeon. As crystallizations of the group's cultural identity, their preservation ensures the transmission of shared histories to future generations and the survival of the vernacular culture.

Paradoxically, as noted in Chapter III, despite her efforts to rewrite her Caribbean cultural identity, Nikki plays an ambiguous role in the preservation of Afro-Antiguan memories. Her participation in Cameron's project on Blackman's Ridge to "earn their [the community's] support for the project, reassure them that their way of life will not be disrupted" (169) places her in an ethically ambiguous position. She prevents their eviction, tries to find a way to develop the project without altering their way of life, and yet she is well aware that their concern about being displaced and forgotten is not completely unfounded. In *The Long Song*, July's son can also be said to stand in an ambiguous position with respect to his mother's wish to reconstruct the story of her life. Although he offers to edit and correct the manuscript and then publish her novel, by imposing limitations in the content and style of her text on the basis of the standards of European history and literature, he restricts her freedom and reproduces cultural imposition.

Thomas and Nikki are raised to acquire a dominant culture¹⁴ that simultaneously includes and excludes them due to their Caribbean origin. Thomas is adopted and educated

¹⁴ As explained by Hall, the postwar period has three general coordinates. The first is the "displacement of European models of high culture"; the second, "the emergence of the United States as a world power and, consequently, as the centre of global cultural production and circulation", and the third, "the decolonization of the Third World" («What is this "Black" in Black Popular Culture?» 468). In this context, mainstream American culture consolidates its status as a Western hegemonic culture.

by a Baptist English family in Jamaica, and then taken to London; Nikki grows up with her Antiguan-American father in New York. Immersed in societies historically imagined as superior, more developed and civilized in relation to the Caribbean, both characters internalize the cultural memory and identity imposed by the dominant culture and, perhaps unintentionally, end up reproducing the invisibilization of Caribbean histories. Through these characters, *The Long Song* and *Oh Gad!* expose the hegemonic manipulation of memory to continue naturalizing cultural hierarchies.

In different ways, however, Nikki and Thomas grow to deconstruct and rewrite their identities in the relationship with the Caribbean community as they come into contact with their perceptions and shared histories. In this sense, their experiences also serve to foreground the collective nature of memories and the need for an affective group, in Halbwachs' terms, to keep the shared past alive. The essential role of the affective community is also highlighted by Virginia's story in *Prospero's Daughter*. Though educated to become an English woman, Virginia defines herself as "[a] true Trini (...). Trinis – Trinidadians. That is that we call ourselves, though we also say we are Chacachacarians" (311). Due to Gardner's abusive nature and his authoritarian character, Virginia detaches herself from her father and creates a bond of love and friendship with Carlos and Ariana, becoming a member of their community. Virginia learns to read the collective memories inscribed in the house and the garden, to deconstruct the role of the European dominant in Caribbean identities and resignify the forgotten histories of the original and African communities in the Caribbean. The bond with an affective community invites her to partake in their collective memories as she develops a sense of belonging to Chacachacare.

It is as members of a community and in the context of meaningful relationships that the characters in the three novels engage in the practice of memory to re-create their cultural identities, to challenge or subvert hegemonic representations of the past and present, or voice histories placed under erasure by the dominant, colonial culture. Memories are never reconstructed in isolation: belonging to a community motivates characters to remember, complete and preserve common histories as a strategy to resist colonial oppression. Conversely, keeping the shared past alive contributes to the consolidation of their cultural identities and to the collective healing of the cultural trauma

of slavery, which is revisited through July's tale in *The Long Song* and through the stories of Carlos' and Nikki's African ancestors in *Prospero's Daughter* and *Oh Gad!* respectively. It is through the collective reconstruction of shared memories that the characters, and through them, the novels under analysis, defy the discursive construction of Afro-Caribbean histories and subjectivities under slavery and colonization, as well as the hierarchical classification of cultures perpetuated by the coloniality of power.

The representation of the Caribbean community as an affective group with a key role to play in the preservation of collective memories is directly connected to the ethical aspect of memory. In the three novels, the reconstruction of the shared past involves different generations within the community. It is based on the dialogue between the views and recollections of a past and a present generation, and the ethical duty to transmit the lessons from the past to future generations within the community. Thus, the reconstruction of memory in each of the texts links past, present and future, since it is a representation of past realities from the perspective of the present, aimed at guiding the young in the construction of their own realities. In *Prospero's Daughter*, for example, Carlos and Virginia have a key role as the generation articulating the dialogue between past and future. Remembering what he learnt from his father about the history of their community helps Carlos – and later, Virginia – develop their own critical perspective of the reality created by Gardner. Their restoration of the house symbolizes the desire to preserve collective memories against the work of forgetting. Their own experiences under Gardner's "colonial" rule, embodied in the arrangement of the vegetation in the garden as a social framework of collective memory, are also part of the legacy they will transmit to the generations to come, represented by the baby in Virginia's womb.

In Levy's novel, before July agrees to write down the story of her life, she desperately tries to have her son listen to her tale, with the intention that, as explained by Thomas in the foreword, "once knowing her tale, [Thomas] would then, at some other date, convey its narrative to [his] own daughters. And so it would go on" (2). July's narration grows out of her desire to preserve the memories of the past, and to make sure slavery is remembered as perceived by the enslaved. In the case of Hillhouse's novel, the protagonist clearly represents young generations within the community who need to learn of the shared past to understand, and perhaps take up, the struggles waged at present. The transmission of

past experiences is mainly in the hands of Tanty, the elderly woman who organizes the pilgrimage to the slave dungeon and ends up setting the spa on fire. Nikki, as a consultant to Cameron's project, represents the dangers of ignoring the history of the Afro-Antiguan community, while Tanty's role is to enlighten the young about the significance of the past.

In all the texts under analysis, then, the affective group not only collaborates in the reconstruction of the past but also functions as the environment where collective memories are shared with the young and the ethical function of memory is thus fulfilled. It should be noted, however, that while *Prospero's Daughter* and *The Long Song* center on characters who have inherited and / or witnessed communal histories and function as mediators between past, present and future generations, *Oh Gad!* explores the perils of forgetting and the need for the young to remember.

3. The Representation of Memories

The uses of memory rendered in the novels under consideration result in the creation of new figures of memory, which are concrete manifestations of cultural identity as well as objectifications of collectively shared knowledge (J. Assman, «Collective Memory and Cultural Identity» 130). The creation of Caribbean cultural memory contributes to the empowerment of a community that has suffered, historically, the imposition of a foreign cultural memory, that of the colonizer. It is grounded in the revaluation of Caribbean nonhistories (Glissant 62), perceptions and views of the world, apart from the resistance against epistemic colonization. At the same time, the development of new figures of memory promotes the collective healing of the shared traumatic memories of a community whose fragmentation and silence served the interests of European colonizers.

In most cases, the new sites of Caribbean cultural memory mark the culmination of the reconstructions of the past presented in the novels. In *The Long Song*, for example, July's account is conceived as a site of memory to help others remember and feel identified as members of a community with a common past. Several sites of memory are created in *Prospero's Daughter*. Among these, the garden – a symbol of the mixed histories of Great Britain and Trinidad –, and Carlos' poems are central. Even though the novel presents only one of his poems, Virginia reveals towards the end that “Carlos is a poet. Like his father,

the sea, the sun, the sky, the birds, all flora and fauna on the island are his inspiration” (309). This suggests that, like his father, Carlos devotes himself to writing about Caribbean experiences, particularly in relation to the ecosystem as the framework where these are anchored. Considering that the novel is set in the context of Trinidadian independence, as a poet, Carlos has a vital function in the creation of the cultural memory of a people that have achieved formal independence but remain profoundly colonial in their culture, traditions and economic organization. As writers, then, Nunez’s Carlos and Levy’s July engage in the task of developing the cultural memory of the Caribbean community, based on the assertion of their right to represent themselves and the past in their own terms.

No writers or poets are portrayed in *Oh Gad!* and yet the narrative concludes with the crystallization of a new site of memory: the ruins of the spa on Blackman’s Ridge, a symbol of Tanty’s sacrifice for the sake of her cultural heritage and the rights of her people. Tanty plays a key role in the preservation of cultural memory in that she assumes the responsibility to raise public awareness of the sacredness of the Valley for the Afro-Antiguan community and the consequences of the investment project on the Ridge. Considering that cultural memory is a top-down type of memory transmitted by a select group of “specialists” (J. Assman, «Communicative and Cultural Memory» 114-16), the source of her authority to participate in the creation and transmission of cultural memory is her wisdom as a woman who learnt the importance of memory from her ancestors and has devoted her life to the preservation of the values, traditions and histories of the Afro-Antiguan community. Her sacrifice is an invitation to remember the nonhistories of their community and their determination to resist white, colonial and capitalist oppression. It is a statement that, though silenced and abused for centuries, the Afro-Antiguan community is no longer to be treated as invisible.

It must be noted that, while the sites or figures of cultural memory built in the novels under analysis are varied, they have certain aspects in common. First, they are representations of the past oriented towards the revaluation of Caribbean experiences, in general terms; and, second, they engage in a critical dialogue with the cultural and historical impositions of the colonial culture. In *Prospero’s Daughter*, this critical dialogue is observed in the combination of fruit trees and artificial flowers in the garden, which symbolizes the tension between the principles, values and attitudes of the colonizer and the

colonized. In *The Long Song*, July's narration defies the conventions of traditional autobiographies as well as the Enlightenment conception of the self as unitary and coherent, and of truth as attainable and universal. She installs these traditional, Western constructions in her text and subverts them by rewriting herself and her community in terms of a multiplicity of truths and selves. Finally, the ruins of Cameron's spa in Hillhouse's novel represent the hegemonic renewed attempts to silence and displace the community in Blackman's Valley and, conversely, their determination to continue fighting against white, capitalist oppression.

Following Achugar's proposal that sites of memory should be analyzed from a pragmatic perspective by considering who remembers, from which position and for what purpose, it can be claimed that all the representations under analysis are created by the "colonized" in response to modern / colonial / Eurocentered / capitalist power with the double purpose of challenging cultural imposition and asserting Caribbean cultural identities. In this sense, the sites of memory erected by the characters in the novel are highly parodic, in Hutcheon's terms, since they use and abuse – or install and subvert – the colonial past as a strategy to appropriate their past and present realities (11).

Apart from the figures of memory created at the level of plot, the revisiting of memory can also be observed in the formal aspects of the novels under discussion, that is, the textual and narrative strategies used to explore the nature of collective memories. In *The Long Song*, in particular, July as an author and narrator – and through her, Andrea Levy – overtly problematizes memory by reflecting upon the partiality of her own reconstruction. She builds her narrative on the assumption that recovering a single truth about the past is impossible. On the very first pages of the novel, she warns her reader that her views of life in the plantation radically differ from the perceptions rendered in white women's stories about the island, for their accounts

will have you acquainted with all the many tribulations of her life upon a Jamaican sugar plantation before you have barely opened the cover. Two pages upon the scarcity of beef. Five more upon the want of a new hat to wear with her splendid pink taffeta dress. No butter but only a wretched alligator pear again! Is surely a hardship worth the ten pages it took to

describe it. Three chapters is not an excess to lament upon a white woman of discerning mind who finds herself adrift in a society too dull for her. (8)

July constantly draws her readers' attention to the ways in which reality is construed differently according to the position from which it is perceived and the interests of the subject of perception. The construction of cultural memory is examined by July as an author at the level of representation, where she wages a battle against her son, editor and publisher and resists colonization by inscribing herself in the blurred boundaries between reality and fiction, truth and lies. The struggles between author and editor are also fleshed out by the novel's structure, as explained before, and the arrangement of voices, considering that Thomas writes the prologue and afterword to July's tale, thus uttering the first and the last words. July's text, however, refuses to be contained by his words and his views of history and literature and transcends all sorts of boundaries.

The interplay of a plurality of voices, or the use of polyphony¹⁵, in Bakhtin's terms, can also be observed in *Prospero's Daughter*, where Carlos and Virginia narrate their own experiences, while Gardner's and Mumsford's focalization (Bal 142) is rendered by an external narrator that is clearly critical of their views. Metaphorically speaking, Nunez does not allow the representatives of the colonial culture – the doctor and the inspector – to speak, while giving a voice to the oppressed, thus symbolically ending the silence to which the colonized were relegated by European cultures. In this way, the novel's structure revisits the collective memories of subjugation and resistance, doing justice to the lost voices of Caribbean history.

One of the aspects to point out in relation to the structure of Hillhouse's novel is the inclusion of the Antiguan proverbs introducing the different sections. This reveals the adoption of popular wisdom as the angle from which readers are guided throughout the development of the plot, which implies a reevaluation of the traditions and world views of the vernacular culture, anchored in their collective memory. Apart from this, it must be noted that, *Oh Gad!* combines different varieties of English, or different "englishes", depending on the characters who speak. Antiguan characters speak creole or Nation Language, in Brathwaite's terms. Their use of the language is represented with such a level

¹⁵ See Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999.

of accuracy that the perusal of the lines spoken by these characters enables readers to listen to the sounds and rhythm of their speech. Each of the characters consistently speaks in a particular way, which contributes to their characterization. Nikki and Jazz – her sister –, both raised in the U.S., speak standard English; Carlene, Jamaican creole; Audrey, Tones, Fanso, Tanty and Sadie speak Antiguan creole, though the speech of the elder characters, namely Tanty and Audrey, who happen to be the ones spending most of their lives in rural areas, proves harder to follow for a standard-English speaker.

The narrator's – and Hillhouse's – representation of creole languages can be read, on the one hand, as a form of abrogation, that is, as “the denial of the privilege of ‘English’”, which “involves a rejection of the metropolitan power over the means of communication”; and, simultaneously, as an act of “appropriation and reconstruction of the language of the centre” (Ashcroft *et. al.* 37-8). On the other hand, the constant presence of creole in the text can be understood as a narrative strategy to foreground the vernacular language as a site of memory evoking the intertwined histories of Europe, Africa and the Caribbean, and the forced cultural translation into which African and aboriginal peoples in the Caribbean were pushed under European colonialism. Creole emerges as a concretion of the European, African and American presences in Caribbean cultural identities, and can thus be read as a crystallization of the collective histories of Caribbean peoples. It must be noted that Jamaican creole is often heard in Andrea Levy's *The Long Song*, as explained in the analysis, though its presence is much less frequent than in the novel by Hillhouse. In *Prospero's Daughter*, there are several references to the differences between Carlos' and the doctor's speech, but the text is written in standard English.

In summary, the three novels under consideration revisit the Caribbean past through the rewriting of collective memories at different levels. At the level of action, the characters engage in the use of memory to subvert the effects of colonialism, racism and cultural imposition, and thus re-create their own histories beyond the realities created by colonial discourse. Apart from this, through a variety of textual and narrative strategies, the novels also evoke Caribbean collective memories at the level of representation.

Chapter VI. Conclusions

The present study started from the hypothesis that, in the corpus under analysis, memory is presented as a contact zone permeated by struggles between cultures in unequal power relations. It is creatively constructed in multiple spaces and practices, and results from the attempt to (re)write Caribbean identities. In general terms, the initial hypothesis has been confirmed, considering that the constructions of memory represented in the novels are a form of resistance against the hierarchy of “races”¹⁶ established by modern / colonial / Eurocentered / capitalist power and the manipulation of Caribbean memories and identities. It has been established that the uses of memory explored consist mainly in the revaluation of collective memories interrupted and / or silenced by the dominant culture, the resignification of the land(scape) and the (re)writing of texts as sites of Caribbean cultural memory. The construction of memory leads to the empowerment of the Caribbean peoples portrayed in the novels through the re-articulation of their cultural identities beyond dominant stereotypes, the creation and / or preservation of cultural memory, the healing of cultural trauma and the appropriation of the realities of the present and the past.

Apart from this, the analysis of the corpus has revealed that memory is rendered and overtly problematized as a complex form of representation in each of the texts, where even the uses of memory allegedly contributing to the empowerment of the Caribbean community can be subtly manipulated to perpetuate asymmetrical power relations between cultures, as seen mainly in *Oh Gad!* and *The Long Song*. To the initial hypothesis, it should also be added that the novels under consideration examine Caribbean memories not only at the thematic but also at the structural level. Through a variety of narrative techniques – among these, a particular arrangement of sections, the combination of multiple narrators and focalizers, and the use of metafictional strategies–, the structure of the three texts is exploited as a means to foreground that the reconstruction of the past is invariably incomplete, subjective and political. In other words, the structure of the texts is rendered as an arena where multiple histories and interests converge, a contact zone where different

¹⁶ This word is placed between inverted commas to indicate the conception of race as a discursive construction to naturalize differences among different cultures from the conquest / construction of the Americas onwards (Quijano «Coloniality and Modernity / Rationality» 171).

cultures seek to appropriate the terms in which they represent and position themselves with respect to others.

To take the reading of the novels a step further, it should also be observed that *Prospero's Daughter*, *The Long Song* and *Oh Gad!* can also be interpreted as sites of memory *in themselves*: they are cultural artifacts aimed to prevent the work of forgetting, keep the Caribbean past alive and ensure the preservation of the shared histories uniting Caribbean peoples. As crystallizations of cultural identity, the novels are concrete figures of memory ensuring the transmission of memory in the culturally institutionalized heritage of the Caribbean society (J. Assman, «Collective Memory and Cultural Identity» 130). In other words, the novels under consideration are *about* the use of memory in that they portray characters who need to remember, and for whom remembering is an act of empowerment. At the same time, they engage readers in the *use* of memory, inviting them to remember the trajectories of Caribbean communities, their values, traditions and perspectives of the world in general, and history in particular.

As figures of memory, the novels are self-reflexive (J. Assman, «Collective Memory and Cultural Identity» 132) in the sense that they explore the construction of memory as a central theme and simultaneously contribute to the formation of Caribbean cultural memory. Besides, the ethical dimension of memory as explored at the level of plot echoes the ethical function of the three novels under analysis, for they offer pictures of the past for the present and future generations in the Caribbean and its diasporas to remember collective histories of oppression and resistance. It is in the hands of the young to preserve the cultural legacy of their ancestors and continue the struggle for decolonization in the context of the modern / colonial / Eurocentred / capitalist power structures that still prevail. The novels are also self-reflexive in the sense that, like the sites of memory created by the characters, they are highly parodic of colonial discourse, in Hutcheon's terms, since, through the experiences of the characters, they revisit colonial discourse to defy it, subvert it or explode it from within and thus revalue Caribbean perspectives, views of the world and cultural memories.

It is interesting to point out that, as suggested in the comparative analysis of the novels, while *The Long Song* and *Prospero's Daughter* center on the colonial era,

Hillhouse's novel revolves around present realities and current struggles in the Caribbean. This is probably related to the fact that Elizabeth Nunez and Andrea Levy rewrite the Caribbean from the perspective of the Caribbean diaspora in the United States and Great Britain respectively. Nunez was born in Trinidad and migrated to the States at the age of nineteen; Andrea Levy was born in London and raised by her parents within the Jamaican diaspora. Their novels rewrite the collective memories of Caribbean communities which are the common histories of the Caribbean diasporas around the world. Hillhouse, in contrast, was born, raised and currently lives on the island of Antigua. Her novel offers a picture of Caribbean cultural identities today and explores collective memories as a key to carry on the struggle for the empowerment of Caribbean peoples, apart from presenting a rich variety of current cultural practices and a vivid representation of the languages spoken in the Anglophone Caribbean. While the three authors (re)construct cultural identities and revisit collective memories, Hillhouse writes her island, its culture and histories from inside Caribbean everyday reality, which helps explain why the approach to memory presented in *Oh Gad!* differs from the other two texts.

On the basis of the aspects of the past revisited in each of the texts, it is possible to consider the three novels as forming a sequence: *The Long Song* deals with the colonial world and the (post)slave era, *Prospero's Daughter* is set in the 1960s and explores the struggles for independence from the empire on a still deeply modern / colonial / Eurocentric Trinidad; and *Oh Gad!* focuses on the effects of the coloniality of power still deeply ingrained in the Caribbean society today. In point of fact, it seems that the more distant the author's relationship with the Caribbean, the further in the past their representations of collective memories are anchored. It is a question of future research to investigate whether this generalization can be held by means of the analysis of a larger corpus. The representation of the Caribbean, its histories and cultures as seen from inside and from the perspective of the diaspora is another aspect to continue exploring. In this respect, it would be interesting to compare and contrast a wider selection of texts written by Nunez, Levy and Hillhouse.

It should be noted that the novels under consideration focus on women's experiences in the Caribbean. *The Long Song* and *Oh Gad!* revolve around the lives of Afro-Caribbean women in particular, while *Prospero's Daughter* portrays the experiences of Afro-

Caribbean Ariana and English-Trinidadian Virginia. The three novels delve into patriarchal oppression, which often intersects with race and class oppression. From the perspective of the representation of memory, the present analysis has addressed the sexual violence exercised against female characters by considering the ways in which their memories are instrumentalized to legitimize their abuse, as in the case of Kitty and July in *The Long Song*, or Ariana in *Prospero's Daughter*; and silence their traumatic pasts, as in the case of Virginia in Nunez's novel. Future research could further explore the sexual dimension of colonization and slavery as presented in the novels, as well as the intersection of patriarchy and colonialism. The combination of memory and gender studies to explore the reconstructions of memory as a means to women's empowerment is another interesting aspect to continue exploring in future studies.

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