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Creolizing Mestizaje: Cultural Hybridity and Nurture Kinship in Latin American Fiction

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Creolizing Mestizaje: Cultural Hybridity and Nurture Kinship in Latin American Fiction

A dissertation presented by

Jeffrey Diteman

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Creolizing Mestizaje:
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A Dissertation Presented

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DEDICATION

To the caregivers.

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ABSTRACT

CREOLIZING MESTIZAJE: CULTURAL HYBRIDITY AND NURTURE KINSHIP

IN LATIN AMERICAN FICTION

MAY 2024

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This research applies Martinican writer Edouard Glissant's theories of creolization and Relation to selected works of Latin American fiction devoted to the theme of nurture kinship. While discourses of cultural hybridity in the Spanish-American sphere have been dominated by concepts of *mestizaje* (mixing) and transculturation, the present research argues that Glissant's model offers unique insights for understanding key aspects of the selected works. After contrasting Glissant's divergent, unpredictable model of mutual cultural influence with the convergent, assimilationist models associated with *mestizaje*, this work describes the Glissantian principles of active synthesis, rhizomatic relations, errant thinking, and opacity as illustrated in the writing of Clorinda Matto de Turner (Peru, 1852-1909), Rosario Castellanos (Mexico, 1925-1974), and Amalialú Posso Figueroa (Colombia, 1947-). The research then draws conclusions from this analysis for culturally responsive approaches to translating Posso Figueroa's writing into English.

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INTRODUCTION

“Perhaps creolization is becoming one of our present-day goals”

– Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, translated by Betsy Wing

“The world is evolving into a state of Creoleness”

– Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *In Praise of Creoleness*,
translated by Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar

The aim of this research is to analyze selected works of Spanish American fiction using theoretical concepts drawn from francophone Caribbean theories of creolization. The selected primary texts all address the theme of cross-cultural nurture kinship; they are all works of fiction written by women with an aim of redefining national identity in terms of cultural hybridity and pluralism. The rationale for conducting the analysis in this manner is that francophone Caribbean creolization discourse, especially as articulated by Edouard Glissant, offers a series of conceptual categories that either are not found or are conceived differently in the predominant theories of cultural hybridity from the Spanish Americas. These established Spanish American theories are generally known as *mestizaje* (i.e., mixing) and *transculturación*. As a theory of cultural progress, *mestizaje* was articulated prominently in Mexico in the early twentieth century by thinkers including Manuel Gamio (in his 1916 book *Forjando patria: pro-nacionalismo* [*Forging a Nation*]) and José Vasconcelos (in his 1925 book *La raza cósmica* [*The Cosmic Race*]). While allusions to mestizo identity had played a part in Peruvian discourse since shortly after the Conquest, the ideology of *mestizaje* as a national unifying principle was articulated

more explicitly in the early to mid-twentieth century through works such as *Paisajes Peruanos* (*Peruvian Landscapes*, 1912) by José de la Riva Agüero and *Peruanidad* (*Peruvianness*, 1943) by Víctor Andrés Belaúnde. Some contemporary scholars tend to interpret these Peruvian discourses of mestizaje as a form of unifying exclusion that seeks to integrate the nation through Westernizing assimilation while denigrating distinctively Indigenous and Afro-Peruvian identities.¹ In this sense, this strain of Peruvian discourse could be described as a form of whitening mestizaje bearing similarities to that of Colombian leaders such as Laureano Gómez, who served as president from 1949 to 1953. In chapter 1 I describe the intellectual histories of Peruvian, Mexican, and Colombian mestizaje in greater detail to clarify how they differ from Glissantian creolization.

The notion of *transculturación*, denoting the transformation of cultures through contact with one another, was coined in 1940 by the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in the book *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*) and elaborated by the Uruguayan literary critic Angel Rama, particularly in the 1982 book *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (*Writing across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America*). The notion of transculturation has been deployed in global cultural studies, becoming widespread in the 1990s in interdisciplinary works of cultural analysis (Kraidy 14).

Both mestizaje and transculturation have been extensively applied to the analysis of phenomena of cultural blending in the context of Spanish-American literature.²

¹ See works by Eddy Walter Romero Meza (2022) and Federico Navarrete (2014) for critiques of twentieth-century Peruvian mestizaje. For earlier discourses, see Cecilia Méndez (2000) and Gonzalo Portocarrero (2007).

² Works applying the concept of mestizaje to a literary analysis of the texts covered in this research include Estelle Tarica's book *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism*; Ronald Sáenz Leandro's article "Aves Sin Nido o La Refundación de La Nación Peruana" (2020); Francisco Rodríguez Cascante's 2014 article

Glissant's ideas about creolization, articulated in his works *Le discours antillais* (1981, translated by Michael Dash as *Caribbean Discourse* [1989]), *Poétique de la Relation* (1990, translated by Betsy Wing as *Poetics of Relation* [1997]), and *Traité du Tout-monde* (1997, translated by Celia Britton as *Treatise on the Whole-World* [2020]) among others, have also been used as a tool for analyzing intercultural influence and cultural evolution in Latin American literature.³ One innovation of the present research lies in the application of creolization theory to Latin American feminist literary works to elucidate the differences between creolization and other discourses of cultural hybridity.⁴ Another innovation is the way this research describes a rather specific literary subgenre—literature of nurture kinship, i.e. kinship based on caregiving relationships rather than biological filiation—as a significant site of creolizing tendencies, highlighting the power of intercultural caregiving to jostle the biological essentialism found in some discourses of mestizaje.

The selected primary texts are *Aves sin nido* (1889, translated by John H.R. Polt as *Torn from the Nest* [1904]) and *Herencia* (1895, never translated into English) by the Peruvian author Clorinda Matto de Turner, *Balún-Canán* by Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos (1957, translated by Irene Nicholson as *The Nine Guardians* [1959]), and

“Políticas de la cultura: mestizaje e indigenismo en Clorinda Matto de Turner y Yolanda Consuegra Martínez.”

Works applying the theory of *transculturación* to relevant texts include the book *Transculturación Narrativa* (1982) by Angel Rama and Véronique Landry's article “El Caso de Balún Canán de Rosario Castellanos: transculturación, feminidad y marginalización social” (2012).

³ Estelle Tarica (2008) uses Glissant's concept of returning to the point of colonial entanglement to describe the intercultural encounter at the heart of Rosario Castellanos' novel *Balún-Canán*. Alberto Bejarano applies a Glissantian analysis to the work of Roberto Bolaño in one of the chapters of *Ficción e historia en Roberto Bolaño* (2018). Kris F. Sealey describes the affinities between Glissantian creolization and the thinking of Latin American feminists Gloria Anzaldúa, Maria Lugones, and Mariana Ortega in her book *Creolizing the Nation* (2020), one of the primary precursors of this dissertation.

⁴ Canelini, Kraidy, and Sturzenegger-Benoist offer theoretical analyses to disambiguate the various concepts of cultural hybridity, but none of them do so with reference to feminism nor to the canonical feminist writers covered herein—Clorinda Matto de Turner and Rosario Castellanos.

Vean vé, mis nanas negras (2001, currently in process of translation by myself and Shanta Lee) by the Colombian author Amalialú Posso Figueroa. This selection makes it possible to detect creolizing elements in literary works from three countries—Peru, Mexico, and Colombia—where the theme of mestizaje has been particularly central to national identity, while considering the ways in which discourses of hybridity have evolved over the century that separates the work of Matto de Turner from that of Posso Figueroa. Matto de Turner’s novels depict the adoption of two Quechua girls by a white, bourgeois couple; *Balún-Canán* depicts the emotional and spiritual bond between an Indigenous nanny and a little girl from the Hispanic *ladino* caste; and *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* offers a series of portraits of Black nannies who exert a cultural and moral influence on the mestiza narrator. The theme of orphanhood pervades Posso Figueroa’s *Aves sin nido* and Castellanos’s *Balún-Canán*, emblemizing the ills of a culture founded on inequality. All three authors espouse what they see as the tenderness of minoritized cultures in contrast with oppressive, dominant white culture, using the theme of nurturing to challenge structures of exclusion.

The concept of nurture kinship offers an alternative to anthropological and sociobiological theories based on the assumption that genetic relatedness is the primary and primordial factor in group cohesion. The idea that familial kinship by common descent is the most fundamental model of group identity for all humans was the implicit assumption underpinning most anthropological research from the origin of the discipline in the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century (Schneider 165-170). This view has tended to place great emphasis on procreation as the central criterion for kinship, founded on a presumed innate psychobiological bond between parents and offspring

(ibid. 171). Working in this framework, Polish anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski (1884-1942) considered the phenomenon of adoption to be so rare that it represented no threat to the primacy of biological ties, and most anthropologists distinguished between “true” and “fictive” kin, with the assumption that these categories were found in all cultures (ibid. 171-173). In his *A Critique of the Study of Kinship* (1984), David Schneider points out the Eurocentrism of these assumptions. In his *Social Bonding and Nurture Kinship* (2012), Maximilian Holland observes that a preoccupation with biological kinship took a central place in the new discipline of sociobiology just as these assumptions were being abandoned by anthropologists in the 1970s (3). Both Schneider and Holland observe that many cultures place more emphasis on the performance of kinship functions—i.e., nurturing—than on the category of biological relatedness. Holland argues that the study of human evolutionary biology through the framework of inclusive fitness theory supports the conclusion that kinship bonds are mediated through the doing of nurturing behaviors rather than by merely being a blood relative (212-216). As Holland puts it, “Many contemporary accounts focus on social bonds formed in childhood and the importance of the performance of acts of care, including food provision, in mediating these bonds. In all cases it is this performance of care which is considered the overriding factor in mediating social bonds, notwithstanding ‘blood ties’” (282).

The term “nurture kinship” is used in the present research to denote relations between caregivers and care-receivers, especially those arising between persons who are not biologically related, but which nevertheless acquire affective and mentoring qualities frequently associated in Western discourse with families defined by common descent. In

the case studies covered in Chapters 2 to 4, I argue that literary depictions of nurturing relationships between children and adult women from different sociocultural backgrounds serve as metaphors for a revised notion of personal and national identity. This metaphoric of nurturance is in keeping with Glissant's call to conceive of identity in terms of rhizomatic relations rather than primordial roots. As I argue in Chapter 4, the institution of the othermother is one of the traces of African culture that has survived in various parts of the Black diaspora, and upholding the value of such familial formulations is a creolizing gesture.

In order to clarify the theoretical terms of analysis, it will be necessary to establish what distinguishes Glissantian creolization from *mestizaje* and transculturation, the frameworks of cross-cultural influence most frequently employed in the Spanish-American sphere.⁵ Broadly speaking, creolization is distinct from *mestizaje* in a few ways: as a metaphor extrapolated from the field of linguistics rather than discourses of biology, its focus is primarily cultural, and less concerned with biological processes of race-mixing (although these processes frequently function as the premises for cultural blending). While *mestizaje* has been conceived both biologically and culturally, the fact that both processes are named by a single term contributes to the tendency to conflate the two, or to assume that the relationship between them is straightforward, an assumption

⁵ Hereinafter I refer to the Spanish concept of *transculturación* by its English cognate, "transculturation," for the purpose of simplicity. Likewise, I refer to the francophone Caribbean idea of *créolisation* by its cognate, "creolization," in keeping with common academic practice in the discipline of comparative literature. The term *mestizaje*, however, has no direct cognate in English, and the nearest candidate term, "miscegenation," comes with a set of highly marked cultural connotations that would introduce too much confusion. Considering the specificity of the idea of *mestizaje* in Latin American cultural theory and considering that the term is quite well established in English-language scholarship in literary studies and the social sciences, I employ the Spanish term hereinafter without italicization. Finally, in order to distinguish between the Franco-Caribbean concept of creolization and the Spanish American idea of *criollización*, which refers to an altogether different process much more akin to assimilation (see footnote 4 below), I preserve the Spanish term *criollización* in passages that address that notion.

that creolization discourse rejects. A corollary idea is that creolization, unlike conventional concepts of biological crossing, has unpredictable results. While most discourses of mestizaje have celebrated the idea of convergence, the forging of a new unity, creolization represents an opening toward divergence, the development of unprecedented newness that goes beyond mere synthesis in ways that cannot be predicted. This means that any unity that results from creolization must come about through active and intentional gestures of coalition, because solidarity is not understood as resulting from myths of unity built around presumed commonality of origins or prescribed biological convergence.

The conflation of culture with biology is not found in the discourse of transculturation, which, like creolization, is not concerned with genetic hybridization. Instead, as I will explain in the last section of Chapter 1, the primary distinction between transculturation and creolization lies in the way the former discourse perpetuates some Western assumptions about linear progress, placing cultures along a spectrum from “primitive” to “modern.” In keeping with his general rejection of universalism, Glissant refuses to think about societal change in terms of a unifying axis of progress.

Creolization as cultural process and theory

Over the course of his long career, Edouard Glissant (1928-2011) offered a gradually expanding and increasingly clear articulation of his ideas about creolization. In his early writings, he saw contemporary embodiments of creolization as failed manifestations of historical cultural syncretism (Shlensky 353). In the 1981 essay collection *Le discours antillais (Caribbean Discourse)*, Glissant argues that the idea of

creolization operates against myths of unique origins and that the fact of creolization makes it impossible for Caribbeans to believe in cultural exclusivity, i.e., the idea that in order to be true to one's own culture, one must reject the influence of other cultures (140-142). Starting with *Poétique de la Relation (Poetics of Relation)*, first published in 1990, Glissant began to conceive of creolization as a primary driving force in the development of cultural formations in the Caribbean, a set of open-ended processes of cross-cultural contact and conflict that produce the region's distinctive and dynamic identities from traces of extirpated African cultures, along with European influences and the exigencies of survival in the context of the "*lieu clos*" (closed site) of the plantation. Later, in his 1996 *Introduction à une poétique du divers (Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity)* and his 1997 *Traité du Tout-monde (Treatise on the Whole-World)*, Glissant formulates creolization and cultural hybridity as themes to extend the human imagination and overcome the chauvinism associated with roots-based identity (*Poetics of Diversity* 6-11, *Treatise* 9). Thus, over the course of Glissant's career, the concept of creolization evolves from a description of unachieved syncretism to a marker distinguishing composite cultures from atavistic ones, to finally become a master concept guiding a fundamental shift in consciousness.

This multiple sense of the term is expressed in the 1992 essay-lecture "Creolization in the Making of the Americas," wherein Glissant offers a general summary of what creolization means for his manner of interpreting cultural evolution. He starts by describing a "civilizational region" defined by the plantation system, including the Caribbean, the coastal parts of Venezuela and Colombia, Guyana, northern Brazil, and part of the southern United States. This sphere more or less corresponds to the area

that he describes as “Neo-America,” that part of the Americas where large numbers of enslaved Africans were brought by Europeans to work on plantations, and where the local Indigenous populations were largely obliterated by genocide, enslavement, forced displacement, or disease. According to Glissant, the Caribbean Sea is fundamentally different from the Mediterranean in that the Mediterranean lent itself to a concentration of cultures, resulting in the reality of Empire and the “concept of the One” (81)—Glissantian shorthand for Western preoccupations with unity, manifest in the form of monotheism, singular origins, universalism, and totalizing narratives.⁶ The Caribbean, by contrast, diffracts: as a site of transience, it does not lend itself to “the intense retrenchment of a self-sufficient thinking of identity,” but rather to “relativity, [...] the relational complicity with the new earth and sea. It does not tend to the One, but opens out onto diversity” (81). This points to one of the main distinctions between Glissantian creolization and most other discourses of cultural hybridity: while the latter tend to emphasize the reduction of difference through integration, creolization is conceived as a constant process of becoming, with unpredictable results resulting in increasing diversity rather than homogenization. It is a centrifugal, not a centripetal, motion.

By drawing parallels between the evolution of creole languages and that of creole cultures, Glissant adds nuance to the account of creolization as a force of innovation and not mere synthesis. A creole language involves the interaction of two or more linguistic traditions. In this interaction, an altogether new kind of expression is developed, a third element to supplement the first two. According to his interpretation, this is different from

⁶ This idea is also explored in the essay “Cross-Cultural Poetics”: “In Western tradition, genealogical descent guarantees racial exclusivity, just as Genesis legitimizes genealogy. To assert peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct in this way the category of ‘creolized’ that is considered as halfway between two ‘pure’ extremes” (*Caribbean Discourse* 140).

the type of synthesis that results from biological crossbreeding: “Creolization is unpredictable, whereas the immediate results of crossbreeding are more or less predictable” (“Making of the Americas” 83). It does not produce a straightforward synthesis, but rather a third way. This is why Glissant chooses the term “*créolisation*” rather than “*métissage*.”⁷ It is fundamentally oriented toward a future that is unwritten, radically unpredictable, and based on a non-essentializing view of subjectivity.

As an open-ended process, creolization does not result in stable formations, but in spiraling, unpredictable processes of change and difference. This unpredictability is related to another key Glissantian concept, that of opacity: processes of cultural change, like the people and literary creations involved in them, are not clearly legible from the outside, and thus do not fit into the Western economy of knowledge as objects of the empirical gaze. The creolizing concept of the subject is grounded not only in the fact of opacity, but also in the *right* to opacity, which is to say that the refusal to submit to demands for clarity and transparency has an ethical dimension (*Poetics of Relation* 189-190). Just as creole languages are based not only on the need for communication but also on the need for obfuscation (the central symbol for this would be that of enslaved people who find ways to twist and muffle the master’s language to turn it into their own secret language),⁸ the sort of cultural formations that emerge from creolizing processes are often

⁷ The corresponding Spanish terms, “*criollización*” and “*mestizaje*,” despite being cognates, have rather different meanings from the French terms. The Spanish “*criollización*” implies assimilation of *indios* or *mestizos* into the Euro-descendant *criollo* caste, rather than the sort of neoculturation that Glissant describes in the franco-Caribbean sphere. The French term “*métissage*” remains largely limited to its biological denotation, while a number of influential Hispanic writers have extended the term “*mestizaje*” to incorporate ideas of cultural evolution, without the term losing its biological connotations. In this sense, the severance between biological and cultural notions of hybridity in Glissant’s framework stands in distinction to the way such notions are conflated in Spanish-American discourse by being covered by the single term “*mestizaje*.”

⁸ See Glissant’s essay “Reversion and Diversion” in *Caribbean Discourse*, pp. 14-25.

intentionally unintelligible to those outside the group. This may appear to be a hindrance to cross-cultural understanding, but when viewed in light of colonial history, asserting the right to opacity is a way of resisting the barbarity of domination (*Poetics of Relation* 189-194). Glissant insists on opacity as opposed to transparency: the idea of the transparency of an individual to analysis, like that of the transparency of one culture to another, is an insidious illusion, inimical to difference. From this perspective, the specter of Westernization, with its hegemonic tendency to homogenization and its obsession with controlling narratives, finds its antidote in the gift of opacity, a distinctly postcolonial, Caribbean contribution to philosophical discourse. Opacity is a way of safeguarding the right to difference. The violence of Western positivistic approaches to understanding (symbolized by the etymology of the French verb *comprendre*, or understanding as the gesture of grasping) is counteracted by the principle of opacity: “In the meeting up of all the world’s cultures, we must have the imaginative strength to conceive of all the cultures as exerting an action of both liberating unity and liberating diversity. That is why I call for the right to opacity for everyone [...] Today, the right to opacity is the most obvious sign of non-barbarism” (*Poetics of Diversity* 45). The opacity of irreducible otherness defies the possessing grasp of Western thought, the impulse to understand in order to control. As I will explain in chapter 1, the non-barbaric imaginary that emerges from an acknowledgement of opacity is epistemologically distinct from the assumptions that underlie many Spanish-American discourses of hybridity, from the Lamarckian positivism of nineteenth-century Mexican writer Francisco Bulnes (as expressed in his book *El porvenir de las naciones hispanoamericanas* [*The Future of Hispanic-American Nations*, first published in 1899]) to the utopic hybridity of twentieth-century Mexican

anthropologist Vasconcelos (as expressed in his 1925 book *La raza cósmica* [*The Cosmic Race*]), as well as the assumptions of knowable alterity and universal progress that subtly undergird the transculturation of Ortiz's *Forjando patria* (1916) and Rama's *Transculturación narrativa* (1982).

Along with this emphasis on opacity, Glissant conceives the world as an open-ended, evolving set of relations between subjects and cultures that are internally multiple. His symbolic template for conceptualizing relations between these entities is the archipelago, with its amorphous, porous boundaries. He contrasts the notion of errant, archipelagic thinking with systemic continental thinking, emphasizing the unpredictability of intercultural processes. Glissant's term for the irreducible indeterminacy of cultures in flux is *chaos-monde*. This term points to the need for a way of naming the world or worlds that emerge from intercultural contact and conflict in a constant process of becoming; these worlds cannot be transparent to analysis, because they are too complex, too unpredictable. Nevertheless, "[c]haos is not 'chaotic,'" but rather a natural aesthetics; the aesthetics of chaos-monde is "totality's action and fluidity, totality's reflection and agent in motion" (*Poetics of Relation* 94). The aesthetics of chaos-monde is associated with an ecological ethics of deterritorialization and a non-totalitarian, non-teleological, non-universalizing conception of totality: "The world in its finished totality cannot be considered a sufficient reason, a generality giving birth to its own generalization. [...] The totality is not what has been called the universal. It is the quantity, finished and realized, of the infinite detail of the real. And which, because it is a matter of detail, is not totalitarian" (*Treatise* 118). Chaos-monde is also associated with the infinite possibilities of the imagination, with archipelagic thought stimulating the

imaginary to reconnect places that have been cut off from one another through political and linguistic boundaries.⁹

It is important to note that this insistence on the epistemological centrality of opacity and chaos does not result in a fatalistic resignation to outright unintelligibility. Absolute unintelligibility would imply the impossibility of Relation, and Relation is the organizing meta-concept for all of Glissantian thought. On the contrary, the gift of opacity implies the demise or inapplicability of a certain Western kind of knowing, the sort that seeks to understand in order to possess or control. Glissant's treatment of William Faulkner offers some insight into the prospect of Relation-despite-opacity. Glissant observes that Faulkner, despite his abiding interest in representing race relations and Blackness in the American South, refrained from narrating Black interiority. As Glissant puts it, "This is where the break occurs in all its force"—that is, the chasm between Black and white consciousness appears so vast that even a writer as engaged as Faulkner hesitates to cross it ("Making of the Americas" 85). And yet, Faulkner's work does involve certain creolizing tendencies, as the collective force of Black memory inevitably finds its way into his writing: "And what is this universe that Faulkner invented and described if not that of the extended family, inextricable, so different from the Western pattern, so rooted in an African memory?" (ibid. 85). This observation has two implications: first, that creolizing disruptions of dominant culture can take place through a literary medium, including in the hands of white authors, and second, that the extended family represents a significant site of creolizing processes. While this passage pertains to the conventional notion of extended family as a set of cousins, uncles, aunts,

⁹ For a more thorough analysis of Glissant's archipelagic thought, see Aliocha Wald Lasowski, *Edouard Glissant, penseur des archipels*, Pocket, 2015, 499.

and so forth, the creolizing implications of extended kinship also apply to cases of nurture kinship through adoption and caregiving, and through another social phenomenon rooted in African memory, the institution of what has come to be called the othermother.¹⁰

This connection between creolization and intercultural nurture kinship constitutes the rationale for the thematic organizing principle of this dissertation: all of the primary texts depict caregiving relations where cross-cultural interactions produce moral ambiguities that jostle hegemonic ideas about filiation, subordinating them to concerns for Relation. In such interactions, the principle of opacity safeguards the right to self-determination, while the reality of Relation remains a perpetual threat to illusions of self-sufficiency. “In other words,” writes Glissant, “ambiguity, discontinuity, traces and remembering, creolization, with its unpredictable results, are not signs of weakness. They contribute to this unprecedented conception of identity that I have been discussing” (ibid. 87). This implies a possible conclusion in keeping with Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s (2011) thesis of the creolization of theory: the awareness of creolization can have a destabilizing effect on hegemonic cultures.¹¹ The development of this awareness is one of the prevailing themes in Glissant’s later books *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity* (1996) and *Treatise on the Whole-World* (1997), but it appears in inchoate form in *Poetics of Relation* (1990).

¹⁰ The othermother is a woman who cares for children who are not biologically her own. Patricia Hill Collins writes, “Cross-culturally, the high status given to othermothers and the cooperative nature of child-care arrangements among bloodmothers and othermothers in Caribbean and other Black societies gives credence to the importance that people of African descent place on mothering” (“Black Women and Motherhood” 155)

¹¹ In the introduction to their edited volume *The Creolization of Theory* (2011), Shu-mei Shih and Françoise Lionnet use the term “creolized theory” to designate the “epistemological entanglement between colonizer and colonized,” enabling “unexpected comparisons and different analytical tools” to substitute “exchange and communication for hegemonization” (30-31).

“Thought of the Other,” writes Glissant in *Poetics of Relation*, “is sterile without the other of Thought” (154). While it is possible to recognize cultural difference without being personally transformed, such recognition would be empty and unproductive. When, however, we engage with otherness in a manner that pries us open and changes our course, that is when we enter the turbulent waters of Relation, a mode of interaction between identities in flux, where the ethical code is not given in advance, and neither are the results of contact. My term for this transformation is the creolization of consciousness. As Glissant puts it in “Creolization and the Making of the Americas,” “Creolization creates a new land before us, and in this process of creation, it helps us to liberate Columbus from himself” (88). In such passages, Glissant alludes to the creolization of the colonial mindset, extending the imagination “by an infinite bursting forth and an infinite repetition of the themes of hybridity, multilingualism and creolization” (*Treatise* 9). In the chapters that follow, I will argue that the theme of nurture kinship serves as an axis for this transformation in the works of Matto de Turner, Castellanos, and Posso Figueroa. Furthermore, these works reflect a common mechanism whereby political instability contributes to an epistemological rupture that makes room for the creolization of consciousness. This observation highlights the parallels between the ideological consequences of the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) in Peru, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, and the 1954 protests against the dismemberment of the Chocó region in Colombia. These events, combined with radical disruptions of Catholic hegemony represented by Marxism and anarchism, had destabilizing effects on the dominant culture, leaving space open for change. In the literary case studies of chapters 2-4, these openings in the socio-historical framework are echoed on the personal level by

the jostling influences of cross-cultural nurture kinship. In Chapter 2, I make the connection between interracial adoption and the creolization of Peruvian national identity in the novels of Clorinda Matto de Turner, which complicate the white savior trope through a critique of *criollo* (Euro-descendant upper class) dominance. Similarly, in Chapter 3, I observe how Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos uses multiple portrayals of nurture kinship to challenge received ideas about filiation and to position an Indigenous nanny as an allegory of national motherhood for a reformed Mexico. Finally, in Chapter 4, I describe how Amalialú Posso Figueroa creolizes the Colombian national imaginary using the theme of nurture kinship, positioning Black othermothers as role models for women's agency. However, before turning to these case studies, it will be useful to examine the Peruvian, Mexican, and Colombian discourses of hybridity and articulate how they differ from Glissantian creolization. This will make it possible to clarify the framework for interpreting the relationship between nurture kinship and creolization in the primary texts under consideration.

CHAPTER 1

DISCOURSES OF HYBRIDITY IN PERU, MEXICO, AND COLOMBIA

In my introduction, I described Edouard Glissant's account of creolization as a discourse that emphasizes cultural interaction over biological essentialism, following a divergent model that contrasts with the convergent models associated with many other discourses of hybridity. According to Glissant, one of the fundamental differences between the view of humanity characteristic of francophone Creole Caribbean cultures and the corresponding view that dominates Western discourse is that the societies of the Caribbean are inoculated by their composite nature against an obsession with unity, while Western societies (including the "Euro-America" of the United States, Canada, and the Southern Cone) continually seek to affirm their claims to cohesion and territory through unifying myths of national origins. This Western obsession with unity, with "Oneness," can also take the form of imperialist mandates for monolingualism, assimilation, and eradication of difference. By privileging the image of interconnected rhizomes rather than a taproot model focused on ancient origins, Glissant foregrounds the distinction between such atavistic, homogenizing ideologies and the composite, creolizing way.

In this chapter, I contrast Glissantian creolization with the predominant discourses of cultural hybridity that have manifested in Peru, Mexico, and Colombia in order to lay the groundwork for an analysis of literary works from these countries in the subsequent chapters. In what follows, I describe how these discourses have opposed white supremacist purity politics, but also indulged in retrograde forms of biological

essentialism and paternalistic attitudes toward Indigenous peoples, sometimes contributing to policies of cultural assimilation and eugenics-inspired “whitening” of national populations. Considering that Glissantian creolization offers conceptual tools for thinking about intercultural influence in an open-ended, non-essentializing, non-homogenizing manner, I propose it as an alternative or supplement for the analysis of progressive narratives of nurture kinship by Clorinda Matto de Turner, Rosario Castellanos, and Amalialú Posso Figueroa.

Indigenismo and mestizaje in Peru

The history of intellectual discourse in Peru with regard to the so-called “Indian question” is characterized by longstanding habits of neglect and exclusion punctuated by occasional assertions of Indigenous dignity and resistance. The vicissitudes of contested identity have ultimately culminated in a contradictory contemporary situation wherein the majority of Peruvians identify as mestizos while Andean Indigenous communities still experience severe marginalization and material impoverishment (“Censo” n.p.; ONAMIAP, “Hacia una propuesta de economía indígena” n.p.). The history of exclusion is related to the extreme center-periphery dynamic that arose in Peru, where the colonial and republican white elite of Lima remained largely insulated from the processes unfolding in the Andes. The great difficulty of movement between the capital and the remote Andean towns and villages meant that Andean cultural syncretism remained substantially contained in the highlands while Lima’s culture persisted in a highly Spanish mode. Nevertheless, Peruvian history has been marked since the conquest by a series of outbursts of Indigenous self-assertion and defenses of mestizo pride.

Early Peruvian colonial discourse on racial politics arose in the context of the heated polemic between the critics and apologists of the Conquest. In the 1540s, the Spanish theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda published the work *Democrates alter*, seeking to justify Spanish domination of Amerindian populations by appealing to the Aristotelian notion that some people are inherently inclined to servitude. Citing the vices of cannibalism, human sacrifice, and sodomy, Sepúlveda asserted that the natives of the New World were incapable of rational self-governance and therefore were naturally destined to be better off under the auspices of Spanish rule (Brading 1-2). A Dominican friar based in Hispaniola, Bartolomé de las Casas, offered a polemical retort to Sepúlveda in the form of his *Apologética historia summaria de las gentes destas Indias* (1536, *Apologetic Summary History of the Peoples of These Indies*), defending the sophistication of Inca and Aztec institutions. The controversy led to a protracted public debate between las Casas and Sepúlveda that took place in Valladolid, Spain, in 1550 and 1551, with each writer stating his case for and against the Spanish conquest of the Indies. The debate was commissioned by the Council of the Indies and supervised by Dominican academics. The Habsburg King Charles V imposed a moratorium on conquests pending the outcome of the debate, which was inconclusive. Although this moratorium soon fell into abeyance, the debate did lead to Sepúlveda being prohibited from publishing *Democrates secundus* (*The Second Democrates*), his defense of Spain's wars in the New World (Lupher 103-134, Covey 175).

Soon thereafter, Las Casas published *La Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias* (*A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies*), attacking the depravity of the conquerors. This book was published in 1552, the same year as Francisco López de

Gómara's *Historia general de las Indias (General History of the Indies)*, commissioned by Hernán Cortés, a book celebrating the conquistador's military exploits (Brading 2). After King Felipe II acceded to the Spanish throne in 1556, publications regarding the Indies were censored and both Las Casas's and López de Gómara's works were banned. The Spanish crown was so eager to control the history of the conquest that they appointed a special chief chronicler to write an authorized version of the story. This ultimately resulted in Antonio de Herrera's 1601 book *Historia general de los hechos de los castellanos en las islas i tierra firme del mar oceano (General History of the Deeds of the Castilians in the Islands and Mainland of the Ocean-Sea)*. In this cleverly constructed text, Herrera endorsed Gómara and Sepúlveda's claims about the barbarity of Native American peoples, justifying this vilification with allusions to their alleged lack of writing and technologies such as gunpowder and iron, and going so far as to claim that the royal support for Las Casas was evidence of Spain's benevolence toward the natives (Brading 2).

The Inca Garcilaso de la Vega (1539-1616), the son of a Spanish conquistador and an Incan noblewoman, was the first major mestizo writer from the Americas. At a time when Spain was eager to control the narrative regarding the conquest, the Inca Garcilaso wrote works of history defending the dignity of Indigenous peoples and condemning the brutality of the conquistadores. Garcilaso emerged as a voice of resistance at the turn of the seventeenth century, contributing a distinct mestizo perspective with strong Indigenous commitments to the discursive battle that had been raging since first contact. His 1605 book *La Florida del Inca (The Florida of the Inca)* described Hernando de Soto's catastrophic foray into what would become the US South.

His *Comentarios reales* (1609, *Royal Commentaries*) and *Historia general del Perú* (1616, *General History of Peru*) both aim to bring about the “harmonious integration of Indigenous and Christian history with the view of creating a truly mestizo society in Peru” (Zamora 14). While acknowledging that the term “mestizo” is typically used with disdain in the Americas, Garcilaso claims in book IX of the *Comentarios* that he wears the term with honor. Much of Garcilaso’s authority as a humanist historian derives from his knowledge of the Quechua language, which gives him access to pre-Colombian history in a manner not available to the Spanish and *criollo* writers of the time (Zamora 53). In the *Comentarios reales*, Garcilaso defends the elegance of the Quechua language while using his knowledge of that language to reinterpret the events of the conquest of Peru, in an effort to restore the reputation of Inca civilization (ibid. 57). This effort is particularly significant in the case of Peru, where Inca agricultural technology, metallurgy, and scientific knowledge offered a powerful rebuttal to the accusations of savagery put forth by Spanish historians such as Sepúlveda, Gómora and Herrera. In Chapter 2, I describe how the late nineteenth-century author Clorinda Matto de Turner draws on the Inca Garcilaso in her account of Quechua culture and language in her 1893 nonfiction book *Leyendas y recortes* (“Legends and Snippets”), wherein she asserts the unique poetic qualities of the language, claims that are also echoed in her novels.

Despite his critique of de Soto and his commitment to defending Incan civilizational accomplishments, Garcilaso’s writing does not constitute an outright denunciation of the conquest. In the *Royal Commentaries*, Garcilaso hails the deeds of conquerors as “greater and more heroic than those of the Alexander of Greece or of Caesar of Rome” (qtd. in Brading 17). This admiration does not prevent Garcilaso from

condemning colonial atrocities such as the execution of the Inca emperor Tupac Amaru in 1572. All told, the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega is most aptly described as a complex thinker whose loyalties were divided but whose commitment to Peru's Indigenous, mestizo, and *criollo* heroes was sincere. Garcilaso expressed pride in both his aristocratic Spanish heritage and his royal Inca blood, and in so doing, he established himself as an important early writer proclaiming the value of Peruvian mestizo identity. That identity, under constant tension between various dichotomies (center-periphery, Spanish-Indigenous, national-international) would continue to undergo a series of transformations over the subsequent centuries.

One of the factors complicating the Peruvian discourses of national and ethnic identity has been the repeated occurrence of mass uprisings, sometimes based on race, sometimes on class. In the early 1780s, a *cacique* (chief) from southern Peru named Juan Gabriel Condorcanqui renamed himself Túpac Amaru II and led a major Indigenous uprising aiming to restore the Inca monarchy (Pratt 42). Along with a parallel uprising led by Tomás Katari, Túpac Amaru's rebels managed to take control of much of the area between Cuzco and the prized silver mining region of Potosí (in present-day Bolivia), occupying towns and besieging the larger cities, leading the colonial authorities to worry that they could lose control of the Viceroyalty of Peru entirely (Walker xi). Túpac Amaru's political project was to establish a tolerant Inca state, intended to bring about social justice for all oppressed Peruvians, including Indigenous peoples, mestizos, Black people, and the white underclass, while maintaining respect for the Catholic church (Walker xii). Therefore, on the level of intention, the rebellion was organized more in terms of social class than ethnicity. However, the violence of the rebellion is a testament

to the extent of racial resentment at the time; while Túpac Amaru and his wife, Micaela Bastidas, advocated for a multiracial, multi-class coalition, many of their Indigenous followers frequently ignored their appeals to tolerance and killed anyone perceived as European (Walker xii).

That did not prevent a certain number of Euro-descended *criollos* from joining the cause. In the wake of the Bourbon reforms, small landowners found themselves under pressure to pay high taxes to the colonial government, fueling their discontent. In towns such as Oruro, where a longstanding history of intermarriage had produced a substantial population of Quechua-speaking mestizos with a strong sense of local loyalty, the Indigenous rebellion attracted the support of the *criollo* elites, who already resented the Spanish for discriminating against them and for appointing Peninsulars (persons born in Spain) to positions of power (Serulnikov 76-77). When the wave of Indigenous rebels arrived in Oruro, the local militia, drawn from the ranks of landowners, joined forces with the revolution. However, they soon found themselves in another predicament: the native rebels wanted more than to throw off the yoke of the Spanish occupiers. They also wanted full possession of the lands they had been working on, largely owned by the *criollos* themselves (Serulnikov 84). It is not surprising, therefore, that the *criollos* were the first to abandon the revolution and join the loyalist cause when the tide started to turn against the rebels.

In May 1781, Túpac Amaru II and his wife Micaela Bastidas were publicly executed in a gruesome display. The war carried on for another year, with the rebels finally defeated in the early months of 1782. All told, it is estimated that about 100,000 Indigenous people and around 10,000 Hispanic people (counting *criollos*, mestizos, and

Peninsulars) lost their lives in the conflict—in a country with a total population no greater than 1.5 million (Serulnikov 1-2). In the aftermath, a ban was decreed on traditional Indigenous clothing, especially articles that reminded people of their Inca heritage and those bearing images of the sun, the central deity in pre-Colombian Peruvian cosmology. In the ensuing decades, the project of Inca restoration went underground, to be taken up again later by *criollos* and mestizos, leading to another revolt in 1805 (Pratt 47). In a certain sense, the 1780s rebellion of Túpac Amaru II represents an abortive attempt at reorganizing colonial Peruvian structures of power according to a logic of multicultural coexistence, which could have represented an opening of the society toward creolizing possibilities.

During the revolutionary era (1809-1826), some Peruvian writers began to reject Spanish literary models in favor of foreign literatures of non-Iberian origin, reflecting a burgeoning desire to participate in international culture (Rama 4). Among the revolutionary generation, perhaps the literary figure most representative of hybrid identity was Mariano Melgar (1790-1815). Hailing from Arequipa, far from Lima in southern Peru, Melgar served as a librarian in the Seminary of Saint Jerome, where the bishop maintained a collection of banned books including the French Encyclopedia (Durán 82). The seminary hosted a secretive network of intellectuals conspiring for independence (ibid.). Melgar was a precocious youth, already in childhood committed to the defense of Indigenous people, and a polyglot familiar with English, French, and Italian (ibid. 85). Melgar was also a translator, recognized for an inspired translation of Ovid's *Remedia amoris* (*Cures for Love*). Passionately devoted to the cause of independence, Melgar died before a Spanish firing squad in 1815.

A Romantic nationalist, Melgar is credited as the first writer to use Quechua poetic forms to craft poems in Spanish. Some of his *yaravíes* (Andean traditional love ballads) became well-known folk songs, spread by word of mouth and modified over time. While the first book compiling his poems did not appear until 1831—sixteen years after his death—they had already been circulating in oral form in the interim, along with the poet’s reputation as a martyr for the national cause (Durán 86). An ode by Melgar called “Por fin libre y seguro” (“Finally Free and Safe”) includes the lines “Lift up these beaten faces / Indians who with fear, / Oppressed slaves / [...] Have been held captive in your own lands.”¹² Pedro Henríquez Ureña wrote that “Mariano Melgar was the first person who systematically tried to bring forth Indian sentiments in Spanish verse. He wrote *yaravíes* in the style of native love songs, and fables seasoned with a splash of Indigenous humor” (qtd. in Durán 89). Antonio Cornejo Polar locates the origin of the *yaraví* in the Quechua poetic forms *jaray arawi* or the *urpi*, describing it as a culturally hybrid form that “is born in the general conflict of two cultures, maintaining its fidelity toward the Indigenous, with noteworthy perseverance, and taking on new characteristics from the West.”¹³ However, Cornejo Polar is not content to reduce Melgar’s contribution to the label “mestizaje” and argues that the *yaravíes* did not merely serve as an antecedent to Peruvian Romanticism, but were also deeply tied to the idea of emancipation—implying the need for another form of emancipation, not only of Peru from Spain, but of Indigenous people from servitude and dispossession (“Sobre la literatura de la emancipación en el Perú,” 92-93). As I observe in Chapter 2, Clorinda

¹² “Levantad esos rostros abatidos, / Indios que con espanto, / Esclavos oprimidos / [...] Cautivos habéis sido en vuestro suelo” (quoted in Durán 88).

¹³ “En todo caso, el *yaraví* nace dentro del conflicto general de dos culturas, manteniendo su fidelidad hacia lo indígena, con perseverancia notable, y asimilando de Occidente nuevos caracteres” (quoted in Durán 92).

Matto de Turner uses a reference to Melgar's *yaravíes* in her 1895 novel *Herencia* to suggest that Indigenous-European cultural hybridity has a longstanding precedent in Peruvian literary history.

During the Romantic period (1810-1870),¹⁴ regionalism played an important role in the originality of Latin American literature. The Romantic quest for originality and representativeness took the form of an emphasis on the uniqueness of American landscapes and cultural diversity. In Peru, the regionalist tendency intersected with social advocacy in the work of Narciso Aréstegui (1820-1869), originally from a village near Cuzco, whose book *El padre Horán* (*Father Horán*, serially published in 1848) is considered the first Peruvian novel. This book, which has never been translated into English, is about a priest who takes advantage of his position to exploit the local population for economic gain and sexual gratification. In these themes, and in its criticism of institutions such as forced Indigenous labor, it can be viewed as a significant precursor to Clorinda Matto de Turner's 1889 novel *Aves sin nido*. According to Luis Alberto Sánchez, Aréstegui "opens the doors of literature to indigenismo in its form of social vindication, protest [...] against reigning injustices."¹⁵

In the mid- to late-nineteenth century, historians such as Mariano Eduardo de Rivero (1798-1857) and Sebastián Lorente (1813-1884) sought to establish a unified national history (Thurner 114-118). Rivero's *Antigüedades Peruanas* (1851) emphasized the legacy of Indigenous Peruvian civilizations as elements of national history (Thurner 118). Lorente was a supporter of Peru's Liberal Revolution of 1854 to 1855, and his

¹⁴ Based on Rama's periodization: Romantic Period (1810-1870); modernizing period (1870-1910); national and socialist period (1910-1940)

¹⁵ "Aréstegui abre las puertas de la literatura al indigenismo en su forma de reivindicación social, de protesta, de dramática protesta contra las injusticias imperantes" (Sánchez 948).

histories published from 1860 to 1879 defined the entirety of the nation as the sovereign territory of “all Peruvians” (Thurner 114). The anti-colonial sentiments of Rivero and Lorente were not shared by Ricardo Palma (1833-1919), who is remembered mainly for his *Tradiciones peruanas* (serially published from 1872 to 1910, *Peruvian Traditions*), a series of vignettes, anecdotes, and dialogues that went on to be considered classics of the *costumbrista* genre and read as a sort of popular history (Thurner 116). Himself a mestizo of humble origins, Palma was criticized by more liberal-republican thinkers for failing to denounce the Spanish aristocracy and its colonial abuses (Martínez 21).

In the waning years of the nineteenth century, there was a modernizing period (1870-1910) during which Peruvian writers tended to look once more toward international models. The Peruvian intelligentsia was dramatically affected by the catastrophic War of the Pacific (1879-1883), in which Peru and its ally Bolivia lost the resource-rich coastal territories of Tarapacá and Atacama to Chile (Sater 2). In a particularly humiliating move, the Chilean army invaded and occupied Lima in 1881 (Sater 20-21). The war brought latent Peruvian racial and class resentments to the surface: an Indigenous guerrilla movement against Chileans and collaborationist landlords in the central Sierra region, racial conflict between Peruvians and Chinese workers that had been loyal to Chile, conflicts between Black and Chinese Peruvians, a series of riots and retributions tantamount to race war (Bonilla 108-113). These conflicts are indicative of the difficulty faced by leaders who sought to promote national unity.

In the chaotic aftermath of the war, the anarchist Manuel González Prada (1844-1918) wrote a series of essays criticizing the backwardness of Peruvian institutions. Already prior to the war, in 1879, González Prada had published the book *Cuartos de*

hora (“Decisive Moments”) attacking the Peruvian aristocracy and the Catholic Church. Later, in his essay “Nuestros Indios” (1904) he took a skeptical position on sociological notions of race, accusing his contemporaries of racism and social Darwinism and condemning the ongoing exploitation of Indigenous people in Peru. Through his materialist critique, González Prada laid the groundwork for future pro-Indigenous advocacy by José Mariátegui and the Marxist APRA political party.

The first chapter of this dissertation is devoted to the writing of Clorinda Matto de Turner (1852-1909), a contemporary of Manuel González Prada and the most prominent female Peruvian writer of her generation. Matto de Turner converted her estate to an infirmary during the War of the Pacific and went on to pursue a prolific career as a writer and publisher in the 1880s. Like González Prada, Matto represented an activist cultural agenda aiming to break the stranglehold of conservative Catholic patriarchy on Peruvian intellectual and political life. Her works *Aves sin nido* (1889) and *Herencia* (1894) form a narrative series depicting a nurturing relationship between a bourgeois *criollo* couple and a pair of orphaned Indigenous sisters. The first book made a significant but brief impact on the tumultuous Peruvian political scene before it was banned and publicly burned for its anti-clerical message. The author was forced into exile by the reactionary government of Nicolás de Piérola in 1894, and her work fell into obscurity for many years, but *Aves sin nido* is now considered an indispensable classic of the Peruvian canon. In Chapter 2, I argue that, when considered together and in light of the ideas expressed in her 1893 book of essays *Leyendas y recortes*, Matto de Turner’s novels constitute an assertion of the urgent need to reconsider Peruvian national identity in terms of the contributions of the Quechua people. Just as, for Glissant, the fact of creolization makes it impossible for

Caribbeans to believe in cultural exclusivity (see *Caribbean Discourse* 140-142), Matto de Turner's writings insist that the recognition of the inextricably intertwined destinies of the country's Indigenous, mestizo, Black, and *criollo* populations make it impossible to persist in a model of national identity that privileges European cultural and biological heritage to the exclusion of other identities. However, Matto de Turner's feminist and Indigenist advocacy had limited immediate impact due to the censorship of *Aves sin nido*, her excommunication and exile.

So severe was the exclusion of Matto de Turner's legacy that she was not even mentioned by the leading thinker of 1920s Peruvian indigenismo, José Mariátegui, in his reflections on Peruvian literature (Cornejo Polar, "Aves sin nido" 5). Mariátegui sought to redefine the so-called "Indian problem" in terms of class struggle rather than culture. At the same time, he aimed to overcome the impasse between centralism and regionalism—between Lima and the highlands—by appealing to a "new national spirit" present in the Liman avant-garde (Rama 101). Mariátegui's magazine *Amauta* published poetry, stories, and essays combining avant-garde aesthetics with Indigenous themes. Its pages, published from 1926 to 1930, included works by César Vallejo, Pablo Neruda, Diego Rivera, Jorge Luis Borges, and André Breton. Mariátegui was an outspoken critic of institutionalized racism in Peru, devoting his *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad Peruana* (1928, translated by Marjory Urquidy as *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* [1971]) to a revised understanding of the country's history and societal structure. In this book, considered his magnum opus, Mariátegui praises the collectivist order of the Inca Empire, denounces the exploitative abuses of the colonial economy and the persistence of feudalism under the republic, and criticizes the role of modern capital

in perpetuating inequality. Mariátegui interprets the so-called “Indian problem” as a matter of material deprivation originating in the unfair system of land ownership—the *latifundia* system whereby a handful of prominent families controlled vast areas of land, leaving many Indigenous people no choice but to toil as tenant farmers or miners with no opportunities for advancement.

Under the leadership of Mariátegui, a new generation of Andean writers forged the literary movement of indigenismo. These were mostly social realist novels depicting the abuses of the Indigenous at the hands of *criollo* landowners and the Church. Key works include Enrique López Albuja’s *Cuentos Andinos* (1920; *Andean Tales*), César Vallejo’s *El tungsteno* (1931; *Tungsten*), Jorge Icaza’s *Huasipungo* (1934), and Ciro Alegría’s *La serpiente de oro* (1935; *The Golden Serpent*) and *El mundo es ancho y ajeno* (1941; *Broad and Alien is the World*). Such works marked the 1920s and 1930s as a time of increasing consciousness of race and class issues in Peru, corresponding with the rise of the Marxist-Indigenist APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana – American Popular Revolutionary Alliance) party founded by Víctor Haya de la Torre.

Unfortunately, even the staunchest literary advocates for Indigenous rights neglected to recognize the important cultural contributions of native peoples to the national identity. Just as the Mexican reformer José Vasconcelos (as described in the next section) viewed the Indigenous contribution to Mexican identity in genetic rather than cultural terms, much of the Peruvian indigenista writing of the 1920s and 1930s seeks to denounce the mistreatment of the Quechua people but stops short of endorsing the Quechua worldview. As Rama observes, the first-generation Andean indigenistas represent a mestizo worldview, not an Indigenous one (96). In a manner reminiscent of

Vasconcelos's integrationist ambitions, "Mestizo culture in effect demanded the universal mestizo transformation of Andean society, even the remaining indigenous peoples whom they exalted but for whom they proposed a profound acculturation under mestizo guidance" (Rama 104). This indigenista movement was aligned with socialist ideas about universal brotherhood and modernization; what this modernizing, unifying framework overlooked was "the positive value of indigenous culture" (ibid. 106).

The Marxist indigenismo of Mariátegui and Haya de la Torre came under increasing scrutiny by Catholic writers Víctor Andrés Belaúnde (1883-1966) and José de la Riva Agüero (1885-1944), both of whom endorsed a unifying, hispanicist version of mestizaje. In his early career, Riva Agüero was a critic of the *criollo* elite, arguing for the abolition of serfdom and an end to abuse by landlords in his 1912 book *Paisajes Peruanos* ("Peruvian Landscapes") (Romero Meza 83). This contrasts with the staunchly anti-indigenista stance that Riva Agüero would adopt in his 1937 work *Por la verdad, la tradición y la patria* (*For Truth, Tradition, and Fatherland*), which emphasizes the Spanish legacy that assimilates the Indigenous element and converts it into the modern, Catholic, Hispanic nation of Peru (ibid. 83-84). For his part, Belaúnde a vision of hybrid national identity the 1943 essay collection *Peruanidad* ("Peruvianness"), in which he outlines a theory of "living synthesis," the idea that Peru is a synthesis that has been initiated but not completed, leading to a situation in which the country's destiny is to continue the process of fusion. According to Belaúnde, the Conquest brought about a five-fold transformation of Inca Peru: biological, economic, politico-social, cultural, and religious. This final aspect of the transformation has produced a "national soul" that is unified by the Catholic faith (ibid. 80). Both Riva Agüero and Belaúnde characterize

colonial occupation as a harmonious fusion of two civilizations (ibid. 81, 85) and insist on a form of mestizaje that unites the nation under Christianity and the Spanish language; for these reasons, Eddy Walter Romero Meza (2022) characterizes their ideology as one that excludes Indigenous and Afro-Peruvian identities in favor of a homogenizing mestizaje (90).

While these relatively conservative formulations of mestizo nationalism rejected the indigenistas' denunciations of colonialism, the two groups shared a view of Indigenous traditional beliefs as incompatible with modernity. This lack of cultural vindication represents the main difference between first-wave indigenismo and the neo-indigenismo of the 1950s and 1960s. In Peru, the most prominent practitioner of this neo-indigenismo was José María Arguedas. Through the use of an idiosyncratic version of the Spanish language inflected by Quechua syntactic and lexical forms, Arguedas sought to portray Quechua dialogue and internal monologue in a manner that would be accessible to monolingual Spanish-speaking readers. In the gritty portrayals of Andean life found in novels such as *Yawar Fiesta* (1941), *Los ríos profundos* (1958, translated as *Deep Rivers* by Frances Horning Barraclough [1978]), and *El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo* (published posthumously in 1971, translated by Frances Horning Barraclough as *The Fox from Up Above and the Fox from Down Below* [2000]), Arguedas took the indigenista genre in a direction that was much more informed by familiarity with Quechua culture than that which had come before. His penultimate novel *Todas las sangres* (1964; "All the Bloods") has never been translated into English. Angel Rama devotes a chapter of his book *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (1982, translated by David Frye as *Writing Across Cultures: Narrative Transculturation in Latin America* [2012]) to

Arguedas, identifying the Peruvian author as a primary exemplar of the principle of transculturation. Estelle Tarica argues in her book *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* (2008) that one of the central commonalities between the writing of José María Arguedas and that of Rosario Castellanos—the subject of chapter 3 of this dissertation—is captured by the idea of “intimate indigenismo” (xiii-xx). Both Arguedas and Castellanos write about Indigenous culture from a perspective of intimacy grounded in personal experience. In the chapters that follow, I expand on Tarica’s reading of Castellanos, which focuses on the Glissantian concept of entanglement, and also argue that similar claims can be made about both Clorinda Matto de Turner and Amalia Posso Figueroa. In these authors’ fictional writings, the intimacy of nurturance participates in the creolization of consciousness.

Mestizaje in Mexico

In order to describe how Castellanos creolizes Mexican mestizo nationalism, it is necessary to consider the historical, demographic, geographic, and political factors that have conspired to make Mexico home to one of Latin America’s most elaborately developed and consequential discourses of mestizaje. A very substantial Indigenous population at the time of conquest combined with colonial practices of intermarriage led to the early establishment of a large mestizo population. In contrast with Argentina, Uruguay and Chile, nineteenth-century efforts to “whiten” the population by encouraging European immigration were less vocal and less successful in Mexico. Perhaps most significantly, the ideas of indigeneity and mestizaje have long been associated with Mexican nationalism. In what follows, I trace the intellectual history of Mexican

discourses of hybrid national identity and their relationship to demographic and political realities, with the aim of establishing the insufficiency of Mexican mestizaje to account for the critical cultural pluralism that informs Rosario Castellanos's novel *Balún-Canán*, the primary object of analysis of Chapter 3.

Some of the factors that led to the complex relationship between biological and cultural definitions of mestizaje in the colonial Viceroyalty of New Spain (present-day Mexico) were also present in the viceroyalties of New Granada (present-day Colombia) and Peru. In the earliest days of Spanish settlement, the fact that very few Spanish women made the journey to the colonies led to a situation in which marriages and other unions—often non-consensual—between Spanish men and Indigenous women became commonplace (Sturzenegger-Benoist 96). The most widely known figure exemplifying native-Spanish union in early colonial New Spain is La Malinche (whose original name was Malintzín), a Nahuatl woman who served as an interpreter and advisor to the conquistador Hernán Cortés, and who later came to be viewed either negatively as a symbol of betrayal or positively as the mother of the Mexican mestizo nation (Townsend 2-3). As the generations passed, and the *criollo* population grew, the practice of Spanish men marrying Indigenous women declined in favor of *criolla* women, but people of different origins continued to marry or be born into the *criollo* caste, including the children of African slaves (Sturzenegger-Benoist 96). Therefore, many people who were considered *criollos* in the Spanish colonies were, in fact, of mixed race. Nevertheless, the distinction between *criollo* and mestizo continued to serve as a significant marker of social status.

The children resulting from intercourse between male Spanish colonists and their Indigenous wives and mistresses were frequently recognized and integrated into Spanish-American colonial society. In this context, there was an imperfect mapping between the social category of the *mestizo* and the reality of biological mixing. Regardless of their biological origins, the ruling classes of the early Spanish colonies were fundamentally friendly to the interests of Spain. Then, starting in the late sixteenth century, in response to a worrisome increase in numbers, the metropolitan authorities began to place increasing restrictions on the mestizo caste, creating tangible consequences for the somewhat artificial distinction between mestizos and *criollos*. This dissimulated a more fundamental conflict, which was between *criollos* and Peninsular Spaniards. Furthermore, because the Spanish colonial caste system was unevenly enforced depending on a person's economic circumstances, a wealthy person with both Spanish and Amerindian ancestry was apt to be considered a *criollo*, a poor one, a mestizo. In the eighteenth century, the colonial administration laid out a formal caste system defining the different racial combinations and their respective rights, but this also was mutable; it was possible to purchase the status of whiteness, and a high social position could efface a high level of mestizaje. In the nineteenth century, this caste system was abolished by all the new governments upon independence from Spain (Sturzenegger-Benoist 97-99).

By the turn of the nineteenth century, Mexico had a highly mixed population. In 1804, Alexander von Humboldt estimated the demographics of Mexico as follows: 2.5 million Indigenous, approximately 1 million white persons, nearly all of them Mexico-born *criollos*, 6,100 Black Africans, and 1.2 million "*castas de sangre mezclada*," mixed-race individuals of various combinations (Lafaye 29). In light of these figures, with white

persons outnumbered by nonwhite persons by a ratio of nearly four to one, the nonwhite population represented a perpetual threat to white economic and political supremacy not only by mere numbers, but also by the constant penetration of mestizos into the ranks of the state, threatening the alignment between caste and power.

Considering the demographic situation, the success of Mexico's War of Independence hinged on the insurrectionists' ability to recruit the participation of Indigenous and mestizo peasants. Following Napoleon's invasion of Spain in 1808 and the kidnapping of King Fernando VII, Mexican nationalist insurgents presented themselves as a new government promising better treatment for Mexico's Indigenous people (Ducey 430). Revolutionary leader Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla advocated for a rebellion by a multiethnic coalition of peasants against the colonial government, leading to the famous "El Grito" uprising of September 1810 (Noll 150-151). A series of letters of invitation successfully recruited peasant support for the revolutionary cause in villages throughout Mexico over the course of the year 1811 (Ducey 437-449). That same year, the priest and statesman José Eduardo de Cárdenas presented the document "Memorias en favor de la Provincia de Tabasco" ("Essays in Favor of the Province of Tabasco") at the Cortes de Cadiz, in which he rejected stereotypes of Indians as savages and defended their love of knowledge and capacity for reason (Cárdenas 38). Also in 1811, Cárdenas contributed to a collective document titled "Exposición de motivos de la guerra de independencia" ("Explanation of Reasons for the War of Independence"), condemning the numerous abuses and abjection of mestizos and Indigenous populations in Mexico and proposing possible solutions including free public education (Sosa 222). In the midst of the war, in the *Acta Solemne de la Declaración de Independencia de la América*

Septentrional (Solemn Act of Declaration of Independence of Northern America) of 1813, revolutionary leader José María Morelos decreed the abolition of slavery and of the caste system.

After Mexico's independence was finally recognized under the Plan de Iguala of 1821, the era of reconstruction and national consolidation saw a fracturing of interethnic solidarity and a rise in anti-Indigenous racism. A potent example of this breakdown is found in the revision of La Malinche's reputation, as she came to symbolize collaboration with Spain as a foreign, occupying force. For the first time, she was portrayed as a traitor to her people in the 1826 novel *Xicoténcatl* by an anonymous author (Townsend 2). Later in the nineteenth century, the image of the Indigenous as unreliable supporters of the national cause was reinforced in Francisco Pimental's 1864 essay *Memoria sobre las causas que han originado la situación actual de la raza indígena de México y medios para remediarla (Essay on the Causes that Produced the Current Situation of the Indigenous Race in Mexico and Ways to Remedy It)*. In this text, Pimental claims that "Indios" only join the military under duress and change their loyalties readily (Zermeño 303). According to Pimental's theories, the native peoples of Mexico were a race in the process of degradation but could be improved through mixing with whites (ibid. 304), making Pimental an advocate of *blanqueamiento*, a theme that the Mexican discourse of hybridity shares with the Peruvian and Colombian.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, the rise of European positivism (led by Auguste Comte and Edmund Spenser) and biological theories of race (advanced by thinkers such as Arthur de Gobineau) began to have a significant influence on Mexican philosophy. In his *El porvenir de las naciones hispanoamericanas (The Future of*

Hispanic-American Nations, first published in 1899), Francisco Bulnes sought to apply scientific rationalism to questions of government policy. In this text, Bulnes claims that there are three great races of humans, based on their diets: the race of wheat (i.e., Europeans), that of maize (Native Americans), and that of rice (Asians). Because wheat provides the necessary nutrition for optimal development, the “race of wheat” is “the only truly progressive race,” i.e., the only race that steadily improves itself (qtd. in Vargas 164). According to Bulnes, the “race of wheat” is superior in military arts and general health because their intellectual abilities are nourished with the most suitable diet; the superiority of the European bread-based diet is demonstrated by the facts of conquest and the ongoing subservience of Latin America to Europe (Vargas 165). Bulnes took a dim view of the “*indios*,” claiming that they only love four things: their idols, the land, personal freedom, and alcohol (ibid. 165).

Bulnes’s racializing theories were in keeping with prevailing ideas of his day about inheritance and biological determinism. According to Manuel Vargas (2009), the orthodox position in Latin America at the turn of the twentieth century regarding racial inheritance and change was fundamentally Lamarckian rather than Mendelian or Darwinian, particularly in the idea that traits acquired through habit could be transmitted to offspring (166). Vargas ascribes this intellectual situation to a general idealization of Paris as a cultural metropolis by Latin American cultural elites and the outsized influence of the French publishing industry, including a substantial sector devoted to translating French literary and scientific works into Spanish (167). Thinking in this Lamarckian framework, Bulnes believed that dietary habits could improve or contaminate a race, and for this reason advocated for the widespread adoption of the European diet but the

exclusion of alcohol; this quasi-eugenicist assimilationism supposedly had the power to improve and redeem the “inferior” races.

Bulnes’ ideas were forged in the context of the Porfiriato, an era of forceful government policies intended to promote social order and economic progress under Porfirio Díaz, Mexico’s last dictator prior to the 1910 Revolution. As the cohesion of the Porfiriato began to crumble, various theories began to emerge with the aim of reconfiguring the idea of Mexican national identity. One of the most prominent thinkers in the new wave of revolutionary approaches to the national question was Andrés Molina Enríquez, who asserted the need for more equitable land redistribution and the establishment of a fully mestizo nation (González Salinas 308). This idealization of the mestizo was not completely new, but rather owed an intellectual debt to nineteenth-century thinkers such as Vicente Riva Palacio and Justo Sierra (ibid. 309). In 1908, Molina Enríquez published his book *Los grandes problemas nacionales* (“The Great National Problems”), in which he claimed that state power should be vested entirely in the hands of the mestizo race, reasoning that this race represented the “strongest, most numerous, and most patriotic element” of Mexican society (quoted in González Salinas 309). Writing within the logic of social Darwinism so prevalent at that time, Molina claimed that both the Indigenous race and the white had certain advantages, but that it was necessary to transform this racial heterogeneity into unity through race mixing and cultural synthesis. These ideas contradicted Gobineau’s pseudoscientific doctrine insisting on the superiority of “pure” races, but rather than rejecting the idea of racial superiority per se, Molina merely substituted one of mestizo superiority (González Salinas 310).

In the wake of the Revolution of 1910, the Mexican intellectual elite began to reject scientific racism along with other forms of positivism; nevertheless, they remained mired in racially essentializing thinking. In 1920, after ten years of struggle, the Mexican Revolution finally gave way to the phase of reconstruction under the presidency of Álvaro Obregón. The new government established the Secretariat of Public Education, to be chaired by the philosopher José Vasconcelos (González Salinas 313). Together with anthropologist Manuel Gamio, Vasconcelos would act as the primary driver in the shift from a biological to a cultural conception of mestizaje (Zermeño 287).

Gamio rejected the idea that the Indigenous population was in a state of cultural underdevelopment, bringing a historical materialist critique to bear on the problem of Indigenous poverty, and claiming that this impoverishment was the result of socioeconomic conditions rather than racial inferiority. In his 1916 book *Forjando patria* (translated as *Forging a Nation* by Fernando Armstrong-Fumero), Gamio proposed three processes for assimilation intended to produce a mestizo nation: 1) racial blending; 2) convergence and blending of cultural phenomena; and 3) linguistic unification and economic equilibrium among social classes (González Salinas 311). According to Gamio's interpretation, the only way to improve living conditions for Mexico's Indigenous populations was to incorporate them into the national mainstream through assimilation. Gamio's theories represented a turn toward a concern for the wellbeing of living Indigenous people, but by insisting that their only hope for survival lay in dissolving their cultural distinctness into a homogenous national identity, these theories advocated for unity at the expense of difference.

Vasconcelos shared with Gamio the thesis of mestizo superiority. His book *La raza cósmica*, first published in 1927, conflates racial history with utopian metaphysics in the form of the following claims: there are four human races (white, yellow, red, and black); while no single race is superior to the others, each has its own particular traits which may be more or less conducive to domination depending on historical circumstances. According to Vasconcelos' cosmic framework, the present day is characterized by the ascendancy of the white race, accompanied by a struggle for control of that race's historical trajectory between Anglo-Saxon and Latino whites. Vasconcelos passionately asserted that it is important for the Latinos to win this struggle because they are more open to racial mixing, which is what is necessary to lay the groundwork for the fifth and final race, the "cosmic race" which will be a combination of the four prior races, bringing together all their best qualities into a superior synthesis. While Vasconcelos rejected the positivism prevalent among late nineteenth-century scientific racists such as Bulnés, Carlos Octavio Bunge, José Ingenieros, and others who sought to diagnose the political subjugation of Latin America to Europe as a consequence of racial traits, Vasconcelos nevertheless remained steeped in racial essentialism. *La raza cósmica* adds a layer of pro-hybrid metaphysical utopianism to the widespread biological determinism of the era. In his emphasis on essence, Vasconcelos reproduces the nineteenth-century racialist framework even while attempting to counter it with an endorsement of race mixing.

Furthermore, the particular version of cultural mestizaje that Vasconcelos endorsed was far from egalitarian. While he interpreted biological race-mixing to be the chief advantage of the Latin American people, destining them for ultimate triumph over

their Anglo rivals to the north, the cultural integration he advocated was meant to draw almost entirely on Spanish spirituality and worldview. The racial superiority of the mestizo, combined with the privileged geographic territory of Latin America, was propitious to mestizo ascendancy, but by Vasconcelos' reckoning, a further component was needed: spiritual development through education and initiation into high art and culture. To this end, he spearheaded the most ambitious educational campaign in Mexican history, focused mainly on vindicating Spanish heritage and Catholicism (González Salinas 313-314). Vasconcelos expressed admiration for conquistadores such as Hernán Cortés and claimed that Latin America represented a culmination of Spanish national identity in the sense that here in the New World, the old tribal distinctions of Castilian, Aragonese, Basque and so forth had blended into a uniform entity: "The Hispanic, as a homogenous and organized nationality, was only brought about in reality in the lands of the New World."¹⁶ For all his utopian visions of integration, Vasconcelos harbored some disdainful views on Indigenous culture, believing that admiration for the Indigenous past was part of a US-based plot to erode Spanish culture and expressing dismay that Mexico sent a copy of the iconic statue of Cuauhtémoc to the World's Fair of Rio de Janeiro in 1922 (González Salinas 314-316). In *La raza cósmica*, Vasconcelos asserts that the "Indian" has no avenue to the future except through modern culture in the form of "Latin" civilization (12).

Vasconcelos and Gamio were part of a broader post-Revolutionary wave of Mexican nationalism, which saw a general rejection of Porfirian theories of racial

¹⁶ "lo hispánico, como nacionalidad homogénea y organizada, solo vino a producirse en realidad, en las tierras del Nuevo Mundo." José Vasconcelos, *Breve historia de México* (Mexico: Continental, 1956) p. 533, quoted in González Salinas, 315.

inferiority, replacing them with an official orthodoxy of indigenismo based on professed reverence for Indigenous people coupled with policies of noncoercive integration (Knight 80). The central strategy for this integration was education, starting with the literacy campaign led by Vasconcelos and culminating in the policies of Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s. It was also characterized by a fetishization of pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures, and co-optation of Indigenous aesthetics into state institutions and elite culture. This integrationist indigenismo was instrumentalized in the aim of establishing political unity against local factionalism, particularly in Chiapas (ibid. 83).

With all this in mind, a picture begins to emerge of the Mexican discourse of mestizaje as an idea that is difficult to dissociate from the ideological and material circumstances under which it arose. Bulnes's Lamarckian theories suggest that in order to improve the supposedly debased lineage of the races of "rice" and "corn," what is needed is the adoption of the European diet, which is tantamount to a policy of cultural assimilation based on assumptions of white superiority. Compared to such farfetched, racist theories, the ideas of Vasconcelos appear to be relatively enlightened, and yet they still reproduce notions of biological determinism and ethnic essentialism, perpetuating the logic of social Darwinism despite their utopian metaphysics of hybridity. While Vasconcelos' interpretation of mestizaje incorporates a positive view of the genetic contribution of the Indigenous to the "cosmic race," it makes little room for an Indigenous component to national culture.

Thus, contrary to the Glissantian conception of creolization as a divergent process in a world of chaotic particularity, Mexican mestizaje is preoccupied with themes of convergence, synthesis, and transcendence. According to Glissant's framework, the

result of intercultural contact and exchange is an unpredictable, outward motion in which new and unprecedented cultural forms emerge through partially chaotic interactions of complex systems (“Making of the Americas” 81-83). This is a far cry from Vasconcelos’s dream of a cultural hybridity that would take the best aspects of each race’s essence to converge upon a new, unified social body propitious to harmony and progress by virtue of the superiority of hybrid specimens. The teleology of utopian mestizaje contrasts with creolization’s chaotic relationality of existing, interacting subjects and groups that retain their distinctness and opacity.

The idea of mestizaje continues to enjoy a high degree of cachet in Mexico, albeit in an evolved form more compatible with the indeterminacy of creolization. For example, it arises in the late twentieth-century writing of Gloria Anzaldúa in a version informed by developments in feminist, queer, and Indigenous-centered cultural theory. Anzaldúa’s concept of the “new mestiza” links the ambiguity of mestiza identity to a promise of emergence, pointing to the possibility of generating new ways of being. Culturally ambiguous and impossible to name, the new mestiza subsists in a state Anzaldúa associates with the Aztec goddess Coatlicue, involving an ambiguous suspension of categories, a way of being and moving between worlds without fully belonging to any of them, which opens the way to alternative modes of thinking. Anzaldúa’s interpretation of “the new mestiza” draws on Vasconcelos’ notions of racial hybridity while extending the principle of cross-pollination to the forging of a new “alien” consciousness endemic to the Borderlands.

As observed by Kris F. Sealey in her 2020 book *Creolizing the Nation*, this version of mestizo/a discourse bears significant compatibilities with the rhizomatic

thinking at the heart of Glissantian creolization: “*La mestiza* constantly has to shift out of habitual formations; from convergent thinking, analytical reasoning that tends to use rationality to move toward a single goal (a Western mode), to divergent thinking, characterized by movement away from set patterns and goals and toward a more whole perspective, one that includes rather than excludes” (Sealey 101). This emphasis on “divergent thinking” has its counterpart in the centrifugal characteristic of Glissantian creolization, emphasizing the unpredictability and spontaneity of the dynamics that emerge from intercultural contact.

Anzaldúa’s more contemporary feminist strand of mestiza discourse resonates with Glissant’s notion of “the other of Thought,” (as articulated in *Poetics of Relation* 154), when consciousness itself is creolized. According to Sealey, this alternative way of naming is “at the conceptual heart of a creolizing way” (116), the acquisition of a consciousness that recognizes the determinative power of historical location without using it to justify chauvinistic constructions of nationalism. Such a creolized consciousness would be more comfortable with ambiguity, embracing the relations of place, power, and community that have a bearing on the subject’s own identity, seeking liberation and connection without reproducing the essentializing logic that has sustained relations of subjugation. As I will argue in Chapter 3, this kind of transformation is a vital element of Rosario Castellanos’s novel *Balún-Canán*, reflected both in the book’s depiction of encounters with cultural otherness and in its challenge to Western categories of legitimacy.

Mestizaje and Blackness in Colombia

Unlike Mexico or Peru, Colombia has not engendered a major indigenista movement in literature or politics. While Colombia shares with these countries a substantial history of mestizo ascendancy, the discourse surrounding the phenomenon has been more frequently characterized by a whitening agenda. In Colombia, the project of establishing a culturally homogenous mestizo nation was integral to both the independence movements and the later reform movements that resulted in the Constitution of 1863. This was complicated by a stark regionalism that tended to obscure the contradictions of a mestizo republic. Differential patterns of settlement and economic development led to the de facto division of Colombia into broad geo-cultural regions: the “white-mestizo” interior highlands, the “Black” coasts (Atlantic to the north, Pacific to the west), and the “Indian” Amazonian lowlands (Wade 54). Overall, the settlement of Colombia followed a pattern more like that of Brazil than like that of Mexico or Peru, with a relatively rapid disintegration of the Indigenous population, a large number of African slaves, and high rates of manumission and race mixing producing a substantial population of free people of color (ibid. 54-55). Indeed, Glissant himself considers the coastal regions of Colombia as part of “plantation America,” a loosely defined region characterized by large Black populations and a history of creolizing tendencies (“Making of the Americas” 81).

The first Spanish foothold in Colombia was on the northerly Caribbean Coast, with the establishment of permanent ports at Cartagena and Santa Marta. However, this location was prone to attack by English pirates, the climate was unfavorable (Germán Espinosa repeatedly alludes to the “miasma” of warm, malarial mist blanketing colonial

Cartagena in his 1982 novel *La tejedora de coronas*), and the soil was poor (Wade 55). The Spanish invaders found a more amenable situation in the Andean highlands, and white people began settling mainly in the provinces of Tunja and Santa Fe de Bogotá. Enslaved Black people were brought primarily to the Caribbean coast and the gold mining districts of the Pacific Coast, particularly Antioquia and Chocó. Processes of race blending varied greatly from one region to another, with more Black-Indigenous mixture in the Caribbean region and in Antioquia, greater white-Indigenous mixing in the highlands, a relatively homogenous Black population on the Pacific Coast, and a predominantly Indigenous population remaining in the Amazon (Wade 56-58).

As in much of the Americas, the disintegration of Colombia's Indigenous populations was propelled by parallel processes of genocide, dispossession, and disease. The colonizers faced fierce resistance on the part of the Wayuu people native to the Guajira Peninsula at the northernmost point of present-day Colombia, who have retained their distinctive cultural identity to the present day. The Wayuu were never subjugated by the Spanish, and engaged in repeated rebellions over the course of the eighteenth century, culminating in a major armed insurrection in 1769. When colonial troops attacked the native populations of the northern tip of the peninsula, a group of settlers took advantage of the disruption to kidnap 22 Indigenous men to build fortifications in Cartagena. This led the local native communities to join forces in a series of attacks on colonists, ambushing troops and burning churches and ranches, taking control of several villages and all the strategic locations surrounding the city of Riohacha (Polo Acuña 190-195). Factors in the Guajira insurrection include economic disputes over livestock trading rights, forbidden trading of arms and liquor by natives, and cultural conflicts involving

attempts by Church authorities to control the natives' marriage practices and drinking ceremonies (Polo Acuña 205-208). The Wayuu have gone on to represent a complicating element for the prospect of Colombian mestizo nationalism, both due to their resistance to assimilation and to their practice of incorporating mixed-race *zambos*, *mulatos*, and *pardos* into their own culture through matrilineal descent (Polo Acuña 232).¹⁷

Another major conflict with racial factors and consequences was the Comunero rebellion of 1781. Just as in Peru, the increased taxes brought about by the Bourbon reforms led to a wave of discontent in the Viceroyalty of New Granada (McFarlane 323-324). This produced a stronger sense of solidarity between certain members of the *criollo* elite and their Black, Indian and mestizo neighbors, with increasing hostility toward the Spanish colonial authorities (McFarlane 315). Under the leadership of Juan Francisco Berbeo, rebels sought to unify the common people and rally a militia to attack Bogotá. After defeating loyalist soldiers from Bogotá, the rebels signed a truce with the Spanish, which the Spanish subsequently nullified, sending reinforcements to quash the rebellion (Loy 237). Considering its contemporaneity with the Túpac Amaru II rebellion in Peru, the Comunero rebellion represents a key moment when Spain very nearly lost its grip on colonial power in South America, presaging the Bolivarian revolutions that would come thirty years later.

The strong regional divisions that had characterized colonial Colombia remained an impediment to unification during the early years of the republic. The aftermath of independence in 1810 saw the Civil War between Centralists and Federalists (1812-

¹⁷ The term “zambo” refers to a person of mixed African and Indigenous descent; the term “mulato,” to one of mixed African and European descent, and the term “pardo” to one of triracial African, European, and Indigenous descent.

1815), with Simon Bolívar leading soldiers in support of Federalist forces based in Tunja against Centralists based in Cundinamarca; the outcome of this civil war was the reconquest of New Granada by Spain. After Bolívar defied the odds to liberate New Granada in 1819, the Republic of Colombia (now commonly known as Gran Colombia to distinguish it from the present-day Republic of Colombia) was declared, a vast agglomeration including the former Viceroyalty of New Granada as well as the Captaincy General of Venezuela, the Royal Audience of Quito and the Government of Guayaquil (that is, covering all of northwestern South America, including present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama, plus parts of Peru, Brazil, and Guyana) (Martínez Garnica 145). The centralist government of Gran Colombia faced constant pressures from regionalist, federalist, and separatist movements until it dissolved in the early 1830s.

The next national formation, the Republic of New Granada (1831-1858), was characterized by tensions between conservative Catholic centralists and liberal, secular federalists. When the government of José Ignacio de Márquez passed a law that would eliminate all convents and monasteries with fewer than eight clergy, with the aim of redirecting the resources toward public schools, religious leaders and local caudillos led a rebellion amounting to civil war, the conflict known as the Guerra de los Supremos (1839-1842) (Santamaría Lambas 3-5). A decade later, when President José Hilario López enacted liberal reforms including emancipating Black slaves, expelling Jesuits, eliminating the death penalty and protecting press freedom, a group of conservative landowners from Cauca fomented a rebellion resulting in the Civil War of 1851 (ibid. 5-6). The Centralist-Federalist divide erupted once more in the Guerra Magna of 1860-

1862, resulting in a new liberal Constitution of 1863 and the declaration of a federal state, the United States of Colombia (ibid. 6-8).

Over the course of the violent nineteenth century, the ruling elites did not hide their desire to whiten the general population. In 1824, the British consul observed that “Those in power [...] feel the full importance of the expediency of inviting Europeans to find homes in Colombia [...] where their descendants must improve the moral and physical properties of the Colombians” (Humphreys 267, qtd. in Wade 13). The liberal immigration laws passed in 1823 were intended to encourage white immigration with the hope of outnumbering nonwhite people and preventing race warfare (Wade 13). More enduring concerns, however, focused on economic progress and national consolidation, purposes for which Black Colombians were viewed as poor material.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, there was a marked increase in studies examining the country’s social and racial characteristics, reflected in the production of travel chronicles, *costumbrista* literature, and historical essays by Colombia’s *criollo* elites (d’Allemand 46). An 1850s commission on national development called the Comisión Corográfica yielded reports referring to the Black people of Chocó as too lazy and shameless to make a positive contribution to the country (Wade 13). The desire for progress, coupled with racist attitudes about Black and Indigenous primitivism, led thinkers such as José Eusebio Caro and José María Samper to dream of the white race absorbing and destroying the others. In his travelogues and reflections on social conditions in Colombia, Samper sought to conceptualize the paradigm of mestizaje as a civilizing and democratizing force (d’Allemand 47). Influenced by the Colombian history of racial discourse, the findings of the Comisión

Corográfica, the totalizing dichotomy of civilization and barbarism advanced by the Argentinian writer and statesman Domingo Sarmiento, and theories of racial determinism gaining currency in Europe through the work of Arthur de Gobineau, Samper attempted to inscribe the particularities of Colombian racial demographics in a grand theory of human progress (d'Allemand 52). Unlike the French scientific racist Gobineau, who viewed all miscegenation as a degenerating threat to racial purity, Samper endorsed whitening mestizaje as a civilizing influence. In his 1861 “Ensayo sobre las revoluciones políticas y la condición social de las repúblicas colombianas” (“Essay on Political Revolutions and Social Conditions of the Colombian Republics”), Samper construed mestizaje as a founding principle of democracy, even while excluding *zambos*, Indigenous and Black people from the national civilizing project (d'Allemand 55-56).

The problems of uneven development across racialized regions combined with eugenicist ideas of population “improvement” through whitening continued to characterize Colombian efforts toward national consolidation in the early twentieth century. Laureano Gómez, who would go on to serve as president from 1949 to 1953, claimed in 1928: “Our race comes from the mixture of Spaniards, Indians and blacks. The latter two flows of heritage are marks of complete inferiority. It is in whatever we have been able to inherit from the Spanish spirit that we must look for the guiding lines of the contemporary Colombian character” (cited in Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixture* 15). The entrenched conservative ruling class had the power to translate such views into policies favorable to white *criollos* and acculturated mestizos. The concentration of power in the white-mestizo highlands, combined with the enduring conditions of isolation and underdevelopment in Chocó and Amazonia, produced a situation in which

proponents of racial, biological, and environmental determinism could point to conditions of poverty, misery, and disease as evidence of the “degeneracy” of Black and Indigenous people. The relative wealth and perceived superior piety and industriousness of Bogotá, Medellín, and even Cartagena contributed to the Colombian tendency to equate progress with a whitening form of mestizaje. Unlike in Peru or Mexico, advocates of indigeneity in Colombia could not point to major past civilizations to rival the Inca or Aztecs. Even still, in early twentieth-century discourse, Colombia’s Indigenous people come out better than the Black population, whom some racist commentators considered simply irredeemable.

In the Colombian context, it appears all the more urgent to add nuance to the idea of mestizaje by contrasting it with the ideas of Glissantian creolization. If Colombian mestizaje has been predominantly conceived as a way of “improving” society by whitening the population (both physically and culturally), it cannot serve as a viable framework for interpreting the positive contributions of Black (and, for that matter, Indigenous) populations to the national culture. While the mestizaje of Vasconcelos, despite its limitations, lends itself to a vindication of marginalized identities in the hands of Gloria Anzaldúa, it is difficult to imagine such a redeeming deployment of thinkers like Samper or Gómez. Furthermore, the existence of a substantial Black population in Colombia calls for an account of the kind of neoculturation that emerges from the rupture of the Middle Passage, a distinctly Afro-diasporic notion of cultural development. Latin American discourses of mestizaje have often failed to take Blackness into consideration as a factor in cultural influence, exchange, and progress. With these theoretical

distinctions in mind, in Chapter 4, I perform a creolizing reading of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* by contemporary Colombian author Amalialú Posso Figueroa.

Transculturation

The term *transculturación* was coined in 1940 by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his book *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*. In this work, Ortiz justifies his use of the neologism “transculturation” as an alternative to “acculturation” based on the insight that “the process of transition from one culture to another does not consist merely in acquiring another culture,” but also necessarily involves the violent loss and uprooting of previous culture (i.e., “deculturation”) and the creation of new cultural phenomena, i.e. “neoculturation” (location 1980). Thus, Ortiz’s concept of transculturation bears significant similarities to Glissant’s notion of creolization: an acknowledgement of foundational violence and destruction, a recognition of innovations that are not mere syntheses. However, unlike Glissant, Ortiz also perpetuates positivistic assumptions that conceive of societal evolution in terms of a presumed universal axis of progression from “primitivity” to “modernity.”

To wit, in his analysis of the evolution of Cuban society, Ortiz seems to assume such a linear notion of human progress. For example, in describing the effects of the Spanish conquest on the Indigenous, he writes, “At one bound the bridge between the drowsing stone ages and the wide-awake Renaissance was spanned” (location 1936). He reinforces this linear view when comparing the states of various cultures from Africa to those of Indigenous Caribbeans at the time of the initiation of the slave trade: “[The African slaves] brought with them their diverse cultures, some as primitive as that of the

[Indigenous Caribbean] Ciboneys, others in a state of advanced barbarism like that of the Tainos” (location 1956). This view of progress contrasts with the interpretation that can be detected in Glissant’s work, such as when he describes Shakespeare’s character Caliban not in terms of primitivism but rather in terms of the enduring principles of lyricism and politics. For Glissant, there is a parallel between the way Caliban challenges Prospero’s legitimacy and the way lyricism and politics supersede epic and tragedy once these have run their course (*Poetics of Relation* 54). Considering that, in this view, the lyric and the political have been active since “the beginnings of time,” this supersession implies a cyclicity that is incompatible with a linear concept of progress.

Different interpreters of Ortiz’s work have emphasized the cataclysmic aspects of the concept. Gustavo Pérez Firmat describes it as follows: “More than a comprehensive rubric for the sum or result of culture contact, transculturation is the name for the collision of cultures, for that interval between deculturation and neoculturation that defines a vernacular culture in its formative phase,” designating “the fermentation and turmoil that *precedes* synthesis” (23, italics original). Gareth Williams describes transculturation as an “intellectual desire firmly rooted within modern processes of nation-state and national culture formation” (23-24). For Williams, transculturation is not so much a synthesis of cultures but a complex dynamic process of heterogeneous and unpredictable interactions, with possible destabilizing effects on both the cultural and the individual level. Williams describes it as a “profoundly ambivalent period of turmoil and of potential transformation that, through the achievement of synthesis, can put an effective end to the cultural upheaval of transculturation itself” (25-26). Williams evokes a notion of transculturation as morally and politically ambivalent, potentially cataclysmic,

possibly serving as the “underlying telos for the fabrication of cultural and social hegemonies” or, conversely, denoting “the anarchic instability of a world of signification beyond hegemony; the chaos of subaltern ‘worldings’ that cannot be incorporated into hegemony’s systems of signification” (Williams 26). This latter version of transculturation bears similarities to Glissant’s concepts of *chaos-monde* and *Tout-monde*, where creolized world-making processes yield a sense of totality that is not reducible to coherence.

The most thorough deployment of the term “transculturation” in the literary sphere is found in the work of Uruguayan critic Angel Rama, particularly in his 1982 book *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina*. Drawing on Ortiz’s definitions, Rama develops a theory of literary transculturation specific to Latin America: the current culture is a “product of long-term transculturation and in constant evolution,” involving the persistence of longstanding, idiosyncratic values, but also a “creative energy that propels it forward” (19). This creative capacity is the evidence that Latin American culture is part of a lively society, with the most complex forms found deep in the hinterlands, the remote areas which are sometimes influenced directly by foreign centers of civilization, but more often by the national capital. Rama proposes that Ortiz’s concept needs some adjustments before being applied to literary works. According to Ortiz’s framework, transculturation is a process with three moments: partial deculturation, incorporation of elements from a foreign culture, and mending culture using surviving elements from the original culture and elements from outside. Rama argues that this schema does not make enough room for the creative selectivity of dynamic cultures, which tend to pick and choose among the possible influences from foreign contributions.

On this point, Rama's notion of transculturation is compatible with Glissant's notion of agentive synthesis.

These considerations point to some fundamental similarities and nuanced differences between transculturation and Glissant's creolization. The similarities include an emphasis on both the destructive effects of cultural contact and the dynamic, creative responses resulting in neoculturation. The main differences between the two concepts lie in the aforementioned conflicting views on the linearity of human progress and Glissant's view of subjectivity. The latter is conceived in Glissant's writing as dynamic and multiple rather than unified and coherent, and elaborated through a series of related ideas: errant thinking, rhizomatic or archipelagic connections, *chaos-monde* and *Tout-monde*, entanglement, opacity, and Relation. While Glissant shares Rama's interest in applying a theory of cultural hybridity to the analysis of literary writing, their approaches to the task are completely different. Rama uses a witty but otherwise straightforward literary analysis informed by an account of historical events and trends, rarely pushing the boundaries of language the way Glissant does. In Glissant's poetic approach to cultural analysis, many terms are invented, while others are subjected to reconsideration, producing a series of working definitions in a lexicon that serves as a scaffold for his idiosyncratic poetics of Relation. By coupling his claims about culture with epistemological supplements—"archipelagic thinking," "thought of the Other," and so forth—Glissant proposes much more than mere literary analysis. In this sense, transculturation has remained limited to designating a conceptual tool, while creolization has come to be associated with an accompanying set of claims about time, subjectivity, and Relation.

Rama's framework of transculturation offers a useful tool for describing how the traditional and regionalist strands of Latin American literature have responded to modernizing influences from metropolitan centers. It is less well suited to the task of explaining the influence exerted on mainstream, national cultures by oppressed and minority values. Glissant argues that "the world is creolizing," that "today's human communities are engaging in the difficult process of giving up [...] the conviction that the identity of a being is valid and recognizable only if it excludes the identity of all other possible beings" (*Poetics of Diversity* 6). This is one way of articulating the abandonment of hegemonic, atavistic thinking in favor of composite thinking, i.e., the creolization of values. In my chapters on Clorinda Matto de Turner, Rosario Castellanos, and Amalia Posso Figueroa, I will argue that these authors enact a creolizing transformation of national values through the incorporation of Indigenous and Black constructs of subjectivity, using the theme of nurture kinship as a means of relativizing Western notions of selfhood, filiation, and ultimately, national belonging.

Extrapolating creolization: prospects and caveats

There are a number of reasons to be wary of the risks of oversimplification when attempting to extrapolate an ostensibly culturally specific phenomenon such as creolization to spheres outside its original context. It can be argued that it is important to restrict the notion of creolization to situations involving Creole languages and the emergence of new cultures from the ruptures involved in the Middle Passage. As Dominique Chancé points out, those who use the term "creolization" are "often unaware of the most basic scientific principles of linguistic theories, favoring instead a

phantasmatic or mythic vision” (*Creolization of Theory* 266). Some argue that the untethering of creolization as a cultural theory from its origin in the linguistic domain incurs undue risks of overextended metaphors. In his 2006 essay “Creolization and Its Discontents,” Stephen Palmié expresses his apprehensions about the metaphors of creolization, insisting on its historically and regionally specific nature. However, as Lionnet and Shih argue, “all life stories of theoretical concepts do begin as regional concepts; they are all first historically and contextually specific before they become widely disseminated, applied, or assumed to be universal” (*Creolization of Theory* 23).

This fraught nexus between particular origins and general principles is indicative of the complexity of the problem of extrapolation. For Glissant, Relation is not so much a matter of systematic theory as one of aesthetics or poetics. Archipelagic thinking derives from the Caribbean’s particular “geography of reason” (Drabinski 139): the islands, separated from one another by expanses of water, lend themselves metaphorically to a view of knowledge as iterative and exceptional, pockets of recognition in the sea of the unknowable. The idea of the “geography of reason” corresponds to an attitude of epistemological humility, recognizing the specificity of discourse, the inextricable link between theory and context, and thus the futility of aspirations to universalism. As Glissant puts it, “creolization is always baroque,” opposed to the classical spirit whereby a culture “proposes its particular values as universal values” (*Poetics of Diversity* 30-31). There is a challenge to squaring this anti-universalism with the alleged generalization of processes of creolization. One solution to this apparent contradiction lies in the acknowledgement of the phenomenon of partial creolization, the idea that processes of

creolization can occur simultaneously with atavistic tendencies, with the poetics of Relation partially counteracted by processes of retrenchment.

Other critics caution against overemphasizing the parallels between *mestizaje* and creolization. In a 2013 article, Odina Sturzenegger-Benoist considers the extent of creolization in the Spanish American world. Sturzenegger-Benoist's hypothesis is that a sense of place rather than a sense of cultural hybridity has been the prevailing factor in Latin American identity formation, and therefore the term "creolization" would be misleading if extrapolated to the Spanish-American literary sphere. Similarly, Rama, the preeminent thinker of narrative transculturation, emphasizes that the quest for roots was never as important in Latin American literature as the quest for independence, originality, and representation, all values that are firmly situated in a sense of place. However, an analysis of that which is creolizing in those processes and formations that have conventionally been labelled as "*mestizaje*" need not come at the expense of local particularity. On the contrary, by describing the Glissantian elements of the primary texts, the present research aims to recognize cultural processes that risk being obscured when considered exclusively through frameworks of *mestizaje* and *indigenismo*. If the idea of creolization can indeed be deemed applicable to such contexts as Chiapas, Lima, or Chocó, it must be kept in mind that it manifests differently in each of these places.

One problem that arises with discourses of hybridity is the difficulty of separating notions of cultural synthesis from notions of biological crossbreeding. The very idea of "*mestizaje/métissage*" is fundamentally imbued with biological connotations, which are based on controversial notions of biological race. "The popular intuition," Sturzenegger-Benoist argues, "...only speaks of *métissage* with regard to the crossing of individuals

with manifest physical differences, which reflects the fact that it does not manage to go beyond the notion of race to explain *métissage*” (92). If race itself is an illusion and a social construct, how can any discourse founded on the assumption of its fundamental reality be defended as intellectually honest or politically desirable? Renowned Peruvian literary scholar Antonio Cornejo Polar addresses some of these concerns in his essay “Mestizaje e hibridez: los riesgos de las metáforas” (“Mestizaje and Hybridity: The Risks of Metaphors”). Cornejo Polar accuses mestizaje of being the most deceptive idea in Latin American culture and literature, saying that it offers harmonious images of what is in fact a brutal history (7-8). He also criticizes the idea of transculturation as just another word for mestizaje; according to Cornejo Polar, a more appropriate master concept for understanding Andean literature would be “heterogeneity.” In this, Cornejo seems to take a stance similar to that of Aimé Césaire, who wrote in his *Discours sur le colonialisme* that no contact between colonizer and colonized has occurred, implying that the history of colonization has only brought about conflict and oppression, not a meaningful cultural encounter. The Glissantian view points to a different conclusion, indicating a way out of the apparent impasse between reductive discourses of hybridity and theories of insurmountable incommensurability. This third way is the way of Relation, the idea of intercultural mutual influence as a set of endlessly productive processes and flows, characterized not only by conflicts, ruptures, and oppressions, but also by creativity, growth, and coalitions. This approach is distinct from mestizaje in its rejection of essentialism and resistance to reductive notions of fusion.

Other possible caveats arise with regard to the relevance of concepts of cultural hybridity to actual identities as measured by self-perception. According to Sturzenegger-

Benoist's analysis, Mexico is the only Spanish American country where identification with being *mestizo* is a prominent feature of the national imaginary. Sturzenegger-Benoist claims that elsewhere, the term is seen as a relic of the colonial era, absent from popular discourse. However, there are reasons to be skeptical of this claim. In fact, the 2018 census found that 60% of all Peruvians consider themselves mestizos ("Censo" 2018). Of course, by its very nature, the extent of cultural mestizaje, and its distinction from processes of appropriation and assimilation, is difficult to quantify. Bonniol defines a society that views itself as mestizo as one characterized by "the fact of having preserved the memory of [its] different ancestries, recorded in the genealogical trajectory of which individuals are the culminating point" (cited in Sturzenegger-Benoist 104). This characteristic is, in Sturzenegger-Benoist's view, present in the societies of the francophone Antilles but absent from all Latin American societies except Mexico. According to this logic, in most of Latin America, sociological discourses of mestizaje would be making claims that are not relevant to the lived experience of individuals. However, this notion is based on the overgeneralization that the concept is not relevant to most contemporary people throughout the entire Spanish-American sphere. This claim obfuscates the complexity of the matter: in certain manifestations, mestizaje preserves Indigenous dignity through the transformations resulting from contact; however, in other manifestations, it has impelled policies of assimilation as well as policies that benefit the mestizo caste or class to the disadvantage of the Indigenous, as has been the case in much of central America, where the term *ladino* applies to land-owning mestizos whose abuses are documented in the works of Castellanos for Chiapas and Rigoberta Menchú for Guatemala, and in Ecuador where mestizo nationalist discourse exerts cultural hegemony

at the expense of Indigenous identities. Indeed, in Ecuador, a history of racial mystification has led to a useful clarification: the Saraguro Indigenous politician Luis Macas has asserted that being Indigenous does not involve merely having a certain genetic heritage or language, but rather a sense of belonging to a historically defined group (Beck and Mijeski 123). This criterion of active engagement and belonging resonates with Bonniol's claim that bicultural memory is an essential component of mestizo identity. But, as suggested above, it seems necessary to distinguish between at least two strands of mestizo discourse: that which pursues unification and homogenization, as represented by Vasconcelos' pan-American *mestizaje*, and that which embraces difference and ambiguity, as expressed by Anzaldúa's concept of the new *mestiza*.

With these distinctions in mind, we are ready to return to the question: under what circumstances can Latin American *mestizaje* or transculturation be said to qualify as forms of Glissantian creolization? Following Sealey's framework as described in *Creolizing the Nation*, creolization is tied to open notions of identity constructed through (rather than despite or against) difference. According to Sealey's analysis, the key to Glissant's way of thinking is in the distinction between *chaos-monde* and *Tout-monde*; both of these terms describe modes of plurality, but the latter represents a unifying perspective. However, this totality is not the same unification as that which is found in Western ontological thinking (characteristic of both Vasconcelos' mestizo utopianism and Mariátegui's socialist indigenism). It is a totality that values rhizomatic connections over root identity, archipelagic thinking over continentalism, errantry over invasion. On an epistemological level, Glissantian creolization does not seek to describe cultural

phenomena in order to control them, and this abandonment of the Western impulse to control reality by rendering it transparent to analysis may appear contrary to received academic ideas about the importance of objectivity. One possible solution to this methodological challenge could be through a dialogic, translational approach to cultural hybridity. In this spirit, this research culminates in the proposal of a collaborative, interactive approach to the translation of Amalialú Posso Figueroa's writing, wherein I engage directly with the author and my collaborator Shanta Lee in the active production of knowledge using the alternative ways of naming that Sealey describes as a hallmark of the creolizing way (116).

In order for any given process of transculturation to qualify as Glissantian creolization, certain minimum criteria must be met: 1) there must be some preservation of cultural elements from various cultures;¹⁸ 2) there must be cultural innovation that goes beyond mere synthesis or syncretism; the results of this neo-culturation are unpredictable; 3) there must be a recognition of the value of difference as a cultural good in itself. This is the principle that Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant refer to as "*diversalité*" and which Glissant alludes to in his invocations of "the other of Thought." With these criteria in mind, it appears that much of the transculturation actually observable in Latin American literature, with recurrent emphasis on modernization, assimilation, and unification, does not qualify as creolization. However, various cultural manifestations in Spanish America do fulfill the basic criteria necessary to qualify as Glissantian creolization: preservation of traces, the right to opacity, centrifugal motion, celebration of difference. Some of the Hispanophone literature of the twentieth century

¹⁸ "Creolization is not a fusion, it requires that each component persist, even if it is already changing." (*Treatise on the Whole World* 210)

offers depictions of creolized consciousness involving a genuine engagement with and vindication of Indigenous worldviews. For example, Gabriela Mistral's *Poema de Chile* is informed by an animistic worldview that seems to be a synthesis of Franciscan attitudes about non-human animals and Quechuan notions of *wak'as* (natural objects endowed with souls) and *kamaken* (communion with nature). Like the three authors at the center of this research, Mistral was preoccupied with the theme of nurturing and used it as a means of challenging Western patriarchy.

As Glissant writes, "Perhaps creolization is becoming one of our present-day goals" (*Poetics of Relation* 84). If creolization becomes a goal, that implies its employment as a set of values around which to organize political effort. As Bernabé et al put it in their *Eloge à la créolité*, "The world is evolving into a state of Creoleness" (902). This statement implies the possibility of identifying creolizing processes outside of the Caribbean context. These two different views of the possibilities for extrapolating the insights of creolization—one corresponding to activist cultural politics, the other to unintentional and possibly inevitable cultural processes—are not incommensurable. While various instances of cross-cultural contact may involve unintentional processes of creolization, naming them as such has political consequences. In the case studies examined in the chapters that follow, the description of creolizing tendencies in Spanish American literature is inseparable from an understanding of creolization as a political project, a groundwork for a coalitional politics.

CHAPTER 2

AGENTIVE SYNTHESIS IN CLORINDA MATTO DE TURNER'S *AVES SIN NIDO* AND *HERENCIA*

In 1889, Peruvian author Clorinda Matto de Turner published her first novel, *Aves sin nido*. Six years later, in 1895, she published a sequel, *Herencia*, shortly before she was forced into exile by dire political circumstances including the ransacking of her home and small press.¹⁹ These two books form a series depicting the relationship between a white bourgeois couple, Lucía and Fernando Marín, and their adopted daughter Margarita, following the death of the girl's Indigenous parents. These novels respond to the crisis of Peruvian national identity incurred by internal factionalism and the War of the Pacific by criticizing white cultural dominance, endorsing cultural hybridity, and placing women and girls at the center of the narrative. In this sense, Matto de Turner's fiction represents an early gesture in the direction of multicultural feminism as an axis of social change in Latin American literature. Matto de Turner's fiction is generally regarded as a precursor to Peruvian literary indigenismo, which reached its apogee in the 1920s and 1930s.²⁰ Like that movement, Matto's work is both recognized for its well-intentioned advocacy on behalf of Indigenous people and criticized for its paternalistic,

¹⁹ Thomas Ward (2002) describes how Matto de Turner's home and publishing house were destroyed by supporters of Nicolás de Piérola during an 1895 coup d'état against President Andrés Avelino Cáceres, whom Matto had supported (402).

²⁰ Scholars of Latin American literature generally classify works by white authors depicting Indigenous people into two distinct genres: indigenismo and indianismo. While indianismo is reserved for nineteenth-century romantic works featuring exotic, fetishized natives, indigenismo refers to twentieth-century realist novels denouncing their exploitation by whites and mestizos. Fernando Arribas García (1991) provides a summary of the debate which occurred in the 1960s on how best to classify *Aves sin nido*, involving scholars such as Enrique Anderson Imbert and Commetta Manzoni who consider it the founding work of indigenismo and others such as Tomás G. Escajadillo who describe it as a work of romantic indianismo (65-66).

assimilationist approach to cultural difference. As Estelle Tarica points out, indigenismo was a multifaceted movement, with some versions positing Indigenous people as the nation's past but excluding their culture from its future, and other versions that recognized the coevalness of Indigenous and non-Indigenous citizens (2). The discourse of indigenismo became indispensable to that of mestizo nationalism in the Andes, construing the ideal national subject as a person who combines European and Indigenous roots through what Nancy Stepan calls "constructive miscegenation" (cited in Tarica 3). By presenting the mestiza character Margarita as the ideal national subject, Matto de Turner advocates for the acceptance of white-Indigenous race mixing as a constitutive element of national identity. While Matto's work participates in the discourse of Andean mestizaje, there are conceptual features of the twentieth-century francophone Caribbean discourse of creolization that illuminate aspects of her writing, particularly in terms of the role of creative self-definition in the constitution of the culturally hybrid subject.

Critics such as Antonio Cornejo Polar (2017) and Francisco Rodríguez Cascante (2013) have accused Matto de Turner of engaging in a retrograde politics of acculturation of the sort associated with hegemonic mestizaje. As discussed in the previous chapter, particularly the section on José de la Riva Agüero and Víctor Andrés Belaúnde, there has been a fraught relationship between Peruvian mestizaje and assimilationist politics. For the purposes of this chapter, the most important distinction between Glissantian creolization and mestizo nationalism lies in the stance on the value of the preservation of difference. While mestizaje tends to promote a convergent model of cultural mixing, resulting in the extension of sameness through hybridity, Glissantian creolization conceives of cultural mixing in terms of the preservation of difference and the creative

development of new cultural forms through contact. In the present chapter, I argue that Matto de Turner's Margarita series complicates the idea of assimilation by challenging core values of the dominant white culture on the grounds of values drawn from Quechua culture. Simultaneously a repository of those traditional values and a creative agent in the production of a new, hybrid Peruvian culture, the orphaned mestiza protagonist Margarita acts as an intercessor in a hypothetical opening of *criollo* (i.e., white, Spanish) culture to Quechua influences. Furthermore, by positioning Margarita as an Indigenous peasant girl given access to an elite liberal education with an emphasis on international culture, Matto's work goes beyond mere national integration to conceive of a cosmopolitan engagement between a hybrid Peruvian identity and world cultural formations.

Clorinda Matto de Turner wrote only three novels: *Aves sin nido*, *Indole*, and *Herencia*. All were composed in the period of postwar reconstruction (1884-1895) following Peru's defeat by Chile in the War of the Pacific. This was a period of intense national introspection and rapid social change in Peru. While the whole nineteenth century had been characterized by conflict—a protracted war of independence, border wars with Bolivia and Colombia, civil wars in 1834 and 1843-1844, war with Ecuador in the late 1850s—the War of the Pacific (1879-1883) and the corresponding loss of territory were particularly destabilizing for Peruvians, bringing racial tensions and class resentments to the surface.²¹ These resentments had been seething for a long time. In the Andes, the basic economic structure of extensive landholding by white and mestizo elites, a legacy of the colonial era, had persisted without significant reform since independence

²¹ See Chambers (2011) 259-262 for an account of political instability and conflict in nineteenth-century Peru. See Rama 89-90 for a description of the impact of the War of the Pacific on the development of social criticism in late nineteenth-century Lima.

from Spain in 1821.²² Many Indigenous Peruvians were locked in debt bondage to work for the large haciendas, where they were subject to various abuses. The Catholic Church wielded enormous power over people's personal lives, reinforcing a highly conservative, rigid power structure in the remote highland villages.²³ A very stark center-periphery dynamic was established between the modernizing coastal metropolis of Lima and the rural Andes and Amazon regions. By the late nineteenth century, Lima was undergoing rapid changes as foreign and domestic capital was concentrating economic activity in developing urban industries, and large numbers of poor rural Indigenous and mestizo peasants were moving to the city to find work and autonomy, a trend that would only accelerate in the ensuing decades.

In this context of societal upheaval, Clorinda Matto de Turner was an outspoken critic of the status quo, regularly publishing essays on controversial political topics. Her most famous novel, *Aves sin nido*, uses the orphan as an allegory for the spiritual and economic conditions of abandonment being experienced not only by Indigenous peasants but also by other elements of society such as urban children and the clergy. Her third and final novel, *Herencia*, uses the theme of the marriage market to lay bare the hypocrisy of Lima's bourgeois elite. While the earlier novel was publicly burned for its anticlerical

²² See Lauria-Santiago (2011) 313-314 for a description of the development of dependency relations between Indigenous Andeans and landowners in the nineteenth century. Nils Jacobsen's *Mirages of Transition: The Peruvian Altiplano, 1780-1930* (1993) describes these processes in detail.

²³ Aljovín de Losada (2020) describes the relationship between Catholic conservatism and the notion of a Catholic republic in Peru, Ecuador and Colombia. In Peru, there was tension between secular liberal and conservative Catholic conceptions of the Republic, but even the reformist constitution of 1860 did not allow for religious tolerance (41).

sentiments, the later one generated less controversy and has received far less critical attention.²⁴

An exploration of Matto de Turner's feminist-Indigenist advocacy through the optic of nurture kinship reveals that her fiction bears some of the hallmarks of the process that is referred to in francophone Caribbean discourse as *créolisation*, a particular form of cultural hybridity involving the preservation of difference, the development of new cultural formations, and the possibility of interethnic political coalitions (Sealey 82, 99). The application of the francophone concept of *créolisation* to the Peruvian context is susceptible to the risk of confusion of categories because of the different meanings associated with the cognate term in Peruvian Spanish. The French term *créole* denotes the syncretic culture of the Antilles, with African, European, and Indigenous American roots, particularly in the form of the creole languages.²⁵ In Peru, the cognate term *criollo* refers to the Euro-descended population, evoking the Spanish-speaking culture of Lima as opposed to the Indigenous and mestizo cultures prevalent in the highlands.²⁶ Thus, when a Peruvianist scholar writes that an Indigenous character has been "*criollizada*" they mean the character has been assimilated to the dominant culture, speaking standard Spanish, and passing as a *criollo* (i.e., functionally white) in high society. Thus, the

²⁴ According to Antonio Cornejo Polar's *La novela peruana*, *Indole* and *Herencia* were "rapidly forgotten by the public and critics," while *Aves sin nido* enjoyed immediate commercial and critical success before falling into oblivion for many years (5).

²⁵ In the colonial era, the French term "créole" was used to designate both white and Black people born in the colonies (Nègre 40-42), but the term has evolved to designate mainly Afro-descendant Caribbeans and, by extension, their languages, while the term most commonly used for the descendants of French settlers in the region is *béké*.

²⁶ According to Luis Gómez Acuña, the term "*criollo*" was used in colonial Peru to denote that which originated in the Americas (including, for a time, referring to the descendants of Africans born in the Americas, as well as to Peruvian-born Indigenous and mestizo people), but in twentieth-century Peru it began to refer to the Europeanized culture of the coastal cities in contradistinction to the "indígena" (116). It is in this sense that I employ the contested term "*criollo*," which Angel Rama defines as "Latin Americans of European descent" (4).

Peruvian version of the term implies assimilation to dominant culture, while the Caribbean cognate evokes the emergence of new cultural forms through displacement and contact.

Interestingly, *Aves sin nido* and *Herencia* are narratives of creolization in both of these different senses. While both works depict the assimilation of the culturally Indigenous mestiza girl Margarita into white bourgeois culture, they do so in ways that challenge the ideas of racial purity and the superiority of European lineage and patriarchal culture. Therefore, Matto de Turner's adoption narratives constitute an early gesture in the direction of a creolized feminist conception of national identity for Peru. In these works, the fact of orphanhood stands as an emblem of needed social change, while the act of caregiving serves as a catalyst for the transformation of the self through relational encounter with the other.

Creolizing mestizaje as a non-hegemonic discourse of hybridity

In my introduction, I argued for the possibility of application of the concept of Glissantian creolization to Spanish American literature. This possibility responds to recent developments in cultural and literary theory. The 2011 book *The Creolization of Theory* edited by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih advances the idea that creolization, considered as a theoretical framework, offers a way to “move past the increasingly melancholic tone” associated with Euro-American theory, as found both in deconstructionist critical theory and in works heralding critical theory's demise (2). Through chapters covering topics as far-ranging as modernity and coloniality in Taiwan, the writing of Assia Djebar and Octavia Butler, and the collaboration between Chinese

author David Henry Hwang and Philip Glass, the contributors to *The Creolization of Theory* extend the notion of creolization to cultural contexts far removed from its Caribbean origins. The book participates in a broader trend toward the theoretical application of creolization to cultures that are not, in the strict sense, creole, but which share important characteristics such as diversity and flux. More specifically to the Latin American context, Estelle Tarica's 2008 book *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* applies Glissant's concept of returning to the point of entanglement ("le point d'intrication") to the analysis of the work of Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos. Recently, in the 2020 book *Creolizing the Nation*, Kris F. Sealey describes compatibilities between Glissantian creolization and Latina feminist theory in terms of these frameworks' accounts of human subjectivity and their concepts of the relationship between the individual and the social body. By conceiving of the subject as a dynamic, emergent being, with a multiplicity of selfhood resulting from the necessity of inhabiting multiple worlds, the creolizing feminist framework offers an alternative to conventional Western models of subjectivity and national identity (Sealey 106-110).

Finally, the inspiration to apply Glissantian creolization to the analysis of Latin American literature can be found in Glissant's own words: He refers to Mexico as a "Creole society" (Hiepmann 258), includes certain Latin American countries in his definition of "Neo-America" ("Creolization in the Making of the Americas" 83), and speculates about creolization as a "goal" and as a widespread phenomenon of global megalopolises (ibid. 84, 88). In his *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, Glissant expresses concern about the destabilization of Indigenous atavistic cultures by creolizing nation-states in Mexico, Peru, and Colombia (38). While insisting on the specificity of

creolization in the strict sense to the Caribbean context, Glissant recognized in the 1990s that trends of globalization, immigration, and provincial identity movements were turning Europe into a metaphorical archipelago and bringing about creolizing processes in various societies far from the Caribbean sphere. Therefore, there is precedent both within Glissant's works and in the work of other recent theorists for the application of creolization as a cultural theory to cultures beyond the Caribbean. The central claim of the present dissertation is that tropes of interracial nurture kinship make room for creolizing polemics in ways that disrupt Latin American discourses of identity, complicating the discourse of mestizo nationalism. The specific claim of the present chapter is that interracial adoption serves as a vehicle for creolizing politics in the works of Clorinda Matto de Turner. In so far as it endorses race-mixing by idealizing the mestiza girl Margarita, Matto de Turner's fiction can be described as an example of literary mestizaje. However, as I argue in my first chapter, existing frameworks of mestizaje have tended to focus on themes of racial and cultural convergence in the name of national unity, often at the expense of the preservation of Indigenous identity. In her efforts to redress the low prestige historically afforded to Andean Indigenous cultures, Matto de Turner asserted a form of cultural hybridity that would respect Indigenous ethical, linguistic, and philosophical contributions to national identity. For this reason, and in light of her emphasis on the mestizo subject's agency in self-definition, her work represents an example of creolizing mestizaje, i.e., the sort of mestizaje that is compatible with Glissantian creolization.

Glissant describes Caribbean Creole people as "active agents of synthesis" (*Caribbean Discourse* 16). Cut loose from the continuity of cultural memory by the

social death of slavery, they have the possibility of reimagining values through a “mingling of experiences” (ibid. 14). This transformation through cross-cultural interaction is at the heart of the process of creolization, closely related to a particular way of viewing the subject as a process rather than a product: “We abandon the idea of fixed being” (ibid. 14). According to Glissant, this dynamic, relational concept of the subject forms a central distinction between the Caribbean worldview and the Western. While the latter is preoccupied with discovering primordial origins and defining individual and collective identities in objective terms understood as well-ordered structures of linear descent, the former accepts the subject’s opacity and mutability and conceives community in terms of composite, rhizomatic relations rather than ancient roots.²⁷ In the present chapter, I contend that Clorinda Matto de Turner used the Peruvian identity crisis of the late nineteenth century as an occasion to assert the role of Indigeneity and mestizaje in a reimagined national identity, portraying the ideal mestiza citizen as an active agent of synthesis. While it may on the surface appear to be merely assimilationist, Matto’s endorsement of intercultural “adoption” actually contains elements of a more profound transformation, an inchoate discourse of Relation corresponding to Glissant’s “other of Thought” (*Poetics of Relation* 154). This can be read as an opening of the settler colonial mindset, prefiguring later developments in “intimate indigenismo” as a form of subversive hybridity.²⁸

²⁷ For Glissant’s distinction between root identity and Relation identity, see *Caribbean Discourse* 140-142 and *Poetics of Relation* 143-144.

²⁸ “Intimate indigenismo” is the term Estelle Tarica uses to characterize the works of writers such as Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos, Bolivian writer Jesús Lara, and Peruvian author José María Arguedas. In such semi-autobiographical works, indigenismo “connects individual aspirations to the collective mystique of nationalist thought and enables them to coalesce. At such times, indigenismo becomes a discourse of liberation and redemption, both individual and collective” (Tarica xxi). Tarica also describes manifestations of literary mestizaje in Glissantian terms, detecting a “forced poetics” in Arguedas’s attempt to express Quechua thought in Spanish, and a return to the point of entanglement in Castellanos’ *Balún-*

In Peru, the discourse of *mestizaje* was late to develop due to the intransigence of the caste system, the lack of a bourgeois revolution, the persistence of cultural heterogeneity favored by geographic and economic factors, and a generally conservative attitude among the lettered elite. Peru is a country with a long history of tension between diversity and unification. As described in Chapter 1, the second half of the nineteenth century was characterized by attempts by historians such as Mariano Eduardo de Rivero and Sebastián Lorente to define national unity in terms of an identification with pre-contact Indigenous civilizations, but such projects faced the challenge of seething racial strife in a context of extreme social inequality. As the economy remained largely based on huge plantation estates producing export commodities such as sugar cane and cotton, as well as on large mining operations, the ownership of the best lands and the means of production remained concentrated in the hands of elite mestizos and *criollos*, leaving the Indigenous populations no opportunities for social advancement.

Despite this pressure, Peruvian Indigenous cultures resisted eradication and assimilation, even while suffering under quasi-colonial oppression and selectively appropriating aspects of Spanish culture. The geographic isolation of the sierra (high mountain) and altiplano (the high plains region between the two crests of the Andes) facilitated a relatively great degree of linguistic preservation of the Quechua and Aymara languages, although both have remained perpetually threatened by the dominance of Spanish. The survival of these cultures involved a certain amount of syncretism, particularly in terms of religion, as Indigenous spirits and worldviews were enmeshed with Catholic symbology, but also in terms of language mixing both between Indigenous

Canán. While Matto de Turner's novels are not autobiographical, they demonstrate levels of cultural introspection and vulnerability that qualify them as precursors to this "intimate indigenismo."

languages and Spanish and among the various Indigenous languages themselves (Mannheim 214). With a very strong center-periphery dynamic involving two different social hierarchies (one in Lima, another in the highlands), elite urban *criollos* of the nineteenth century took scant interest in the culture or welfare of the unassimilated Indigenous population.

This indifference began to change with the *novecentista* (turn-of-the-century) generation. Like Clorinda Matto de Turner, the radical philosopher Manuel González Prada took a profound interest in the plight of the Indigenous peasants of the highlands. In his essay “Nuestros Indios” (1904), González Prada attacks the indifference of Peruvian society towards the country’s Indigenous people. Similarly, in her essay “Estudios Históricos” (1893), Matto de Turner asserts the beauty and harmonious sensibility of the Quechua language, denounces the 1532 Massacre of Cajamarca (in which Francisco Pizarro’s forces used their technological advantage to kill large numbers of Inca warriors including the chief Atahualpa), and refers to Quechua as “our mother tongue” (*Leyendas y recortes* 99). The advocacy of intercultural caregiving found in Matto de Turner’s fiction corresponds to an example of radical (for the time) *mestizaje* and a rejection of purity politics.

Antonio Cornejo Polar has noted the assimilationist tendencies of Matto de Turner’s work: “The limit of *Aves sin nido* is located [...] in its inability to understand that not every process of national integration must imply the cancellation of regional differences, and in the abusive way it subsumes the Indigenous world, and the Andean world in its totality, into the principles, values and interests of other sectors of the country” (*La novela peruana. Siete estudios*, first published in 1977, 28). While Cornejo

Polar's observation is valid with regard to *Aves sin nido* considered in isolation, the portrayal of Liman high society in *Herencia* involves a criticism of some of the same *criollo* values that represent the homogenizing force in the first book. Cornejo Polar's introduction to the 1974 edition of *Herencia* recognizes the novel's social critique without engaging with the topic of cultural hybridity. By considering the two novels together, along with some of Matto de Turner's relevant essays, I will argue that she goes beyond assimilationism to propose a creolizing vision of Peruvian national identity.

Historical context

By the time of first publication of *Aves sin nido* in 1889, Clorinda Matto de Turner had risen to great prominence as a writer and editor. In 1877 an evening was celebrated in her honor, with readings by various luminaries of the time, including the preeminent writer of *tradiciones* (short parables of folk life), Ricardo Palma. Palma's writing had a significant influence on that of Matto de Turner, although her *Tradiciones cuzqueñas* (1884) takes the genre in a more serious direction, hanging closer to historical fact and foregrounding the theme of Indigeneity which was more incidental in Palma's work (Schneider, in the foreword to *Aves sin nido* 16). The waning years of the nineteenth century in Peru were a time of national introspection and reconsideration of notions of *patria* and justice.²⁹ As she rose to literary fame in the 1880s, Matto de Turner and her circle tended to decenter Lima in discussions of Peruvian national character. For

²⁹ "Lima was therefore the city where the idea of critically reexamining the system arose, once it became patently clear (with the loss of Peruvian territory to Chile during the War of the Pacific, 1879-81) that the system was incapable of confronting the conditions of the modern world; the starting point for this reexamination would be the fragmentation of Western culture by the emergence of new social groups" (Rama 89).

example, in a speech in 1888, González Prada stated that “The nation is formed of the mass of Indians disseminated in the eastern band of the Andes” (cited in *Aves sin nido* 21). By the end of the nineteenth century, conditions of economic stagnation and quasi-colonial domination in the Andes appeared to be a completely untenable situation, leading thinkers such as González Prada and Matto de Turner to issue scathing indictments of Peruvian national ideology and institutions, laying the groundwork for the Andean *indigenista* movement which would be taken up by the next generation of writers including José Carlos Mariátegui, César Vallejo, and Luis Valcárcel.

Angel Rama has observed that the Andean region was late to develop a mainstream narrative discourse of transculturation, partially because the bourgeois revolution that took place elsewhere in Latin America did not occur here. The persistence of colonial economic and social structures after independence led to the survival of colonial culture and the preservation of a racial caste system, with *criollo* upper classes maintaining economic hegemony through large landholdings. This entailed both the dominance of Hispanic culture and the relatively intact preservation of Indigenous cultural traditions in the hinterlands. Rama claims that, in this context, both Indigenous and Hispanic cultures became static, “facing one another across the divide of class ideologies that condemned them to parallel stagnation” (88). Significantly, this stagnation meant that a national consciousness based on a vision of the future did not arise in the Andean sphere, particularly Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. Of these countries, Peru was the site of the strongest resistance to social change through most of the nineteenth century, until the country’s defeat by Chile in the War of the Pacific (1879-1881) led to a crisis of national identity. As Western culture underwent a process of

fragmentation through the emergence of new social groups such as an ascendant bourgeoisie and a growing urban population of Indigenous, mestizo, and immigrant workers, Peruvian intellectuals in the last two decades of the nineteenth century developed a new propensity to criticism of the status quo (Rama 89). Two of the most influential of these radical critics were González Prada and Matto de Turner.

Aves sin nido is cited as an early example or precursor of Andean indigenismo (see footnote 2 above), the genre of literature devoted to depicting the subjugation and struggles of Indigenous people. The apogee of indigenismo in the Andes took place in the 1920s and 1930s, with social realist novels by writers such as Ciro Alegria, Jorge Icaza, and César Vallejo giving narrative force to the political rhetoric of the Marxist essayist José Mariátegui. In the decades separating Matto's turn-of-the-century work from this apogee, the radical pro-Indigenous ideas sparked by González Prada and Matto de Turner fell into a period of latency. Nevertheless, the *novecentista* generation laid the groundwork for future intellectual interventions by criticizing the backwardness of Peruvian social and economic structures. In particular, *Aves sin nido* and *Herencia* present a progressive critique of the country's institutions, the former through a depiction of church corruption, sexual exploitation, and unjust treatment of the Indigenous people by the rural landholding elite, and the latter through an unflattering portrayal of the shallow materialism of Lima high society. In this manner, Matto de Turner criticizes both the violation of women's bodies by the beneficiaries of conservative power structures in the hinterlands and the dehumanizing commodification of their bodies in the modernizing urban center.

The godmothering relationship at the heart of these narratives serves as a mechanism for cultural integration, bringing the Indigenous/mestiza orphan into the national fold. However, in the sequel, the value of this integration is called into question by the depiction of the objectification of women in high society. Against these different forms of oppression founded in forced binaries of race and gender, these novels present positive values of mestizaje brought about by nurture kinship. The values endorsed by Matto de Turner prefigure later developments in Peruvian cultural hybridity, including the work of José María Arguedas, whose ethnographic and fictional works attest to a lifelong effort to vindicate the Indigenous contribution to national identity. Just as Arguedas's midcentury works went further than any other indigenista writing had heretofore gone to describe and defend the value of Quechua culture, Matto de Turner's turn-of-the-century writings represented a major step forward in pro-Indigenous advocacy. They constitute a gesture of creolizing mestizaje in the sense that they present an idealized mestiza subject as a creative agent in the development of a new national identity, capable of drawing intelligently on the strengths from both of her lineages. In this way, Matto de Turner both resumes the syncretic spirit of the sixteenth-century mestizo historian the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega and lays the groundwork for an egalitarian, creolizing vision of cultural hybridity for Peru.

Orphanhood, adoption, and assimilation in Matto de Turner's fiction

Aves sin nido is a tale of interracial nurture kinship, with a wealthy white couple in the role of godparents to two Indigenous sisters. The story depicts the subjugated status of Indigenous women in late nineteenth-century Peru, living under constant threat of

sexual predation by powerful men. The novel shows how power relations established under colonial rule persist into the late nineteenth century, with the governor, priest, and the collection agent acting as tyrants, preserving the patriarchy through the control of women's bodies and their labor. Through caricatured portrayals of rural elites as self-dealing miscreants, the novel represents a scathing attack on the established powers of church and state, which explains why it was publicly burned and listed on the Catholic Index of banned books.

The novel criticizes the abuses perpetrated by unscrupulous men including the governor Sebastián Pancorbo, the judge Verdejos, and the priest Pascual Vargas, who use their titles and established traditions of unfair business practices to exploit the local Indigenous population. The most explicitly criticized of these practices is that of the "*reparto adelantado*" or "advance payment," which involves giving a poor family an unrequested loan at an outlandish interest rate and then seizing their supplies of wool or livestock as collateral. When an Indigenous woman named Marcela shows up at the house of the bourgeois Marín family asking for charity to help her pay back the advance payment, the idealistic Lucía Marín becomes embroiled in the local class struggle, making powerful enemies among the elites of Kíllac. The conflict culminates in an attack on the Maríns' house, where the local leaders have convinced the peasants that church-robbing bandits are being harbored. In the battle, Marcela and her husband Juan Yupanqui lose their lives, leaving their two daughters in the care of Lucía and Fernando Marín. The rest of the novel narrates the girls' upbringing in the Marín household, with a focus on the coming-of-age of the older girl, Margarita. The sequel *Herencia* picks up the

story of Lucía and Margarita's relationship as Margarita enters the marriage market in Lima.

The sort of cultural transformation most obviously associated with Margarita's adoption and education is *criollización* in the Spanish Peruvian sense, i.e., assimilation to the dominant white *criollo* caste, with the corresponding acquisition of Euro-Peruvian knowledge, manners, and tastes. However, there are reasons to conclude that these novels also jostle the very idea of *criollización*. While Lucía and Fernando Marín are depicted in *Aves sin nido* as morally superior to the rural dignitaries of Killac, they are in turn positively contrasted with the aristocratic Aguilera family in *Herencia*, demonstrating that there is more than one way to be *criollo*, and that some ways are preferable to others. Despite the apparently assimilationist message at the heart of the narrative, the contrast between the virtues of the Maríns and the vices of the Aguileras illustrates the dialectic shift from mere assimilation to a concept of integration involving reforms to aristocratic values. In particular, the Maríns are depicted as enlightened enough to serve as positive integrating forces because they do not accept the racist disdain harbored by other elites against Peru's Indigenous people.

After reading *Herencia*, one is left with the impression that the Maríns represent rare moral paragons among the *criollo* caste, by virtue of their modesty, pragmatism, and decency. Furthermore, in *Aves sin nido*, the Maríns are shown to harbor a much greater level of respect for Peru's Indigenous people than was commonplace among their social class at that time. Considered in parallel with the angelic portrayal of the mestiza/Indigenous girl Margarita and several passages asserting the virtues of Quechua culture, this advocacy represents an expression of biological and cultural mestizaje,

several decades before indigenismo would coalesce into a political movement in Peru. As I will explain below, key passages of each novel express a creolizing (in the Glissantian sense) view of Peruvian national identity, suggesting that there is a need to go beyond paternalism and welcome the Indigenous contribution to the country's ethos.

Although adoption is one of the central elements of the plot of *Aves sin nido*, it is not among the measures explicitly recommended by the text to address Peru's social ills. Rather, these measures are universal education, church reform, and the eradication of corrupt traditions of exploitation. The novel suggests that universal education will serve to integrate Indigenous and mestizo peasants into national life and help prevent the barbaric mindset of the rural elite. The text also repeatedly advocates for church reform, particularly in favor of rescinding the oath of celibacy for priests, which the novel suggests only causes them to direct their lust at powerless peasant girls. Yet, while it is not explicitly advocated with the same didactic fervor as the aforementioned reforms, the trope of adoption in *Aves sin nido* functions on a metaphorical level to indicate a way of reconceiving the Peruvian patria. Indeed, this novel constantly reiterates the theme of orphanhood, of "birds without a nest," as numerous characters are ultimately revealed to be orphans. Margarita is orphaned twice over: long before the events of the novel take place, she had already lost her biological father. Her love interest, Manuel, also turns out to be an orphan (at least in a partial sense, having been abandoned by his biological father), as do Father Pascual and young Teodora, a minor character who flees sexual persecution by the local Sub-Commandant. Along with the vision of hordes of street children in Lima, this constantly repeated motif of orphanhood suggests that the phenomenon is not limited to any particular race or class, but fostered by widespread

conventions that discourage personal responsibility, such as the impunity with which the clergy and landowners rape Indigenous women and abandon their illegitimate children. Thus, the motif of orphanhood serves as a metaphor for Peru's social ills, implying that a metaphorical "adoption" of the nation's dispossessed population by its privileged classes is necessary to establish a thriving republic.

There are other reasons to consider Matto de Turner's assimilationist agenda with nuance. One of these is the emphasis on alternative family structures, which inherently challenge traditional patriarchal assumptions. Armanda Lewis describes *Aves sin nido* and *Herencia* as texts that resisted the dominant national ideology that had been imposed in the nineteenth century. This national ethic portrayed the nation in a fatherly role, serving as provider for the people and unifying them into a single *pueblo* (Lewis 46). Lewis associates Matto's work with a strain of writing she calls "orphan discourse," claiming that such discourse "gives the woman writer an acceptable entry point into the public arena, allowing her to develop a valid political voice by privileging certain 'feminine' aspects, critiquing existing gender relations, and expanding the notion of what constitutes moral decision-making" (47). Orphan discourse represents a counter-discourse to the paternalistic official national discourse by depicting the abandoned, vulnerable child, revealing exceptions to the supposedly all-embracing care of the patria.

According to Lewis' analysis, orphan discourse functions in Matto's novels to address a variety of forms of alterity, on the political, economic, social, racial, and sexual levels, establishing parallels between allegorical and real states of orphanhood among the higher social strata as well as the lower. The Indigenous are depicted as dispossessed, and in this sense, orphaned (Lewis 52). At the same time, the most reprehensible figure,

Father Pascual, is also portrayed as an object of pity, because it is ultimately revealed that he too was an orphan, suggesting that lack of family ties is a primary driver of social dysfunction. Considered in tandem with Matto de Turner's messages about education, her use of motifs of orphanhood and adoption constitute an inchoate discourse of cultural hybridity in a Peruvian context where transculturation was relatively late to develop (Rama 106). The theoretical connection between orphan discourse and the distinctly creolizing approach to cultural hybridity lies in the way orphan discourse shifts emphasis away from essentializing notions of hybridity through the foregrounding of caregiving relationships rather than biological kinship. The association between intercultural nurture kinship and creolizing *mestizaje* is the unifying theme that ties Matto de Turner's fiction to that of Mexican writer Rosario Castellanos and Colombian writer Amalia Posso Figueroa.

Orphan discourse bears conceptual affinities with Glissant's notion of errant thinking. Just as the errant thinker is cut off from cultural roots, and therefore left free to engage in a horizontal, rhizomatic model of relation, the orphan is severed from familial continuity. While the severance is in itself a tragedy, it results in an opening and the possibility of reconceptualizing the relationships between self, community, and society. In Matto de Turner's work, orphan discourse serves as a tool to disrupt essentialist biological notions of hybridity and present an alternative vision of cultural hybridity grounded in a relational logic. It is in this sense, and in way this hybridity is enacted through active, intentional synthesis, that I detect a creolizing tendency in Matto de Turner's *mestizaje*.

The author's feminist convictions are expressed in her denunciations of sexual abuse, her advocacy for access to education for girls, and in her emphasis on the transformative power of mothering. The text presents the bourgeois protagonist Lucía Marín as a transcendent heroine who selflessly devotes herself to caring for the orphaned Yupanqui sisters, practically angelic in her spirit of compassion, and suggests that the reader should follow her example and figuratively "adopt" the dispossessed children of Peru. Lucía, as her luminous forename suggests, is a figure of enlightenment who is able to receive the benefits of privilege without dissipating them in a life of petty materialism. This character seems to be crafted to indicate the way forward for a nation that, in the wake of crushing defeat in the War of the Pacific, was struggling to find its identity, while generally failing to acknowledge the ethnic and cultural diversity that could have been a source of strength. According to Elisabeth L. Austin in her 2010 article "Insufficient Motherhood and Ideological Psychosis in Matto de Turner's *Aves sin nido*," the novel engages the reader in a promise of hope through a "subtle, multi-layered metaphor of protective motherhood that begins with motifs of mothering and adoption, and extends into heavy Marian imagery that marks Lucía Marín—and the reader by extension—as idealized exemplars, agents of hopeful intercession" (518).

However, any optimism which the novel might have inspired seems to be shattered in the final scene, when it is revealed that Margarita and her sweetheart Manuel cannot be married because they are, in fact, half-siblings: they were both fathered by a former parish priest. The revelation brings to light the fact that Margarita is a mestiza, which finally explains the way she was described upon her first appearance in part 1, chapter 7: "Marcela was crossing the courtyard of the white house, followed by a young

girl, a marvel of beauty and liveliness who at once intrigued Lucía and made her eager to know her father, for her loveliness reflected that mixture of the Spaniard and the Indian that has produced stunning beauties in Peru” (*Torn from the Nest* 22).³⁰ According to Austin’s analysis, the disappointment of the novel’s conclusion “extends its pessimistic assessment not only to Lucía’s fruitless efforts but also to the activist potential of the urban Creole reader, arguing the impotence of Catholic discourse, mothering, and liberal citizenship” (518). Austin concludes that the novel ultimately argues that the future of Peru’s Indigenous people is a lost cause, leaving the paternalistic role of the “enlightened” subset of the *criollo* class in a state of ambivalence. However, despite the wrenching disappointment of frustrated young love, perhaps all is not lost, as Margarita’s hope resides in another form of kinship: through the mentoring relationship between Lucía and Margarita, an enduring transformation and allegiance will be established; in this sense, secular education and female community serve as a replacement for the resolution represented by intermarriage. Overall, the novel suggests that until the conditions producing abandonment and iniquity can be overcome, adoptive care is a way to help mitigate the suffering. When Fernando first encounters Margarita, he says to Lucía, “This girl has to be brought up with every care,” to which Lucía responds, “She’ll be our godchild, Fernando” (36).³¹ This reflexive attitude of paternalism is a compassionate response to conditions of abjection; despite the novel’s tragic ending, its optimism lies in its attempt to inspire such compassion in its privileged readership.

³⁰ “Marcela cruzaba el patio de la casa blanca, acompañada de una tierna niña que la seguía. Aquella muchacha era portento de belleza y de vivacidad, que desde el primer momento preocupó a Lucía, haciendo nacer en ella la curiosidad de conocer de cerca al padre, pues su belleza era el trasunto de esa mezcla del español y la peruana, que ha producido hermosuras notables en el país” (*Aves sin nido* 67).

³¹ “‘Esta niña debe educarse con esmero,’ dijo don Fernando [...] ‘Va a ser nuestra ahijada, Fernando’ [...] dijo Lucía” (*Aves sin nido* 82)

Moreover, the bleak outcome of *Aves sin nido* is partially contradicted by the more optimistic story line of *Herencia*, which depicts Margarita's successful effort to find a good marriage in contrast with the shattered hopes of her aristocratic peer, Camila Aguilera. As *Herencia* depicts Margarita's social debut on the bourgeois Liman marriage market, the exposure of the materialistic values driving that market serves as a caveat regarding the notion of assimilation as a panacea. Therefore, the sequel's social critique constitutes an argument against a simplistically assimilationist interpretation of the story. At the same time as they call for the upper classes to take an interest in the wellbeing of the country's dispossessed, disenfranchised Indigenous population, these novels insist on the message that the culture of wealth and power itself must be reformed through the adoption of feminist values informed by an appreciation of diversity.

The assimilationist agenda of *Aves sin nido* is further complicated by the text's repeated assertions of the aesthetic and moral virtues of Indigenous Andeans. In an example that is less trivial than it may appear, the Maríns' appreciation for Indigenous culture is expressed in their preference of chicha over beer, with Fernando saying, "What a delightful drink, my dear! I don't know how some people can prefer that awful domestic beer" (*Torn from the Nest* 57).³² Chicha is not a mere beverage; for Indigenous Peruvians it is drunk both recreationally and ceremonially. Being derived from sacred maize, chicha is imbued with the power of the sun. Another example of cultural vindication in *Aves sin nido* comes when Manuel admires a *huaco* (a face-shaped pot crafted since antiquity by various Andean cultures). These moments of appreciation for

³² "Qué bebida tan comfortable, hija. No sé cómo hay gente que prefieren a ésta, la cerveza del país, tan horrible." (*Aves sin nido* 104)

Indigenous cultural products are indicative of a spirit of bidirectional integration, not merely Westernizing assimilation.

A similar principle is at work in the many moments of praise for Indigenous people's physical beauty. In the Romantic symbolic system of the text, the extolling of aesthetic values carries along with it an endorsement of underlying moral worth. What may appear to be mere superficial praise also has moral and political implications, in the sense that this beauty is extolled in terms of its centrality to national identity. When Marcela first appears in the narration, she is described as "a woman in the full flower of her years, striking for her typically Peruvian beauty" (9). This description is significant because of the way the narrative will go on to position Marcela's daughter Margarita as a quintessentially Peruvian woman, a paragon of beauty, talent, and virtue. In contrast with this virtue, the narration makes an association between moral and physical corruption with regard to Pascual's propensity to vice as he approaches death by typhoid fever: "The demands of moral purity can rarely be met for long by an organism corrupted by vice" (ibid. 100).³³ In the novel's simplified symbolic system, Margarita is the polar opposite of Father Pascal. In chapter 16 of *Aves sin nido*, Margarita and her sister Rosalía are described as "two stars that shed cheer on their hut and whose destinies were already sealed with the mark that God puts on those He chooses to play a part in the transformation of society" (46).³⁴ This intimation of the impact that these young girls will have on Peruvian society participates in the text's portrayal of the orphans as inheritors and guardians of the nobility of their ancestors.

³³ "En las naturalezas carcomidas por el vicio, es casi imposible la duración de lo que pide la santidad moral" (ibid. 144).

³⁴ "esas dos estrellas rientes de la choza, cuyos destinos estaban señalados con la marca que Dios pone en cada predestinado en el mapa de las evoluciones sociales" (ibid. 93).

The nobility of the Quechua spirit is also expressed in the actions of Margarita and Rosalía's Indigenous family. It is worth remembering that the Maríns are not the only heroes of *Aves sin nido*. Their adoption of the sisters is precipitated by the fact that their parents, Juan and Marcela Yupanqui, sacrificed their own lives trying to save the Maríns. In the aftermath of the attack, Fernando comments, "They say the Indians are ingrates, but it was gratitude that killed Juan Yupanqui" (ibid. 57).³⁵ This leads Lucía to reply, "As far as I'm concerned, the upright and noble race that founded the empire conquered by Pizarro has not died out in Peru" (ibid. 57),³⁶ contradicting the idea that the Spanish conquest of the Inca represented the permanent cultural death of the Andean Indigenous people. The Yupanquis are portrayed as victims, but also as courageous and morally upright heroes who lose their lives in the defense of others, demonstrating a moral courage that contrasts with the hypocritical egoism of Father Pascual. Such passages resist stereotypes that held that the Quechua were a fallen race, permanently cut off from the splendor of their ancestors' civilization.³⁷

These efforts to counter the low prestige afforded to Indigenous culture constitute a creolizing gesture in the sense that they seek to correct an imbalance of power between two cultures in a situation of contact characterized by domination. In his *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, Glissant discusses the problem of power imbalance in the process of hybridization: "Creolization presupposes that the cultural elements brought together must

³⁵ "Dicen que los indios son ingratos, y Juan Yupanqui ha muerto por gratitud." (ibid. 104)

³⁶ "Para mí no se ha extinguido en el Perú esa raza con principios de rectitud y nobleza, que caracterizó a los fundadores del imperio conquistado por Pizarro" (ibid. 104)

³⁷ It is worth noting here that Matto de Turner's novels predate the major shift in attitudes toward Peruvian Indigenous people that were brought about through the work of the archeologist Julian C. Tello (1880-1947), who believed that the "establishment of the true history of native Peruvian peoples through archeology undermines the pejorative view of indigenous peoples promoted by those nonindigenous intellectuals controlling the construction of national identity" (Burger 4).

necessarily be ‘of equivalent value’ for this creolization to be truly realized. That is to say that if some of the cultural elements brought together are seen as inferior to others, creolization does not really happen. It happens, but in a bastardized and unjust fashion” (7).³⁸ Such an unjust, corrupt version of cultural hybridity characterized much of the history of race relations in Peru, from the genocidal response to the Túpac Amaru II rebellion in the 1780s (Serulnikov 1-2) (described in Chapter 1) to the abusive conditions described in *Aves sin nido*. By coupling her depiction of these conditions with words of praise for the poetic qualities of the Quechua language and the tenderness of Quechua culture, along with a recognition that the Incas themselves placed a high value on education, Matto de Turner pursued a correction to that imbalance that could potentially lay the groundwork for a more egalitarian form of creolization, i.e., the establishment of meaningful intercultural relations to displace conditions of dominance.

Education, civilization, and barbarism

In the author’s preface to *Aves sin nido*, she writes, “I feel a tender love for our native race, precisely because I have closely observed its way of life, charming in its simplicity, and the abjection and degradation to which it is subjected by those backwoods despots...” (*Torn from the Nest* 3-4).³⁹ In order to overcome this pattern of degradation, *Aves sin nido* advocates for universal education to elevate the populace. The text

³⁸ « La créolisation suppose [que] des éléments culturels mis en présence doivent obligatoirement être équivalents en valeurs pour que cette créolisation s’effectue réellement. C’est-à-dire que si dans des éléments culturels mis en relation certains sont infériorisés par rapport à d’autres, la créolisation ne se fait pas vraiment. Elle se fait mais sur un mode bâtard et sur un mode injuste. » (*Introduction à une poétique du divers* 17)

³⁹ “Amo con amor de ternura a la raza indígena, por lo mismo que he observado de cerca sus costumbres, encantadoras por su sencillez, y la abyección a que someten esa raza aquellos mandones de villorio” (ibid. 51)

frequently portrays educated characters in a positive light, as with Manuel: “As soon as he had arranged for and in part witnessed the removal of Marcela to Lucía’s house, he devoted himself to making prudent inquiries, putting to use that good sense that is the product of a well-ordered and assiduous education” (ibid. 58-59).⁴⁰ Conversely, the narration describes uneducated characters negatively, as with Father Pascual: “[Lucía] forgot that the priestly mission depends on the will of man, which is inclined to err; and she knew nothing of what sort of priest generally serves our remote parishes” (ibid. 15).⁴¹ The narrator describes the educated Don Fernando as “*honrado*” (“honorable”) and his wife Lucía’s actions as “*amistosa y caritativa*” (“friendly and charitable”) (*Aves sin nido* 71). Through these descriptions, the desirability of education becomes clear.

The endorsement of universal education is an effort to counter various forms of degradation. In *Aves sin nido*, part one chapter ten, the text comments on the prospects of social change in rural Peru. This passage is worth quoting at length:

If we tell the Canibus and the Huachipairis not to eat the flesh of their prisoners but do not previously impart to them the notions of humanity, brotherly love, and respect for the dignity and rights of others, then we, too, shall soon become food for those cannibals [...] We believe that what happens in Kíllac, as in every small town of the Peruvian hinterland, is only another form of that savagery. The lack of schools, the lack of good faith on the part of the clergy, and the obvious depravity of those few who exploit the ignorance and consequent docility of the many, drive these towns ever farther away from true civilization (*Torn from the Nest* 29).⁴²

⁴⁰ “Luego que ordenó la traslación de Marcela a casa de Lucía y la presencié en partes [Manuel] se consagró a practicar averiguaciones prudentes, emplando para ello la sagacidad, patrimonio que deja la buena educación de un colegio sistemado y celoso” (ibid. 105).

⁴¹ “Olvidaba, Lucía, que, siendo misión dependiente de la voluntad humana, quedaba explicada su propensión al error, y ella no sabía cómo son generalmente, los pastores de los curatos apartados” (*Aves sin nido* 60).

⁴² “Digamos a los canibus y huachipairis que no coman las carnes de sus prisioneros, sin haberles dado antes las nociones de la humanidad, el amor fraternal y la dignidad que el hombre respeta en los derechos de otro hombre, y pronto seremos también reducidos a pasto de aquellos antropófagos [...] solo es variante de aquel salvajismo lo que ocurre en Kíllac, como en todos los pequeños pueblos del interior del Perú, donde la carencia de esquelas, la falta de buena fe en los párrocos y la depravación manifiesta de los pocos que comercian con la ignorancia y la consiguiente sumisión de las masas, alejan, cada día más, a aquellos pueblos de la verdadera civilización” (ibid. 75).

In instances such as this, the author draws parallels between the supposed “savagery” of the Amazonian Huachipaeri people and that of Peru’s rural elite, contrasting both with the tenderness of the Quechua people. Just as the “savage” Huachipaeri must be saved from themselves, the “gentle” Quechua must be saved from the exploiting white “savages.” The value of education is asserted in terms of a Hobbesian worldview in which the state of nature is conceived as cruel and amoral, requiring an intervention by civilizing forces—with the implication that the Quechua people deserve to be considered on the side of civilization. Here, Matto de Turner participates in the discourse of the tension between civilization and barbarism, one of the central organizing themes of nineteenth-century Latin American literature, with roots in the works of the Argentinian statesman Domingo Faustino Sarmiento, particularly his book *Facundo: Civilización y barbarie* from 1845. However, inverting the hierarchy found in much civilization-and-barbarism discourse, Matto de Turner considers the Quechua to be civilized and their *criollo* abusers to be barbarians.

Antonio Cornejo Polar asserts that the novel’s portrayal of the Indigenous as innocent victims of the abuses of the notables undergoes a discursive shift when it comes to the relationship between Indigenous and “foreigners,” i.e., the civilized Limeños. Cornejo views this as indicative of the author’s hierarchy of values, which places educated, civilized society above all other forms:

In fact, although indigenous values are praised, they remain clearly inferior to those of the civilization carried by the foreigners; consequently, it is appropriate to postulate a gradual educational process that leads the Indians toward the superior level occupied by the truly civilized men, the possessors of authentic ‘modernity.’ As the story makes explicit, educational work is ‘prior’ to any

other method to promote development and progress of the Indians; moreover, raising the standard of living of the Indians without prior educational enlightenment would be dangerous and harmful for society as a whole.⁴³

Cornejo Polar's reading addresses the teleological progressivism at the heart of *Aves sin nido*, and yet it does not consider the way this agenda is complicated by the critique of Liman high society expressed in *Herencia*. In this second book, the Maríns are once again portrayed as superior individuals, but this time superior to the petty materialism of Lima's upper class. While Cornejo is right to point out the assimilationist values underpinning *Aves sin nido*, it is fair to recognize that some of these biases are contradicted by the plot of *Herencia*, wherein educated Limans are by and large depicted as self-obsessed socialites devoid of moral fiber. The ethical shortcomings of these elites suggest that the sort of "education" that Margarita (and by extrapolation, anyone who is dispossessed, or "torn from the nest") needs is not the kind that is obtained in grammar school or finishing school. In fact, as I will argue below, the ideal of education portrayed in *Herencia* is one that will allow the genius of Quechua culture to flourish in the mestiza subject; this ideal of preservation distances the work from assimilative versions of mestizaje.

While it may seem intuitive to associate systemic education with hegemonic processes of Westernizing assimilation, it is not necessarily the case that Matto de Turner viewed the matter in such simple terms. It is true that Matto de Turner wrote within a

⁴³ "En efecto, los valores indígenas, con ser alabados, resultan claramente inferiores a los de la civilización que portan los forasteros; por consiguiente, cabe postular un paulatino proceso educativo que conduzca a los indios hasta el nivel superior que ocupan los hombres de verdad civilizados, los poseedores de la auténtica 'modernidad'. Según se explicita en el relato, la tarea educativa es 'previa' a cualquier otra medida que tienda al desarrollo y progreso de los indios; más todavía, la elevación del nivel de vida de los indios sin una concientización educativa anterior sería peligrosa y dañina para la sociedad en su conjunto" (Cornejo Polar 15, translation mine).

framework of assimilation, but she also sought to transform dominant society through the influence of Indigenous ideas. In her 1893 book *Leyendas y recortes*, she cites the colonial writer Córdova Urrutia who said of Inca Rocca, the fourth Incan Emperor:

He was wise enough to found public schools, in which his Amautas or philosophers taught the sciences, the wisdom of the quipos, which the analyst of the Empire or quipocana maintained in the Temple of the Sun, and the general language which had been adopted, which was Quechua, which all the conquered nations had indispensably to learn, doubtless because, identified by the language, they were considered members of a single family and came together reciprocally, losing the hatred they might have had for one another.⁴⁴

This passage suggests that Matto de Turner admired the integrative capacity of education in a manner independent from its association with Westernizing assimilation. Though these Indigenous modes of education endorsed by Matto de Turner are associated with Incan cultural dominance and imperialism, they are still a far cry from the forced assimilation characteristic of the religious boarding school model.

Social constructivism and rags-to-riches narratives

The theme of cultural education in *Aves sin nido* and *Herencia* places these works in the tradition of Pygmalion narratives. Inspired by Ovid's ancient tale of an artist, Pygmalion, who creates a statue, Galatea, who comes to life, various modern narratives have reprised the theme to argue for a social constructivist view of subjectivity while contemplating the moral implications of the intentional transformation of a

⁴⁴ “fue sabio hasta fundar escuelas públicas, en que sus Amauttas ó filósofos enseñaban las ciencias, la inteligencia de los qquipos, que el analista del imperio ó quípocana custodiaba en el templo del Sol, y LA LENGUA GENERAL QUE SE HABIA ADOPTADO, QUE ERA LA QUECHUA, que todas las naciones conquistadas aprendían indispensablemente, sin duda para que, identificados por el idioma, se considerasen miembros de una sola familia y se amasen recíprocamente, perdiendo el odio que podían tenerse” (cited in *Leyendas y recortes* 93-94).

disempowered individual by a powerful intellectual. Perhaps the most influential work to take up this theme was George Bernard Shaw's 1916 play *Pygmalion*, which depicts the efforts of a British linguist named Higgins to transform a young, impoverished Cockney woman named Eliza Doolittle into someone indistinguishable from a member of high society through modifications of her speech patterns. Higgins claims in Act I that, "in three months I could pass that girl off as a duchess at an ambassador's garden party" (Shaw, n.p.). Jean Reynolds has noted that Shaw "attacked [...] the popular belief that every human possesses a stable and unchanging essence, or self" (29, qtd. in Kennell 74). According to Vicki R. Kennell's analysis, this social-constructivist stance made it possible for Shaw to bridge the gap between nineteenth-century and twentieth-century views of the self (74). While the Victorian view of the subject as inexorably conditioned by their social background, with a singular and real self, contrasts with the twentieth-century view of the self as devoid of ontological truth, capable of adapting to the expectations of multiple social roles (Kennell 75), Shaw's play offers a synthesis of the two views in a manner that acknowledges both the transformative power of education and the importance of individual agency in the act of self-creation.

Like Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Matto de Turner's fictional account of Margarita's rags-to-riches transformation operates in a social-constructivist framework that accommodates the possibility of individual agency and creativity. In several passages, Matto de Turner suggests that a woman's moral and aesthetic virtues are something to be intentionally fostered through affectionate care: "'Come in,' said Don Fernando, drawing away a little from his wife; and Margarita's charming figure appeared, made even more strikingly beautiful by the care and affection lavished on her" (99). In the same scene, Lucía reflects

on the objective principle behind this effect: “‘Someone has said that woman responds more than any other creature to gentle and kind treatment. Ah, my Margarita is the living proof of that theory!’” (99). Lest the reader harbor any doubt about the robustness of the theory, the narrator steps in to confirm:

And Lucía was right. A woman who is cherished and pampered gains a hundred percent in beauty and moral qualities. If anyone doubt this, let him think of those wretched women victimized in the privacy of their homes by groundless jealousy, worn out by their husbands’ inordinate appetites, forced to breathe stale air and take sparse nourishment; and instantly he will see before him an unfortunate woman, ill-tempered, pale, hollow-eyed, her mind ever prey to gloomy thoughts, her capacity for action engulfed in dreamy lethargy. (*Torn from the Nest* 99)⁴⁵

A “cherished and pampered” woman gains greatly in “beauty and moral qualities.” That is, a man has an interest in treating his wife (and daughters) with gentle kindness and indulgence, because in this way he can cultivate desirable properties in them, in keeping with a social-constructivist view of personal development.⁴⁶ The subtext of this message seems to be that the man remains the master of the household and arbiter of both aesthetic and moral value. This assumption is reinforced by the prospects for education that Fernando proposes for the girls on the previous page: “‘They’re our adopted daughters. They’ll go to Lima with us; and there, just as we’ve planned, we’ll place them in the school that will best prepare them to be wives and mothers, without the

⁴⁵ “En efecto. Engréida y estimada la mujer, gana un ciento por ciento en hermosura y en cualidades morales. Si no, acordémonos de esas infelices mujeres hostigadas en los misterios del hogar por los celos infundados; gastadas por la glotonería de los maridos; reducidas a respirar aire débil y tomar alimento escaso, y al punto tendremos a la vista a la infeliz mujer displicente, pálida, ojerosa, en cuya mente Cruzan pensamientos siempre tristes, y cuya voluntad de acción duerme el letárgico sueño del desmayo.” (ibid. 144)

⁴⁶ The androcentrism of this particular passage is less pronounced in the original Spanish version, wherein the perceptions are all couched in terms of the first person plural rather than the third person singular masculine as is the case in the English translation. Nevertheless, in its advice about how a man should treat a woman in order to cultivate desirable qualities in her, the passage still conveys a patriarchal perspective.

false piety of constant rote prayers” (*Torn from the Nest* 98).⁴⁷ Thus, the Pygmalionesque transformation of Margarita and Rosalía into members of the *criollo* elite is to take place through a caring home environment and secular education rather than through the Catholic indoctrination that Matto de Turner associated with the country’s backwardness and corruption.

The tension between the social-constructivist and role-agent models of subjectivity is further complicated when non-Western interpretations of personal development are considered. Going beyond a model of the socially constructed yet autonomous subject, some of these models offer an intersubjective account of the self. In his article “Pensamiento social sobre la infancia: una mirada sociohistórica desde el sur global,” (“Social Thinking about Childhood: A Socio-Historic View from the Global South,” 2018), Enrique M. Jaramillo García argues that the view of the human subject held in Indigenous, Afro-diasporic, and mestiza cultures is distinct from the individualistic view prevalent in Western(ized) societies. As Jaramillo puts it, “Our main epistemological focus is centered on the human person, which is to say, in Indigenous, Afro-descended, and mestiza childhood, not as an ontologically atomistic thinking ‘I’, but rather as an ‘I-other’, in society.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, according to Jaramillo, this non-Western view eschews the patriarchal view of childhood as a state of inferiority, and this rejection has sociopolitical implications. According to Jaramillo’s assessment, Indigenous Andeans have resisted the “destructive logic” and “dehumanization of the life of

⁴⁷ “Ellas son nuestras hijas adoptivas, ellas irán con nosotros hasta Lima, y allá, como ya lo teníamos pensado y resuelto, las colocaremos en el colegio más a propósito para formar esposas y madres, sin la exagerada mojigatería de un rezo inmoderato, vacía de sentimientos” (*Aves sin nido* 143)

⁴⁸ “Nuestro principal enfoque epistemológico se centra en la persona humana, es decir, en la infancia indígena, afrodescendiente y mestiza entendida no como un yo-pensador ontológicamente atomista, sino como un yo-otro, en la sociedad.” (Jaramillo 209)

childhood” imposed by Western culture, to preserve the worldview that sees childhood and nature as valid forces in human life, endowed with dignity: “In the social imaginary and the social representations of original cultures, childhood has another connotation and rationality, due to the resistance and diversity of the ethnic minorities that have faced the Western monoculture.”⁴⁹ The view of childhood in Indigenous cultures as described by Jaramillo is one in which children are seen as legitimate beings endowed with agency and worthy of respect. This is a relational rather than hierarchical approach to childhood: “The ancestral worldview of the original cultures has been kept alive, which considers childhood to be an important part of the social life of the *ayllu* [family clan] and the community.”⁵⁰ From this perspective, childhood does not represent a problem to be solved through institutional education, but rather an important component of community with its own inherent value. This is a useful way of looking at the theme of innocence in Matto de Turner’s fiction, where Margarita’s inauspicious origins do not prevent her from being pure of heart, precisely because she was raised in a nurturing Indigenous family that values childhood.

When assessing the differences between Western and Andean Indigenous constructions of childhood, there is a risk of romanticizing and overgeneralizing about Indigenous beliefs. While Jaramillo’s description may be informative about broad differences between two super-systems, it does not address the heterogeneity of approaches taken by the various ethnic groups of Peru. This caveat points to a more

⁴⁹ “En el imaginario social y las representaciones sociales de las culturas originarias, la infancia tiene otra connotación y racionalidad, gracias a la resistencia y la diversidad de las minorías étnicas que han hecho frente a la monocultura occidental” (Jaramillo 217).

⁵⁰ “Se ha mantenido viva la cosmovisión ancestral de las culturas originarias, que considera a la infancia como parte importante de la vida social del *ayllu* y la comunidad” (Jaramillo 217).

general difficulty inherent in academic descriptions of Indigenous worldviews, a difficulty having to do with the academic tendency to pursue “objective” descriptions as well as a humanist tendency to idealize the supposed innocence or spiritual purity of “primitive” cultures. A simplistic defense of Indigenous values based on dogmatic claims about their general superiority is likely to indulge in “noble savage” stereotypes.

The problem of attempting to compare radically different views of child development appears less daunting when the analysis is informed by a Glissantian view of the subject as a process of emergence rather than a stable essence. This view offers a third way, avoiding the contradictions that arise when trying to reconcile social constructivism, role-agency, and intersubjectivity in terms of a unified self. This dynamic view of the subject is associated with what Glissant calls the “thinking of errantry” that “silently emerges from the destructuring of compact national entities that yesterday were still triumphant and, at the same time, from difficult, uncertain births of identity that call to us” (*Poetics of Relation* 18). Having moved beyond the ontological (premodern) and mechanical (modern) notions of self, a new, relational form of identity emerges, an errant self, forged through contact with alterity: “Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself” (ibid.). This errant subject is enmeshed in a rhizomatic web of relations perpetually provoking mutual transformations. From this perspective, there is no contradiction between the social-constructivist, role-agent, or intersubjective views of personal development, because the errant self exercises agency among a series of relational encounters that recursively constitute the agent.

This errant subject serves as a conceptual bridge linking creolization to Latin American feminism. Kris F. Sealey has observed the compatibility between the

Glissantian concepts of composite relationality and rhizomatic errantry and the notion of multiplicitous subjectivity articulated by Mariana Ortega. For Ortega, the requirement of living in between different worlds creates the need for liminal subjects such as immigrants to inhabit multiple identities (Sealey 100). To apply this concept to the notion of assimilative education and child-rearing, it is possible to imagine that a non-totalizing approach to education could allow the Indigenous aspects of the self to flourish even while preparing the student to navigate the institutions of Western society.

Margarita embodies this kind of multiplicity as she carries her Quechua cultural legacy to Lima. This legacy is part of her “inheritance,” which the author decided to mark as the central theme of the sequel by giving it the title *Herencia*. The preoccupation with inheritances seems to situate Matto de Turner’s fiction in the framework of biological determinism that dominated late nineteenth-century Western thought. However, the work infuses that determinism with sociological nuance. In an era heavily influenced by eugenics and scientific racism, Matto perpetuates some aspects of the prevailing essentialism while rejecting others. For example, Fernando is preoccupied with the risk of inherited corruption, as demonstrated when he questions the suitor Ernesto to make sure he has no family history of mental illness, syphilis, or epilepsy. In the same conversation, Fernando assures Ernesto that Margarita’s blood is “robust and pure,” alluding to her inauspicious origins as an “accident,” not “corruption” (*Herencia* 145). Assuming that the educated, refined Fernando is meant to represent a voice of informed reason, this indicates a worldview in which a morally disreputable woman is liable to pass her corruption onto her children. Such a view is expressed in an earlier conversation at the ball between Fernando and a doctor named Pedreros, where the view is formulated more

in social than in biological terms. The doctor assures Fernando that Ernesto is a decent young man because his mother set a good example. Fernando says, “For me, the example of the home carries all the doctrine of social morality,” and the doctor replies, “Exactly. That’s why lustful wives and mothers leave a fatal inheritance to their daughters.” Fernando agrees: “Yes, the terrible inheritance!”⁵¹ This idea of a shameful inheritance of sin leaving a stain on the next generation inscribes the text in a morally essentializing framework, albeit in a manner that places more emphasis on the corrupting influence of action than on biologically inherited moral inferiority. However, the emphasis on Margarita’s positive inheritances—both in terms of her Quechua heritage and the legacy of virtue bequeathed by Lucía—stands as a counterexample and a way forward.

In so far as Margarita is presented as a model for reconceptualizing Peruvian identity, her internal multiplicity (Indigenous in her native language and cultural origins, mestiza in her ancestry, *criolla* in her educated adulthood) implies that this identity need not be “pure” to be whole. This multiplicitous concept of selfhood participates in the vision of subjectivity that Sealey associates with the “creolizing way.” Sealey outlines parallels between Ortega’s concept of the multiplicitous self and María Lugones’ notion of the “world-traveling” subject, an “anti-structural self” that navigates between worlds (100). According to this creolizing feminist concept of subjectivity, the necessity of inhabiting multiple different worlds produces a complex sense of being, with different selves emerging within a person as she moves from one context to another.

⁵¹ “‘El ejemplo del hogar importa para mí toda la doctrina de moral social.’ ‘Cabales. Por eso las esposas y las madres libidinosas dejan a las hijas la herencia fatal.’ ‘¡Sí, la terrible herencia!’” (*Herencia* 74-75)

Creativity and agentive synthesis

Any characterization of Matto de Turner's work as a form of creolizing mestizaje must take into account the very critical view Glissant held toward assimilation, which he saw as a kind of cultural suicide. In his essay "Reversion and Diversion," he writes, "The mimetic impulse is a kind of insidious violence" (*Caribbean Discourse* 18). In this text, the Martinican thinker describes three possible options for a transplanted people: reversion to earlier ways, imitation of the colonizer, and diversion, which refers to a generative process in which the language of domination is transformed and repurposed to allow deception, camouflage, and the preservation of opacity.⁵²

For Glissant, the desirable opposite of assimilation is not a fundamentalist return to origins but rather the innovative cross-pollination of cultures, i.e., creolization: "The most secure protection against self-destructive imitation is the process of Creolization. [...] cultural cross-fertilization and imitation are diametrically opposed" (*Caribbean Discourse*, footnote 4, 46). One of the distinctions between imitation (i.e., self-assimilation) and creolization is that the latter involves the possibility of people dealing with values as "active agents of synthesis" (*Caribbean Discourse* 16), moving away from an empirical notion of syncretism as a quasi-natural process and toward a concept of

⁵² In a footnote to this essay on different kinds of cultural change, Glissant offers a taxonomy of transplants: "A transplanted population that becomes a people (Haiti), that blends into another people (Peru), that becomes part of a multiple whole (Brazil), that maintains its identity without being able to be 'fulfilled' (North America), that is a people wedged in an impossible situation (Martinique)..." (*Caribbean Discourse*, footnote 2, 17-18). This characterization of Peru as a "blended" nation runs contrary to the analysis of Antonio Cornejo Polar, who emphasizes the nation's heterogeneity. The apparent contradiction here may be partially resolved by a notion of heterogeneity that makes room not only for difference but also for various modes of synthesis, convergence, and divergence: a society as complex as Peru can include unassimilated Indigenous people, partially assimilated Indo-mestizos, highland mestizos with their own distinctive cultural formations, Afro-Peruvians, Asian Peruvians, and so forth.

hybridity that is open to its unpredictability because it is constantly being acted on by creative impulses, both collective and individual.

This emphasis on human creativity as a factor in creolization is represented in the characterization of Margarita as a musical prodigy. A key scene in *Herencia* illustrates Matto de Turner's message regarding the desirability of cultural hybridity and its relationship to creative genius. The scene takes place in chapter 21, as Margarita's suitor Ernesto has come to visit her and her family to invite them to a bullfight. Margarita is seated at a piano, playing Chopin:

Seated on the swiveling piano stool, Margarita was warming up, as though toying around on the keyboard, playing the melancholy notes of the "Chant des marins," a romance by Chopin recently arrived from Europe in the music shops and which was driving the young women of Lima wild, with its scale so deliciously combined, mimicking in the ear that enchanting gesture of the damsel in love, seated on the shore of an undulating lake, lifting and releasing a cupped handful of water again and again, producing the *chacc pacc*, which can only be interpreted on the musical scale or in the modulation of Quechua, which is the language of the heart and imitative harmony par excellence.⁵³

In this passage, the prosody and phonetic qualities of the Quechua language are compared to the visual-sonic image of a girl occupied in a meditative, repetitive gesture while engrossed in the contemplation of love, which in turn is compared to the musical genius of Chopin. The scene implies that Margarita's prodigious aptitude for music is related to her Quechuan cultural origins, thereby figuring Quechua as a vehicle for art and humanity at a fundamental level. The scene therefore represents a subtle yet incisive

⁵³ "Sentada en el banquito giratorio del piano, preludiaba Margarita, como jugando sobre el teclado, las melancólicas notas del 'Canto de los marinos,' romanza de Chopin recién llegada de Europa a los almacenes de música y que traía enloquecidas a las señoritas limeñas, por la escala tan deliciosamente combinada remedando al oído aquella encantadora acción de la doncella enamorada que, en la ribera del undoso lago, levanta y suelta un puñado de agua, produciendo el *chacc pacc*, capaz de interpretarse sólo en el pentagrama o en la modulación del quechua, que es el idioma del corazón y de la armonía imitativa por excelencia" (*Herencia* 119, my translation).

rejection of anti-Indigenous racism, along with the implication that it is precisely Margarita's multiplicity that positions her as a model for Peruvian identity. As with Eliza in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, the traces of the girl's original culture may have been suppressed, but they have not been erased entirely, and her ability to draw upon these resources constitutes an element of her genius. Moreover, this scene suggests that the liberating function of education allows the mestiza subject to go beyond national integration and enter into contact with global culture.

The piano scene is one of the rare instances in *Herencia* where Margarita's Quechua heritage is foregrounded; otherwise, it has little prominence in the text. Indeed, a reading of Matto de Turner's fiction alone does not indicate the extent to which she admired and was familiar with Quechuan language and culture. In fact, she was fluent in the language and an advocate of cultural preservation. In *Leyendas y recortes* (1893), Matto includes a text called "Estudios históricos" in which she draws on the Inca Garcilaso de la Vega to describe the history of the Quechua people in the area north of the river Amancay, in the provinces of Suttupampa, Catonera, and others, "united by the same rich, sonorous language" (*Leyendas y recortes* 93). She refers to the Quechua language as "the sublime language of imitative harmony, for its peaceful character, the tenderness of its poetry, and its loving constancy" (*Leyendas y recortes* 93). Such statements tend to support an image of Clorinda Matto de Turner as a thoughtful advocate of the preservation of Indigenous culture, contradicting a reductively assimilationist interpretation of her literary oeuvre. While her works demonstrate a romanticized, essentialist notion of the Quechua language, they are nonetheless endorsements made in

good faith by an informed thinker with the courage to defy stereotypes associating indigeneity with barbarism.

The characterization of Quechua as the “language of the heart” in *Herencia* echoes the author’s opinions description of it as the “sublime language of imitative harmony,” as well as another passage in *Leyendas y recortes* describing how Quechua came to occupy a position of ascendancy over the other local Indigenous languages:

The language, rich and captivating, soon came to be known, and subjugated the others which, although sonorous and abundant in expression, like Aymara, did not achieve the *modulation of the soul* or the *courage of wrath*, and even less so the liveliness and representation of the image, as did Quechua, this language whose beauty and flexibility makes us see the tear drops, when it expresses suffering; *shows* us the laughter, when depicting joy; makes us hear the sound of the water when mentioning a waterfall.⁵⁴ (italics original)

According to Matto de Turner’s interpretation, the Quechua language possesses a uniquely potent capacity for onomatopoeia, which makes it distinctly effective at representing the flows of nature and images of human emotions, the glistening dentition of a smile or the rushing of a river. By Matto de Turner’s reckoning, Quechua’s capacity for “imitative harmony” is associated with its ability to express the experience of love and the suffering of loss: “Quechua, whose tender accents were surely invented by disgraced love, which weeps with the suffering of captivity and the pain of absence!”⁵⁵ This high praise suggests the connection between suffering and poetic beauty, which in this case goes beyond a conventional romanticization of the melancholy of colonial

⁵⁴ “El idioma, rico y cautivador, pronto se hizo conocer y sojuzgó a los otros que, si bien sonoros y abundosos de expresión, como el aimará, no llegan á la *modulación del alma*, ni al coraje de la ira, y menos a la viveza y representación de la imagen, como el quechua, ese idioma cuya hermosura y flexibilidad nos hace ver las gotas de las lágrimas, cuando expresa la pena; nos muestra la risa, al pintar la alegría; nos hace escuchar el ruido del agua, señalando la cascada” (*Leyendas y recortes* 95, emphasis in original).

⁵⁵ “¡El quechua, cuyos acentos tiernos inventó sin duda el amor desgraciado, que llora con la pena del cautiverio y el dolor de la ausencia!” (*Leyendas y recortes* 95).

domination and points to a notion of postcolonial redemption. For if Quechua has always been a language of cosmic deixis, endowed with a mystical resonance between signifier and signified, how much more powerful must its magic be in a context of (post)colonial dispossession and domination by an occupying power? That is, if Quechua came to occupy a dominant position in precolonial Peru due to its inherent imitative properties, there is an underlying implication that these same properties could one day bring it back to a position of political glory befitting its poetic splendor.

Matto de Turner subtly suggests that the return of Quechua to a place of honor in Peru will occur through the recognition that it has always played a fundamental role in national identity. In *Herencia*, this message is formulated in terms of cultural syncretism, as later in the piano scene when Ernesto says, “The instrument of Gounod sighing in the ‘Ave María,’ with its heavenly blessings, or weeping with Melgar the ‘aye’ of the *yaravi* evoking the beloved woman, Margarita, always wraps the soul in something divine to complement the joy of being by your side” (121). Here, Ernesto alludes to the revolutionary-era Peruvian poet Mariano Melgar, who adapted the form of the Quechuan love song or *yaravi* (also spelled *harawi*) for the expression of romantic poetry in Spanish, thereby inventing a form of mestizo poetry in the early nineteenth century. The invocation of Melgar’s *yaravies* reminds the reader that Indigenous-European cultural hybridity has been a constitutive element of Peruvian culture since the very founding of the nation. It is probably not a coincidence that the European composer chosen to display Margarita’s musical prowess was Chopin, who was both an acculturated immigrant (a Pole living in France) and a master of cultural-artistic fusion, incorporating traditional Polish folk dances and melodies into his ornate classical compositions. In the depiction of

Margarita playing Chopin, the narrative goes beyond the project of asserting a form of mestizo nationalism, to endorse a vision of mestiza cosmopolitanism. From Matto de Turner's liberal humanist perspective, creating a space for imagining connections between Indigenous potential and international influences is just as important as the resolution of national tensions through the embrace of mestizaje.

Relevance to contemporary Indigenous issues

In its advocacy of both biological and cultural mestizaje, Matto de Turner's fiction presages a political and literary movement that would take several decades to come into full bloom. From the end of the nineteenth century to the 1940s, *mestizaje* was perhaps the single most influential organizing concept for the formulation of Latin American identity. In Peru, the discourse of cultural *mestizaje*, recognizing the value of cultural syncretism, came to prominence in tandem with the rise of literary and political indigenismo in the 1920s and 1930s. The movement's precursors in the *novecentista* generation initiated the polemic by focusing on injustices in the highlands. For example, in his 1905 essay "Nuestros indios," Manuel González Prada wrote, "We hold him [the Indian] in ignorance and servitude, we debase him in the garrisons, we brutalize him with alcohol, we set him to destroying himself in civil war, and from time to time we organize hunting parties and massacres [...] It is an unwritten axiom that the Indian has no rights, only obligations."⁵⁶ Given the dominant culture's lack of interest in forging an integrated national identity, Peru remained locked in a dynamic of oppression and apparently

⁵⁶ "Le conservamos en la ignorancia y la servidumbre, le envilecemos en el cuartel, le embrutecemos con el alcohol, le lanzamos a destrozarse en las guerras civiles y de tiempo en tiempo organizamos cacerías y matanzas [...] No se escribe pero se observa el axioma de que el indio no tiene derechos sino obligaciones" (González Prada, "Nuestros indios" 6).

incommensurable difference, with the culturally Indigenous consigned to life in peonage on the haciendas, penury in the villages, or hard labor in the mines. Both acculturated highland *mestizos* and urban *criollos* accepted the hypothesis of the inferiority of the Indigenous people as a way of justifying their own dominance. Thus, for most of the country's history, the existence of a relatively prosperous *mestizo* class did not lead to the vindication of Indigenous culture.

In this context, Clorinda Matto de Turner's pro-Indigenous advocacy was a revolutionary stance. The representation of the girl Margarita as a paragon of beauty and virtue constitutes a jostling of received ideas, considering the impurity of her origins: she is at once "mongrel," orphan, and "bastard." Despite participating to some extent in the essentialist notions of the era, *Aves sin nido* and *Herencia* argue that no matter the inauspiciousness of the child's origins, her careful upbringing and integration into society point to the most viable way forward for a nation of orphans. In light of the author's known views on the virtues of Quechua language and culture and the subtle infusion of these views into her fiction, as well as the fundamental critiques she levies against the prevailing male chauvinism and racism of her day, these texts go beyond mere instrumentalization of subaltern identity for ulterior motives (one of Rama's critiques of literary indigenismo, 95-96) as well as mere homogenizing assimilationism.

Francisco Rodríguez Cascante (2013) has charged Matto de Turner with endorsing a culturally destructive form of assimilationist *mestizaje*. According to Rodríguez Cascante's interpretation, *Aves sin nido* depicts social mobility through Westernization as the only path to salvation for the country's Indigenous people (71). As Rodríguez Cascante puts it, "It is necessary to cancel the prior identities through the tool

of education; this pragmatic dimension is what inspires the writing of the novel.”⁵⁷ While this interpretation is echoed by some of the cynical assessments levied by prominent literary theorists such as Antonio Cornejo Polar and Angel Rama, it does not consider the acculturating agenda of *Aves sin nido* in its intertextual context with regard to the novelist’s other works, particularly *Leyendas y recortes* and *Herencia*. As I have argued, the assertions of Quechua genius expressed in these other works are a reason to treat Matto de Turner’s assimilationism with nuance.

These debates continue to be relevant in the present day. Even well-intentioned advocacy advanced by white and mestizo indigenista writers, when framed in terms of assimilation and progress, is subject to criticism by Indigenous activists. The ONAMIAP (Organización Nacional de Mujeres Indígenas Andinas y Amazónicas del Perú), founded in 2009, is Peru’s only national-level Indigenous women’s organization. In an article published in March 2022, the organization criticizes state policies of “civilization and development” that continue to promote the disappearance of autochthonous languages and cultures. As they put it, “This ‘civilization’ imposes a colonial educational model that seeks to disappear our cultural identity to assimilate us as mestizos, to destroy Mother Nature while affecting the lives of future generations.”⁵⁸ Viewed from this perspective, the coordination between ideological mestizaje and policies promoting modernizing development and assimilative education involves the terminal flaw of a failure to respect Indigenous forms of knowledge, environmental values, and rights to self-identification.

⁵⁷ “Hay que cancelar las identidades anteriores mediante el instrumento pedagógico; esa dimensión pragmática es la que alienta la escritura de la novela” (Rodríguez Cascante 72, my translation).

⁵⁸ “Esa “civilización” impone un modelo educativo colonial que busca desaparecer nuestra identidad cultural para asimilarnos como mestizos, para destruir la Madre Naturaleza afectando las vidas de las futuras generaciones” (ONAMIAP, “Más de 500 años de Resistencia”).

ONAMIAP's stance on education demonstrates the nuance that a feminist Indigenous perspective can bring to the question of integration. While Glissant rightly criticizes the tendency of "people with writing to think it justified to dominate and rule people with an oral tradition" (*Caribbean Discourse* 76), this does not imply that he opposed the promotion of literacy. On the contrary, Glissant argues in favor of multilingual education for Martinican youth (*Caribbean Discourse* 183). Likewise, the right to education is one of the central aims of contemporary Indigenous women's activism. The ONAMIAP conducts training programs to help historically marginalized women find their voices and learn about their rights under national law and international declarations. They work to promote civic participation by Indigenous women at the various levels of local, regional, and national government, not only through voting and organizing but also through preparation for leadership roles. In a 2014 article on gender inequality in education, the ONAMIAP cites the findings of a UNESCO documentary to denounce women's and girls' lack of access to quality schooling, observing that inequality is reinforced at home by parents who prefer to push their daughters into domestic work or marriage. This brings up a tension between the idealized "global south" view of childhood described by Jaramillo and the notion of education as a human right. The traditional Andean view that a person is not considered an adult until marriage has persisted to the present day (Dean 158); it is difficult to reconcile this view with the idea that women have the right to prioritize education and professional development over marriage and childbearing if they so choose. ONAMIAP's invocation of universal human rights—a set of values associated with liberal humanism—indicates that the humanism of

writers such as Clorinda Matto de Turner still has relevance, at least when it comes to the topic of educational gender equality.

Furthermore, the ONAMIAP recognizes the importance of increasing literacy rates in the Indigenous communities of the Andes and Amazon. In a 2010 article, the ONAMIAP denounces the poor implementation of bilingual intercultural education, a stance that suggests that the group values intercultural education and sees no contradiction between integrative educational policies and the right to difference and self-identification. The ONAMIAP's record of success in advocating simultaneously for individual rights, women's rights and collective rights demonstrates that enfranchisement needs not come at the expense of the preservation of difference. As Carmen Valdivia describes it, "ONAMIAP's agency and success attest to the futility of Peruvian excluding mestizo discourses of nationalism, even more so for being a women's movement in a male-dominated arena" (110). In sum, the activities of the ONAMIAP and other Indigenous organizations demonstrates that the frequently lamented absence of Indigenous self-representation is becoming less relevant. The subaltern can, in fact, speak, if anyone cares to listen. These contemporary considerations are a reason to push back against the stereotype of Indigenous cultures as inherently atavistic, an unfortunate assumption that Glissant is prone to make. The ONAMIAP's stance is open to a certain degree of integration, provided it can be done on Indigenous Peruvians' own terms. With this in mind, the stances on education embraced by contemporary Indigenous activists and those extolled by Matto de Turner do not seem irreconcilable.

With its assimilationist agenda thus reconsidered, Clorinda Matto de Turner's fiction deserves to be recognized for its creolizing potential, grounded in a politics of

impurity. Glissant claims that the innovativeness of creole culture in the Caribbean was predicated on the context of rupture resulting from the violence of enslavement (*Poetics of Relation* 63-68). The situation of cultural rupture engendered by the slave trade and plantation life creates a space for reimagining values; in place of the illusion of absolute values enforced in contexts of cultural continuity, the rupture presents the possibility of relativity, contact, and active world-making. Responding to the crisis of national identity brought about by the War of the Pacific, Clorinda Matto de Turner used her fiction to attempt to create a rupture in white patriarchy, which could in theory have left a space open for a creolizing sort of mestizaje. This project was not successful; after creating a great stir upon initial publication, *Aves sin nido* faded into obscurity to the point that the prominent 1920s indigenista writer José Mariátegui did not even mention it in his reflections on Peruvian literature, and *Herencia* never had a substantial impact. By the time *Aves sin nido* began to be recognized for its historical and literary value, starting with Concha Meléndez's 1934 book *La novela indianista en Hispanoamérica (1832-1889)* but with greater momentum following the work of Aída Cometta Manzoni's 1961 *El indio en la novela de América*,⁵⁹ the discourses of indigenismo and mestizaje had been developing under the influence of international modernism and Marxism, leaving Matto's liberal feminist vision of cultural hybridity unexplored. In describing the creolizing tendencies of this vision, I do not mean to suggest that Matto de Turner's thought represents a precursor to Glissant's theory, but rather that some aspects of the creolizing view of national identity can be detected in her work, and that this conceptual apparatus

⁵⁹ Antonio Cornejo Polar describes the reception of *Aves sin nido* in his foreword, published in the Oxford edition of *Torn from the Nest*, pp. xxv-xxvi.

provides a useful tool for distinguishing between hegemonic and emancipatory forms of literary mestizaje.

CHAPTER 3

DISRUPTED FILIATION IN *BALÚN-CANÁN* BY ROSARIO CASTELLANOS

In 2018, an international women's festival was hosted by Zapatista women in Caracol Morelia, near Altamirano, Chiapas, Mexico. Roughly 7,000 women attended the event, including 2,000 Indigenous Zapatistas and 5,000 visitors from all over the world. The festival included workshops and panels conceived to raise consciousness about issues including sexism, gender violence, self-care, sexual rights, and decolonization. There were also sporting events, art exhibitions, and workshops on Indigenous knowledge and health practices. Men were only allowed to participate in the event as support staff, preparing food and performing cleaning duties so that the women would be free to sing, dance, and share their knowledge.⁶⁰

The summit was emblematic of the prominent role women have established for themselves in the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) and the broader Zapatista movement. An event entirely planned and executed by the Indigenous women of the EZLN, with its ambition to promote international solidarity among women in the struggle against patriarchy, the summit represented a reversal of the stereotypically conceived relationship between international advocacy and Indigenous people. Instead of the usual narrative of paternalistic intervention by the international human rights community on behalf of the Indigenous, this event demonstrated Zapatista women's readiness to act as leaders in the global struggle against sexism.

⁶⁰ An [article](#) by Shirin Hess describes the 2018 Zapatista Women's Summit.

The Zapatista uprising of 1994 was a direct response to the passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement, but it represented a culmination of years of interethnic organizing efforts seeking the recognition of Indigenous identities and rights to self-determination (Nash 10). Beyond its function as an assertion of cultural diversity and Indigenous rights, the revolution created an opening that has allowed Mesoamerican Indigenous women to pursue gender reforms within their respective cultures (Speed et al. 43). Thus, the 2018 Women’s Summit is a testament not only to the Zapatista movement’s enduring challenge to Mexican national politics of assimilation, but also to the movement’s capacity to bring about changes within Indigenous cultural frameworks themselves.

It so happens that 2018 was an important year for Indigenous women’s representation in mainstream Mexican pop culture, particularly with the release of Alfonso Cuarón’s film *Roma*. Depicting the life of a live-in Mixteca housekeeper working for an upper middle-class white family in Mexico City, the film was extremely well received by critics. It won a Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival and garnered ten nominations at the 2018 US Academy Awards, winning in the categories of Best Foreign Language Film, Best Cinematography, and Best Director. Critics extol the manner in which the film portrays the Indigenous housekeeper without exoticizing her or purporting to speak in her place. Lucía Gloria Vázquez Rodríguez and Francisco A. Zurian Hernández assert in a 2022 article that the film participates in a “sort of aesthetics of the marginal”—a centering of peripheral figures such as children, racialized subjects, LGBT+ characters, and domestic servants—that has come to the fore in Latin American cultural production, occasioned by the crisis of neoliberalism (103). While this

cinematographic interest in domestic servants—exemplified by films such as *Roma*, as well as *La Nana* (*The Maid*, by Sebastián Silva, 2009), *Cama adentro* (*Live-in Maid*, by Jorge Gaggero, 2004), and *La tierra y la sombra* (*Land and Shade*, by César Augusto Acevedo, 2015)—appears to be a twenty-first century trend,⁶¹ it has precedent in one of the most prominent works of twentieth-century literary *indigenismo*: the novel *Balún-Canán* by Rosario Castellanos.

What the Zapatista Women’s Summit and the *Roma* phenomenon have in common is that both involve a project of shifting Indigenous female subjectivities from their historical position at the periphery of discourse to a central position. Both the Women’s Summit and *Roma* draw attention to the care work that Indigenous women perform in Mexican society, the former by exempting them from such work for an entire weekend, the latter by depicting domestic labor in slow, cinematic detail. By bringing visibility to this care work and other positive contributions of Indigenous women, these phenomena participate in a general trend toward assertion of dignity for this historically marginalized group. However, the medium and mode of representation matter a great deal; while Cuarón’s film may do some important cultural work by casting an Indigenous woman in a lead role, it is not an act of Indigenous self-representation. While *Roma* received enormous praise from global media outlets, the Zapatista Women’s Summit was reported only in Marxist and radical feminist journals with limited readership.⁶²

⁶¹ These and other twenty-first century films devoted to domestic laborers are analyzed in the book *Domestic Labor in Twenty-First Century Latin American Cinema* edited by Elizabeth Osborne and Sofia Ruiz-Alfaro (2020).

⁶² The film was presented in an advance screening at the inaugural Zapatista film festival, the Festival de Cine Puy ta Cuxlejalitic, where it was warmly received and garnered numerous awards (Caballero). It was also endorsed by actual domestic workers such as Marcelina Bautista, who noted in an opinion for *El Universal* that the film brings visibility to their situation and reveals that little has changed in 40 years.

The discrepancy between the amount of attention received by *Roma* and that garnered by the Women's Summit is indicative of the limits that neoliberal culture places on acceptable forms of engagement with subaltern identities. This is the justification for what may seem to be a strange comparison between a work of cinematic fiction and a work of direct activist praxis: both offer ways of rethinking indigeneity, but only one of them does so in a manner that represents a true threat to neoliberal ideology. A middle-class person from a dominant culture can watch *Roma*, become enamored with the protagonist, and come away with a warm feeling of self-congratulatory compassion, and then seamlessly go on living complacently in a system that continues to rely on extreme inequality for its functioning. Imagine, for a moment, if the international media were to lavish as much attention on events like the Women's Summit as they did on *Roma*. If it seems unthinkable, this is precisely because neoliberalism has so tightly shackled modern notions of subjectivity to capitalist modes of production and ownership. The moment one is willing to seriously engage with the political reality of Zapatista feminism, the predicament of Mexican racial alterity—and indigeneity in the Americas more broadly—acquires a sense of urgency, not only in terms of the impact of structural inequality on Indigenous communities, but also in terms of what the rest of us stand to learn from Zapatista feminist resistance.

These events correspond to two different possible approaches to the presence of indigeneity in the national and international psyche: while the cinematic event involves an aesthetic and affective engagement, the Women's Summit invites the kind of engagement that represents a threat to Western ideological hegemony by demonstrating that anticapitalist feminist praxis offers an entirely different way of life. This comes at a

time when eco-socialism, a label that could be applied to Zapatismo and various other Indigenous sovereignty movements, is attaining unprecedented levels of recognition due to the increasing obviousness of the climate emergency.⁶³ It also comes at the peak of the #MeToo movement, as well as the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women movement—an international campaign to raise awareness about the epidemic of femicide and human trafficking targeting Indigenous women and girls in the US and Canada.⁶⁴ In an era of overdue denunciations of environmental destruction and gendered and racial violence, the Zapatistas host an event to show the world what militant Indigenous feminism is capable of achieving. Unfortunately, that message resonates no further than leftist echo chambers. Meanwhile, 2018's most prominent representation of Mesoamerican identity takes the form of a film set in the 1970s depicting an Indigenous woman in her prescribed role as long-suffering, infinitely patient servant to a middle-class white family. But the real problem with *Roma* lies not in its depiction of the housekeeper Cleo, indeed not anywhere within the film itself, but rather in the position of dominance it occupies in the field of existing and possible representations of Indigenous people. It can be a thoughtful, humane film and still pose the threat of a certain form of harm: the risk that attends this work is that it may reinforce in some (white, educated, affluent, or otherwise privileged) viewers the illusion of care.

These two different ways of looking at alterity correspond to two possible ways of reading the Global South: one which risks nothing but sentiment, the other which risks

⁶³ See Baer, Hans A. *Democratic Eco-Socialism as a Real Utopia: Transitioning into an Alternative World System*.

⁶⁴ According a report by the Urban Indian Health Institute, the murder rate is ten times higher than the US national average for women living on reservations, and murder is the third leading cause of death for Native women (2).

incurring a meaningful disruption in the status quo. As Glissant puts it, “thought of the Other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without ‘prizing me open,’ without changing me within myself [...] The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought” (*Poetics of Relation* 154). This dichotomy offers a useful way of analyzing the central distinction drawn in this dissertation, that between hegemonic mestizaje and creolizing mestizaje. Discourses of mestizaje, or race-mixing, have been employed for various purposes in different Latin American contexts. Some of these have involved celebrating one kind of hybridity (one favored form is: Indigenous ancestry plus Spanish/European ancestry plus European knowledge and values plus Indigenous aesthetics) while denigrating other kinds (African and Asian ancestry, Indigenous and African worldviews). In the hands of some thinkers and creators, mestizaje not only celebrates the Indigenous biological and cultural contributions to a nation’s collective identity; it also challenges Western hegemonic foundations of that identity by relativizing dominant ideology in terms provided by Black or Indigenous values. This insubordinate strain of discourse is what I call creolizing mestizaje.

As demonstrated by the popularity of *Roma*, there is either an increasing general interest in the topic of Indigenous people or an increased willingness on the part of culture magnates in the film and publishing industries to “take the risk” of engaging with indigeneity. At this moment, it is not enough to reiterate the refrain “representation matters”; it is urgent to reflect about what kinds of representation are desirable, about what sorts of representation have what sorts of consequences. The increasing profile of Mexican indigeneity as a certain form of otherness is noteworthy because Mexico,

perhaps more than any other Latin American country, has used public policy to incorporate indigeneity into its national identity, albeit frequently in the form of a discourse of mestizaje with assimilative tendencies. This nation has spent more than a century in constant negotiations about the positions of Indigenous people vis-à-vis public life, with influential culture brokers such as José Vasconcelos who worked to infuse the national consciousness with a unifying sense of mestizo identity.

Given the contemporary tension between the two different approaches to Indigenous representation outlined above, and considering the persistence of debates regarding the political viability and desirability of discourses of hybridity,⁶⁵ this chapter will conduct a critical appraisal of a work that presages these cultural phenomena: the novel *Balún-Canán* by Rosario Castellanos, first published in 1957 (translated by Irene Nicholson as *The Nine Guardians*, 1959). Set in 1930s Chiapas, *Balún-Canán* is useful for an understanding of the socio-historical circumstances that set the stage for the Zapatista revolution. The novel also bears significant thematic similarities to Cuarón's film, with a prominent Indigenous nanny character, common plot points including a near-drowning and a catastrophic ranch fire, and an overall tone of tenderness that contrasts with the brutality of certain depicted events.

In particular, the purpose of this chapter is to analyze *Balún-Canán* using the ideas of Martinican theorist Edouard Glissant, whose notions of creolization and Relation represent an alternative to the "aging field of Euro-American Theory" (*Creolization of Theory* 2). In the previous chapter, I argued that Clorinda Matto de Turner's novels *Aves sin nido* and *Herencia* respond to the late nineteenth-century Peruvian identity crisis

⁶⁵ Such as Haim Hazan's book *Against Hybridity: Social Impasses in a Globalizing World* (2015) and Marwan Kraïdy's *Hybridity, or the Cultural Logic of Globalization* (2005).

occasioned by the War of the Pacific with a political critique grounded in creolizing values, establishing a space for difference and opacity and acknowledging the creative potential that emerges from cross-cultural interaction. Through an emphasis on orphanhood and adoption, Matto de Turner's approach to hybridity emphasizes the cultural aspect while de-emphasizing the biological. Matto de Turner's work is less essentializing than much late nineteenth-century racial discourse, and, while certainly assimilationist, it opens the way for a reconsideration of dominant *criollo* values in terms provided by the values of Quechua culture. Therefore, I associate Matto de Turner's work with a creolizing strain of mestizo literature in the sense that it possesses several of the elements that Glissant would describe as hallmarks of creolization: preservation of difference, errant thinking, and agentive synthesis.

Matto de Turner's work was ahead of its time, making it difficult to categorize; while some scholars situate her as an early, radical indigenista, others consider her work to belong to the Romantic indianista tradition.⁶⁶ By the time Rosario Castellanos set out to craft her own literary contribution, the discourses of indigenismo and mestizaje had been developed into full-fledged political movements with associated literary genres. In Mexico, these developments were heavily influenced by the ideas of José Vasconcelos, whose 1925 essay *La raza cósmica* is a manifesto of Latin American ascendancy by way of embracing hybridity. In her book *The Inner Life of Mestizo Nationalism* (2008), Estelle Tarica observes that Castellanos, like her Peruvian contemporary José María Arguedas, goes beyond the social-realist indigenismo of the 1920s and 1930s by forging a sort of "intimate indigenismo," a semi-autobiographical approach that uses the narrator's

⁶⁶ See Arribas García (1991) for a summary of this debate.

childish innocence, vulnerability, and encounter with Otherness to make a new kind of contribution to mestizo nationalism. For Tarica, *Balún-Canán* enacts this “intimate indigenismo” via a Glissantian return to the colonial point of intercultural entanglement (“*le point d’intrication*”). In the present chapter, I detect other Glissantian principles at work in the novel, particularly the undermining of linear filiation through relational values and an associated creolization of the imaginary.

Castellanos’s first novel, *Balún-Canán* depicts racial and gender tensions in 1930s Chiapas, where the contradiction between the established patriarchal order of the *ladino*⁶⁷ landed gentry and the pro-Indigenous policies of the government under President Lázaro Cárdenas (in office 1934-1940) resulted in widespread social upheaval. In what follows, I will argue that Castellanos’s novel responds to the crisis of the crumbling hacienda system by using the theme of adoption to undermine the legitimacy of patronymic and biological lineage central to *ladino* patriarchy. To support this assertion, I examine four “adoptive” relationships with different configurations: the central relationship between the white child protagonist and her Indigenous nanny; the fraught relationship between the protagonist’s biological mother Zoraida and Zoraida’s nephew Ernesto; the volatile relationship between the cousin Francisca and her younger sister Matilde; and, finally, the mutually adoptive caring relationship between the ancestor Otilia and her father Estanislao. Here, I use the term “adoptive relationships” in a broad sense to capture both literal examples of adoption (such as the adoption of Otilia) and instances of figurative adoption such as the imprinting of the protagonist onto her nanny. To analyze how these

⁶⁷ In Chiapas and Central America, this term refers to the demographic of Spanish-speaking people who dress in Western clothing; it is therefore more of a cultural category than a biological one. See Navarro and Legorreta for sociological accounts of race relations in Mexico.

complex alliances undermine the principles of lineage and patriarchal authority, I will consider ways of interpreting the work's subversive imaginary according to a creolizing feminist framework. To accomplish this, I draw on the synthesis formulated by Kris F. Sealey in her 2020 book *Creolizing the Nation*, which lays out a series of compatible concepts from Édouard Glissant, Gloria Anzaldúa, Mariana Ortega, and Maria Lugones. The relevant concepts from creolization theory include the privileging of relational contacts over linear filiation in the construction of identity, the disavowal of the Western concept of subjectivity as autonomous and unified, and the assertion of the imperative to transform the personal and national imaginary based on these insights. In its rejection of a roots-based model of legitimacy in favor of a relational notion of identity, *Balún-Canán* presents a critical, disruptive vision of cultural hybridity associated with the creolization of the imaginary.

Legitimacy, authority, and Relation

The novel enacts its critique of received notions of legitimacy through its portrayal of interpersonal conflicts and caregiving in a context of extreme power imbalances. Various scholars including Sandra Messenger Cypess and Maria Rosa Fiscal have analyzed the plot of *Balún-Canán* in terms of power dynamics. According to Fiscal, the three main axes of the author's work are lack of identity, loneliness, and matrimony/maternity, all of which converge in the conflictive relationship between men and women.⁶⁸ In *Balún-Canán*, this gender conflict intersects with racial conflict in the

⁶⁸ “La falta de identidad, la soltería y el matrimonio-maternidad—este último como única forma de realización femenina—son los tres ejes principales que se cruzan y entrecruzan en la narrativa de RC. Todos convergen en un punto común: la conflictividad de la relación hombre-mujer.” (Fiscal 27)

context of the tenuous situation at the hacienda Chactajal, where the Indigenous peasants tied to the *ladino* Argüello family have begun to rebel. Although the father figure, César, is vested with power over this domain, the servants' insubordination looms as a growing threat to the landowners' authority. Alongside this incipient unrest, a series of figuratively adoptive relationships serve as counterexamples to the standard model of lineage, undermining the principles that undergird the patriarch's authority. In her article "*Balún-Canán: A Model Demonstration of Discourse as Power*" (1985), Cypess offers a Foucauldian reading of the novel, emphasizing the antagonistic relationships between several key characters. In the present chapter, I take Cypess's relational analysis a step further by turning attention to a selection of caring relationships in the text. As Cypess has argued, "central to *Balún-Canán* is a study of the strategies of power, elaborating the oppressor-oppressed relationship in many of its manifestations in Mexican society" (2). These manifestations include "the obvious Ladino-Indian struggle, but also Man-Woman, parent-child, brother-sister, Spanish speaker-Tzeltal speaker, hijo legítimo-ilegítimo." (2) An analysis of nurture kinship in this text shows how Castellanos goes beyond mere societal critique to suggest a creolized, relational mode of belonging to potentially supplant patriarchal tradition and other nostalgic forms of world-making, evoking possibilities for change in Mexican society by depicting complex alliances among marginalized characters. This subversion of legitimacy-based criteria of belonging is grounded in a model of subjectivity that is more compatible with the creolizing model described by Glissant than with dominant Western models. The main differences between these models of subjectivity have to do with their respective stances on the stability, autonomy, and unity of the subject. Contrasting with the static, autonomous, unified

subject (which is prototypically male), Castellanos' characters exemplify a model that is dynamic, interdependent, and multiplicitous.

Coupling a scathing portrait of Mexican male chauvinism with a critique of settler colonialism, *Balún Canán* depicts the inequalities inherent in the hacienda as a structure of social organization. The novel addresses multiple modalities of belonging and exclusion, including the exclusion of women and girls from patriarchal power, the related limitations on women's self-development, the anti-Indigenous racism foundational to *ladino* dominance, and the exclusion of "illegitimate" children from inherited privilege. Through the contrast between the brutality of the status quo and the possibilities presented by intersubjective values (including Mayan ethics of reciprocity as expressed in the moral mythology conveyed by the nanny), the novel attacks the hacienda's patriarchal structure and the principles on which it is based. As Cypess puts it, "The patriarchal hierarchy in place since the Conquest is presented as a fragile and alterable structure instead of the immutable and unassailable institution the patriarchy would like us to accept" (2). By repeatedly emphasizing the fragility of conventional modes of legitimacy while depicting the destabilizing, motivating, and nurturing roles of substitute mothers, *Balún-Canán* goes beyond mere social critique to present some possible avenues for a nascent relational ethics. In this sense, Castellanos' masterwork participates in the strains of feminist and anticolonial discourse that reject nostalgia in favor of an emphasis on contemporary relational values.⁶⁹ This project is associated with a creolization of the imaginary based on intimate encounters with otherness that disrupt the child narrator's sense of self, jostling the idea of *ladino* identity and its historically privileged position.

⁶⁹ For an account of some of these, see Lynn Huffer's book *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures: Nostalgia, Ethics, and the Question of Difference* (1998).

As I will explain in detail below, this jostling takes place through the Indigenous nanny's mentoring relationship with the child and is reinforced by revelations about the arbitrariness of the familial construct of legitimacy, as exemplified by the existence of liminal characters who violate the code of linear filiation.

According to Sealey's interpretation, Glissantian creolization is broadly compatible with resistant notions of subjectivity proposed by Latin American feminists Maria Lugones, Mariana Ortega, and Gloria Anzaldúa. As Sealey describes it: "Both creolist and Latina feminist scholars have taken up this task of envisioning subjectivity otherwise. Theirs is a search for a conception of the subject that (a) is relational, (b) avoids essentialism, (c) is grounded not in the fear of the power of the other, and (d) conditions the possibility of a coalitional politics" (Sealey 99). The subject conceived under this creolizing-feminist approach offers an alternative to the form of subjectivity that underlies settler colonialism, which Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes in terms of a supplemental skepticism that accompanies the Cartesian "ego cogito," a skepticism about the humanity of racialized peoples captured by the phrase "ego conquiro" (Maldonado-Torres 245, cited in Sealey 99). To go beyond both the "ego cogito" and "ego conquiro" would require "thinking subjectivity otherwise," which for Mariana Ortega takes the form of moving away from a concern for "being-in-the-world" and toward a notion of "being-in-between-worlds," and away from concepts of the self as static, stable, independent, and internally homogenous, to a vision of the subject as dynamic, interdependent, and mutable without being fragmented. This creolizing concept of subjectivity results in notions of collective identity that run counter to many traditional and modern Western models of belonging, especially discourses of belonging grounded

in purity of origins and constructions of national identity based on a quest for a unifying History. In the section below on the cousin characters Matilde and Francisca, I detect the multiplicitous concept of subjectivity as one of the mechanisms whereby Castellanos undermines Western assumptions about identity and filiation.

The creolizing framework of cultural hybridity bears some similarities and differences to the Mexican discourse of *mestizaje*, most prominently theorized by the cultural administrator and philosopher José Vasconcelos in the 1920s and 1930s. Both discourses reject the politics of racial purity and aim at the rehabilitation of racially subjugated peoples. However, the relevant distinction between Vasconcelian *mestizaje* and Glissantian creolization has to do with the preservation of difference: the former proposes a model of cultural convergence, the achievement of national unity through homogenizing synthesis, while the latter regards cross-cultural influence as a dynamic, ongoing process that yields unpredictable new cultural formations. Vasconcelos's ideas have been highly influential in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, with impacts on public policy, literature, art and aesthetics, and national identity (González Salinas 316-317, Amado 449). Although his ideas fell into disfavor in the 1930s due to their association with social Darwinism (González Salinas 324), they had already been sufficiently incorporated into assumptions about Latin American identity as to constitute the groundwork for ideologies of colorblindness and regressive assimilationism (Amado 454-457). For this reason, I refer to Vasconcelos's theories and affiliated discourses of whitening assimilation as hegemonic *mestizaje*.

Thus, one key difference between creolizing *mestizaje* and its hegemonic counterpart has to do with the distinction between convergent and divergent models of

cultural change. In the Glissantian framework, creolization represents a centrifugal motion, while *métissage*, like its Spanish cognate *mestizaje*, corresponds to a centripetal motion. In Glissant's own words: "If we posit *métissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. Creolization diffracts, whereas certain forms of *métissage* can concentrate one more time" (*Poetics of Relation* 34). Glissant conceives of philosophies of unity ("the One") as characteristic of Western hegemonic discourse. In contrast with this idea, Glissant traces the origin of hybrid identity in the Caribbean to the ruptures represented by the plantation. This existential ontology "retrieves resistance from being," and so under Glissant's idea of creolization, "events at the level of the everyday determine modalities not yet coded for in the totality of being and (more significantly) in the being of power" (Sealey 81). While Glissant views Creole language as the most obvious symbol of how creolization "approximates the idea of Relation," he does not conceive of the principle as limited to the Caribbean archipelago; indeed, he finds evidence of creolizing processes in the work of Henry James and Walt Whitman, as well as Black American poets and William Faulkner, and also in the Ibero-American sphere: "And at stake once again in Brazilian and Hispano-American literatures: the explosion of baroque expression, the whorls of time, the mingling of centuries and jungles, the same epic voice retying into the weft of the world, beyond any imposed solitude, exaction, or oppression" (*Poetics of Relation* 34). Because Glissantian creolization represents a fairly specific type of cross-cultural development characterized by its rejection of essentialism and assimilationism, it presents a set of tools for defining non-totalizing tendencies in certain versions of *mestizaje*. In the close

readings further on in this chapter, these theoretical distinctions support my claim that *Balún-Canán* represents a de-assimilation of *ladino* identity, an attempt to dissociate this mestizo people from the Western settler-colonial mindset.

Historical context

The historical circumstances of *Balún-Canán* are characterized by social upheaval in Chiapas during the period of political reforms under the Cárdenas government in the 1930s. These reforms, intended to promote the wellbeing of Mexico's Indigenous people by requiring a minimum wage, prohibiting capital punishment, redistributing lands, and requiring that large landowners provide education for their servants' children, had a destabilizing effect on the balance of power in rural Mexico; nevertheless, in the Ocosingo region of Chiapas, the basic political organization of the hacienda remained unchanged for decades, and did not disappear until the 1970s (Legorreta Díaz 602). Under the hacienda system, economic and discursive power are concentrated in the hands of the *patrón*, the family patriarch. This power is grounded in relations of coercion and dependence, but also negotiation. In her study of the political organization of the haciendas of Ocosingo, Chiapas (a study which includes a letter written by Rosario Castellanos' real-life father César), María del Carmen Legorreta Díaz states that studies which exclusively focus on power enforced through threat of violence fail to consider the complexity of the relations of dependence between hacienda servants and owners. If it is surprising that conditions resembling feudal serfdom persisted on the haciendas into the third quarter of the twentieth century, it is perhaps because it is difficult to imagine the degree of dependence that was established between the Indigenous servant class and their

masters. According to Legorreta Díaz, interviews with former servants and masters suggest that methods of coercion were of secondary importance in these haciendas (604). In fact, power relations on the haciendas were based on the reduction of the peasants' life-world to the plantation in a context of nearly total isolation, with the masters serving as the servants' primary and often sole intermediaries with the outside world. The owners tried to prevent their servants from having contact with public administration officials and handled all administrative affairs such as birth and death certificates on their behalf; this dependence was compounded by the fact that most of the peasants spoke no Spanish (Legorreta Díaz 607-608). With the *ladinos* enjoying a monopoly on land ownership, a relationship of dependence was established such that expulsion from the hacienda was a punishment to be feared rather than a desirable emancipation.

In the region of Cañadas de Ocosingo, the initial period of reforms under Cárdenas in the 1930s was accompanied by an agrarian struggle aiming at redistributing the hacienda land; Indigenous people from all the haciendas participated in this struggle via the organization of a league of agrarian communities (Legorreta Díaz 602). These struggles were directed against a semi-feudal localized power structure which Legorreta Díaz describes as oligarchic in nature, using Max Weber's definition of oligarchy, associated with the concept of patrimonialism, whereby the "common good" becomes the domain of a private individual and this power is conflated with property such that the subordinated persons are considered part of the patriarch's estate (605). In this context, the landowner's legally sanctioned right to the land is associated with dominion over the people who live there, who are maintained in a state of dependency through geographic isolation, lack of access to education, and an absence of alternative means of survival

(Legorreta Díaz 606-608). In light of these facts, it is clear that the context depicted in *Balún-Canán* bears substantial similarities to the sphere Glissant describes as the “region of the ‘plantation system,’” making it one of the spaces that blurs the boundaries between “plantation America” and Mesoamerica (“Making of the Americas” 81, 84-85).

Considering that the *patrón*’s political power is based on land ownership, which in theory is inherited in a patrilineal manner, the critique of legitimacy enacted through counterexamples in *Balún-Canán* strikes at the heart of the local political power structure. In what follows, I will argue that this critique represents a creolizing strategy in the sense that it relies on a rejection of filiation in favor of Relation as the central criterion of societal belonging. The criteria for the power of the *hacendado* (landowner) are age, gender, blood, and name.⁷⁰ Those who enjoy a “legitimate” claim to territory by possessing the right attributes in each of these categories are vested with discursive and coercive authority within the scope of their domain. In the rigid hierarchy of the hacienda, women, Indigenous servants, and children are all subjugated to the power of the *patrón*. However, as Castellanos depicts the situation in *Balún-Canán*, the complexity of the constellation of legitimacy is also one of its weaknesses, because it will inevitably be challenged by liminal cases, such as César’s cousin Francisca who possesses the family name and blood but lacks male authority, or the protagonist’s mother Zoraida, who possesses the family name but not the blood or gender of power (and whose authority is therefore projected onto the boy child Mario), or César’s nephew Ernesto,

⁷⁰ “Class distinctions, gender, and age are the key determinants of the privilege of discourse, and Castellanos focuses on these in *Balún-Canán*” (Cypess 3). For the purposes of the present argument, I have refined the category of “class distinctions” to the more specific criteria of blood and name, because both criteria are central to César’s power but possessed variously by other key characters.

who has the family name but who is not recognized by his father, and is treated as an illegitimate child, destined to spend the whole novel struggling for legitimacy and agent.

Ultimately, the criteria of name, blood, and gender are founded on a nostalgic principle of inheritance. The justification for César's claim to territory is rooted in the Spanish model of inheritance, projected onto Mexican soil. The significance of the name Argüello in the novel is associated with nostalgia for the privileges associated with inherited wealth, with the related connotations of prestige and power—the sorts of privileges threatened by the Cárdenas reforms. As Lynne Huffer points out in her book *Maternal Pasts, Feminist Futures* (1998), nostalgia is inherently conservative; any return to origins entails a return to the social forms of the past. White male authority, as represented in *Balún-Canán*, depends on the perpetuation of the traditional criteria of legitimacy; when these are threatened, the fear arises that the whole edifice of society will fall apart. Moreover, given that the privileges associated with being white, male, and wealthy are also the only guarantors of access to education, and that familiarity with European culture further consolidates legitimacy in the form of intellectual development (alluded to in the novel through references to César's young adulthood in Europe), it is fair to say that traditional Chiapan *ladino* patriarchy simultaneously establishes artificial criteria for fully realized subjectivity and systematically prohibits large groups of people from fulfilling those criteria. Castellanos's destabilization of these criteria represents a creolizing gesture in the sense that it relativizes the notion of filiation to clear a space for relational identity. As Glissant puts it, “can we not imagine a new dimension of identity, open to the truth, or simply the presence of the Other?” (“Making of the Americas” 84).

Narrative structure and structural power

Balún-Canán follows a unique structure: it is divided into three parts, each of which is further subdivided into many short chapters, with first-person narration in the first and third sections and omniscient or polyvocal narration in the middle section. The first part is narrated from the perspective of the anonymous ladina protagonist, hereinafter referred to as the “niña.” This first part takes place in the city of Comitán, where the Argüello family has been living in comfort, far from the work and grit of the ranch, Chactajal, which is their legacy and source of income. The second part of the book describes their relocation to the ranch and the ensuing months of conflict and is recounted in a voice that alternates between omniscient narrative and the inner monologues of Don César, his wife Zoraida, their nephew Ernesto, cousins Matilde and Francisca, and the Indigenous leader Felipe. In this middle part, the niña is described but not voiced, a narrative strategy reflecting the alienation she experiences at Chactajal. Finally, the third section of the novel returns to the first-person narration in the voice of the niña as she returns to Comitán hoping to find a connection to her past and especially her nanny.

The structural innovation of casting the opening and closing sections in the voice of a little girl while depicting the central section through omniscient third-person narration and the inner monologues of a variety of characters is not merely a formal conceit. This structure reserves a prominent place for the voice of the girl without limiting the storytelling to her perspective. It allows her to be the protagonist of the novel without playing a prominent role in the events that comprise the central story arc of racial class struggle and social upheaval. With the dramatic events at Chactajal bookended by the personal narrative of the little girl, the novel’s structure places the protagonist quite

literally at the margins of the action, while simultaneously expanding those margins, dilating time in the first and third sections in contrast to the rapid succession of events that unfold in the middle section. Tarica argues that the novel's fractured composition results from the tensions between the author's commitment to a marginal, disempowered perspective and her desire to use narrative omniscience to inscribe the text in a national narrative of progress (145).

According to Zamudio Rodríguez, the narrator of all three parts is the same person; in the second section the narrator is the girl once she has grown up: "subjective memory is narrated in the first person and the third person is used for the narration which, by appearing more objective, validates the first."⁷¹ While the claim that the omniscient narrator of section two is the same person as the girl narrator of the first and third sections cannot be verified, the idea that the third-person narration serves to validate the first-person narrative has merit. However, it could just as readily be claimed that the direct experiences of the girl serve to validate the messages of the central section. What is certain is that the two modes of narration stand in a relationship of complementarity, allowing the book to depict a series of events that the girl did not witness (but which will affect her greatly) while still being fundamentally centered on her perspective.

Disruptive relations

In *Balún-Canán*, the threats to the *ladino* order of authority come from above, in the form of changing laws, from below, in the form of a rising spirit of rebellion amongst the Indigenous servant class, and from within, in the form of relationships that disrupt

⁷¹ "se narra en primera persona el recuerdo subjetivo y se usa la tercera persona para la narración que, al paracer más objetiva, valida la primera." (Zamudio Rodríguez 130)

and contradict the established hierarchy. As mentioned above, this authority is associated with certain criteria, particularly name, blood, and gender. The various examples of adoptive relationships each undermine different aspects of this triad. The niña's transcultural relationship with the nana contrasts with other adoptive relationships: that between Ernesto and his pseudo-godparents Zoraida and César, that between Matilde and her older sister Francisca, and that between the ancestors Otilia and Estanislao. While the niña-nana nexus evokes the creolization of innocent consciousness, the latter three relationships demonstrate the fragility of the landed gentry's grip on power. Through the negative parallelism of these relationships, it is suggested that the tenuousness of César and Zoraida's grip on economic power also applies to the power they wield over their own daughter's mind.

In this story of a family in decline, it gradually becomes apparent that the clan is crumbling one member at a time, some more spectacularly than others. Along the way, the adoptive relationships are arranged as a cascade of frustrated attempts at connection. The niña's adoption offers a glimpse of possible hope which is ultimately disappointed; Ernesto's adoption displays the precariousness of relations founded on utility in the absence of deeper bonds. This relationship reveals the absurdity of the blood criterion of legitimacy in a context where most male landowners habitually sire multiple "illegitimate" children, all doomed not to be recognized. The relationship between Matilde and Francisca is a story of sacrifice, dependency, and ultimately resentment. The extreme behaviors of Francisca in response to the threat of displacement reflect the tenuous bonds of a family in crisis, further complicating modern notions of legitimacy through recourse to magic and superstition. Finally, the barely mentioned, easily

overlooked relationship between Otilia and her father Estanislao presents a delinking between name and blood, in the sense that Otilia is an adopted orphan who goes on to become the progenitor of the family line. In this manner, the hallmarks of legitimacy and lineage are successively called into question, discursively effecting a *tabula rasa* of the foundations of inherited power. In light of Glissant's characterization of Western epic literature as that which responds to a crisis of identity by affirming ancient filial ties and unique roots, Castellanos's preoccupation with themes of adoption and illegitimacy places *Balún-Canán* in the category of anti-epic. While epic works such as *Beowulf*, the *Iliad* and the Books of Moses set out to justify territorial claims through unifying accounts of singular origins and ancestral warfare, *Balún-Canán* does precisely the opposite, depicting the landowners' identity as dubious and their claim to the territory as untenable.

Niña-nana

The first section of the novel depicts the niña's experiences in Comitán under the care of her Indigenous nanny, always referred to simply as "mi nana." The opening words, in the voice of the nanny, are notably foreboding: "And then in anger they dispossessed us, they confiscated what we had treasured: the word, which is memory's strong-box"⁷² (ibid. 13). Her speech then describes the degraded state and future fate of the wealthy landowners: "Ever since that day they have burned and been eaten up with the great logs on the hearth. [...] Only the ash remains, and it has no face. All this so that you might come, and he who was younger than you are, and a breath—just a breath—

⁷² "Y entonces, coléricos, nos despojaron, nos arrebataron lo que habíamos atesorado: la palabra, que es el arca de la memoria" (ibid., 9)

might suffice you...”⁷³ (13). Hearing these strange and doleful words, the little girl demands that the nanny stop telling that story. This scene contains omens of all that will unfold in the novel: the decline of the family’s power and of their control over their Indigenous servants, the great arson fire that will mark the beginning of the end, the death of the protagonist’s brother Mario, and the family’s refusal to heed the signs of the times.

These signs of change arrive one after another, both in the form of official decrees and rumblings of rebellion among the servants. The signs include closure of the girls’ school of Comitán, an assault on an Indigenous peasant for being loyal to César, and the closure of the churches. When César is informed by his neighbor Jaime that the landowners will be required to provide schools for their servants’ children, César dismisses the mandate as inconsequential: “But this isn’t important. You remember when they fixed the minimum salary? [...] What I’m saying is that we can fix things now as we did before”⁷⁴ (ibid. 46). César has a clever strategy to get around the mandate; he will appoint his own teacher. To this end, he chooses his brother’s illegitimate son Ernesto. Shortly thereafter, it is decided that the family will go to live at the ranch, Chactajal. As they prepare for their departure, the nanny utters a prayer that seems to harken back to the “breath” she mentioned in the opening scene, a prayer to ignite the fires of change in the little girl’s heart, to make her a kind and humble master: “Open her understanding, broaden it so that truth may find ample space there, that she may pause before raising the whip, knowing that every lash that falls prints a scar on the chastiser’s shoulder. May her

⁷³ “Desde aquellos días arden y se consumen con el leño en la hoguera... Queda la ceniza sin rostro. Para que puedas venir tú y el que es menor que tú y les baste un soplo, solamente un soplo...” (ibid., 9)

⁷⁴ “Pero esto no tiene importancia. ¿Te acuerdas cuando impusieron el salario mínimo? [...] Lo que te digo es que igual que entonces podemos ahora arreglar las cosas” (*Balún-Canán* 44).

acts be like ointment poured into wounds”⁷⁵ (ibid. 62). This scene displays the nanny’s moral influence on the *niña*, which serves as a microcosm of creolization of the Mexican national imaginary through influences from Mayan values of reciprocity and mutual support. This transformation could be conceived as a form of cultural *mestizaje*, but it is distinct from the *mestizaje* of Vasconcelos, which conceived the Indigenous contribution to Mexican identity as fundamentally biological rather than cultural or intellectual (González Salinas 313-314).

Much has been written about the protagonist’s relationship with her nanny.⁷⁶ This relationship is one of the most important aspects of the novel and yields vital insights for an understanding of Castellanos’ disappointed idealism and feelings of indebtedness toward the Tzeltal people. While this relationship is fundamental to the formation of the protagonist’s identity, the analysis of it is all the richer when complemented by that of parallel relationships; it is useful to consider the primary adoptive relationship in its context as one of many adoptive relationships depicted in the book. The *niña*’s relationship with her *nana* seems, in the first section, to be emblematic of hope of possible redemption and reconciliation between the Tzeltal and their *ladino* masters. The words “les baste un soplo, solamente un soplo” suggest that it only requires a breath to ignite the fires of change in the hearts of the impressionable young. It rapidly becomes clear that the *niña* feels far more affection for the *nana* than for her biological mother Zoraida, who is constantly portrayed as cruel, petty, racist, and complicit in perpetuating patriarchal domination. The *niña* feels disaffected from the masculinist culture of her

⁷⁵ “Abre su entendimiento, ensánchalo, para que pueda caber la verdad. Y se detenga antes de descargar el latigazo, sabiendo que cada latigazo que cae graba su cicatriz en la espalda del verdugo. Y así sean sus gestos como el ungüento derramado sobre las llagas.” (62)

⁷⁶ See articles by María Inés Lagos (1997), Guillermo Lain Corona (2011), and Carol Clark D’Lugo (2009).

family, and feels drawn to the culture of the nana, but there too she is an outcast. The nana provides the niña with some native knowledge of plants, animals, and spirits such as the *dzulum* and the nine guardians of the title. This mentorship subtly undermines the *ladino* claim to the land by offering a model of a relationship to the land based on intimate knowledge rather than territorial domination.

In one key passage, the nana recounts an origin myth. In the beginning, there were four lords in heaven, who wanted to create a man who would be grateful to them. Deciding what to make man out of, they first try mud, but on the test of water, the man dissolves. Then they make a man of wood, but on the test of fire, he burns up. When they make the man of gold, he withstands water and fire, but is immobile and mute. Finally, they make a man of flesh, who spreads out and reproduces and works the land. The people of flesh find the man of gold, and are enraptured, and begin to worship him and make offerings to him. Finally, the man of gold is overcome with gratitude and gives thanks to the lords in heaven. The lords in heaven look down on the situation, and say that it is good, and ever since that day, we call the man of gold the rich man and the men of flesh the poor. This fable depicts unequal social relations in terms of a fragile harmony. As long as the poor continue to accept the legitimacy of the man of gold, this harmony can be maintained. This will depend on the rich man keeping his word and taking care of the poor man, who has made him rich. Furthermore, the gods ordered that the poor would be called to testify for the goodness of the rich at the time of final judgement: no rich person can get into heaven unless accompanied by a poor person (*Balún-Canan* 30).

The niña asks who her companion to the afterlife will be, to which the nana replies that it is unknown, but will be revealed in the future. This passage evokes a values system that seems resigned to inequality but which places limits on abuse, suggesting that the rich will ultimately be accountable to the poor. In this scene, the Tzeltal worldview is portrayed as a colonized mindset accepting the master-slave dialectic as divinely ordained, with the caveat that the master's legitimacy is contingent on his good faith. The slave's recourse is not in this world, but the next. It is useful to compare this passage to the opening scene of the novel, when the nana says that all that is required is to blow on the embers to bring the children to life. With this in mind, the telling of the origin tale appears to have a clear motive: to ignite a spark in the child. At the close of the first section, when the nana blesses the niña in farewell, the substance of her prayer is to ask God to make the niña into a good master, which is to say, a good steward of land and people. These passages suggest that the nana, who appears to be among the least resistant and insubordinate of all the Indigenous people described in the book, is actually very intentionally planting the seeds of change in the mind of the girl.

These seeds of change are nourished by offering the girl an alternative worldview to supplant the ideology of *ladino* domination. By teaching the niña about the properties of plants, the mythical *dzulúm*, and various parables, and by offering an attitude of dutiful care coupled with candid criticism, the nana serves as a substitute mother who is able to offer an ethical model which, despite being trapped in the logic of domination, is based on reciprocity and relationality, in stark contrast to the hierarchical thinking central to César and Zoraida's worldview. The niña cannot know and love the nana and simultaneously accept the extreme prejudices of Zoraida. Nevertheless, the niña has still

absorbed some racist attitudes, as we see in her horror in the opening scene at the idea of turning into an “Indian,” or in her remark in the closing chapter that all “Indians” look alike. With these moments in mind, the outcome of the ember remains quite ambiguous—it is unknown whether it will be stoked into a steady flame of Relation or burst out in a conflagration of hatred. The niña’s future path is unwritten. As I shall argue below, this ambiguity does not diminish the book’s significance in the creolization of Mexican national identity, but leaves the onus on the reader to draw the necessary conclusions.

The girl’s obsession with the nanny, preferring her over her biological mother, serves as a site of possible transference of loyalty, as the niña seems at times to be prepared to abandon her privileges as an Argüello. Véronique Landry describes this process as an example of transculturation, a term coined in 1940 by Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz in his book *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar*. Ortiz observes that transculturation accounts both for syncretism of national cultures and for the terribly violent clashes of colonial history. In literary criticism, the concept of transculturation has been most thoroughly developed by Uruguayan critic Angel Rama, for whom transculturation serves as a tool for achieving cultural and economic modernity despite the obstacles created by colonial systems. In Rama’s view, transculturation frequently occurs first between foreign metropolitan influences and local capitals, and then secondly between the local capitals and the hinterlands. For both Ortiz and Rama, the notion of transculturation is not unidirectional in the sense of acculturating a subordinate culture to the values of a dominant one but can also involve the influence of a dominated culture on a dominant one. It is in this sense that Landry describes the recovery of Other voices in

Balún-Canán as a case of “transculturation from below,” whereby female and Indigenous subjectivities are vindicated and contrasted with the brutality of landed patriarchal domination.

When I argue that *Balún-Canán* represents a creolizing form of mestizaje, I do not simply mean that it is an instance of “transculturation from below,” although Landry’s concept remains relevant to my interpretation. On a deeper level, the connection between Castellanos and Glissant pertains to the Mexican author’s profound and subtle interrogation of subjectivity in terms complicated by a painful reckoning with otherness. The crisis of self-identity captured by *Balún-Canán* as a coming-of-age narrative suggests not only that Mexican mestizaje ought to be informed by Mayan values, but also that a recognition of the central contradictions of Mexico as a site of colonization implies the shattering of the vision of selfhood upon which the modern state and society have been erected. That is, *Balún-Canán* is not merely a transculturating text, but also one that operates at the nexus of fundamental philosophical and political concerns regarding the relationship between subjectivity and citizenship. With this in mind, the general concept of “transculturation from below” opens the way for the more specific concept of the creolization of the imaginary through the acquisition of an alternative model of subjectivity and belonging.

Landry has observed that the void created by the indifference of the parents leaves the niña open to adopting Indigenous viewpoints. Her close relationship with her nanny allows her to observe the similarity between the marginalization she experiences as a girl and that suffered by the Tzeltal people, reinforcing her feeling of being an outsider in a

world she cannot escape. One example of her acquisition of this consciousness comes in the following scene, when the niña discovers the voice of the wind:

Now I know that this is the voice I've been hearing ever since I was born. It's my constant companion. I've known it in winter, armed with knives that are sharp and long, to stab through our flesh that's suffering with cold. I've felt it in summer, drawing lazily ever nearer, yellow with pollen, with a flavour of wild honey between the lips. [...] But until today I've never been to its homeland where its will runs free, and I stand here with lowered eyes because (Nana's said so) that's the way humility looks at bigness. [...]

The moment we're back home I look for Nana to tell her the news. "You know? Today I've met the wind."

She doesn't stop working. Thoughtful and unsmiling she goes on husking corn. But I know she's happy.

"That's good, child. Because your people possess Nine Guardians, and the wind is one." (*Nine Guardians* 23)⁷⁷

Here, the niña hurries to inform the nanny proudly that she has gotten to know the wind, seeking the nanny's approval, which is subtly granted. The close attention the girl pays to the nanny's stories and lessons contrasts with the alienation she feels from her parents. Landry observes that the novel illustrates two different sides of the concept of transculturation, one provided by Ortiz and the other by Gareth Williams, who describes transculturation as an "intellectual desire firmly rooted within modern processes of nation-state and national culture formation" (Williams 23-24). Following Ortiz's

⁷⁷ "Ahora me doy cuenta que la voz que he estado escuchando desde que nací era ésta. Y ésta la compañía de todas mis horas. Lo había visto ya, en invierno, venir armado de largos y agudos cuchillos y traspasar nuestra carne acongojada de frío. Lo he sentido en verano, perezoso, amarillo de polen, acercarse con un gusto de miel silvestre entre los labios. [...] Pero nunca, hasta hoy, había yo venido a la casa de su albedrío. Y me quedo aquí, con los ojos bajos porque (la nana me lo ha dicho) es así como el respeto mira a lo que es grande. [...]"

Apenas llegamos a la casa busco a mi nana para comunicarle la noticia.

-¿Sabes? Hoy he conocido al viento.

Ella no interrumpe su labor. Continúa desgranando el maíz, pensativa y sin sonrisa. Pero yo sé que está contenta.

-Eso es bueno, niña. Porque el viento es uno de los nueve guardianes de tu pueblo." (*Balún-Canán* 24)

definition, the presence of the nanny produces a transculturating influence whereby Indigenous values supplant *ladino* values; by contrast, using Williams' definition, the necessity of living between two worlds produces instability for the girl (Landry 6). To put this latter process in terms current to Latina feminism (as used in the works of Maria Lugones and Mariana Ortega), one might say that the influence of the nanny allows the girl to move from fragmentation to multiplicity, and this multiplicity will be characterized by a feeling of unease to the extent that her heart is penetrated by commitment.

This brings up the theoretical distinction between the “multiplicitous” and the “fragmentary.” According to Kris F. Sealey (2020), this distinction lies in assumptions about what precedes the concept of subjectivity: if the template for subjectivity is a united, pure subject, then the alternative might be conceived as fragmentary: “A fragment is an incomplete part of a whole: in its being it calls forth some large unity of which it is a part and without which it is incomplete, lacking, and perhaps also ontologically degraded as a consequence” (Sealey 103). When certain subjects, such as those affected by imposed racialization, are conceived as “fragmented,” this implies the existence of a prior, unified self; in this sense, fragmentation represents just another guise for unity without escaping the logic of the cogito. Sealey proposes that this ideal of the unified self is a Western construct, not a universal truth. The creolizing insight is that there is no pre-existing whole self independent of the experiences of contradiction. This distinction between fragmentation and multiplicity helps explain the inner conflict that drives the coming-of-age narrative of *Balún-Canán*: the *hacendado* lifeworld, with its emphasis on hierarchy and rigid roles, does not make room for an intellectually ambitious girl; this

world's insistence on its own cohesive unity through resistance to change consigns the girl to a pre-circumscribed set of possibilities involving marriage, inheritance, and domesticity. If she cannot or will not fit into that mold, she will be treated as problematic, broken, flawed. To the extent that she rejects the role played by Zoraida, her identity will be fragmented. Were it not for the presence of the nanny, the protagonist would have had no recourse for overcoming this fragmentation, but the nanny's modeling of other ways of thinking and being offers a way of relativizing the familial power structure. This makes it possible to conceive the contradictions of the girl's existence in terms of multiplicity rather than fragmentation.

According to Ortega, ontological pluralism is needed to understand the experience of marginalized subjects so that oppressed people can know and recognize themselves in different realities. Under Lugones' framework expressed in the book *Pilgrimages / Peregrinajes*, experiences of migration and travel yield a view of an "antistructural self" which subsists "without an underlying 'I,'" with a subject who navigates between worlds, manifested as "various selves that find comportment in each world" (Sealey 100). This would allow the marginalized subject to enact an alternative self with comportments adapted to an alternative world. Ortega's concept of the multiplicitous self brings more nuance to this plural approach to subjectivity, clarifying that it is a matter of a multiplicitous self with access to a sense of coherence rather than a question of multiple selves. Lugones recognizes the need for a nonfragmented self; Sealey detects possible resolutions to the problem of fragmentation in Ortega's distinction between "thick" and "thin" senses of unease, and in Anzaldúa's concept of the new mestiza. "Thick unease" is anguish of the sort that stymies action, crippling a person's capacity for self-assertion,

whereas “thin unease” corresponds to a state of discomfort that does not prevent action (Sealey 107).

To apply these concepts to an analysis of the child-nanny relationship at the center of *Balún-Canán*, the contradiction between the expectation of docility and the fact of having a critical mind brings about a state of fragmentation in the girl. From this fragmented perspective, she is able to perceive the injustice perpetrated on the nanny, who is likewise required to live a fragmented existence in the false docility of pretending not to understand the injustice of her socioeconomic circumstances. As the nanny allows the girl partial access to the Tzeltal worldview, the girl is able to glimpse the nanny’s multiplicitous self and her ability to move between worlds, which points to the possibility of moving from the stagnation of thick unease to the agitation of thin unease. This leads to a kind of critical transculturalism (to use Marwan Kraïdy’s terminology) that is distinct from the sort of mestizo nationalism that is predicated on assimilation, convergence, and the reproduction of sameness. It leads to a creolizing mestizaje in the sense that it implies the creolization of the imaginary as a component of coming of age in a multicultural society.

The dual action of transculturation “from below”—first through seduction, then through conviction—is a move that we also witness in the work of Castellanos’ Peruvian contemporary, José María Arguedas. In Arguedas’s coming-of-age narrative, as in that of Castellanos, the Euro-descended child experiences contact with indigeneity in two phases, the first being the seductions of comfort and loving care, as well as the appeal of oral culture in the form of songs and stories, and the second being a mandate for change. In Arguedas’s *Los ríos profundos* (1958, *Deep Rivers*), the protagonist Ernesto is drawn

into the Quechua culture in the context of the chicherías, where he is enchanted by the *huayno* songs and the convivial atmosphere. Similarly, the niña of *Balún-Canán* is attracted to Tzeltal culture by the nana's storytelling, which offers a way to make sense of the natural world in the form of plant knowledge and of the social world in the form of the parable of the three men. However, to put it in Glissantian terms, mere "thought of the Other" is futile until it brings about the "other of Thought" (*Poetics of Relation* 154). The first motion is cultural, the second is political. The encounter with the humanity of the Indigenous via storytelling produces dissonance with the knowledge of dehumanizing oppression, and the result is a creolized conscience, an awareness of the barbarity of one's ancestors and the imperative of change. However, this inchoate compassion is constantly threatened by the compelling temptations of whiteness, the offer of belonging to the core of mainstream power, manifested in *Los ríos profundos* in the form of Ernesto's friendship with Antero, a privileged scion of the landowning class, who maintains his fidelity to that class rather than placing his allegiance with the chicheras as Ernesto does. In *Balún-Canán*, the effective transformation of the niña's consciousness is left ambiguous, as we see in the last chapter when she says "besides, all Indians look alike"⁷⁸ (271). Nevertheless, the principle of a politics of impurity grounded in a multiplicitous notion of the self is established. As Sealey puts it, "The multiplicitous self is open to transformation (as she moves between multiple worlds), but also squarely located in historical relations of power" (112). In these works of intimate indigenismo (to borrow Tarica's term), premised on cross-cultural encounters as vital turning points in a

⁷⁸ "Además, todos los indios tienen la misma cara" (285).

child's development, the groundwork for a coalitional politics is based on the discovery of an internal multiplicity.

For some interpreters of *Balún-Canán*, the motion toward writing suggested in the closing image resolves the question of whom the niña will grow up to be: clearly, she will grow up to be Castellanos herself, a bold advocate for women's and Indigenous rights.⁷⁹ On my reading, this outcome is by no means clear. While it is true that there is much to suggest that *Balún-Canán* is an autobiographical novel (Castellanos' real-life father was named César, her brother Mario died at a young age, she occasionally accidentally wrote her mother's name where she meant to write "Zoraida" in her manuscripts; as a child, the author did have a close relationship with her nanny Rufina [Landry 3]), it is not a memoir but a fictionalized account portraying conversations, events, and internal monologues in a manner requiring imaginative writerly craftsmanship. Based strictly on a reading of the novel itself, its conclusion does not offer any guarantees that the niña will fulfill the nana's prayer and become an ally to the Indigenous. This ambiguity is important because in the absence of a clear resolution, the reader must introspect and consider what they would do if they were in the niña's position.

In her capacity as substitute mother, the nanny's relationship with the niña undermines the legitimacy criteria of blood and name. The transculturating influence of the nana is all the more salient as it contrasts with the girl's difficult relationship with her parents as well as the negative portrayals of adoptive relationships such as those between Zoraida and Ernesto and between Francisca and Matilde. Its symbolic power is

⁷⁹ For a discussion of autobiographical elements in *Balún-Canán*, see Zamudio-Rodríguez, as well as Elena Poniatowska's foreword to *Meditación en el umbral* (1985).

augmented through its resonance with the anecdote of Otilia's relationship with Estanislao, which serves as an example of reciprocal caregiving and disruption of lineage.

Ernesto-Zoraida

The relationship between two malicious characters, the hired nephew Ernesto and the matriarch Zoraida, stands in sharp contrast with that between the niña and the nana. The trait which Ernesto and Zoraida most fully share is their extreme desire to obtain and keep the privileges associated with the Argüello name. Having been born to a poor family, Zoraida knows firsthand what she stands to lose if the Argüellos were to lose their wealth, especially the land (see chapter 2 of part II for Zoraida's back story). Given that Ernesto's presence at Chactajal is primarily intended to mollify the Indigenous servants by acting as teacher, his relationship with Zoraida is based mainly on convenience. Zoraida and Ernesto's central claim to legitimacy is in their possession of the Argüello name, but both of them know that their claim to that name is tenuous. Hers is only by marriage, to a man who is not faithful. Ernesto's claim is only as the illegitimate son of his father Ernesto, César's brother. His "adoption" by César and Zoraida is a matter of convenience for them—he seems to be the perfect patsy to fulfill the role of teacher at the school where they do not intend to teach anything. He is hired to satisfy the servants and fulfill the government requirement pro forma, but he destabilizes the situation by killing a deer for no reason (inciting anger in the peasants), having an affair with his cousin Matilde, drinking during his teaching duties, and ultimately striking a student. Ernesto is a figure of a dark orphan who absorbs and reproduces all the iniquity of his circumstances. Avid for instant personal redemption, he makes impossible the

redemption of the family. Zoraida figures as a wicked stepmother, incapable of human feeling, completely consumed in the work of preserving her own privileged position.

There are strong parallels between Zoraida's and Ernesto's attitudes toward the Indigenous: both characters wish to distinguish themselves from the Indigenous as fully as possible, so as to emphasize their own belonging to the Argüello family and to the *ladino* class. In one of their earliest encounters, Zoraida seeks to establish a bond with Ernesto based on this shared chauvinism: as César is addressing the Indigenous staff, she asks if Ernesto can understand what they are saying. When he replies in the negative, she carps, "They're so uncouth they're incapable of learning Spanish" (94) in a tone that invites Ernesto to be complicit in her disdain. Both characters were born into poverty, and so both have a direct understanding of the fate that would await them if they were to lose their privilege. These attitudes contrast with that of César, who remains blithely confident to the bitter end. César has never known anything but privilege, a privilege so intricately interwoven with his machismo that the two are inseparable strands of a single identity. César cannot lose his name, and so he believes that there is nothing that can challenge his superior position.

Zoraida and Ernesto's obsession with the name, and their lack of the noble characteristics which would, according to the Tzeltal myth of the man of gold, justify their authority, demonstrate the arbitrary nature of the name as a criterion for legitimacy. In the end, Ernesto's ambitions result in destruction, as his actions hasten the downfall of the family. The Argüello name, coupled with the position of relative privilege, is not enough to make Ernesto into a good steward, as his ambition exceeds his position, and his resentment drives him to sabotage himself and his family. These characters are

emblematic of hegemonic insistence on purity and linearity, the resistance of dominant culture to creolizing influences. By portraying them both as doomed by this intransigence, the novel suggests by contrast that the creolization of the Mexican national imaginary is a necessary element in the country's modernization.

Francisca-Matilde

On their way from Comitán to Chactajal, the family visits César's cousins Francisca, Romelia, and Matilde. The reader learns that Francisca has been serving as Matilde's mother since the latter was born and has renounced marriage to fulfill this role; in the narrative present, Matilde has reached the age of thirty without marrying. Thus, the narrative presents Matilde as a character disempowered through multiple forms of isolation and deprivation: she is an orphan and a spinster, cut off from any avenue to power. In the thoroughness of her disempowerment, she resembles other subaltern figures in comparable works of literature, such as the "opa" Marcelina from Arguedas' *Los ríos profundos*, a mentally disabled young woman who is repeatedly sexually assaulted at the boarding school of Abancay. Matilde serves in *Balún-Canán* as a foil for the child protagonist, whose alienation is mitigated through her connection to the Indigenous nanny.

Francisca has given up her youth and marriage prospects to raise her orphaned sister Matilde: "Francisca had taken the place of their mother, who had died when Matilde was born. And from that day all parties and amusements had ended, together with Francisca's engagement to Jaime Rovelo. Francisca had devoted herself to looking

after Matilde”⁸⁰ (*Nine Guardians* 109). Francisca has taught her how to read and worked hard on the ranch to allow Matilde to live in comfort. In return for this devotion, when Matilde reaches marrying age, she reciprocates by renouncing her own chances at marriage, preferring to remain to live forever with Francisca. They get along until their tranquility is disturbed by the arrival of another sister, Romelia, who has separated from her husband. This is when Francisca decides to evict both of her sisters; she sends Romelia to Mexico City, and Matilde to Chactajal.

For a minor character, Francisca carries a great deal of symbolic weight in the novel. Her claim to legitimacy is anchored in the Argüello name, but also in her ruthless obstinacy. She is prepared to do whatever it takes to hold on to the land that she believes is rightly her own. She shows just how far she is willing to go when, in chapter 5 of part II, after many sleepless nights wandering the halls in a black shawl, she disappears one night with a horrifying scream, and is later found at the bottom of a ravine, badly bruised from the rocks and riddled with thorns, and claims to have had a vision. She has seen the *dzulúm*, and the only reason he did not carry her off is that she made a pact with him. This narrative allows her to terrify her servants into obeying her, and she begins sleeping in a coffin, claiming to communicate with the spirits. The power of the Argüello name is replaced by the power of words, incantations, magic, and fear. Francisca’s pact with the *dzulúm* is revealed to be a ruse later when she tells César that she will do whatever it takes to keep her land.

⁸⁰ “Pues Francisca tomó el lugar de la madre, muerta al nacer Matilde. Y desde ese día se acabaron las fiestas y las diversiones, se acabó el noviazgo con Jaime Rovelo. Francisca se dedicó a cuidar a Matilde” (*Balún-Canán* 110)

Francisca's legitimacy thus shifts with the times; when the legitimacy of the name is compromised by changes in the legal-social order, Francisca finds a strategy to achieve a different kind of legitimacy. Her relationship with Matilde proves to be just as mutable as her relationship to legal authority; she will abandon all commitments to maintain her grip on her ranch. Thus, Francisca might be described as a sort of fairy godmother who transforms into a wicked witch. This relationship is an allegory of one possible response to crisis, a response where subjectivity itself transforms into its obverse in the name of self-interest.

In its absence, masculinity here is revealed to be a force that legitimates power through threat of violence. Lacking the presence of a male figure to secure her claim to the land, Francisca functionally weds the demon spirit *dzulúm*; thus, she appropriates unto herself the threat of violence that is conventionally reserved for the male. Her transformation into a witch and demon-bride also corresponds to her abandonment of her sister-daughter Matilde, left to her own devices to adjust to the brutality of Chactajál. Therefore, this adoptive relationship symbolizes the triumph of property—the conventional domain of filiation and guarantor of privilege—over relationality. In the parallel between the *dzulúm*'s usurpation of Francisca's kinship network and Ernesto's destabilization of Chactajal, there is yet another critique of the arbitrariness of male power, which is revealed to be just as mythical as that of the *dzulúm*. Matilde's extreme dependency contrasts sharply with the autonomy Francisca is able to achieve through her ruse.

Matilde and Francisca both find themselves fragmented due to their inability to adhere to their prescribed roles under patriarchy. No parallel space exists in society for

them, so they are doomed to dwell in the margins of society. In a sense, they both seek solace in monstrosity, as Francisca betroths the *dzulúm* and Matilde devotes herself to Ernesto. To put this in Anzaldúa's terms, Francisca and Matilde both suffer from the "intimate terrorism" of a life that does not adhere to the standard template of patriarchy. To use Ortega's vocabulary, the unease in which they live is always "thick," never the "thin unease" which can promote growth, but the stultifying discomfiture of irreconcilable non-belonging. As emblems of the limited options for women in the hacendado order, these characters represent the incompatibility of that order with a modernizing society, reinforcing the need for a transformation of the imaginary.

Otilia-Estanislao

Balún Canán is filled with constant references to godparenthood and adoption both literal and metaphorical. The above three examples are only the most prominent. It is also worth noting that the civil servant Gonzalo is César's neglected godson, which only makes his revenge as an emissary of the government all the sweeter. Another subtle case is found in the ancestor Otilia's relationship with her father Estanislao, a subplot that is only described indirectly.

Toward the end of the first section, the narrator-protagonist discovers a letter written by an "Elder Brother" of the local tribe of Tzeltal people, who for many generations have been living as servants on the Argüellos' ranch. The letter describes the series of masters of the Argüello clan, some more ruthless than others; although the current master, the girl's father César, has kept the letter to attest to his family's legal claim to the land, for the reader it serves as a document of injustice and exploitation. In

addition to these functions, the letter also provides a bit of information that resonates with one of the central themes in the book, that of adoption: “An orphan, one ‘picked up by the wayside’ as they used to say in those days, was the heir, because she had attended the death agony: Otilia. Other more legal relatives contested the inheritance, and it was then that the outlying lands could no longer be preserved”⁸¹ (58). Through the letter, the niña learns that Estanislao Argüello, the great reformer who prohibited corporal punishment of the servants, died without a male heir, and left his inheritance to his adoptive daughter Otilia. This heiress’ claim to the land was disputed, and some of the lands on the periphery of Chactajal were lost in the fray. Otilia is the one who began the practice of baptizing the Indigenous in church and giving them Christian names. After acquiring the name Argüello through marriage, she had only sons, and after her passing, Chactajal was divided up among them.

Although this letter is never mentioned again in the novel, the knowledge it contains is essential to an understanding of the theme of inheritance in the text. This is because it is here that the protagonist learns that this recent ancestor, Otilia, was born with neither the blood nor the name of an Argüello, and yet she was one of the most influential of the past masters, having undertaken to baptize the Indigenous with Christian names, and having produced the sons who ultimately carved up the formerly vast estate. This letter reveals that there has in fact been an interruption in the Argüello lineage, and that a woman from outside the family has usurped the family line and land, acquiring the Argüello name by marrying a distant cousin.

⁸¹ “Una huérfana, una recogida, como entonces se dijo, fue la heredera. Pues asistió la agonía del moribundo. Otilia. Otros parientes más allegados le disputaron la herencia y fue entonces cuando los lugares remotos ya no pudieron ser defendidos” (*Balún-Canán* 58)

When the protagonist is discovered by her mother, the latter snatches the letter out of her hands, saying, “You mustn’t play with these things [...] They are Mario’s inheritance. The male child’s”⁸² (*Nine Guardians* 59). This feeling of being excluded based on sex from the rights and responsibilities of ownership is a constant theme in the novel, but examples such as Otilia demonstrate that the rule of male inheritance, like so many other rules, is not hard and fast, but mutable and subject to interpretation. Indeed, all the criteria that supposedly justify inheritance by male primogeniture, the criteria of blood, surname, and sex, are ultimately revealed to be arbitrary. The discovery of the letter is followed shortly by the family’s departure from the village of Comitán, to go live at Chactajal, leaving the nanny behind.

This final adoptive relationship demonstrates the arbitrariness of the three primary criteria of legitimacy: blood, name, and sex. Otilia is not born an Argüello; she comes by the name only after she has inherited the land. In this text, much is made of the Argüello name and the prestige associated with it. Characters such as Ernesto and Zoraida with tenuous claims to the name struggle to assert their right to it and to the privileges it is supposed to bestow. She does not have Argüello blood; her offspring may have it through their father, but so do any number of “illegitimate” male Argüellos, and the patrilineal line of descent has been broken. Furthermore, her gender does not prevent her from taking and wielding power, serving, like her father, as an influential reformer.

Like many other elements of this nuanced novel, the meaning of the letter is never explicitly stated. The little girl does not draw any conclusions from this discovery, does not use the information in any explicit way. Nevertheless, the letter is a sort of skeleton

⁸² “No juegues con estas cosas—dice al fin—. Son la herencia de Mario. Del varón.” (*Balún-Canán* 58)

key which unlocks a whole chain of meaning in this text, a chain that ties all of the major characters together through relationships of elective kinship. This theme of elective kinship offers a way out from the master-slave dialectic, proposing that Mexicans could recognize their mutual interest in breaking the pattern of domination and servitude and establishing bonds of care that transcend race and class. This novel is noteworthy for its pessimistic depiction of the unlikelihood of this transcendence, as even the *niña* character is shown to have internalized the logic of domination and racism, possibly permanently. In *Balún Canán*, redemption and reconciliation are not presented as easily achieved. Francisca persists in power only through her pact with the *dzulúm*, which is only as durable as the servants' superstition. Ernesto dies a violent death, Matilde disappears never to be seen, the family's only male heir succumbs to malaria, and *niña* and *nana* are doomed never to see each other again. In this concatenation of disasters, the only spirit that rises from the ashes is, potentially, that of the reader, who can only hope not to repeat the sins and errors of the lapsed *hacendados*. Otilia is a figure that ties all of these strands together in the sense that she is a person whose legitimacy is founded on a care relationship, and her legitimacy endures and becomes the conditions for future legitimacy even though it is not founded in the conventional triad of blood, name, and gender.

Estanislao and Otilia's durable adoptive relationship contrasts with other examples of relationships that are founded in care, but which are fragile. For example, the relationship between *niña* and *nana*: it is rich in affective attachment, but it lacks sufficient time to develop because of the subaltern positions of the two people involved, two characters who are so disempowered that they never even receive a name. These characters lack the power to maintain their relationship beyond the rupture that takes

place at the end of the first part. Likewise, the fragility of the relationship between Francisca and Matilde becomes apparent as it is sacrificed along with all of Francisca's other relationships in the name of clinging to power. Meanwhile, the relationship between Zoraida and Ernesto is characterized by convenience and commiseration and is devoid of profundity of commitment because of the unprincipled opportunism of the two characters in question. Their inability to think outside the order of power condemns them to replicate and even amplify its injustices, with deadly outcomes.

Therefore, the three elective kinships depicted in the narrative present of the novel are quite fragile, a fragility that points to the arbitrary nature of the *ladino* criteria of legitimacy inherited from Spanish culture. The anecdote about Otilia, by contrast, points to the possibility of a care relationship that is durable: It is a care relationship that has founded an empire, and as a descendent of Otilia, César's own claim to Chactajal hinges on the past actions of this adopted interloper. The most fundamental difference between Otilia and the other "adopted" characters in the novel is that Otilia's relationship with Estanislao is based on reciprocity. The patriarch has cared for the orphan, and the orphan has in turn cared for the patriarch in his dotage. This reciprocity of care is not found in the actions of the text's other "orphans," Matilde, Ernesto, or even the niña. Otilia is the only orphan who has transformed into a caregiver.

This novel that presents a time of conflict in a pessimistic light, with no obvious sense of redemption or reconciliation, and yet it contains this passage that contradicts all the criteria of legitimacy and their related exclusions depicted in the present narrative. Comparing this ancestral connection to other relationships in the present day where the family is breaking down (a microcosm of the widespread changes occasioned by the

Cárdenas-era land and education reforms), it emerges as an outlier example which suggests that rules are made to be broken. The crisis precipitated by Estanislao's death with no male heirs becomes an opportunity in Otilia's hands; this suggests that the great ruptures of Cárdenas-era Mexico also represented a potential opportunity.

The crises of legitimacy within the Argüello family are a microcosm of a broader tension in Mexican society: Is Mexico to cling to Hispanic identity and thus remain attached to what Glissant would call an atavistic culture? Such cultures are associated with a quest for single origins whereby cohesion is achieved through the unifying narratives of epics, scriptures, and creation myths. In the more recently founded and undeniably heterogeneous societies of the Caribbean, the recourse to European origin myths signals a colonized mindset—as captured in the image of Martinican schoolchildren learning about “*nos ancêtres les Gaulois*”—and is too far removed from experience to function as a foundational narrative. Rather, in such composite cultures, national belonging derives from a sense of Relation, a pattern of interactions between different but mutually interpolating ethnicities and identities according to a rhizomatic model of communicating nodes rather than a taproot model of single origins. If Europe and the Caribbean form the two poles of this dichotomy, it is not clear where to place a country like Mexico.

Of all the ideological legacies of Spanish colonialism, the Mexican social-legal construct of legitimacy by filiation is relevant here for its relationship to property rights. The land reforms required by the Cárdenas government and the contemporaneous agrarian peasant struggle had little effect on redistribution of land in 1930s Ocosingo (Legorreta Díaz 602). In a context where legal and political avenues were proving

ineffective in bringing about the kinds of reforms necessary for emancipation of the peasants from dependency, Castellanos's novel adopts a different strategy to dismantle the haciendas: Eroding the logic of filiation that undergirds the system by highlighting its exceptions, liminal cases, and contradictions.

From domination by linguistic fragmentation to relational multiplicity

In societies marked by settler colonial domination, marginalized and racialized people bear the brunt of personal fragmentation due to historical and ongoing patterns of oppression and contradictory expectations. In the Mexican context, as the most readily perceptible marker of the distinction between national identity and Indigenous ethnic identity, language is the primary axis of fragmentation in the name of purity. In *Balún-Canán*, Indigenous characters face discrimination for their inability to speak Spanish but are treated with suspicion when they do. The Indigenous character Felipe is regarded as particularly dangerous because of his ability to speak both Spanish and Tzeltal. The threat he poses on a political level is echoed by the threat posed by the nanny on a cultural level. These threats are associated with the "impurity" of Indigenous figures who violate the social code by speaking Spanish. The anxiety surrounding these transgressive interpreters has to do with the threat they pose to the established social order based on the illusion of linguistic purity (as though Spanish were not already a hybrid language, as though Mexican Spanish were not characterized by its habit of absorbing Indigenous words, as though linguistic correctness were a marker of worth rather than mere privilege).

In Chapter 12 of the first section, Zoraida remarks, “Hey you there, upstart Indian, speaking pure Castille. Who’d have been giving you leave?” whereupon the girl narrator comments, “For there are rules. Spanish is our privilege. And we use it with a ‘your honour’ to our superiors, with a ‘thou’ to our equals, and with a ‘ye’ to the Indians”⁸³ (40). Compare this to Zoraida’s remark upon learning that the Argüellos will be required to provide education to the *indios*: “Who’s ever heard of such a thing? Teaching them to read when they’re not even able to speak Spanish!”⁸⁴ (46). So, from Zoraida’s perspective, the only way for the “Indian” to prove her full humanity is to speak Spanish; at the same time, she is prohibited from speaking Spanish. And yet, how is the nanny to do her job of caring for the children without speaking Spanish? In this way, the fullness of her being is relegated to the margins of life, to moments of solitude or to rare moments when she is with the girl and unobserved, when she can speak with relative liberty, as she does in the opening scene and in her farewell prayer. Forced to behave according to contradictory expectations, compelled to simultaneously possess and not possess the ability to communicate in the master’s tongue, the nana toils under a regime of compulsory fragmentation.

The theme of linguistic domination in *Balún-Canán* reflects some of the ideas that the author later formulated in her essay “Language as an Instrument of Domination,” published in the anthology *Mujer que sabe latín* in 1973.⁸⁵ In this essay, Castellanos describes how the Spanish language has been deployed in Latin America as a tool to

⁸³ ““Oílo vos, este indio igualado. Está hablando castilla. ¿Quién le daría permiso?” Porque hay reglas. El español es privilegio nuestro. Y lo usamos hablando de usted a los superiores; de tú a los iguales; de vos a los indios.” (38)

⁸⁴ “¿Dónde se ha visto semejante cosa? Enseñarles a leer cuando ni siquiera son capaces de aprender a hablar español” (44)

⁸⁵ An English translation of this essay is included in the anthology *The Rosario Castellanos Reader*, edited by Maureen Ahern, 1988.

reinforce the colonial hierarchy, not only through its homogenizing mandate but also through the alienation of the written word from its primary referential function. Noting that Hispanists (Castellanos does not provide specific names) tend to justify the conquest of America based on the “gift” of the Spanish language, which has reduced the diversity of Indigenous languages to a common unity, Castellanos inquires into the nature of this “gift,” questioning who has it benefitted, and how it has been applied. The missionaries’ attempt to incorporate Natives into European culture has been largely unsuccessful.

“Once the first apostolic impetus was past, things that had been settling into their rightful hierarchy tended to make that hierarchy persist: the Indian in submission; the mestizo in a no-man’s-land of conflict; the *criollo*, or American-born Spaniard, at his ease; and the Spaniard in power” (250). Language then became part of the constellation of outward signs of power, along with skin color and the “purity and antiquity of faith” (250). Mastery of linguistic correctness in the use of Spanish was an initial criterion, but this evolved into a criterion of possession: the dominant class was the one that “owned” Spanish, and used it to display wealth, arouse envy and praise. Language was used to give orders, preach dogma, and address theatrical audiences. In response to this unidirectional linguistic flow, the “Indian” fell silent due to ignorance, the mestizo due to timidity (251). Castellanos goes on to describe how, with time, written Spanish developed into Baroque complexity through the association between verbal virtuosity and prestige. “The chatterers are too absorbed in the play of words that, to avoid the wind blowing them away, are pinned down, like butterflies, with the pin of writing” (252). Castellanos criticizes the abuse of formal innovations that alienate the word from its referent:

Here are the clerks busy at the task of constructing a sonnet that can be read from top to bottom, and bottom to top [...] an acrobatic acrostic; a metric in which the jungle is petrified in Hellenic marbles. It doesn't matter that the forest explodes or the stone rots. Words have not been vulnerable, because they were separate from and beyond the reach of stone or jungle. It was an eternal chipping away in the realm of pure sound. (252)

This criticism of literary decadence and its relationship to cultural homogenization resembles some of Glissant's ideas about how language is used in Western society to pursue a unitary vision of History, in a series of developments from Shakespeare to Hegel. For Glissant, the ascendancy of written language is part of a process by which "History" and "Literature" (in Glissant's writing, these capitalized terms denote the reification of these concepts as unified master narratives) had sought to establish a total system, a global hierarchy of human formations with Shakespeare's Prospero at the top and Caliban at the bottom, legitimizing European domination by its association with "culture" in contrast with the "naturalness" of so-called "primitive" peoples. "Literature attains a metaexistence," he writes, "the all-powerfulness of a sacred sign, which will allow people with writing to think it justified to dominate and rule peoples with an oral civilization" (*Caribbean Discourse* 76). According to Castellanos, language can possibly serve as a tool of liberation, but only by restoring its deictic function: "This pristineness consists in exactness. The word is the arrow that hits its mark" (253). This resonates with Glissant's claim that, as Western cultural hegemony unravels, it is time to "let the weight of lived experience 'slip in.' Literature is not only fragmented, it is henceforth shared. In it lie histories and the voice of peoples" (77). In wording that echoes Castellanos's idea that "we have to create another language" (252), Glissant concludes that "We must reflect on a new relationship between history and literature. We need to live it differently" (77).

The evolution from a notion of Literature as the pursuit of universalizing poetics and convergent History to literature as the reflection of diverse lived histories is reflected in the reconciliation between writing and speech, on the one hand, and between writing and referentially grounded meaning on the other. The de-hierarchization of language entails an acceptance of linguistic impurity and change. In this spirit, Gloria Anzaldúa describes the perception of Chicano Spanish as “illegitimate, a bastard language” (*Borderlands/La Frontera*, 80). By writing in a voice that oscillates between academic and vernacular registers of English and Spanish, Anzaldúa asserts the intelligibility of “bastard language” as a viable way of describing the experience of being in between worlds. Anzaldúa insists that Chicano/as should take pride in this transgression of categories, because, in Kris Sealey’s words, “its bastard nature points to a way of naming (of articulating one’s subjectivity) that is void of the essentializing forces of origin” (118). This suggests that there is a connection between the use of impure linguistic forms and the renunciation of linear descent as a standard of legitimacy. As the hegemony of rooted descent, with its illusions of order, gives way to the chaotic negotiations of relational coexistence, the attendant shift in consciousness is reflected by an alternative approach to language.

This alternative way of naming is associated with creolizing processes of identity formation and world-making: “Much like identities that have emerged through creolizing processes, the identity that is bastard is without linear genealogies, without single roots, and without purity” (Sealey 118). Such a notion of “bastard identity” is associated with the themes of metaphorical orphanhood and adoption in Castellanos’s fiction. As the protagonist of *Balún-Canán* is severed from her filial connections, she is set free from the

determinism of root identity. This leaves her in a position for a more genuine encounter with otherness, just as the author would experience in her work for the National Indigenist Institute (“Semblanza” n.p.). The reconciliation of language with its referential function ends up, on a social level, being equivalent with the reconciliation between writing and speech. For Glissant, this shift is associated with a rejection of Saussure’s distinction between diachrony and synchrony and the associated reification of *langue* as a stable system; likewise, for Castellanos, it entails a turn away from a structural theory of meaning and toward a relational one: “The meaning of a word is its addressee: the other being who hears it, understands it, and who, when he answers, converts his questioner into a listener and understander, establishing in this way the relationship of dialogue that is only possible between beings who consider themselves and deal with each other as equals” (*Castellanos Reader* 253). This view of signification is compatible with Bakhtin’s view of meaning as fundamentally dialogic, a view that resonates with Glissant’s preoccupation with Relation rather than roots as the site of identity formation.

The contrast between wholeness and fragmentation can serve as a criterion that masks and perpetuates structures of domination: “As part of this unifying logic, the fragmented individual (whose fragmentation signifies in (and as) the intimate terrorism that Ortega and Anzaldúa critiques [sic]) is an essential trope in those political structures geared toward control” (Sealey 103). In the hacienda system depicted in *Balún-Canán*, the Indigenous workers are perpetually infantilized by a system that limits their contact with the outside world. When required to provide education, the *patrón* attempts to comply pro forma by installing a teacher whom he assumes will ensure the status quo. The hiring of Ernesto is in keeping with the contradictory paternalism of the *hacendados*;

they must maintain the closed structure of the plantation, because any contact with the outside world could cause a rupture in the entire system. The wholeness of the system requires the fragmentation of the peasants.

The conception of a unified whole is contingent on a point of view that exists beyond the whole; I liken this detached point of view to the mystified bourgeois subject of positivism, which makes truth claims based on the purported objectivity of neutral observation. That is to say, to believe that there exists somewhere a whole, unified, pure subject is to suggest that some subjects meet these criteria and some do not, and thereby to reproduce the logic of colonial domination expressed in the “ego conquiro”; as Lugones puts it, “fragmentation is another form of domination” (*Pilgrimages / Perigrinajes* 128). In order to work toward creolizing, relational ways of being, what is called for is not to project hegemonic notions of unity, purity, and agency onto liminal and marginalized figures, but rather to do away with the primary notions of purity and unity as criteria for selfhood.

Grappling with the psychological effects of multiplicity and in-betweenness, Ortega proposes the concepts of “thick” and “thin” unease as tools for understanding the nuances of estrangement and belonging as experienced by marginal figures. Ortega addresses the relationship between Heidegger’s concept of “mineness” and the experience of being at ease in the world.⁸⁶ When the coherence offered by “mineness” is compromised due to living in between worlds, an experience of unease is produced (Sealey 108). As Ortega describes it, “being-at-ease is a function of one’s ability to be

⁸⁶ Ortega understands Heidegger’s concept of “mineness” as denoting “a way of being in which I experience events as happening to me or as mine” (Ortega 80). It can be understood as the sort of attachment to experience, the way in which existence matters to a conscious being.

nonreflective about everyday norms in the sense that Heidegger indicates and of having familiarity with the language, as well as sharing a history with people” (Ortega 60-61). Thus, being overly at ease is conducive to complacency, undermining the capacity for resistance (Sealey 109). However, the hard converse of ease, the anguish of not being familiar with norms and practices, can be stultifying, as the subject is beset by what Anzaldúa might call “intimate terrorism” and the feelings of self-alienation that Lugones refers to under the notion of fragmentation.⁸⁷ Ortega refers to this crippling experience of difference and non-belonging as “thick unease,” and acknowledges the risks attending the fragmented coherence of the subject in this mode. Not content to accept the double-bind dichotomy of complacent coherence versus stymied fragmentation, Ortega proposes the concept of “thin unease,” the experience of minimal ruptures in one’s everyday practices, a milder feeling of discomfort that may be necessary for the motivation to develop alternative ways of living and being. As Sealey describes it: “This subject’s thin sense of not being at ease equips her with a readiness to respond to difference, given that she is both critical of structures that code for that difference as illegitimate and reflective of the implications, for her own liminal existence, of such political codes that vilify impurity (codes that determine difference as illegitimate)” (110). The roles of purity and multiplicity in the feminist framework Sealey outlines can make a difference in the grounding and efficacy of identity politics. When the encounter with the other is conceived in terms of a reckoning between pure, discrete, homogenous identities, the prospects for solidarity may appear to be contingent on finding common ground. When,

⁸⁷ In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Frantz Fanon describes the internalized inferiority complex of colonized Black people who must face the choice between obliterating assimilation and fidelity to an identity forged in the ruptures of the Middle Passage and the plantation. Fanon’s description of internalized racism resonates with Latina feminists’ notions of intimate terrorism and fragmentation.

on the other hand, it is conceived in terms of intersubjective engagement between fluid, multiplicitous beings, the possibility of an opening arises. This is the kind of engagement found in *Balún-Canán* between the niña and the nana: both of them live in between worlds, the nanny because she is a Tzeltal woman partially integrated into a *ladino* family, and the little girl because the nanny's presence gives her a window into the Tzeltal worldview. In the ambivalence of the niña's responses to the many conflicts she witnesses, the multiplicitous nature of her subjectivity facilitates the possibility of the creolization of consciousness.

The central encounter is that of different experiences of marginalization, accompanied by different manifestations of exclusion and social alienation. One of the main differences between the colonizer's experience of white supremacist settler colonialism and colonized people's experience of the same is this: for those who fit the profile of a "typical citizen," being at home in mainstream society means that there is always that larger home to go back to, no matter what the experience of identity-based adversity in particular contexts. This is the difference between the nana and the niña's experiences of oppression: for the nana, otherness and liminality are not optional, nor conditional, but existentially tied to her being through her racialization. For someone in the niña's position, domination manifests via a dichotomy: as a woman, she will always be subjugated within patriarchal society. However, as a *ladina*, her experiences of resistance, rejection, and exclusion will be conditional to her behavior. Will she meet the expectations of her race and caste? Will she conform with expectations, fulfil her obligations of motherhood, ensure the family's lineage and claim to the land? Or will she rebel, become a feminist, an activist, a revolutionary?

Whiteness imposes its demands differentially, exerting discipline through varying degrees of conditionality of privilege. Under the unspoken logic of whiteness, liminal figures may have reprieve from their exclusions, and be temporarily, provisionally, conditionally allowed to participate in dominant structures of culture, state, and power, as long as they do not rock the boat by insisting too fervently on their own perspectives insofar as these diverge from mainstream ideology. Evidence of this conditional whiteness abounds. When enacted on the level of language, it is the phenomenon of partial assimilation described by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks*, whereby Black Caribbeans are allowed partial access to metropolitan institutions provided they can speak fluent, standard French. A dark-skinned Black man may never “pass” visually in the same way that certain pale Latinas might, but the marker of language is sometimes as powerful as that of skin.

Under the logic of racial hegemony, liminal individuals are rewarded for conforming with the codes of whiteness and punished for identifying with the oppressed. In his poem “Jumping Off the Mystic Tobin Bridge,” contemporary poet Martín Espada describes the experience of riding in a New York taxi with a driver who warns him that “there’s a lotta Josés” in the neighborhood, only to have the poet respond, “I’m a José” (3). In this instance, the option of belonging in the white world is offered to the white-passing individual in the form of the slur. “If you can assent to this slur,” the cab driver seems to be saying, “then you are one of us.” A white-passing Latino in this situation is confronted with the choice of ignoring the slur—and thus normalizing bigotry—or remaining true to his identity and community.

A similar specter of conditional belonging haunts the story of *Balún-Canán*. The niña is fated by her gender to be marginalized from full power of the *hacendado*, but she is expected to maintain the cultural code by respecting her father and brother and perpetuating the caste system. Her experience of non-belonging in the *ladino* sphere is conditioned by the cold, neglectful attitude of her mother Zoraida. This leaves a lacuna in the niña's lifeworld, which is filled by the presence of the nana. It is the family's expectation that this relationship will be limited to professional caregiving, but the nana subverts that expectation in two ways: first, by telling the niña stories from the Mayan perspective, and thus complicating the girl's view of the world, and second, by offering a farewell blessing in the form of a prayer. The substance of this prayer is that the girl will be a good master and bring about change in the master-servant relationship.

Filiation and legitimacy

Balún-Canán is a narrative of a wealthy family in decline, whose fortune is threatened not only by changes in the law, but also by their own incompetence, mutual mistrust, and failure to adapt. Zoraida and César attempt to cling to the old order of power as changes beyond their control are rendering that order obsolete. This aspect of the narrative bears striking parallels with the Russian writer Anton Chekhov's play *The Cherry Orchard* (*Вишневый Сад*, 1904), which depicts the decline of a formerly wealthy landowning family as they struggle to maintain their way of life. In *The Cherry Orchard*, as in *Balún-Canán*, a major historical reorganization of society in the name of human rights (the 1861 emancipation of the Russian serfs for Chekhov, the reforms imposed by

Lázaro Cárdenas for Castellanos) is the occasion for an epistemological crisis whereby the ruling class must adopt a new worldview or perish.

In both works, some characters are eager to change with the times while others are not. In Chekhov's play, the character most eager to embrace the new values of bourgeois liberalism is Yermolai Alexeievitch Lopakhin, a merchant whose grandfather was a serf. Similarly, in *Balún-Canán*, one of the characters who most readily embraces the Cárdenas reforms is César's godson Gonzalo Utrilla, a government inspector whose mother was an Indigenous peasant. On the occasion of his visit to the ranch to inform César that the landowners will be required to build a school and hire a teacher, Gonzalo voices one of the most telling lines in the novel: "It's a good thing your day is past and gone, Don César"⁸⁸ (*Nine Guardians* 128). Similarly, in *The Cherry Orchard*, Lopakhin is the main driving force trying to convince the landowning family to adapt to the new order, telling them that they must cut down their cherry orchard to build summer villas to create a revenue stream: "You really are the most improvident people I have ever met. I'm sorry. But you really are. I've told you as plainly as I can that your estate is going to be sold and you don't seem to understand me. Your estate is going to be sold. Can you hear me?"⁸⁹ (Chekhov, Act II, p. 33). Both narratives depict the new social mobility of such figures in a context where opportunity is no longer strictly limited by caste. This disassociation of privilege from filiation destabilizes the myths of origins undergirding structures of power that had previously appeared unassailable. In Chekhov's play, the demise of the orchard heralds the transition from feudalism to capitalism, while in the

⁸⁸ "Por fortuna ya no son sus tiempos, don César" (*Balún-Canán* 131).

⁸⁹ "Простите, таких легкомысленных людей, как вы, господа, таких неделовых, странных, я еще не встречал. Вам говорят русским языком, имение ваше продается, а вы точно не понимаете" (*Вишневый Сад* 24)

Mexican context, the destabilization of the feudal structure of the hacienda creates an opening for the insertion of critical hybridity into the national imaginary, symbolized by the education reforms whereby the state pursues the incorporation of the peasants into the structures of national life.

While Chekhov's play depicts the unravelling of inherited privilege in the form of ties between family and land, the parallel unravelling in *Balún-Canán* represents a more fundamental epistemological rupture threatening Western ideological assumptions about land as territory. Glissant's thoughts on filiation and legitimacy offer productive ways of analyzing the destabilization of the nexus between caste privilege and territorial claims. He traces the Western preoccupation with filiation back to the ancient Greek epics, which allow an ethnic community to link itself to the initial creation, thereby justifying claims to territorial possession. To Glissant, legitimacy is the consequence and hidden cause of both Epic and Tragedy, because:

Tragedy springs from any situation in which community consent is threatened. Something is 'tragic' because the threat will not be discovered (held off or deferred) until the moment in which the community *feels* that the chain of filiation has been broken. The tragic action is the uncovering of what had gone unnoticed.

Engendering tragedy, it is illegitimacy that threatens the community by leading toward its dissolution (*Poetics of Relation* 52).

This interpretation of tragedy is useful in the analysis of filiation and legitimacy in *Balún-Canán*, particularly with regard to the figures of the "bastard" Ernesto and the "foundling" Otilia. As an illegitimate son of a father who has dissipated his fortune and died in debt, Ernesto is excluded from the family line and treated more as a hired hand than as kin. This exclusion is the root of his bitterness, a resentment that will operate in conjunction with his impulsiveness to hasten the family's demise as he provokes the ire

of the Indigenous community by killing a deer, failing to teach, drinking at school, and most significantly beating one of his pupils. Ernesto's failures are commensurate with his nihilism, a cynicism that emerges directly from his ambition, mistreatment, and liminal status. In the encounter between Ernesto and Zoraida mentioned above, which takes place early in their sojourn at Chactajal, it is possible to surmise that these two characters might be positioned to find common cause. After growing bored with listening to César address the Indigenous crew in Tzeltal, Zoraida approaches Ernesto and asks if he can understand them. She speaks derisively of the Indians' supposed inability to learn Spanish, claiming that she had tried to teach the nanny how to speak the language to no avail (a claim belied by the many scenes in which the nanny speaks rather eloquently). In this moment, Zoraida appears to be welcoming Ernesto into the family through the complicity of superiority, as she says, "And yet there are people who say [the Indians are] the same as us"⁹⁰ (94). Ernesto is affected by this olive branch, but it is not enough to overcome his male chauvinism: "Us: the exclusive circle Ernesto is not allowed to violate is broken. But his satisfaction is only partial, for he'd rather it had been César who broke it, for César is the man and the Argüello"⁹¹ (94). This scene illustrates how the principle of patriarchal power maintains divisions even among characters who are positioned for an alliance. When individuals hold themselves to the standards of hegemonic culture, they doom themselves to languish in the isolation of social fragmentation. The myth of unity undermines the possibility of relation—even when, as in this case, the relation on offer is one of shared chauvinism.

⁹⁰ "Y todavía hay quienes digan que son iguales a nosotros" (*Balún-Canán* 94).

⁹¹ "Nosotros. El círculo de exclusión en que Ernesto se siente confinado está roto. Pero su satisfacción no es completa. Habría preferido que quien lo rompiera hubiera sido César, el hombre, el Argüello" (*Balún-Canán* 94).

Ernesto's status as an illegitimate or "bastard" child places him in a constant state of agitation, a mixture of ambition and rancor that is only exacerbated by his partial inclusion in the affairs of the ranch. The "bastard" figure is destined to languish at the periphery of power so long as that power remains associated with a strict conception of inheritance and legitimacy. Ernesto's position as a foil to the *niña* (he is also young, also an outsider, but otherwise the dark obverse of her idealism) yields the insight that the *niña* herself is a sort of bastard child, in the sense that all female children in this society are by default disempowered and deprived of rights conferred to male scions. The moment we begin to think of the *niña* as metaphorically illegitimate because of gender exclusions, we are reminded that Otilia and Francisca both present counterexamples to the gender criterion. This clears the field of illusions of linearity, and the *niña*'s liberation from patrilineal entanglements potentially releases her into a field of relationality. When ultimate tragedy comes to the household in the form of the death of Mario, with him dies any remaining illusion of maternal devotion between Zoraida and the *niña*, as demonstrated by Zoraida's complaint that it was the boy, not the girl, who died. This completes the *niña*'s steady process of severance from filial bonds—her transformation into a metaphorical orphan.

For all his shortcomings, Ernesto's misdeeds are merely the proximate cause of the Argüellos' downfall; its more fundamental roots lie in the untenable contradictions at the heart of the hacienda structure of power and possession. The absurdity of this system of inheritance is exemplified by the break in the chain of filiation represented by Otilia, who at birth possessed none of the criteria for legitimate inheritance, and yet was able to acquire what Ernesto never could: legitimacy. That Otilia was able to rise to the position

of matriarch despite her inauspicious birth is a tragedy according to the logic of epic and myth; in Glissant's words, "if legitimacy is ruptured, the chain of filiation is no longer meaningful, and the community wanders the world, no longer able to lay claim to any primordial necessity" (*Poetics of Relation* 52). It is quite telling that the dirty secret of Otilia's intrusion into the family line is testified only in the writings of an Indigenous chieftain; this is one more example of how the Indigenous gaze represents an existential threat to the *hacendado* order of power, one more reason for the *ladinos* to fear and suppress the acquisition of the Spanish language by their Indigenous servants. The irony captured in this letter exemplifies the complexity with which this novel addresses the questions of legitimacy, considering that the main purpose of the letter is in fact to bolster César's claims to legitimate possession of Chactajal. The revelation of Otilia's accession would not represent a legal threat to César's legitimacy, but it would undermine the very principles at the heart of his patriarchal authority, and so must be kept secret, to be used in the particular circumstances of legal boundary disputes, and above all not to be interpreted as a challenge to the principle of male inheritance. By threatening to reveal the break in ancestral filiation represented by Otilia, the letter functions in tandem with the rumblings of Indigenous resistance to relativize the legitimacy of the hacienda structure, marking the hypocrisy of Ocosingo's atavistic culture and the need for reckoning with the reality of Mexico as a composite society, a process of demystification that could be described in Glissantian terms as the creolization of the collective imaginary. The thought of the Other brings about the other of Thought.

Cultural pluralism in present-day Chiapas

In sum, the relationships of nurture kinship in *Balún-Canán* all contribute to a destabilization of fixed concepts of legitimacy, yielding ways of thinking otherwise about subjectivity, community, and power. The depicted confrontation with otherness responds to the ruptures in Cárdenas-era Mexico, where the feudal economic system of the hacienda was threatened both by top-down political policies and by bottom-up processes of ideological evolution among the working classes. I have described how the fraught but meaningful caring relationships depicted in Castellanos's novel foreground a sense of multiplicitous subjectivity that can serve as a groundwork for a Relational notion of national identity. The nana-niña relationship disrupts the protagonist's sense of belonging, potentially opening her up to the state of errantry and suspension of categories; it is an example of becoming other, becoming liminal, moving from a position of comfortable ignorance to one of informed unease. In contrast, the relationship between Ernesto and Zoraida illustrates how liminal figures may doom themselves to perpetual anguish by insisting on reinforcing the very kinds of exclusions that prevent them from full participation in family and society. The relationship between Francisca and Matilde shows how individuals fragmented by the inability to adhere to accepted categories might develop alternative modes of power through the syncretic recombination of cultural forms, and how remaining in a state of "thick unease" can stymie such figures' efforts at reintegration. Finally, the relationship between Otilia and her adoptive father Estanislao illustrates the arbitrary nature of the supposedly categorical principle of legitimacy, allowing new modes of naming to emerge. If Otilia can acquire a new name, and thereby acquire a legacy, then someone else could do the same. Likewise, if she can rename her

Indigenous serfs, indeed institute a new principle of naming for this group of people, then it stands to reason that another person—perhaps a servant, perhaps a master—could come along and change the logic of naming once more.

This implied prophecy finds its historical culmination in the Zapatista movement and its proposal of a new social contract between Indigenous communities and the Mexican state. By virtue of its interethnic character (incorporating Tzeltal, Tzotzil, Chol, Tojolabal, Mam, and Zoque ethnicities) (Nash 8), its impact on the recognition of cultural diversity in Mexico, and its capacity to infuse traditional Indigenous cultures with a feminist agenda, the Zapatista movement can be read as an irruption of the transformative chaos of creolization into the illusion of Mexican national unity. One of the primary axes of intervention for critical multiculturalism is education. In the years since the 1994 uprising, the Zapatistas have pursued their own grassroots educational initiatives, including an approach to multilingual education that contrasts with the neoliberal multiculturalism of the Mexican state. Within the *caracoles*, the Zapatistas have devised educational practices that seek both to create opportunities for Indigenous youth to integrate into mainstream Mexican society and to establish space for the preservation of Indigenous languages, customs, and values. This simultaneous assertion of the right to integration (captured by the slogan “Never again a Mexico without us”) and preservation of difference is expressed through educational campaigns within the *caracoles*. For example, the New Education Union of Teachers for Mexico (*Unión de Maestros de la Nueva Educación para México*) has proposed a model of citizenship and ethics grounded in multilingual, intercultural education. The ethical values implicit in the daily practices of Mayan peoples are described in the educational pamphlet “Los hombres y las mujeres

del maíz,” which was published in 2008 in Spanish as well as the three most widely spoken Mayan languages (Chol, Tzeltal, and Tzotzil). This effort resembles the Glissantian model of cultural hybridity in its agentive, selective approach to acculturation coupled with affirmations of local particularity, with an archipelago of caracoles linked by rhizomatic connections, not only to one another, but to other Indigenous communities and people’s movements around the world.

The Zapatista’s seizure of the right to self-determination through grassroots education is foretold in microcosmic form in *Balún-Canán*. The novel depicts the way the top-down approach to educating the Indigenous youth fails in two ways: first because the mandate to build the school is delegated to the landowners, and second because the landowners are given the responsibility of hiring the educators. In the first instance, the Tzeltal peasants take matters into their own hands and build the school themselves. In the second instance, Ernesto’s failure as a teacher is never resolved within the framework of the novel. However, it is worth noting that Castellanos worked in real life to promote education for Indigenous youth by writing educational texts for the Instituto Nacional Indigenista de México (“Semblanza,” n.p).

Thus, a common thread uniting the work of Castellanos with the contemporary Zapatista project is the resistance to the homogenizing impulse of mestizo nationalism, even while honoring the creative potential of cultural hybridity. Notwithstanding its central emphasis on specifically Indigenous rights, Zapatismo is also a hybrid movement, drawing upon Western Marxism and anarchism while uniting various Indigenous ethnicities in solidarity. This characterization is somewhat counterintuitive; in a 1998 interview, Glissant himself characterized Chiapas as a conflict between the “atavistic

culture” of the “Indians” and “the rest of Creole society in Mexico” (Hiepko 258). However, the increasing presence of women as active members of the Zapatista resistance, as demonstrated by their representation in the 2001 delegation to Mexico City⁹² and more recent events such as the 2018 Women’s Summit, indicates that the movement is not as atavistic as it might have appeared. Indeed, the Glissantian dichotomy between atavistic and composite cultures does not do justice to the vast differences between Indigenous and Western forms of atavism.

In any case, as reflected by both literature and politics, creolizing processes of cross-cultural influence have driven historical developments in the diverse contact zone of Chiapas in a manner that exceeds the conceptual limitations of the Mexican discourse of mestizaje. Indigenous resistance to imposed assimilation works toward critical transculturalism while recognizing the perpetual threat of erasure and reconquest through the hard hand of state violence or insidious processes of Westernization. In such dynamics, it becomes evident that neither creolization nor any other discourse of hybridity will serve as a panacea to the problems of conflictive plurality. Nevertheless, Glissantian creolization can offer conceptual tools to disambiguate between hegemonic and emancipatory ways of thinking about nationality, plurality, belonging, and difference.

⁹² For an account of this evolution, see Sonia Toledo Tello and Anna María Garza Caligaris’ chapter on “Gender and Stereotypes in the Social Movements of Chiapas” in the 2006 book *Dissident Women* edited by Speed et al.

CHAPTER 4

CREOLIZING MESTIZAJE IN TRANSLATION: *VEAN VÉ, MIS NANAS NEGRAS* BY AMALIALÚ POSSO FIGUEROA

In the preceding chapters, I have described creolizing tendencies in two major canonical works of literary mestizaje, *Aves sin nido* (*Torn from the Nest*) by Clorinda Matto de Turner from Peru (1889) and *Balún-Canán* (*The Nine Guardians*) by Rosario Castellanos from Mexico (1957). In these works, a subversive notion of cultural hybridity is endorsed through the theme of nurture kinship (the idea of kinship based on caregiving rather than biological filiation), challenging discourses of ethnic purity and patriarchal domination through positive portrayals of interracial caregiving. In the works of these Latin American feminist writers, nurture kinship supplants biological descent to make room for a distinctly cultural notion of mestizaje, a form of cultural hybridity that privileges active relations over biological kinship. This leads to the concept of a sub-discourse which I describe as creolizing mestizaje. The characteristics of this discourse that have emerged from my analysis are as follows: 1) Creolizing mestizaje is a non-essentialist discourse of hybridity; in contrast with the mestizaje of Andrés Molina Enríquez and José Vasconcelos, which instead focuses on biological synthesis to achieve national unity. 2) Creolizing mestizaje conceives of cultural change in terms of spontaneous neoculturation, a centrifugal model contrasting with Manuel Gamio's and Vasconcelos's ideas of biological and cultural convergence.⁹³ 3) Creolizing mestizaje often involves a critique of dominant culture in terms of ideas and values drawn from a

⁹³ "Our end should be to make the national race homogeneous, unify the language, and make the different cultures that exist in our country converge into one," writes Gamio in his 1916 book *Forjando patria* (28).

dominated culture. This distinguishes it from works of indigenismo (such as Enrique López Albuja's *Cuentos Andinos* or Jorge Icaza's *Huasipungo*) that critically depict the debasement of Indigenous people without engaging meaningfully with Indigenous knowledge and values.

One analytical advantage of the creolizing framework over the usual Latin American frameworks of mestizaje and transculturation is that creolization emphasizes cultural innovation through personal transformation in a manner that challenges chauvinistic approaches to nationalism. As such, creolization as a theory of cultural change offers ways of conceiving national identity without resorting to essentialist doctrines of roots-based belonging. As Kris F. Sealey puts it, "It is possible to imagine creolization as a theoretical accounting for the possibility of new and decolonial articulations of national community and national identity" (Sealey 59-60). Whereas mestizaje has incurred the risk of reinforcing racial essentialism, creolization is explicitly anti-essentialist.⁹⁴ Whereas transculturation is a descriptive concept developed under the supposedly objective gaze of sociology, creolization is avowedly subjective, open-ended, seeking less to define and describe and more to engage and provoke. Without being outright normative, Glissantian creolization has a certain prescriptiveness to it, in the sense that it presents alternative ways of thinking about subjectivity and relationality and suggests that these ways might offer a more viable grounding for coalitional politics. While mestizaje has often been politicized, it has not been articulated in terms of a cross-cultural relational framework in the way that creolization has in the works of Glissant, as

⁹⁴ Scholars critical of ideological uses of mestizaje include Antonio Cornejo Polar (in his 1998 article "Mestizaje e hibridez: Los riesgos de las metáforas"), Marwan Kraidy (in the 2005 book *Hybridity: The Cultural Logic of Globalization*), and Manuel Vargas (in his chapter "La biología y la filosofía de la 'raza' en México: Francisco Bulnés y José Vasconcelos.")

well as subsequent writers who have sought to extrapolate creolizing principles to domains beyond the Caribbean, particularly Kris Sealey, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih.⁹⁵

Using this framework, I have argued that Clorinda Matto de Turner's vociferous rejection of dominant *criollo* culture coupled with her advocacy of Quechua values constitutes an effort to re-center Peruvian national identity on an idealized mestiza subject creatively drawing on Indigenous and Western cultures, and that this subject is both national and cosmopolitan. I have argued that Rosario Castellanos's *Balún-Canán* is grounded in a logic of belonging that rejects the Western patriarchal model of legitimate filiation, presenting the possibility of a creolization of the imaginary via interethnic caregiving relationships. Through these studies, a picture begins to emerge of interethnic caregiving narratives as a significant site of creolizing mestizaje.

The present chapter turns this conceptual apparatus toward an analysis of another narrative devoted to the theme of nurture kinship, *Vean vé, mis nanas negras (Lookahere, My Black Nannies)* by Amalialú Posso Figueroa. This book, first published in 2001, represents a unique contribution to Latin American literature in the way it asserts the distinctive values of Black Colombian culture, urging a country with a long history of mestizo nationalism to accept both the difference of its Black population and that population's contribution to national identity.

The aims of this chapter are as follows: 1) To describe Posso Figueroa's work in terms of Glissantian cultural theory; 2) To situate Posso Figueroa's work in relation to

⁹⁵ See *The Creolization of Theory* (2011) edited by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-Mei Shih and *Creolizing the Nation* (2020) by Kris F. Sealey. Furthermore, Sealey's new volume, *Creolizing Critical Theory* (edited in collaboration with Benjamin P. Davis), was published in January 2024 as part of Rowman and Littlefield's series *Creolizing the Canon*.

comparable works of Caribbean Creole literature and the Black feminist notion of the othermother; 3) To situate the work in terms of the history of the Chocó region; 4) To compare the work to the nurture kinship narratives of Matto de Turner and Castellanos, observing its contribution to the tradition of creolizing feminist mestiza literature; and finally 5) To synthesize the results of these investigations so as to formulate a coherent and culturally responsive translation strategy. I am currently collaborating with the African-American poet Shanta Lee to produce the first English translation of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*, and our goal is to craft a translation that conveys the Afro-diasporic sensibilities, cultural hybridity, and creativity of the original text through judicious juxtapositions of vernacular, standard, and novel forms of language. In order to articulate the cultural stakes of this translation project, I draw upon insights from Black feminist translation scholars Kaiama L. Glover and Sharon Masingale Bell to consider issues of framing, representation, audience, and language. These insights provide a framework for the final section of this chapter comparing *Vean vé* to the novel *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1972) by Simone Schwarz-Bart from Guadeloupe, with an assessment of how the successes and shortcomings of Barbara Bray's English translation of that novel (*The Bridge of Beyond*, 1986) might inform an approach to translating Posso Figueroa's writing.

Playfulness, errantry, and othermothers in *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*

“The nanny Fidelia Córdoba kept her rhythm in her tetras.”⁹⁶ The opening line of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* by Amalialú Posso Figueroa seizes the reader's attention with

⁹⁶ “La nana Fidelia Córdoba tenía el ritmo en las tetras” (Posso Figueroa 17). All translations in this chapter are my own unless otherwise credited.

its enigmatic imagery, drawing them into a memorable modern fable of magic and betrayal. The story of Fidelia Córdoba goes on to describe several occasions on which this Black nanny performed miracles with the help of her nipples' fantastic sense of direction. This is the first of the 25 tales that comprise the book, each dedicated to a different Black nanny in the Chocó region of Colombia's Pacific coast. *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* is Posso Figueroa's most successful publication, having reached ten editions in Colombia and three in Spain.

Vean vé, mis nanas negras makes the nannies the protagonists, while their ward, the child version of the author or a fictionalized avatar thereof, recedes into the background of the text, playing the role of narrator without imposing herself as a character. In fact, notions such as nurturing and mentoring are mostly present in this text indirectly by implication, as the biographical vignettes focus much more on each nanny's personality, body, and story outside of the context of the Figueroa household. Taking the text at face value with appropriate suspension of disbelief, the reader is invited to infer that each of these nannies must have recounted the story of her earlier life to the narrator, or that the narrator was able to learn through channels of community gossip what became of each nanny after she departed the Figueroa household. In either case, the narrator seems to have access to knowledge that a child would have difficulty acquiring or understanding, and this mystery built into the narrative voice contributes to the marvelous-real tone of the text.

These stories convey a profound sense of the nexus between place and community as they immerse the reader in the geographic and cultural landscapes of Chocó, one of the rainiest places on earth, an area crisscrossed by a hundred rivers and inhabited by a

majority Black population. This region comes across in Posso Figueroa's writing as a land of staggering biodiversity and surprising possibilities. In this context, life is experienced mostly outdoors, punctuated by daily drenching rainstorms and penetrating heat rather than clocks and calendars. In this rainforest of remembrance, far from the hubbub of Bogotá, there are more boats than cars, more plant species than brand names, more gossip than literature. According to a description by the Biblioteca Pública Piloto of Medellín, "As a child [the author] lived surrounded by Black culture, and from the oral tradition she received all these stories of jungles, rivers, suns, boats, everything which allowed her to immerse herself in the feeling of her African ancestors, in the feel of their dances, their songs, and especially their stories."⁹⁷ Through her literary representation of the Afro-descendant, syncretic culture of the Chocó region, Posso Figueroa contributes a creolizing element to Colombian literature, which has generally been dominated by a whitening form of mestizo nationalism.

In addition to a study of place, *Vean vé* is an atlas of corporeal wonders. Each nanny keeps her rhythm in a different part of her body—her breasts, her tongue, her back, her nose—or in an aspect of her comportment, such as her way of sitting, her manner of crossing her legs, or her gaze. These distinctively situated rhythms give each nanny her unique way of relating to her environment and her sense of self, expressed in the form of habits, preoccupations, and desires. Some of these bodily rhythms demonstrate a special attunement with the natural world, such as that of Fidelia Córdoba, whose breasts serve as a sextant, compass, or astrolabe, her nipples always pointing out the right way to go.

⁹⁷ "De niña vivió rodeada de cultura negra, le fueron transmitidos desde la tradición oral, todos esos cuentos de selvas, ríos, soles, barcas, todo aquello que le permitió adentrarse en el sentimiento de sus ancestros africanos, en el sentir de sus bailes, sus cantos, y sobre todo de sus relatos."

Another nanny, Secundina Caldón, keeps her rhythm in her sowing; her mystical gift for making plants grow allows her to see the metaphorical resonances between the world of plants and that of humans, particularly human sexuality. Just as plants respond to wind stress by developing stronger stems and deeper roots, the nannies in Posso Figueroa's stories show how habits of attunement with natural forces and rhythms can confer resilience, positing these women as societal role models in a manner that relativizes their subaltern status. A review by Lilit Lobos published in 2017 in the online journal *Afroféminas* includes the following assessment: "This book is a compilation of particularities rarely found in Colombian literature, including: the everyday landscape of the Pacific Coast, the vindication of female eroticism of Black women as personal and cultural empowerment."⁹⁸ While the narrator's childhood self is largely absent from the narration, a composite sense of her identity gradually coalesces through the multiplicity of role models and rhythms described in loving detail. Like Rosario Castellanos's novel *Balún-Canán*, Posso Figueroa's literary fiction is based on the author's real-life experience of care received from racially marginalized nannies. The creolizing element of the gesture of writing about these relationships lies in the way it challenges societal fictions of racial boundaries by depicting the interactions of figures who transgress these boundaries by virtue of their position as caregivers. In this manner, the text simultaneously carves out new space for Black culture in the Colombian national imaginary and criticizes the segregationist mindset that has historically excluded that culture from discourses of mestizo identity. As I described in my introduction, the

⁹⁸ "Este libro es una compilación de particularidades poco halladas en la literatura colombiana, entre ellos: el paisaje cotidiano del Pacífico, la reivindicación del erotismo femenino de las mujeres negras como empoderamiento personal y cultural."

dominant form of mestizo nationalism in Colombia has been characterized by projects to “whiten” the Indigenous (and sometimes the Black) population by encouraging European immigration and intermarriage, thus pursuing national consolidation through biological convergence. By asserting the distinctness of Black Colombian communities, Posso Figueroa counters this whitening mestizaje in a manner that opens onto a Relational sense of identity, a diffracting, unpredictable, chaotic vision of cultural hybridity in keeping with the Glissantian account of the political potential of creolization.⁹⁹

The tales are recounted in Posso Figueroa’s poetic prose, rich with terms and turns of phrase from the Chocoano dialect. Imbued with the rhythmic pacing and symbolic sensibilities of the local oral culture, Posso Figueroa’s writing has been praised for its ethnographic qualities,¹⁰⁰ although the author asserts that the stories are written from an insider’s perspective, not an ethnographer’s. “An encounter with the nanny Amalialú Posso Figueroa,” writes Arnoldo Palacios in the book’s introduction, “immediately turns into a noble, rich encounter with Chocó. With oral literature. With the African imagination, weaver of new stories” (Posso Figueroa 7). By oscillating between the distinct local speech patterns of Chocó and more internationally recognizable forms of Spanish, the author creates a hybrid language capable of conveying the particularity of the culture and its dialect to a general audience. Terms such as *corrinche* (hubbub), *pichindé* (penis), and *bambazú* (pregnancy-related discomfort) are not found in dictionaries of standard Spanish. The musicality of Chocó’s oral culture flows through these texts in the form of melodic narrative prosody, incantatory repetition, vivid

⁹⁹ See *Poetics of Relation* p. 34 for a summary of Glissant’s notion of creolization as a real-world manifestation of Relation.

¹⁰⁰ See Jaime Arocha’s preface to *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*.

metaphors drawn from the collective imaginary, and snippets of song. These qualities, associated more with the craft of storytelling than that of writing per se, imbue the narrative with humor, musicality, and an overall tone of wonder and delight.

This attitude of wonder is key to understanding how *Vean vé* creolizes Colombian mestizo nationalism. Through a playful rejection of a positivistic approach to knowledge, the creolizing spirit enriches the depiction of reality with elements of folk storytelling and magic realism, such as astonishing coincidences, supernatural powers, and amazing intuitions. These fantastic qualities of Posso Figueroa's writing exemplify the utility of playfulness as a component of decolonial practice. The idea of playfulness as a form of resistance is an element of creolization theory with both epistemological and political implications. As a mode of cultural relation, playfulness rejects a totalizing kind of knowing. Glissant distinguishes between knowledge in the sense of capturing the object of knowledge and a sort of "errant thinking" that regards the field of experience as an open forum for active meaning-making, challenging universal values and strict definitions (*Poetics of Relation* 11-22). According to Sealey's interpretation, there is a resonance between Glissant's notion of errant thinking and Maria Lugones' concept of playful world-travel. Lugones asserts that the decolonial path needs to be open to newness, open to abandoning the rigidity of colonial structures through playful world travel (Sealey 134). This kind of playfulness is not a frivolous disregard of history; as I shall explain below, the ludic spirit of *Vean vé mis nanas negras* is decidedly not an abnegation of historical responsibility. Without losing sight of real and often unjust circumstances, the playful epistemology serves as a counterpoint to the sort of seriousness that seeks knowledge as a way of mastering reality and fixing it in place.

The playful tone of the stories in *Vean vé*, the surprising and seemingly impossible events and characters, require the reader to enter into a state of playful world-travel, to accept the narrated place at face value and linger there in a state of curiosity. This is contrary to the world-travel of the ethnographer or anthropologist, who goes to a place to explain and define it in objective terms. Meeting the other in their own “alternative community of sense” (Sealey 133), the playful world-traveler is ready to abandon the matrix of power that has defined their own sense of self in relation to coloniality, and this stripping-away of the colonial mindset is a step toward the creolization of consciousness, and thus—when considered in terms of the possible effect of Posso Figueroa’s writing on the Colombian reader—the creolization of national identity.

The fact that this spirit of playfulness is located in the depiction of role models gives the work its ethical dimension. The framing of these fantastical women as caregivers lends them a certain authority which counterbalances the absurd elements of the narrative with the gravity of familial respect. In this manner, the reader is invited to experience the work from a childlike perspective, but one that is not plagued by what Lugones calls “infantile judgement” the sort of attitude that would cause a person to make judgements about the world “in fear of hostility, and hostile in [their] fear” (Sealey 133). As Sealey puts it, “Such infantile habits of being are in flight from critique, from transformation in relationships with others, and from having to possibly change views of the world” (133). As nannies, the women in Posso Figueroa’s tales are presented as mentors, a position of respect that contradicts the apparent frivolity of some of their personalities, reframing impulsiveness as spontaneity and lack of education as the value

of unmediated experience. As the author writes in her preface, “my Black nannies taught me to enjoy every millimeter of the wealth of my body, put me in the vibe to take pleasure in all the rhythms my body has.”¹⁰¹ The emphasis on rhythm in *Vean vé* suggests a worldview centered on cycles, pulses, and repetitions. In this view, the key to thriving is being in sync with one’s own body, and letting the body be in sync with nature. Against the masculinist mode of sexuality that treats the female body as a mere object of appraisal and heterosexual male desire, Posso’s work invites the reader to accept the female body with all its flows and idiosyncrasies, its so-called “imperfections” in the form of strong odors, exaggerated shapes, missing teeth, and so forth, and to recognize the wholeness and self-sufficiency of womanhood with its various rhythms.

In order to understand how this balance between ludic aesthetics and familial ethics informs the cultural hybridity at the heart of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*, it is necessary to consider how the work responds to the Black cultural concept of what Patricia Hill Collins calls the othermother, that is, a woman who cares for a child or children that are not her own biological offspring. In Afro-Latin and Afro-Caribbean literature, the figure of the othermother often serves as a symbol of community resilience responding to the necessities incurred by social and environmental challenges with the persistence of traditional community-based survival strategies. As Collins puts it, “The resiliency of women-centered family networks illustrates how traditional cultural values—namely, the African origins of community-based child care—can help people cope with and resist oppression” (“Black Women and Motherhood” 156). Collins asserts

¹⁰¹ “mis nanas negras me enseñaron a disfrutar al milímetro la riqueza del cuerpo, me metieron en el corrinche de gozar con todos los ritmos que tiene mi cuerpo” (15).

that “women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers” play a key role in maintaining women’s central position in Black extended families, and that this centrality reflects a continuation of West African cultural mores and “functional adaptations to race and gender oppression” (ibid. 153). According to Collins, the figure of the othermother represents an alternative to the cultural tropes of the Mammy (a maternal Black woman who happily cares for a white family) and the Matriarch (the pathologized archetype of the Black mother of a Black household who violates the expectations of the nuclear family structure), tropes that Collins began calling into question in her 1990 book *Black Feminist Thought*. With an emphasis on mothering as a dignified praxis rather than motherhood as a limiting identity, Posso’s writing presents othermothers as whole, idiosyncratic characters in a manner that defies Black female stereotypes found in regressive portrayals of Mammies and Matriarchs. In doing so, it participates in a tradition of Black literature featuring othermothers in respected mentoring roles. Furthermore, by evoking the role that these nannies play within mestizo families and the nannies’ influence on her own sense of self, Posso Figueroa suggests that the development of mestizo identity can occur under the auspices of Black modes of caring. When this personal model of care and knowledge is extrapolated to the level of the national “family,” it becomes possible to conceive of the Afro-diasporic cultural phenomenon of the othermother as a Colombian value, creolizing the received idea of mestizaje and diverting it from the “blanqueamiento,” or whitening, that Peter Wade (1993) has described as a fundamental feature of Colombian discourse on race-mixing.

According to Collins, the special status of othermothers is one of the uniting features of African and Afro-diasporic societies: “Cross-culturally, the high status given

to othermothers and the cooperative nature of child-care arrangements among bloodmothers and othermothers in Caribbean and other Black societies gives credence to the importance that people of African descent place on mothering” (“Black Women and Motherhood” 155). Considering that this principle represents one of the common threads uniting apparently disparate strands of the African diaspora—cultures of the Americas isolated from one another by geographic distance and language barriers, peoples whose common cultural heritage was historically subject to intentional eradication by white colonial powers—cross-cultural analyses of literary representations of othermothers should yield relevant insights about the distinctly Black values and sensibilities that have endured to constitute nexuses of resistance and resilience. Othermothering is one of the themes that connects Posso Figueroa’s writing to other significant works of Afro-diasporic literature from the Anglo-American tradition and the Franco-Caribbean tradition.¹⁰² While Afro-diasporic literature offers many examples of the theme, the present chapter will focus its comparative analysis on Simone Schwartz-Bart, based on the substantial parallels between the functions of othermothering found in Schwartz-Bart and Posso Figueroa.

In Posso Figueroa’s work, othermothers are portrayed as spiritual guides offering strategies for the re-integration of the bodymind through empathy with telluric forces. The opening vignette of *Vean vé* tells the story of the nanny Fidelia Córdoba, who had her rhythm in her breasts. Fidelia’s incredibly sensitive and retractile nipples seem to respond to energies in the environment, giving them a supernatural sense of direction:

¹⁰² Othermother figures are depicted in prominent works such as Toni Morrison’s *Home*, which places a brother in a mothering role, Maryse Condé’s *Moi, Tituba, sorcière... noire de Salem* (1986), which reserves a prominent role for the grandmother of the titular protagonist, and Joseph Zobel’s autobiographical novel *La Rue Cases-Nègres* (1950).

“they were all at once a compass, sextant, weathervane, plumb line, quadrant, and astrolabe.”¹⁰³ When a group of people go out on a party boat ride on the River Atrato, only to have the motor fail shortly after nightfall, the group find themselves lost and without recourse until Fidelia’s nipples point the way to an embarkation point in a nearby village, thus saving everyone. On a different occasion, a group of people are preparing a meal on the bank of the River Sipí when the water level suddenly rises and they find themselves stranded on a narrow strip of land, pinned between the rising river and an insurmountable cliff. Once again, Fidelia’s breasts solve the problem by pointing in the direction of a river ford shallow enough to allow their escape.

The nanny Fidelia’s supernatural connection to earth and water resembles Gloria Anzaldúa’s interpretation of Coatlicue, an Aztec goddess associated with fertility and rain. The feeling of being whole and integrated in place sometimes involves a suspension of reason and a dissolution into natural being, in a manner akin to the process of communion with Coatlicue, which Anzaldúa describes: “I tremble before the animal, the alien, the sub- or suprahuman, the me that has something in common with the wind and the trees and the rocks” (72). Likewise, the nanny Fidelia Córdoba has the gift of telluric empathy, a mystical connection between her body and the water that makes her the salvation of the people on the defunct boat and those stranded by the flood. Anzaldúa conceives the encounter with Coatlicue as an internal journey or descent into arcane, subconscious recesses of the self, a journey that is a “prelude to a crossing” (70), a voluntary surrender of the conscious mind in preparation for a transformation. Similarly, when Fidelia locates the river ford and saves the stranded people, it is like being “reborn

¹⁰³ “eran al tiempo brújula, sextante, rosa de los vientos, escandelo, sondaleza, cuadrante y astrolabio” (17).

in another time, another era; that is, precisely, in another rhythm: the rhythm of the nipples on the tetas of the nanny Fidelia.”¹⁰⁴ This image of crossing over into another time, another rhythm, occurring here in the opening story of the collection, functions as an invitation for the reader to cross over into the world of Posso Figueroa’s nannies, a world in which the boundaries between humanity and nature, reason and intuition, the mundane and the sublime no longer hold. For Anzaldúa, Coatlicue simultaneously represents duality, a synthesis of duality, and a third perspective that goes beyond duality. So, through direct engagement with the part of herself that participates in the non-rational causality of wind, trees, and rocks, Anzaldúa’s new mestiza is capable of achieving a synthesis between disparate components of the psyche, between the ephemeral bodymind and the abiding spirits of her ancestors, and from this convergence, something new emerges, as the self is transformed through encounters with hidden, internal forces which, being the same stuff as wind and rock, are capable of enduring the harshness of the weather. The idea of such a convergence resulting in new creation resonates with Glissant’s concept of creolization as a productive cultural process and his call for poetics to produce a textual equivalent of the world. Western obsessions with division, separateness, and purity, applied not only to distinctions between humanity and nature but also between one type of human and another, dissolve in the spirit of the othermother Coatlicue.

The dual nature of the substitute mother—both a mother and not one at the same time—reflects the dual nature of Black motherhood itself, which has been described as a kind of “double history,” the site of both oppression and resistance. Collins has described

¹⁰⁴ “Era como haber nacido de nuevo, en otro tiempo, en otra era; es decir, exactamente en otro ritmo, el ritmo de los pezones de las tetas de la nana Fidelia” (Posso Figueroa 20).

women-centered networks of bloodmothers and othermothers as social forms that help Black women endure and resist multiple forms of oppression (“Meaning of Motherhood” 277-281). In her 2005 chapter “Black Women and Motherhood,” she describes the central role played by othermothers in Black communities. Collins writes that, in African American communities, biological mothers are expected to care for their own children, but “African and African-American communities have also recognized that investing one person with full responsibility for mothering a child may not be wise or possible. As a result, othermothers—women who assist bloodmothers by sharing mothering responsibilities—traditionally have been central to the institution of Black motherhood” (152-153). The centrality of mothers and othermothers is not “predicated on male powerlessness” or absence, but informal relations of care by othermothers (grandmothers, sisters, aunts, neighbors, and so forth) have been reinforced by necessities incurred by conditions of poverty, separation, and widowhood. This social function of the othermother in the context of absence takes on a new meaning in Posso Figueroa’s writing: The mestiza narrator is not deprived of her birth mother, so the substitution is not a matter of compensation for maternal absence. Nevertheless, there are social lacunae that find redress under the tender auspices of the Black nannies: the alienation of the female subject in a society constructed according to the logic of male desire, the contradictions inherent in a Colombian mestizo national identity that excludes and denigrates Blackness. Thus, through the rhythms of their telluric enmeshment and the directness of oral culture, Posso Figueroa’s Black nannies enact a feminist praxis against neocolonial alienation. Like Coatlicue, the othermother helps the younger female subject to think and feel

beyond her proximate circumstances, finding strength in her connection to durable natural cycles and processes that will outlast immediate experience.

The Chocó region: a history of isolation

In a 2021 interview, Sealey describes the basic messages of her book *Creolizing the Nation*. One of the driving questions is “How does anything other than abjectness get to exist in the context of the Middle Passage?” (Sealey and Monahan 92). To apply this question to the Chocó region requires a look at the particular history of Black settlement in the region. This history is related to broader processes of forced displacement and enslavement throughout Latin America, while also characterized by distinctive features and factors that set this population apart. Perhaps most significantly, the relatively low level of white or mestizo economic activity in this region during the late colonial era and early republic resulted in a substantial degree of autonomy for Black inhabitants of Chocó as compared to other parts of Latin America, the Caribbean, and the American South, where plantation slavery was frequently replaced by arrangements of sharecropping and worker dependency.

The territorial distribution of the Black population in Colombia’s Pacific region results from an unconventional model of slavery, as the area did not participate in the system of sugar plantations found in the Antilles or Brazil. Rather, in the Pacific region, slavery was primarily associated with mining activities. The region’s history is marked by the contradiction between the natural abundance of the land, both in terms of mineral wealth and fertile soil, and the poverty of its inhabitants. This poverty has mainly to do with the long history of exclusion from the national economy, an exclusion which has its

basis in geographic factors (the difficulty of building roads through the steep, rainy jungle) and in social factors (the general indifference of government and industrial elites toward the development and wellbeing of the region, i.e., racism by neglect) (Wade, *Blackness and Race Mixing* 99-105).

The pattern of settlement in the colonial era produced a very strong center-periphery dynamic whereby the cities of Colombia's central high plain region, or *altiplano*, came to be the sites of concentration of the owning classes, leaving the rural hinterlands of the Pacific Coast untouched by urbanization. Colonization of the Pacific was mainly based on gold mining, with impermanent settlements set up in the area of the eastern tributaries of the Atrato and San Juan rivers (*ibid.* 99). The mine owners were mostly absentee landlords, congregating in the cities of the *altiplano* such as Popayán, Cali, and Pasta. This owner class included white people, Indigenous people, and mestizos (Hoffmann 38). Starting in 1580, Black Africans constituted the majority of enslaved people in the major mining areas of Western Colombia. Most enslaved people in the region came from West and Central Africa. They were brought first to Cartágena de Indias on the Caribbean coast, and then passed through the town of Mompo before being brought to the mining operations further south. The first enslaved populations arrived at the river Atrato in the 1640s, leading to the founding of the town of Citara (present-day Quibdó, the region's capital) (Retourné 22). The workforce was brought from Valle del Cauca to work extracting gold from the Atrato and cutting timber on the river Baudó (Agudelo 379). Owners of mines and large haciendas were able to use legal maneuvers to acquire large land holdings, leading to a system of territorialization whereby the coastal region was divided up into tracts known as *baldíos*. These *baldíos*

were nationalized following independence in the nineteenth century; thenceforth, they were officially uninhabited, but were subject to later state-supervised adjudication (Hoffman 55). By the end of the eighteenth century, the rural areas were mostly occupied by free Black people (Retourné 22).

The initial structure of the slavery system and subsequent patterns of neglect left the Pacific Coast region largely isolated from Colombia's processes of national formation. The region was certainly inauspicious to travel, crisscrossed as it was by hundreds of rivers and streams, densely forested, with the few roads under perpetual threat of washouts due to heavy rainfall and unpredictable fluctuations in river levels. Located at a great distance from major population centers, plagued by tropical diseases, and bound by tempestuous Pacific waters to the west, travel between this region and the country's interior was a dangerous, expensive undertaking (Velásquez 28-29). This geographic isolation, along with a lack of interest on the part of government and industrial powers in the development of the region, left the Pacific Coast untouched by many of the processes of modernization and urbanization that would contribute to the consolidation of national identity in the major cities of Bogotá and Medellín. The legacy of the slavery system was a racialized territorial structure with rural areas inhabited mainly by freed Black people, while white people continued to concentrate in the cities of the *altiplano*, holding administrative and military posts in addition to entrepreneurial activities such as owning and operating precious metal mines from a distance (Retourné 22). By the time Simón Bolívar arrived with his liberating forces in Santa Fé de Bogotá in 1819, resentments among the enslaved coastal population were stoking fears of race war. In order to prevent such a calamity, Bolívar declared a free birth law in 1821, stating

that thenceforth any children born of slaves in the newly independent administrative area of Nueva Granada would be treated as free citizens (Agudelo 388). Slavery was finally abolished for good under the government of José Hilario López in 1851. This further contributed to the cultural isolation of the region, as the minority white and mestizo population that had persisted in the Pacific Coast area largely migrated to the interior, while many freed Black people moved into the lower coastal areas and took to a life of subsistence farming and fishing. According to official laws, this occupation was illegal, but it was by and large carried out in a peaceful manner.

The above-described conditions laid the groundwork for the consolidation of Black regional identity in Chocó as an entity distinct from mainstream Colombian society. The first constitutional republic of Colombia was established in 1886. Under the new republic, the myth of the mestizo nation was the central organizing concept for national identity (Wade, *Blackness* 46). The country's first constitution makes no reference to Black or Indigenous populations. Official discourse as well as early republican literary productions promoted the imperatives of uniformity and unity to the exclusion of ethnic difference. In this context, mestizaje served as a conceptual apparatus to perpetuate the myth of unity and active practices of cultural homogenization. Wade describes this process as a whitening form of assimilation, intended to blend Colombia's various ethnicities together under the banner of national unity. Literary production in the young republic was overtly based on Western ideological assumptions and dominated by white male intellectual culture centered in the highlands, excluding both women's writing and any influence from popular Black oral forms prevalent in the western hinterlands.

If the nineteenth-century Colombian *ciudad letrada* took little interest in the oral culture of their Black neighbors, it was certainly not for lack of creativity on the part of the latter. With complex musical forms such as *gualíes*, *chigualos*, and *alabaos* dating back to the eighteenth century, the Black inhabitants of the Pacific Coast found ways to consolidate social and kinship networks by forging an original, syncretic culture bearing traces of Western and central African influences along with Spanish song (Moreno Tovar 308). During the slave trade, some captured Africans had been permitted to bring drums along on the slave ships as a strategy to reduce the high rate of suicide (some were even forced to participate in musical sessions while held captive at slave auctions). Of course, this coercive approach to culture did little to attenuate the atrocity of the experience of sequestration and forced displacement, but eventually the enslaved populations were able to turn this one permitted cultural activity into a mechanism of resistance, for example by using drums as tools for communicating messages about incipient rebellions (Mosquera 76-77). In response, and in a general spirit of extirpation of ancestral religion, slave owners began persecuting the drum along with enslaved people's music more broadly. Such persecution was less thorough in Chocó than in other regions of Latin America with large populations of enslaved Africans due to the absenteeism of the masters and clergy (Moreno Tovar 308). Thus, Black collective memory was able to persist in the form of traces carried forward through song.

As manumissions increased in the mid-eighteenth century, the increasing free Black population that settled along the riverbanks of Chocó consolidated their social bonds through musical gatherings to commemorate the saints and the dead (Moreno Tovar 307-308). In these religious ceremonies, the musical forms of *gualíes* and

chigualos were reserved for funerals for children, while *alabaos* were for adults and saints. The death of a child was considered a reason to celebrate, because it meant that heaven had gained an angel (Moreno Tovar 309). Funerals tended to be rather festive affairs, intended to send the deceased off on their journey to the afterlife. There was a nine-day period of mourning, initiated by a gathering at the home of the deceased to sing *alabaos* until dawn, with liquor, food and sweets passed around, and people telling stories and jokes.

Posso Figueroa's narrative depicts the continued relevance of such ceremonies in the twentieth century. The final tale in *Vean vé*, "Dioselina Chontó," addresses the themes of community grief and women's role in preserving cultural memory. Dioselina (also known as Diosa, "Goddess") was 97 years old, but still had her memory perfectly intact, allowing her to recount the stories of Black people from far away: "I never knew how far, but it must have been very far, because she sometimes spoke in Bantu" (168). Her rhythm was in her sentimentality, and she always sang *alabaos* to the dead. This closing chapter serves its own sort of ceremonial purpose, recounting the funerals of several community members, including the child Bartolito, the legendary womanizer Crispulo Copete, the murder victim Ibagón Cañadas, and the narrator's uncle Julio. Dioselina is also called to accompany the body of an Indigenous Embera man to whom the priest refuses to give last rites in the absence of pay.

Of all of these funerals, the most raucous is that of Don Crispulo. As he realizes he is dying, Crispulo asks Diosa to have all the women with whom he ever had sex to show up for his funeral so he can go to the afterlife happy (and erect). Diosa relays this request to the town crier Vicente Romaña, who makes the announcement, adding that the

women should show up with their blouses open and without panties. Nearly all the women in Quibdó attend the funeral, because even those who consider themselves decent do not want to be omitted from the list of the desired. The funeral takes on the ambiance of a raucous party, and Diosa feels it inappropriate to sing the *alabaos* as the smell of all these congregated women's genitals fills the air, provoking the men to a frenzy. The chaos lasts until the body is buried, whereupon Diosa feels sure that she has accomplished her task of sending Crispulo away happy.

Similarly, Diosa manages to turn the funeral of little Bartolito into a joyful occasion. She asks the children in attendance to tell about their best memory with the deceased, and then has them all sit in a circle and play a game. "Diosa insisted that the best company a dead child can be given is that of joy, so they can go to heaven happy and laughing." Everyone goes home from Bartolito's *gualí* remembering him "with fondness but especially with joy," and afterward, Diosa's main regret is that life "doesn't let the years last longer to bring joy to children."¹⁰⁵ A specialist in the art of mourning, Dioselina brings a surprisingly positive sense of purpose to her work. Her aim is to comfort the living, both by reassuring them that their dead loved ones have had a happy departure and by facilitating the consecrating process of communal memory. This approach to death helps provide an answer to Sealey's question, "How does anything other than abjectness get to exist in the context of the Middle Passage?" The grief work that is integrated into community life in the Chocó region is one strategy whereby the people manage to resist total abjectness. This resistance takes the form of a defiant spirit

¹⁰⁵ "Diosa insistía en que la mejor compañía que se le puede dar a un niño muerto es la de la alegría, para que se vaya al cielo contento y riendo [...] cuando todos se fueron a sus casas, recordando con cariño pero sobre todo con alegría a Bartolito muerto, Diosa [...] lloró por las cosas raras que tiene la vida, que no deja que duren más los años para dar felicidad a los niños." (171)

of joy undiminished by the reality of untimely death, and the festive aspects of Afro-Colombian burial traditions have preserved that spirit for centuries. Such practices therefore represent traces of African culture that survived the Middle Passage, and which have been transformed through creolization into contemporary cultural formations.

In the early 1960s—that is, around the same time as the events described in *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*—the religious authorities of Chocó criticized the Black communities’ funeral traditions, calling the nine-day mourning period an “abomination” due to its festive nature (Moreno Tovar 309). This was not the first time Black Colombian musical culture had faced suppression; in the seventeenth century, the Jesuit San Pedro Claver had sought to prohibit the drum in Cartagena on the grounds that it “brings idolatry,” and later a priest named Jesús Mera tried to ban the marimba in Barbacoas (ibid. 309). By holding fast to their musical traditions, particularly funeral music, Black Colombians have resisted forced evangelization, and the playful exercise of social critique in song allows the continuity and evolution of oral culture (ibid. 310).

This playfulness, applied even to the somber matter of death and mourning, is a point of commonality between the Black population of Colombia and other strands of the African diaspora.¹⁰⁶ The insistence on festivity in the face of tragedy marks these cultures’ emphasis on human connection as a means of overcoming difficulty. In this sense, the nine-day mourning ritual can be thought of as an instance of Lugones’s notion of playfulness, a non-frivolous yet ludic spirit that serves as a mode of resistance and resilience. This spirit of festive community connection is one of the elements that

¹⁰⁶ See Patricia de Aquino (1998) on funeral rites in Candomblé, Brazil; McDaniel (1985) on the Stone Feast in Carriacou, Grenada; Richman (2018) on the African and French origins of mortuary traditions in Léogâne, Haiti.

inscribes *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* in the Afro-diasporic traditions of the Americas, characterized by traces of African traditions subject to processes of creolizing syncretism.

Supernatural nannies and *chaos-monde*

At the end of her tale, after having moved on from her time as a nanny, Fidelia Córdoba falls in love with a white man who exploits her gift by using her to find parcels of cocaine dropped by airplanes into the ocean. The white man uses Fidelia over and over in this way until one day their boat mysteriously disappears, and she is never seen again. The tragedy of Fidelia Córdoba is that, although she never lost the rhythm of her breasts, she allowed it to be repurposed by a white man, and in this sense, she abdicated control of her own rhythm. The tragic outcome of this first, most prominent tale is one of the reasons I disagree with a few of Ana M. Patiño Mejía's interpretations of *Vean vé*. For one thing, Patiño Mejía suggests that these narratives take place in an "almost mythic time" and in a "remote past" (47). While it is true that the tales largely omit historical references signaling the precise chronological setting—scant references to historical or political events or famous people, no mention of specific years—the presence of the airplane and its implied use in the illicit drug trade places the text squarely in the Colombia of the latter half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, mentions of modern consumer goods such as Platino liquor and Mennen deodorant (which was not exported until after the First World War), and to cultural references such as the 1956 film *Sissi, die junge Kaiserin* (mentioned as *Sissi emperatriz*, 71) and the BBC (assigned as a nickname to the nanny Basilisa Balanta Copete but with obvious reference to the British Broadcasting Corporation, 121) all contribute to a rather clear sense of the time setting of

these tales. Nevertheless, some of the author's descriptions do evoke a general tone of timelessness within the stories, such as when the character Cleómenes decides to confess his love to Wbaldina Conto Asprilla: "At the end of the day, any day of some month of no year, don Cleómenes de Jesús Ledezma allowed his heart to win out over his reason."¹⁰⁷ However, the clear reference in the penultimate story to the dictatorship of General Rojas Pinilla resolves all chronological vagueness, placing the events of that story squarely in the mid-1950s (more on this below). The seriousness of Posso Figueroa's engagement with the political history of Chocó inscribes her work in a creolizing mode of writing that pursues Relation through a candid account of particular, non-generalizable conditions. As Glissant writes, "[W]e establish Relation. And not by an abstraction, an idealization of everything, that would have led us to see in our particular place a sort of reflection of a beneficial, profitable universal" (Treatise 73). This is why it matters that Posso Figueroa's stories, despite their occasional superficial resemblance to fairy tales, are not situated in a "mythic time."

Fidelia Córdoba's exploitation is a reason to question Patiño Mejía's assertion that the "beings that make up this universe live under conditions of equality and justice" (49). While it is true that one of the remarkable features of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* is its emphasis on joy, humor, community, and pleasure, the text does not sugar-coat the conditions of poverty and exploitation that existed and persist in Chocó, which remains one of the poorest regions in Colombia and in South America more broadly, a region where many rivers have been poisoned with mercury due to gold mining practices, and several municipalities lack access to sanitary drinking water. Posso Figueroa's text

¹⁰⁷ "Al terminar el día, cualquier día de algún mes de ningún año, don Cleómenes de Jesús Ledezma permitió que su corazón le ganara la partida a la razón." (35)

mentions food shortages (unavailability of lemons in “Aspasia Copete,” closure of a bakery due to lack of bread in “Acento Romero”) and implies the lack of access to dental care (the nanny Bella Paz Murillo Palomeque is missing her four front teeth, and rather than seeking care, she lives on a diet of soft food and avoids saying words that will force her to open her mouth too wide). After she gives up her work as a nanny, Wbaldina Conto Asprilla begins working as a fish scaler on the riverbank, removing scales with only her fingers; this sort of drudge labor can hardly be described as “conditions of equality and justice.” Moreover, in the story “Amira Ocoró,” it is revealed that the narrator’s mother was the only nurse in Quibdó’s only hospital, where the narrator’s uncle was the only doctor. Indeed, Wade has noted that the ratio of medical practitioners to inhabitants in the Chocó region has always been severely inadequate (*Blackness* 143). According to Posso’s narrative, the main ailments treated in Quibdó’s hospital were yaws, goiter, and snakebite (*Vean vé* 140). It is difficult to conceive of this setting as a timeless, bucolic paradise. On the contrary, it is a land of harsh realities characterized by forms of suffering that are partially alleviated by the tenderness of community sentiment, where every wonderful or harrowing detail contributes vitally to the sense of the whole. As Glissant puts it, “It is the actual substance of each of the places, their minute or infinite detail and the thrilling sum of their particularities, that is to be placed in complicity with those of all places” (*Treatise* 73). By narrating the minute details of Chocoano culture in accessible, beguiling prose, Posso Figueroa uses a baroque aesthetics to establish a space for Relational interaction between that relatively isolated, underrepresented culture and the broader world, thereby contributing to the creolization of Colombian, Latin American, and global imaginaries.

Notwithstanding the text's unflinching engagement with misery, the characters' apparent acceptance and occasional choice of abject conditions seems to suggest a sort of harmony. Wbaldina, who "kept her rhythm in her booty" (she has steatopygia, a condition that produces very pronounced hips and buttocks) resigns herself to the stinking piles of fish as a way of hiding from the world in the wake of a devastating heartbreak: "she liked to be soaked in the disorder of this smell; it was her shield to keep anyone from getting too close."¹⁰⁸ This nanny's embrace of disorder as a refuge from humanity can be read as a curious illustration of Glissant's concept of *chaos-monde*. Glissant uses the term "monde" to refer to the relations between things. His framework for thinking about this "world" of relation includes three modes: *chaos-monde* (the world of things that cannot be systematized), *écho-monde* (the world of things as they resonate with each other), and *Tout-monde* (the world considered in its entirety, but not in a reductive way). In all of these modes of considering the world, Glissant rejects what he calls "onto-thinking" (*pensée ontologique*), which he associates with the Western project of describing the world in order to control it. In this framework, chaos-monde refers to those aspects of the world that cannot be described in terms of predictable flows; significantly, culture is conceived as such an irreducible phenomenon, resistant to the generalizing ambitions of positivistic human sciences. Wbaldina's choice to embrace and identify with the stench of the fish market represents a preference for the chaos of becoming, a way of wresting her destiny from the totalizing gaze of modern civilization, wearing the smells of different fish as a veil of mystery: "People said to her: 'Vé, vos negra, who you plannin' to suffocate with that stench?' But she always gave the same answer: a loud

¹⁰⁸ "le gustaba impregnarse con el desorden de ese olor; era su escudo para que nadie se acercara" (35).

cackle as she walked away, hauling her booty along with her.”¹⁰⁹ This moment is reminiscent of the unbothered pride demonstrated by the role model DeLois mentioned in Audre Lorde’s autobiography *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), who “moved like she felt she was somebody special” as “her big proud stomach moved her on down the block while I watched, not caring whether or not she was a poem” (Lorde 4). Just as Wbaldina wears her attention-getting rear end and the smell of fish with blithe indifference to the world’s judgement, DeLois pays no mind to the normalizing harassment she faces from passersby who yell, “Hurry up, you flat-footed, nappy-headed, funny-looking bitch!” (ibid.). Such similarities inscribe Posso Figueroa’s writing in a tradition of feminist resistance to normative models of beauty.

It may appear that Wbaldina’s behavior represents a flight from relation, a rejection of community, but resistance and repelling are just as important to the economy of chaos-monde as attraction and influence. Glissant writes, “I call Chaos-World the current clash of so many cultures set ablaze, pushing each other away, disappearing, but still persisting, sleeping or transforming themselves” (*Treatise* 12). Wbaldina’s defiant embrace of solitude and stench can be read as emblematic of a threatened culture clinging to its identity: Just as the Chocoanos rose up in 1954 to defend the integrity of their regional territory, despite the economic and social benefits that were promised by the proposed territorial reform, Wbaldina rejects the world in favor of the freedom of solitude. If Wbaldina’s renunciation of society is interpreted as an allegory for the Chocó region’s resistance to assimilation, it comes also to evoke the relationship between the unpredictability of chaos-monde and the irreducibility of Tout-monde: the persistence of

¹⁰⁹ “La gente la decía: Vé, vos negra a cuyo, ¿a quién es que vas a asfixiar con ese olor?, pero siempre dio la misma respuesta: una sonora carcajada mientras se alejaba meneando la nalga” (*Vean vé* 34).

difference despite cultural interpenetration implies that the processes of creolization will continue to generate new forms of chaos that cannot be captured by the co-opting logic of Westernization.

In the end, it is precisely Wbaldina's stench that brings her back into the fold of humanity, as it is what attracts the attention of Cleomenes, the anosmic man who will become her true love. The fish stench, the only odor in town strong enough to stimulate his enfeebled olfaction, gives him a point of attraction besides her pronounced buttocks, and thus offers her a way out of being perpetually pigeonholed for her most obvious quality. Being able to be loved for precisely that which most people find revolting, Wbaldina overcomes her heartbreak, pointing to a mode of relation based on complementary quirks and desires (i.e., the chaos of the particular) rather than homogenizing Western standards of beauty. As Sealey puts it, "What the term *le chaos-monde* underscores is the fluidity endemic to real diversity, and it provides a model for understanding how that diversity can be gathered [...] without being universalized, or come together without having to undergo the genocide [...] of homogenizing difference" (89). One of the recurrent themes in *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* is precisely the diversity of desire as it arises among members of the Black community of Chocó, and the way these chaotic manifestations of desire participate in the community's distinctive sense of identity.

On the whole, *Vean vé* is pervaded with a sense of exuberance, which does not necessarily imply an omission of the realities of struggle in Chocó but suggests that a strong sense of community allows people to achieve joy and satisfaction in life despite conditions of material poverty. This potent and salient sense of community is reinforced

by the multitude of nannies that populate the text: 26 in all, each with her own unique sense and locus of rhythm. Patiño Mejía observes that the nannies serve centrally as transmitters of erotic culture and describes the particularity of the apprenticeship in these tales: “The knowledge that the narrator has obtained through her nannies is presented as limited, partial, identifiable, localizable, and situated in the bodies of the women that participate in the tales” (48). The candor of the sexual and sentimental teachings reflected in these narratives is testament to the author’s assertion of female self-determination through the direct control and transmission of bodily knowledge by and about women themselves, without mediation by masculine pretensions to empirical objectivity. While Patiño Mejía sensibly observes that the community of women in these tales finds a “utopic fictional universe in which sexuality is exercised freely” (49), her claim that “in none of the stories of *Vean vé* do pregnancies, abortions, birth control, menstrual problems, or venereal [sic] diseases appear” (49) is not quite accurate. On the contrary, the tale “Amira Ocoró” mentions that one of the most commonly treated conditions at the hospital of Quibdó is the yaws, a disease that can be transmitted sexually. Furthermore, the book makes multiple references to the phenomenon of “*bambazú*,” which refers to the pains and discomforts associated with pregnancy. Again, Posso Figueroa’s attitude of wonder does not come at the expense of acknowledging suffering; her “textual equivalent of the world” has room for both delight and dismay.

One of the most striking of the 26 portraits is that of the nanny Valentina, who had her rhythm in her thinking. She was as “big as the cathedral of Quibdó, had a smile that filled the world, showing her huge, super-white, perfect teeth; she had the deep voice

and tenderness of her race.”¹¹⁰ This story constitutes the strongest argument against Patiño’s claim that the book takes place in a “mythic time,” as it unmistakably refers to specific real events in the history of the region. While it does not designate the dictator General Rojas Pinilla by name, it mentions that the story takes place in “times of dictatorial government”; General Rojas, the “man dressed as a president” did in fact decree that Chocó would be subdivided and annexed to the neighboring departments of Antioquia, Caldas, and Valle. The tale of Valentina recounts the 1954 general uprising against the proposed dismemberment of Chocó from the perspective of the local Black population. Posso Figueroa’s insider account of these events is significant because this history has mainly been described from the outsider perspective of journalistic and governmental professionals based in Bogotá—including a young journalist by the name of Gabriel García Márquez. Indeed, the man who would become Colombia’s most famous author covered the events for the newspaper *El Espectador* and describes his visit to Chocó in his 2002 memoir *Vivir para contarla*. Posso Figueroa’s account of the events differs from García Márquez’s in a few details: while García Márquez claims that by the time he arrived, the protest had died down due to “lack of topics” (*Vivir para contarla* 447), Posso Figueroa says that it was the downpour that sent the protesters indoors (159). According to García Márquez’s version, the journalists were motivated to reignite the protests so that they would have a story to cover, and it was mainly *El Espectador*’s correspondent Primo Guerrero who agitated the masses back into action. According to Posso Figueroa’s version, it was García Márquez himself who stoked the fires of protest back to life: “At that time he was a neophyte journalist who said to my people: go out and

¹¹⁰ “Valentina era grande como la catedral de Quibdó; tenía una sonrisa que llenaba el mundo y dejaba ver unos dientes enormes, blanquísimos, perfectos; tenía la voz grave y la ternura de su raza” (157).

demonstrate, protest, listen to what the radio says: it's talking about a people in uprising, not sitting around drinking champagne."¹¹¹ In any case, it seems clear that in this instance at least, *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* refers to real historical events that can be clearly pinpointed in time and place, events that represented a turning point both in the Chocoano community's sense of self and the author's sense of belonging to that community. As she puts it, "My little-girl voice mimicked what my nanny Valentina was shouting: 'Viva el Cocó'; I think this was the first and most important order I ever shouted in my life: Viva el Chocó."¹¹²

As it turns out, the narrative of the protests against Chocó's dismemberment is only a prelude to the deeper story, the story told by Valentina's mother, which is the story of how Chocó came to be impoverished in the first place. Through Valentina's secondhand account of her mother's experiences, the text pushes back to the early twentieth century, to the days when "pale gringos" began arriving with a machine called a dredge to churn up the riverbeds and extract gold. These "*gringos monos*" set up their massive machine in one river after another, and wherever it went, at the same time as it extracted gold it also killed all the fish in the river because it spat out a thick, red sludge that poisoned the water. The introduction of the dredge initiated a new process of increasing inequality in Chocó, as the locals found themselves drawn into the extractive economy, obligated to work for the growing population of white capitalists—initially led by three Americans and one particularly cruel German—as the economy of sustenance fishing and artisanal metalcraft became impossible due to the way the capitalists

¹¹¹ "En esa época era un novel periodista que le decía a mi gente: salgan a manifestar, protesten, oigan lo que dice la radio: habla de un pueblo sublevado y no sentado tomando champaña" (159).

¹¹² "Mi voz de niña remedaba lo que gritaba mi nana Valentina: Viva el Cocó; creo que esa fue la primer y más importante consigna que he gritado en mi vida: Viva el Chocó" (158).

destroyed the river's ecosystem and took all the gold for themselves. The story describes the introduction of segregation, as electrified fences are set up to cordon the white community off from the rest, and that of refrigeration, which makes it possible to store fish and other foods for a long time, a technology that becomes more necessary in the face of the environmental destruction wrought by the mining processes. Through this third-hand retelling, Valentina's mother exclaims, "Bah! What corrupt things the white monkeys knew."¹¹³ In the only extensive description of white culture to be found in the book, this chapter describes how the white women danced without shaking their hips, how the white people lived without joy, without laughter, their sexual relations filled with sadness in their beautiful houses isolated from the heat that induces passion: "And this sadness in the fucking and this coldness in the food, produced for them a barrier, worse than that of their electric wires, which did not allow them to be contaminated with the tenderness and joy which the Black people of Chocó possessed and still possess."¹¹⁴ In Colombia, where mestizo nationalism has often been associated with a whitening conception of mestizaje (as described in the first chapter), Black cultural contributions to national identity have historically been overlooked. In this context, Posso Figueroa's critique of white frigidity and emphasis on the tenderness of Black culture seeks to redress this exclusion in a manner that, by virtue of its creative intentionality, exceeds the scope of the discourses of mestizaje or transculturation. The subversion of Western conceptual linkages (land as territory, home as protective enclosure, nature as a set of commodities) is enacted through the provincialization of Euro-American values

¹¹³ "Barujo! Las cosas tan corrompidas que sabían los monos blancos" (161).

¹¹⁴ "Y esta tristeza en la pichada y ese frío en la alimentación, les produjo un cerco, peor que el de sus alambres eléctricos, que no dejó que se contagiaran de la ternura y de la alegría que tenían y tienen los negros en el Chocó" (163).

surrounding the fundamental material realities of sex and food, figuring these carnal realities as a site for the creolization of the imaginary by endorsing historically marginalized Black values of tenderness and joy.

This notion, that white (or, for that matter, acculturated mestizo) people have lessons to learn from their Black neighbors about what it means to live well resonates with the messages of Clorinda Matto de Turner and Rosario Castellanos about the tenderness of Indigenous cultures. As noted in the first chapter, Matto de Turner wrote of the Quechua language as “the sublime language of imitative harmony, for its peaceful character, the tenderness of its poetry, and its loving constancy” (*Leyendas y recortes* 93). Just as Matto de Turner contrasts the loving kindness of the Indigenous Yupanqui family with the greed and corruption of the rural elites in *Aves sin nido*, Posso Figueroa emphasizes the coldness and alienation of white culture in contrast with the “tenderness and joy” of Chocoano Black culture. Likewise, just as Castellanos foregrounds the stark contrast between the nurturing nanny and the cruel, petty mother figure Zoraida in *Balún-Canán*, the nannies in *Veán vé, mis nanas negras* individually and cumulatively represent the warmth of Black culture and the role of othermothers in unifying the community. The contrasting coldness of white culture is related to the spirit that Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007) describes as “ego conquiro,” the desire to establish dominion (cited in Sealey 99). As Sealey points out, in order to move beyond this aspect of the colonizing mindset, it is necessary to reconsider the notion of subjectivity, opening up to the possibility of a multiplicitous self and a mode of relational existence that tolerates difference, opacity, and uncertainty (99). With this in mind, it appears that Posso Figueroa’s contrast between

Black warmth and white frigidity functions as an invitation to Colombians to reject the colonialist mindset and the corresponding ideology of whitening *mestizaje*.

One of the functions of hegemonic, whitening *mestizaje* in the age of high capitalism is to construct a national identity around a unifying narrative that mystifies mappings between race and class. Beyond the national level, in the age of globalization, this mystification serves to erode the community commitments of the racialized proletariat to make them more susceptible to the lure of participation in a global economy that never ceases to exploit them. As Marwan Kraidy puts it, “Hybridity is thus placed at the service of a neoliberal economic order that respects no borders and harbors no prejudice toward cultural and ethnic difference that can be harnessed for growth” (90). Contrary to this logic, the assertion of difference found in Posso Figueroa’s fiction offers a potent counterpoint to the mainstream developmental narrative of capitalism, which in much of Latin America has taken the form of neo-colonialism. According to developmental ideology, investors and developers offer a valuable service to impoverished, so-called “third-world” nations and peoples by introducing technologies that boost the efficiency of extractive practices so that locals can accumulate wealth and enjoy the benefits of modern living.¹¹⁵ In contrast, the pattern described in “Valentina” shows how traditional lifeways and knowledge accumulated over time are interrupted and destabilized by the introduction of extractive technologies and the capitalist ethos of private property and wealth, incurring devastating harm to the environment and to human health.

¹¹⁵ “The dual sector model—based on an export-led, import-substitution, foreign investment supported type of economic development—sponsored a long and disastrous period of national economic development, which further undermined the economic position of one country after another in [Latin America and the Caribbean]” (Hall 198).

It is worth noting that most of the stories in *Veana vé* are not preoccupied with racial economic exploitation; most of them focus on the joy, sadness, and above all human connection typical of Chocó's Black communities. Valentina's story, placed in the penultimate position in the text, is one of the most serious and by far the most politically engaged of Posso Figueroa's tales. It seems to exist in the text as a reminder that, even though there is so much joy and beauty to be found in the deep connections that bind people together in Chocó, there are nevertheless persistent shadows over the region, the shadows of colonial slavery and neocolonial capitalism. If the "corporate transculturalism" described by Kraidy pursues a boundaryless world of porous hybridities—and thus, the reduction of all human existence to a totalizing logic of market ideology—the assertion of difference reminds us that *chaos-monde* is irreducible. These contradictions highlight the moral ambivalence of chaotic interaction as a factor in societal change: while the spontaneous interactions of cultures in contact perpetually engender unprecedented, unpredictable cultural formations (i.e., creolization), capitalism simultaneously thrives on the chaotic destabilizations inherent in globalization. It is for reasons such as this that Kraidy describes hybridity as "the cultural logic of globalization" (148), leading him to assert the need for a "critical transculturalism" (149-153) that recognizes the roles of power disparities and human agency in cultural hybridity. Glissant's approach to creolization, like Kraidy's critical transculturalism, never loses sight of these factors, which are also central to an ethical approach to interpreting and translating Posso Figueroa's writing.

The copresence of contradictory sentiments—the misery of historically conditioned poverty and the joy of chaotic community—combined with the gesture of

presenting a positive portrayal of Chocoano culture for a broad readership, offers a response to Glissant's call for poetics to produce a textual equivalent of the world as a means of resisting globalizing homogenization. Describing the impact of Glissant's thinking, Patrick Chamoiseau states that in the 1950s and subsequent years, it was difficult to think outside the dynamics of global capitalism and resistance to it:

This economic globalization under the auspices of Western intentions brought about resistances and counter-resistances, a seething multitude of rebels who, in order to reject the Western project and its new dominations, would usually reject world-belonging itself. The anti-colonialists, anti-capitalists, and anti-Western agitators initially aspired to close themselves off from the world entirely, in order to reconstitute themselves in fantasies of stability and prior states of being.¹¹⁶

To overcome the apparent double-bind between a form of globalization that was largely synonymous with Westernization and the cultural isolationism Chamoiseau describes, Glissant proposed a third way. He referred to his version of proletarian cosmopolitanism as "*mondialité*," a worldliness that constitutes an alternative to "*mondialisation*" (i.e., globalization). This *mondialité* differs from the cosmopolitanism of bourgeois liberalism in that it locates the grounds for Relation in the acceptance of chaotic, unpredictable diversity rather than in the assumption of universal values or principles. In order to describe the complex relationality of *mondialité*, Glissant uses the term "*Tout-monde*." According to Chamoiseau, "*Tout-monde* is the designation of a relational fact where the 'I's and 'we's are mutually constructed on the bases of an imaginary that is no longer the imaginary of fixity, of the 'same' or of the single root [...] but an imaginary of relational flows in the process of becoming" (127). While *Tout-monde* designates a mode of

¹¹⁶ "Cette globalisation économique sous les auspices de l'intention occidentale fera surgir des résistances et des contre-résistances, toute une effervescence de rebelles qui, pour rejeter le projet occidental et ses nouvelles dominations, allaient le plus souvent rejeter l'appartenance au monde elle-même. Les anti-colonialistes, anti-capitalistes, anti-occidentaux aspirèrent dans un premier temps à se fermer au monde en son ensemble, à se reconstituer dans des antériorités et fixités fantasmatiques" (Chamoiseau 125).

conceiving the world in its entirety, it avoids the reductively totalizing tendencies of what Glissant called “onto-thinking” by passing through a necessary preliminary engagement with *chaos-monde*. The thought of totality informed by the assumptions of chaos is distinct from a notion of totality based on primordial essences and fixed, universal principles. While the latter is associated with a homogenizing form of globalization that has sought to remake the world according to Euro-American models of lifestyle, economics, politics, and ideology, the former is associated with Glissant’s “archipelagic” or “errant” thinking, which recognizes that what unites world-totality to place-particularity is the limitless potential of the imaginary rather than the fixity of unified roots. As Glissant puts it, “The imaginary of my place is tied to the imaginable reality of the places of the world, and vice-versa.”¹¹⁷

The Glissantian concepts of *chaos-monde* and *Tout-monde* offer ways of describing the visions of human relationships to the environment and to one another that undergird the stories in *Veau vè, mis nanas negras*. The contrast between Secundina Caldón’s way of knowing about plants, which is embodied and unmediated, and the way of describing them found in the natural science book she is using to learn to read, which is mediated by language riddled with anthropocentric metaphors, points to the way science’s use of such anthropocentric metaphors tends to become sublimated to the point of invisibility: “Floremiro was perplexed by nanny Caldongina’s associations, but more than perplexed, he was disturbed; he’d never thought about these questions about the

¹¹⁷ “L’imaginaire de mon lieu est relié à la réalité imaginable des lieux du monde, et tout inversement” (*Philosophie de la Relation* 47).

names and characteristics of species.”¹¹⁸ This revelation lays bare one of the functional mystifications of the scientific (or, more precisely, scientistic) worldview: concepts that are fundamentally reliant on metaphorical mappings between empirical observations and experiential knowledge have their metaphorical character obscured by layers of arcane language until they are taken for granted as direct representations of actual fact rather than anthropocentric projections.

This kind of extrapolation becomes particularly insidious when metaphors come full circle, and ideas about what is “natural” are used to justify cultural norms governing human interactions, particularly sexuality. In a circular chain of signification, conventional notions about human sexuality are projected onto the world of plants and animals such that certain species’ gender relations are subtly conceived as “typical” while others are conceived as “aberrant”; certain species are described as “hermaphroditic,” others as “promiscuous,” “polygamous,” or “monogamous.” To complete the chain, a simplified narrative of “natural” sexuality is projected back onto humanity.

This kind of reductively normative naturalization is challenged by Glissant’s grounding of the thought of totality in the recognition of chaos. One aspect of accepting chaos is embracing human diversity, not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but also in terms of body shape, (dis)ability, and culture. When Posso Figueroa depicts the beauty and dignity of characters with steatopygia, missing teeth, and other deviations from Western beauty norms, she asserts a counter-aesthetics associated with forms of diversity that escape the logic of hegemonic discourses of hybridity. The eugenic project of

¹¹⁸ “Floremiro se desconcertó con las asociaciones de la nana Caldoncina y más que desconcertarse, se intranquilizó; nunca se había hecho esas preguntas frente a los nombres y características de las especies” (27).

intentionally improving the human species is revealed, under the light of creolization, to be not only morally repugnant, but also practically undesirable. In biological terms, chaos has a value unto itself, as it contributes the resilience of diversity in the gene pool. On a cultural level, the thought of totality in and through chaos lays the groundwork for a creolized consciousness, an alternative humanism that might actually respond to Aimé Césaire's invocation of a humanism "commensurate with the world."¹¹⁹

The totality implied by the idea of *Tout-monde* pertains to the commonality of destiny rather than a myth of common origins. The shared infinity of the imaginary can serve as a pole to unite disparate groups in the struggle to establish spaces for common destiny:

In expanse/extension the forms of *chaos-monde* (the immeasurable intermixing of cultures) are unforeseeable and foretellable. We have not yet begun to calculate their consequences: the passive adoptions, irrevocable rejections, naïve beliefs, parallel lives, and the many forms of confrontation or consent, the many syntheses, surpassings, or returns, the many sudden outbursts of invention, born of impacts and breaking what has produced them, which compose the fluid, turbulent, stubborn, and possibly organized matter of our common destiny. (*Poetics of Relation* 138)

In the work of Amalialú Posso Figueroa, the "parallel lives" of the Chocoano community, simultaneously part of and apart from the homogenizing influences of globalization, are depicted through their "sudden outburst of invention." This work responds to Glissant's call for poetics to "produce a textual equivalent of world, and hence enter into the equivalences of relation" (La Vedrine 96). By destabilizing the nature-culture boundary (through the telluric magic of characters like Fidelia Córdoba and Secundina Caldón) and

¹¹⁹ "[J]amais l'Occident, dans le temps même où il se gargarise le plus du mot, n'a été plus éloigné de pouvoir assumer les exigences d'un humanisme vrai, de pouvoir vivre l'humanisme vrai – l'humanisme à la mesure du monde" (Césaire 36).

by engaging what Chamoiseau calls “an imaginary of relational flows in the process of becoming,” Posso Figueroa’s writing approaches “the inaccessible aspects of the real and the fundamental modalities of the living.”¹²⁰ Readers coming from an entrenched Western worldview may perceive these “inaccessible aspects” as indicators of the quaintly superstitious naivety of the culture, thus reinforcing stereotypes associating Blackness with primitivity. To avoid such folklorization of Posso Figueroa’s tales, it is important to treat her writing as a starting point for an open-minded inquiry rather than as a representation of essence capable of telling the whole story.

Situating Posso Figueroa: Afro-diasporic folk tales and the carnivalesque

Vean vé, mis nanas negras repeatedly addresses the theme of finding and accepting one’s whole bodymind in all its different rhythms. Conditions such as steatopygia, anosmia, missing teeth, and strong body odor, along with quirky preoccupations in the form of various autoeroticisms and exhibitionism, all are normalized in this text as a celebration of the dazzling diversity of human passion. With these corporeal desires and quirks presented alongside tales of women who have their rhythm in their thinking and their feeling—as in the last two tales in the compilation—a sense begins to emerge of the holistic sense of self gained through connection to this community, a connection based on sexual candor, festive mourning, and music as a vector of memory. One of Posso Figueroa’s distinctive contributions to Colombian literature pertains to this manner of depicting women’s voices expressing women’s

¹²⁰ “Le Tout-monde est la désignation d’un fait relationnel où les « je » et les « nous » se construisent mutuellement sur les bases d’un imaginaire qui n’est plus l’imaginaire de la fixité, du « même » ou de la racine unique (qui de fait n’a jamais existé), mais un imaginaire des flux relationnels en devenir bien plus proche des inaccessibles du réel et des modalités fondamentales du vivant.” (Chamoiseau 127).

desires, sometimes centered entirely on themselves, and sometimes turning the gaze toward desirable men, overcoming the silence that often shrouds female desire in shame. Viewed from this perspective, the Black people of Chocó possess an enviable freedom, which is a testament to their resilience in the face of conservative forces in mainstream Colombian society that would tend to erase or annihilate the unconventional pleasures Amalia Posso Figueroa sets out to celebrate.

This celebratory tone, along with the grotesque imagery and the constant emphasis on music and rhythm, lends *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* a carnivalesque quality that aligns it both with ludic traditions of Afro-diasporic literature, on the one hand, and with Latin American magic realism, on the other hand.¹²¹ In the introduction of refrigeration to Chocó recounted by Valentina, for example, the reader is quickly reminded of the introduction of ice to Macondo in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Just as in Gabriel García Márquez's masterpiece, the characters of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* live in relative isolation and naivety vis-à-vis the goings-on of the outside world, but this ignorance is compensated by an immediacy of existence, a presence of mind and a forthrightness about the here-and-now that allow them to know themselves and each other far better than most so-called "modern" urbanites do. This immediacy of self-knowledge forms a partial contrast with the state of alienation described by prominent African American thinkers (such as the double consciousness described by W.E.B. Du Bois, whereby the Black subject is torn between African identity and the pressure to conform to dominant white culture [*Souls of Black Folk* 2]) and Afro-Caribbean thinkers

¹²¹ I use the term "carnivalesque" in the sense explored by Mikhail Bakhtin in his work on Dostoevsky (107-110) and Rabelais (10-11), where "Карнавализация" refers to a literary mode characterized by inversions and destabilizations of established hierarchies, depictions of eccentric behavior, profanity, and celebration of corporeal realities.

(such as the inferiority complex described by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*, a condition with substantial parallels to Du Bois's double consciousness). The carnivalesque qualities of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* and the *joie de vivre* of the Chocoano populace are associated with the sense of wholeness that comes from a community forged in common values and lifeways, foregrounding the strength of Black interconnection. It is not for nothing that Posso's text laments the fact that the white settlers in Chocó walled themselves off from the tenderness and joy of their Black neighbors. From this perspective, the persistence of white bourgeois characters' alienation from their own bodies forms a parallel with capitalist alienation from the natural world and the ideology that views the world and its workers as a set of resources to be exploited. In this inversion of the civilizing mission, the text argues that white (and, by extrapolation, mestizo) culture has important things to learn from Black culture.

In light of this message of vindication, it is worthwhile to examine how Posso Figueroa's transculturalism responds to Afro-Hispanic literary precedents. Considering that Glissant locates the origins of creolization in the cultural rupture caused by the violence of the Middle Passage and plantation life, and considering the way that history is entangled with the distinctly Black experience of being in the Americas, it seems on the surface that Afro-Spanish literatures would be likely sites for the development of particularly creolizing forms of cultural hybridity. The way Glissant challenges the Western concept of subjectivity through an emphasis on being as dynamic emergence and intersubjectivity, the way this self is defined in terms of relationality rather than origins or essences, and the way relational existence contributes to the production of new, unprecedented cultural formations—all of these principles and processes appear just as

likely to arise in Afro-Hispanic contexts as in the francophone Caribbean from which Glissant was writing.

Indeed, manifestations of Glissantian principles can be found in Black Hispanophone writing from the 1920s to the present day. The *Afrocriollo* movement has been referred to as “the Harlem Renaissance of Latin America” (Jackson 20). This movement, including Caribbean authors such as Fernando Ortiz, Alejo Carpentier, Luis Palés Matos, and Nicolás Guillén, was prominent from the 1920s to the 1940s and left a substantial mark on subsequent literary developments, particularly the apogee of marvelous realism in the 1960s, Brazilian anthropophagia, and the 1970s Afro-mestizaje of writers such as Roberto Fernández Retamar. The origins of the *Afrocriollo* movement can be located in two sources: the *negrista* poetry and prose of non-Black writers, and the *negritud* poetry written by Afro-descendant writers such as Guillén. While some of the *negrista* writing created by white writers such as the Puerto Rican Palés Matos bears unfortunate affinities with the faddism of European negrophilia found in the likes of André Gide and Blaise Cendrars, in the hands of Alejo Carpentier it eventually evolved into a more genuine engagement with Black experiences rather than mere aesthetics (Jackson 20). Palés Matos and the Cuban anthropologist Ortiz both held racist views, and their interest in Blackness is related to their preoccupation with primitivism. Carpentier saw this “primitivism” as a valuable tool to compensate for the perceived failure of white culture, and his first novel, *Ecué Yambá O* (1933), was generally regarded (including, later, by the author himself) as a failed attempt to depict Black culture, one that propagated racist stereotypes. In later work, Carpentier shifts toward representing Black

people as cultural heroes because of their resistance and indifference to bourgeois, North American values.

Despite its checkered history, the *Afrocriollo* movement was also a response to real social conditions, a “crisis-oriented phenomenon in which racial, social, and ethnic forces merged to produce a heightened awareness in Latin America of blacks and blackness” (Jackson 22). A more politically laudable strain of *Afrocriollismo* is found in the writing of the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén. The Haitian writer René Depestre has described the difference between *negrismo* and the *negritud* of poets like Guillén as akin to the difference “between an ordinary wick and the wick of a stick of dynamite” (cited in Jackson 26). Guillén has sometimes been lumped together with Afro-Cubanist writers such as Carpentier and Ortiz, but he stands apart from these writers in many ways, and not only because of his personal claim to Black identity. *Motivos de son*, Guillén’s volume of poems published in 1930, asserted the Black contribution to Cuban culture, implying that this element is what makes Cuban culture distinct from North American and European models. In this manner, Guillén’s *mulatez* (“mulattoness”) served a literary-political project with aims parallel with some versions of mestizaje.

One of the reasons Guillén’s work has had such a lasting impact is the way it incorporates oral forms into written poetry. In so doing, Guillén was able to vindicate the creativity of Black Cuban popular culture. By fusing an ethic of Black pride with national pride, Guillén set a precedent for later writers who praise Black citizens as the defenders of that which is distinctly national, such as the Afro-Ecuadorian writer Adalberto Ortiz. Furthermore, by forging ties of friendship, translation, and mutual literary influence with Langston Hughes, Guillén placed his commitment to Afro-Cuban identity in the service

of international Black solidarity.¹²² Guillén's contribution to the *Afrocriollo* movement helped shift the movement away from the stereotypes and mimicry found in the *negrista* poets. By vindicating Black oral culture, Guillén helped move *Afrocriollismo* into a mode of relationality similar to Glissant's idea of creolization. "Diversity," writes Glissant, "which is neither chaos nor sterility, means the human spirit's striving for a cross-cultural relationship, without universalist transcendence" (*Caribbean Discourse* 98). Through an emphasis on orality, Nicolas Guillén was able to infuse Black sensibilities into the Cuban literary canon without dissolving their distinctness into a homogenized sameness.

Like Guillén, Posso Figueroa draws on oral storytelling and folk musical traditions to convey the distinctive qualities of a historically marginalized Black subculture. Margarita Krakusin observes the similarities between Posso Figueroa's writing and that of Guillén in terms of rhythm and vernacular: "The rhythm of [Posso's] text, that of the body of the mulatta woman and that of the structure of the work recall the dialect speech, sensual and musical rhythm of the compositions of Nicolás Guillén."¹²³ In order to situate Posso Figueroa's cultural work vis-à-vis that of Guillén, it is important to recognize the rather extreme levels of cultural marginalization that have continued to characterize the relationship between Chocó and mainstream Colombian (and, more broadly, Latin American) society.

The closest thing that the Chocó region ever had to a Nicolas Guillén, i.e., a prominent writer who celebrated the Black population's oral culture and its contribution

¹²² In *The Worlds of Langston Hughes* (2012), Vera Kutzinski provides an account of Hughes's relationship with Guillén.

¹²³ "El ritmo del texto, el del cuerpo de la mujer mulata y el de la estructura de la obra recuerdan el habla dialectal, el ritmo sensual y musical de las composiciones de Nicolás Guillén" (Krakusin 209).

to national identity, was probably the novelist Arnolfo Palacios (1924-2015). Palacios's novel *Las estrellas son negras* (*The Stars are Black*, 1949) is recognized as a classic of Colombian literature, but it has never been translated into English. Palacios's depictions of the speech patterns and everyday life of the inhabitants of Chocó is echoed by Posso Figueroa's attention to the people's modest circumstances and community values.

Unfortunately, outside of Palacios and a handful of other examples, the culture of Chocó was largely left by the wayside in the international negritude and *Afrocriollo* movements. While this marginalization does not imply a lack of relevance of Afro-Colombian precedents for Posso Figueroa's writing, it does highlight the significance of her work as an effort to raise awareness about the culture of the Pacific littoral population on the national and international levels. The region's culture had so little visibility in the mid-twentieth century that Gabriel García Márquez felt like he was visiting an uncharted otherworld when he went there in 1954; he describes it as "the most forgotten region in the country," and as a "magical homeland of flowering jungles and eternal downpours, where everything seemed like an unimaginable version of ordinary life" (*Living to Tell the Tale* 448-449). The visit certainly had an impact on García Márquez's literary writing, but Blackness figures far less prominently in his work than it did in that of Alejo Carpentier. García Márquez worked in his capacity as a journalist to boost the region's profile on the national scene, but less so in his literary work. Thus, the one Colombian mestizo writer who had the most power to raise the visibility of the culture and conditions of Chocó did little to engage with the region on a literary level until the 2002 release of his memoir *Vivir para contarla*.

One exception to the general exclusion of Afro-Colombian writers from the tradition of marvelous realism is Manuel Zapata Olivella (1920-2004). Zapata Olivella sought to counteract the omission of Blackness from Colombian literary life through works such as his 1963 novel *Chambacú* (translated by Jonathan Tittler as *Chambacu, Black Slum* [1989]), which is inscribed in the tradition of the Latin American Boom (Tillis 61). Late in life, in a 2002 interview with Christopher Dennis, Zapata Olivella commented on the difficulty Afro-Colombian writers face in trying to get published, due to the lack of economic power and low level of education among the country's Black population, conditions associated with a limited potential readership (Dennis 83). One example of the marginalization that Afro-Colombian writers face is that Zapata Olivella's masterwork *Changó el gran putas* (1983, translated by Jonathan Tittler as *Changó, the Biggest Badass* [2010]) remained out of print and difficult to obtain for many years (Dennis 84). Many of Zapata Olivella's short stories and novels have never been translated into English. Furthermore, it is worth bearing in mind that Zapata Olivella, being from the Caribbean coast, does not represent the same kind of a challenge to Colombia's "Caribbean identity" (described by García Márquez in *Living to Tell the Tale* 449-450) as a Chocoano writer would.

The general absence of a significant Chocoano influence on Colombian marvelous realism has meant that the culture of Chocó, particularly its oral storytelling tradition, had little visibility in the most prominent Latin American literary movement of the second half of the twentieth century. This lacuna is certainly a disservice to that culture, but also has deprived the genre of the rich narrative potential of the Pacific region's oral forms, which bear aesthetic affinities with the marvelous real genre. One of

the conceptual links between orality and writing is the folk tale. In the essay “History and Literature” (included in *Caribbean Discourse* pp. 69-87), Glissant describes the differences between Western narratives and Caribbean folk tales. According to his analysis, the main difference is that Western works seek an ideal of history. Glissant describes the different manifestations of this longing in the works of Faulkner, Carpentier, and Gabriel García Márquez, explaining how each of them engages in a quest for primordial origins. The quest for family lineage in *Absalom Absalom!*, the river that leads to the past as one walks upstream in Carpentier’s *The Lost Steps*, and the journey of the hero of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, are all pursuits of primitive origins. According to Glissant’s analysis, in Western cultures, myth first presents an obscurity and then a clarification that creates history. Glissant claims that the tale functions in the opposite manner. It is transparent in its structures and intentions. The difference between myth and tale leads to two different notions of the world. Myth has the power to prefigure and even generate history, but it also seems to pave the way for History, i.e. the totalizing narrative of official history. The tale, for Glissant, only presents stories that resist generalization. The tale has utility in opposing the yearning for a coherent narrative of history, the Western idea that capital-H History is the structuring dimension of life.¹²⁴

The folk tale, according to Glissant, is anti-History; the Caribbean folk tale is the “site of the deactivated word,” a testament to the people’s absence of history (*Caribbean Discourse* 85). Its non-teleological, non-linear, non-absolute nature produces its

¹²⁴ The French word *histoire* has two primary meanings, corresponding to the English concepts of “story” and “history.” For this reason, to distinguish between the two denotations, many French writers capitalize the word when using it to mean “history.” For Glissant and others, *l’Histoire* connotes a totalizing, hegemonic narrative record of past events that might best be conveyed by the English phrase “official history.” Hereinafter, for the sake of economy in describing Glissant’s ideas, I have followed the convention of capitalizing the word “History” when using it in this manner.

particular characteristics: sudden changes in tone, many asides, many psychological twists, repetitions, lack of solutions or resolutions. He goes on: “the taste for excess, that is, in the first place the total freedom with regard to the paralyzing fear of repetition. The art of repetition is refreshingly inventive. It is a pleasure to re-examine the text. Onomatopoeia or, even deeper, the repeated chant swirls in the dizzying rush of reality” (ibid.). This excess is associated with a baroque aesthetics, rich with particular details, that rejects stylistic criteria of linearity, coherence, and instrumentality.

This description of the Caribbean folktale offers useful ways of approaching the writing of Amalialú Posso Figueroa, whose work draws heavily on oral traditions and is crafted in a manner conducive to being recited aloud. Posso Figueroa’s tales share these characteristics with Caribbean folktales: frequent shifts in tone (e.g., between colloquial and erudite registers); psychological twists in the form of inexplicable motivations, autoerotic obsessions, and idiosyncratic fetishes; repetitions (often in the form of quasi-musical poetic refrains); and stories that often end without tidy conclusions or any sense of redemption. On a sonic level, the use of onomatopoeia (such as “chumblum-chumblum” for taking a dip in the river) enlivens Posso’s work with a feel for local ways of perceiving the environment. Similarly, the use of repeated refrains often reinforces the intensity of the sensory imagery through incantatory lists: “*chere, charre, dentón, bocachico y nicuro*” is a list of different species of fish, mentioned over and over again to emphasize the marine smell that clings to the body of Wbaldina Aspasia Copete. Glissant’s “dizzying rush of reality” is an apt way of describing the sensation of encountering Posso’s baroque suites of images delivered in streams of suave sibilants and

staccato plosives, a wash of words carrying not only the distinctive features of this place but also the local people's particular way of experiencing it, sharing it, and relating (to) it.

Glissant observes that a difference between Caribbean and French folk tales is that in the Caribbean folk tale there is no heroic central narrative to serve as the respectable dimension of the real. This difference helps explain how the Caribbean can have "intimate contact with our overlapping tales" (*Caribbean Discourse* 85) without giving in to the temptation to detect a sublimated History within these tales. The same is true for Posso Figueroa's writing, which largely refrains from grandiose allegories that would seek to capture "the world in a grain of sand." Like a Caribbean folk tale, Posso Figueroa's Chocoano tales are meant neither to convey supposedly universal sentiments or principles, nor to totalize the essence of a people through origin myths. Rather, they serve to paint a picture of a culture's idiosyncratic and shifting ways of thinking about its relationship to the natural world and the way this relationship informs particular notions of self and belonging. For example, the nanny Limbania Pretel works as a schoolteacher, teaching through stories and songs, offering a telluric teleology in the form of an onomatopoeic litany:

She told them why the downpour is wonderful, why the moon comes out and the sun goes down when Juanacho goes out playing his drum, why the sea moves, why animals love one another, and kill one another, why men kill each other more often than they love one another, why the horse whinnies, why the treefrog eats cacao, why the compass moves, why the swan trumpets, the crow caws, the hen clucks, the cat meows, the dog barks, the lion roars, the sheep bleats, the snake hisses, the deer snorts, the goose honks, the cricket chirps, the crane cranes, the boar grunts, the parrot chats, the monkey chatters, the panther screams, the duck quacks, the frog croaks, the bull bellows and the partridge only whispers while the dove coos.¹²⁵

²⁵ "Les contaba por qué es maravilloso el aguacero, por qué sale la luna y entra el sol mientras sale Juanacho tocando tambor, por qué se mueve el mar, por qué se aman y se matan los animales, por qué se matan más que se aman los hombres, por qué relincha el caballo, por qué el cisne voznea, el cuervo

Like the Caribbean folk tale, Limbania's teaching offers answers to the kinds of questions that children frequently ask but most adults have learned not to. It is worth noting that, while the narration describes Limbania's efforts to educate the children on these matters, the actual explanations are omitted. In keeping with the many strategic ambiguities of this text, this omission allows the reader to fill in the gaps with their own interpretation.

Krakusin detects a Lacanian gesture in Posso Figueroa's use of nonsense, observing that a certain form of signification emerges from the use of sound and symbols: "In other words, the meaning of the work originates in the nonsense of the signifier. This meaning will be different in each case because it is the reader who will give it this meaning."²⁶

This ambiguity is most palpable in the book's indeterminate ending, as it concludes on an uncertain note regarding how Maya Figueroa and her daughter Amalialú might meet the Black nannies again in the afterlife.

While mythology aims at reconstructing origins, and Western fables often seek to illustrate supposedly universal truths, Posso Figueroa's tales, like the Caribbean folk tale, are invested in the particularities of a culture in the process of defining itself. In this manner, the ludic and fantastical qualities inscribe the work in a distinctively postcolonial, Black diasporic, carnivalesque tradition, one in which inversions of hierarchy arise in a space largely abandoned by white authority as an active presence but haunted by the afterlife of colonialism in the form of displacement, dispossession, and

grazna, la gallina cacarea, el gato maúlla, el perro ladra, el león ruge, la oveja bala, la culebra silva, el gamo ronca, el ganso grazna, el grillo grilla, la grulla gruye, el jabalí rebudia, el loro parlotea, el mono castañetea, la pantera himpla, el pato parpa, la rana croa, el toro muge y la perdiz sólo cuchichea mientras que la paloma arrulla." (50)

²⁶ "En otras palabras, es a partir del sin sentido del significante desde donde se engendra la significación de la obra que, en todo caso, será diferente, ya que es el lector quien le dará esa significación" (Krakusin 211, citing Miller 14-17).

structural inequality. In “History and Literature,” Glissant suggests that the consolidation of collective identity through epic writing is not a viable avenue for composite cultures, and that what is called for is a “novel of the relationship of individual to collectivity, of individual to the Other, of We to Us,” a “collective novel” forged in the “cross-cultural imagination” (87). With its origins in oral tradition, its intercultural commitments, and its rejection of the standard model of a singular protagonist, *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* can be read as a gesture in the direction of such a collective novel.

Blackness and creolization in translation

The aforementioned factors are all relevant to establishing a coherent strategy for translating *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* into English. The tonal resonance between Posso Figueroa’s short stories and Caribbean and Afro-Colombian folk tales indicates that the translation should respond to these folk tales’ aesthetic system, while the specific historical and cultural references in certain passages require the translator to conduct sufficient background research to ensure that vital details are not mangled. Perhaps more urgently, the translators need to do what is possible to engage with the source culture’s symbolic and rhetorical frameworks. For these reasons, it is useful to consult references on the region’s oral tradition (such as Pérez Hernández 2017), musical traditions (Moreno Tovar 2011), cultural identity (Núñez et al. 2017), and social history (Hoffmann 2007, Martínez 2012, and Wade 1993). As Gayatri Spivak insists, within any given sociolinguistic context, the “jagged relationship between rhetoric and logic, condition and effect of knowing, is a relationship by which a world is made for the agent [...] Unless one can at least construct a model of this for the other language, there is no real

translation” (181). In order to avoid a “neocolonialist construction of the non-Western scene” (ibid.), the translation of this work will benefit from using available resources for immersion in the Chocoano imaginary: consulting with the author, listening to the region’s music, watching films such as Jhonny Hendrix Hinestroza’s 2012 *Chocó*, and listening to podcasts such as *Chocoanizando*.

The rhythmic affinities between Posso Figueroa’s writing and that of Nicolas Guillén point to the possibility of drawing on methods used by Guillén’s translators, including Langston Hughes. This could suggest the selective use of U.S. Black vernacular as a sort of equivalent of the vernacular found in the source text, but without reducing the style to any single, specific dialect.¹²⁷ It is important to acknowledge the ways in which the Chocoano dialect stands in relation to dominant Colombian and standard Spanishes, and the ways in which this relationship reflects the historical relationship between these geographically and racially distinct contexts. The oral qualities of the text deserve to be reproduced—the translation should lend itself to being recited aloud just as the original does. The author’s unique voice, characterized by frequent shifts in register between a speech-like, informal vernacular and more formal, “literary” flourishes of languages, should also be reproduced insofar as possible. Finally, the translation should be “packaged” in a manner that accentuates the work’s value as a depiction of a lesser-known living culture without reinforcing negative stereotypes. The common thread in all these considerations is the responsibility to craft a translation that presents an underrepresented culture to Western readers in a respectful manner.

²⁷ “Unlike [his collaborator] Ben Carruthers, Hughes seems to have understood and appreciated the Cuban texts’ irreducible strangeness, and he sensed how tenuous it might be to make claims about a shared African American poetics when faced with textual situations in which even *negro* did not comfortably translate as either ‘black’ or ‘Negro’” (Kutzinski 134).

On a linguistic level, there are theoretical reasons to use African American dialect to stand as an equivalent for the Chocoano dialect. Sharon Masingale Bell has argued that Haitian Creole and Black English perform similar functions in their respective communities and within the context of their dominant languages, and a similar argument can be applied to the dialect spoken by Black people in Chocó. As Bell observes, Black English reflects African American history and links those who speak it to speakers of other New World creole languages (53). Like Black English and Haitian Creole, Chocoano Spanish functions as a marker of intergroup unity, distinguishing its speakers from other groups in society. For speakers who use both Black English and standard English, the former is the preferred code for intimate and informal settings (Bell 56). Such code-switching is found in Posso Figueroa's writing, which tends to employ more vernacular forms when describing matters of great sentiment and to represent intimate dialogue and internal monologue with marked dialect.

The creolizing aspects of Posso Figueroa's work, its celebration of Chocó's distinctive cultural qualities, its embrace of the chaos and dynamism of an irreducible culture, the role of rhythm and song in the perpetuation of collective memory and cultural cohesion, all deserve to be considered in light of the contemporary issues surrounding the translation of Blackness. As Kaiama L. Glover notes—echoing the thoughts of John Keene (2016)—there is currently a need both for more translations of Black voices and for “more substantive reflection on race across diverse cultural frameworks” (Glover 25). While Posso Figueroa herself may be racially ambiguous—she has been described by herself and others as white, Black, and mestiza¹²⁸—there is no question as to whether her

¹²⁸ In her prologue to Posso Figueroa's book *Mido mi cuarta y me paro en ella*, Velia Vidal writes that “Amalialú is a mestiza woman who writes stories featuring Black characters and their culture,” which some

writing constitutes a manifestation of Afro-Colombian culture, reflecting Black voices with a degree of verisimilitude that has been recognized by Arnoldo Palacios as well as by the Black Colombian Cultural Foundation, the Nelson Mandela Cultural Foundation, and the Editorial Universidad del Valle, which included her writing in the 2008 collection *Negras somos. Antología de mujeres poetas afrocolombianas de la Región Pacífica*.

Therefore, a theoretical consideration of the political stakes of translating Black literature is relevant to the determination of appropriate translation strategies for *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*. The work of translating this text participates in the activist translation project Glover describes, aiming to “make plain the contingency of race as lived experience and, further, to push against homogenizing, U.S.-centric conceptions of what blackness represents” (25). Because there is no universal global “Black experience,” because African and Afro-diasporic cultures have been affected differently by their different histories and geographies, the present situation is one in which Black peoples are “in many ways illegible to one another” (Glover 25). In light of this situation, it stands to reason that the translation of a work of high literary value such as *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* represents an opportunity to challenge this illegibility, to establish a space for a representation of Chocoano culture that transcends the language barrier between Spanish and English. This insight points to a *skopos*, or purpose, for the translation of Posso Figueroa’s work: the translation should function on the linguistic and cultural levels as a bridge allowing Anglophone Black readers who do not know Spanish to learn

would today consider cultural appropriation, a charge which Vidal rejects in this case because Posso Figueroa writes from a “place of enunciation that belongs to her” (17). In a letter to Margarita Krakusin written in 2002, Posso wrote “I am a white woman [...] [but also] I identify (*me reivindico*) as Black, because in addition to the feeling and experience, I have the raised buttock and thin ankle, undeniable characteristics of the race, of my race” (quoted in Krakusin 208). In his introduction to *Vean vé*, Arnoldo Palacios remarks that Posso Figueroa is neither “ink black nor milk white, but a Chocoana native from Quibdó” (9).

about the culture of Chocó. Scholarly work on the translation of Black authors in the last few decades has prioritized the Black diasporic reader rather than a supposed “universal” (i.e., white) reader.¹²⁹

In an introduction written for the eighth edition of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* in 2011, Arnoldo Palacios observes that Posso Figueroa’s stories are both original and derivative, both African and Chocoano, a product of the Black imagination and oral tradition, deeply rooted in the particularity of Chocó, where the author grew up “sun-drenched, anchored in the precious banks of metal of precious metals of the River Atrato” (9). Palacios compares her work to that of Simone Schwarz-Bart in terms of their unique contributions to their respective languages: “Her stories have the virtue of being a *sui generis*, authentic contribution of written Colombian literature to Spanish. Written in Chocoñol. For this reason, *Mis nanas negras* make me think of Simone Schwarz-Bart and black stars at the same time.”¹³⁰ Palacios’s praise of Posso Figueroa’s work indicates that he found it to fulfill his ideal for a national literature, in keeping with Jean-Paul Sartre’s notion of political engagement.¹³¹ The mention of “black stars” is a reference to Palacios’ own 1949 novel *Las estrellas son negras*, which addresses themes of hunger and poverty in Quibdó, with dialogue heavily inflected with the Chocoano dialect. Palacios does not elaborate on the affinities between Schwarz-Bart’s work and that of Posso Figueroa, but the suggestion is that the two authors both draw on Afro-diasporic cultural heritage to

¹²⁹ See Edwards (2003) and Glover (2018).

¹³⁰ “Sus cuentos tienen ya la virtud de ser un aporte *sui generis*, auténtico, de la literatura colombiana escrita, al castellano. Escrita en Chocoñol. Por eso *Mis nanas negras* me hacen pensar en Simone Schwarz-Bart y en las estrellas negras al mismo tiempo” (Arnoldo Palacios, in Posso Figueroa 8).

¹³¹ “Palacios [...] defendía la idea de una ‘literatura nacional’ y se mostraba fiel a la idea del ‘compromiso’ expuesta por Jean-Paul Sartre” (Collazos 18).

make a distinctly Black contribution to the literary canon. In this sense, the two authors participate in processes of creolizing their respective written languages.

The relevant parallels between Posso Figueroa's work and that of Schwarz-Bart yield insights about what is at stake in the translation of Blackness in light of an ethics of Relation, pointing to considerations relevant for the translation of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*. Schwarz-Bart's *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (1973) is a work of francophone Caribbean literature that reserves a prominent role for othermothers. It can be considered a work of Creole literature in the sense that it depicts the lives of Black Creole characters, despite the fact that it is composed in French (and in this sense, the dialogue found in the novel is born translated, since most of it would have actually been uttered in Guadeloupian Creole). It is the story of the titular character Télumée Lougandor and the three generations of women who preceded her in her family: her great-grandmother Minèrve, her grandmother Toussine, and her mother Victoire. The predominant nurturing relationship depicted in the novel is that between the grandmother and the protagonist. This grandmother Toussine is primarily known by the moniker Reine Sans Nom, "Queen Without a Name," and her powerful personality has a major influence on the protagonist's developing sense of herself and her place in society. By narrating the experiences and relations of four generations of Lougandor women, along with the influence of Toussine's friend, the hermitic witch Man Cia, *Pluie et vent* depicts the integration of the protagonist into a community of women that constitutes an alternative both to alienation through isolation and to assimilation into dominant metropolitan culture. This sense of coming of age through initiation into a community of Black women is also an underlying theme of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*.

In *Pluie et vent*, the progression from wholeness in innocence to wholeness in knowledge comes about through an intermediate step of extreme atomization, the disintegration of the self through abuse and humiliation. The grandmother-as-mother contributes to cultural continuity in the context of potential ruptures in collective knowledge due to poverty and the exigencies of survival. The story takes place in Guadeloupe in the mid-twentieth century, at a time when the colonial plantation system was still functionally intact despite the official abolition of slavery in the French colonies in 1848. Schwarz-Bart's novel depicts 1930s Guadeloupe in terms of adversity and refuge. In its visceral depiction of the brutality of cane work, the text presents a critique of plantation capitalism; by contrast, in its idyllic depiction of the gardens kept by Reine Sans Nom and later by Télumée herself, the novel hints at a potential alternative way of life that could displace, or at least provide refuge from, capitalist exploitation.

Living with her elderly grandmother, the girl is initiated into a community of adult women, but always kept at a slight distance spiritually to avoid being consumed by the bitterness that some of them exude. For example, when one of them, Madame Brindosier, begins to complain that life is just a torn garment, that the Black people of Guadeloupe are doomed to crawl the earth on their bellies (“à plat ventre”), and when this discourse begins to cast a shadow over Télumée's spirit, making her wonder whether she had come down to earth by mistake, Reine Sans Nom is there to pull her back from the abyss, saying that those women are just a lot of beached whales that the sea does not want, and little fish must not listen to them or risk losing their fins (*Pluie et vent* 51). Such moments of figurative language contribute to the novel's folk tale-like tone, a quality it shares with *Véan vé mis nanas negras*.

Reine Sans Nom introduces Télumée to her friend Man Cia, a reputed local witch. Toward the end of their visit, Man Cia turns to Télumée and gives the following advice: “Be a fine little Negress, a real drum with two sides. Let life bang and thump but keep the underside always intact” (39).¹³² These words paint a picture of a woman whose resilience lies in maintaining a secret side of herself, a side turned away and sheltered from the world. The image of the drum evokes the weathering effect which gives the book its title, “Pluie et Vent,” “Rain and Wind,” the erosive forces which strike the outer face of the drum, presenting internal multiplicity as a means of self-protection. In a similar vein, Reine Sans Nom possesses the gift of duality: “Queen Without a Name was talented, a real Negress with two hearts, and she had made up her mind that life was not going to lead her up the garden path” (41).¹³³ This description of the grandmother as a “Negress with two hearts” echoes Man Cia’s advice to be a “drum with two sides,” suggesting that Reine Sans Nom has achieved a certain Black female ideal in her adaptive ability, her capacity for multiplicity. This resonates with Mariana Ortega’s idea of the multiplicitous self, discussed previously in the chapter on *Balún-Canán*, which Ortega has developed as a way of complicating Heidegger’s notion of being-in-the-world, which in the context of borders and liminality must be reconceived as “being-in-between-worlds.” In Latina feminist theory, just as in Antillean fiction, the capacity for multiplicity is a response to the contradictory demands of living in between worlds. One way of conceiving of this multiplicity has to do with the way a child takes on aspects of different adult mentors.

¹³² “Sois une vaillante petite négresse, un vrai tambour à deux faces, laisse la vie frapper, cogner, mais conserve toujours intacte la face du dessous.” (64)

¹³³ “une talentueuse, une vraie négresse à deux cœurs, et elle avait décidé que la vie ne la ferait pas passer par quatre chemins.” (68)

Pluie et vent sur Têlumée Miracle and *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* both take a multiple approach to the question of othermotherhood as a vector of cultural memory, each depicting the institution in terms of parallelism rather than unilinearity. This multiplicity of connections is a factor in the confirmation of belonging which gives Black communities their strength. By presenting these alternatives to the Western construct of the nuclear family, these works and their translations can contribute to revealing “the range and complexity of black lives” in their global diversity (Glover 30, citing Keene). While it is true that translations of global Black literature frequently incur the risk of reinforcing stereotypes and exoticist fantasies, the benefits entailed by sharing these stories of Black othermothers seem to outweigh the risk of harm, as long as care is taken to execute the translation in a manner that respects its Afro-diasporic valences and to “package” the translations in a culturally responsible manner. In her description of her rationale for the translation of René Depestre’s *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves*, Glover lists her three central engagements: “first, translating responsibly within the maelstrom of existing narratives about Haiti and ‘blackness’/Vodou; second, translating to and for a desired Afro-diasporic readership; and third, remaining attentive to the ‘packaging’ of my translation” (30). All three of these criteria are relevant to the translation of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*, which can be contrasted with the existing English translation of *Pluie et vent*.

Barbara Bray’s translation of *Pluie et vent sur Têlumée Miracle* offers a few examples of pitfalls on the levels of packaging and voice. On a packaging level, a shift in thematic emphasis has occurred through the choice of the title, rendered in English as *The Bridge of Beyond*. The imagery of the protagonist as a weathered object—surviving an

abusive husband, the drudgery of working in the cane fields, a bout of alcoholism, and so forth—is one of the key recurring themes in the novel. The shift that takes place in the translation into English, by leaving the image of weather out of the title and replacing it with the image of a bridge, decenters this key image and replaces it with one evoking transcendence and otherworldliness. In fact, the notion of the “Beyond” never appears literally in the French; rather, this is a loose translation of the term “l’Autre Bord,” the “other bank.” With this in mind, it appears that the translation has raised the prominence of the theme of transcendence at the expense of that of weathering. Such packaging choices may not have been up to Bray to decide.

The preface to the English translation also packages the work in a condescending manner. Preface writer Bridget Jones seeks to reassure the reader about the quality of the translation: “At times, the English version seems to improve on the original, since Barbara Bray, a very experienced literary translator, favours a plainer and more direct text which checks the tendency to whimsical rambling” (Jones xiv). This remark implies a hierarchy of language that places “plain” and “direct” writing above “whimsical rambling,” suggesting that Schwarz-Bart’s work has benefited from the expert curation of her “very experienced” translator. Such “whimsical rambling” is precisely what marks this book as a work of Creole literature, inscribing it in an oral tradition characterized by digressions; as Glissant puts it: “The art of the Creole storyteller is made up of driftings and also accumulations, with the baroque quality in the sentences, those distortions of discourse where what is inserted acts as a natural breathing space” (*Poetics of Diversity* 25). Thus, distinctively Creole features of Schwarz-Bart’s style—orality, detours, traces

of African heritage preserved in the musical sensibilities of language—have been translated out of the text.

Another issue with Bray's translation pertains to the register of diction used to represent dialogue between characters. For example, the translation has Elie say: "But don't forget—don't forget you're the only woman I shall ever love" (*Bridge of Beyond* 45) as a way of translating "Mais n'oublie pas, n'oublie pas que tu es la seule femme que j'aimerai" (*Pluie et vent* 75). While Elie is generally quite articulate in the original, the use of "shall" marks his speech as unusually posh. Overall, the speech patterns depicted in Bray's translation evoke the British middle class more than the Black cultures of the Americas. However, in assessing the consequences of Bray's translation choices, it is important to remember that Schwarz-Bart's novel is already itself a work of translation, in the sense that most of the dialogue represented in French would have actually taken place in Guadeloupean Creole. As Jones puts it, "Schwarz-Bart has attempted to render the consciousness of a Creole speaker not by creolized dialogue or footnotes, but by sustaining the strangeness of an unfamiliar world-view" (xii-xiii). Indeed, the French version of the text largely renders speech without recourse to Creole words or syntax. While Bray may have flattened some aspects of Schwarz-Bart's voice through "plainer and more direct" writing, the general choice to use standard English is an honest reflection of the source text's standard French.

In extrapolating these insights to the translation of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*, the criteria for choosing voices to represent characters' speech patterns become more complicated than a matter of simply looking for equivalences of dialect. The use of Black vernacular forms to convey the Blackness of a literary text in translation could be based

on an essentializing logic that views the commonalities among Black diasporic cultures as a result of racial determinism, construing Black communities as inherently uneducated, impoverished, and oral in contrast with a white dominant culture identified with education, refinement, and linguistic “correctness.” Such a view would likely lead to translation strategies that would flatten the polyvocalic literary qualities of the work into a caricatured “Black” monovocality based on an imaginary equivalence between one Black dialect and another. Such an approach would do the writing a disservice by failing to account for the writer’s versatility in crafting a narrative that uses dialect selectively, alternating between vernacular and literary registers depending on a storytelling logic founded on the assumption of intelligent, curious, open-minded reader.

These stylistic considerations are related to the work’s thematic preoccupations with human connection. As Jaime Arocha writes in his prologue to *Vean vé*, “It is refreshing that this book, unlike almost all the books that talk about Chocó, does not dwell in inventories of marginalities and lacks” (13). This is another point of similarity between Posso Figueroa and Schwarz-Bart. Rather than focusing on poverty and inequality, both authors emphasize the indomitable spirits of their characters, reveling in the pleasures of living as a relational being, through unmediated, unashamed communion with the bodymind in connection with other people and in sync with the rhythms of nature. This is not to say that these works sugar-coat the harsh realities of life in Chocó or Guadeloupe—the struggles of rural poverty and exploitation do form a backdrop for the events—but that the predominant themes of connection and joy are all the more prominent for their contrast with these underlying struggles. One of the strong points of Bray’s English translation of Schwarz-Bart is the way it evokes the triumph of joy over

despair by faithfully conveying the sentimentality of the original work, and the translation of *Vean vé* should do the same.

Unlike Schwarz-Bart's novel, *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* is highly (although by no means totally) inflected with colloquial linguistic forms. Certain structural features of the Chocoano dialect merit consideration for the purposes of translation. The dialect involves patterns of phonetic shifts including aspiration, flapping, backing, and elision. As in Andalusian Spanish, the Chocoano dialect frequently transforms non-initial /s/ sounds to the velar fricative /x/, transcribed in Spanish using the letter "j". The bilabial plosive /b/, represented by the Spanish letters "b" or "v", can be found transformed into the velar plosive /g/. Various phonemes including /l/ and /d/ are often transformed into the flap /r/. An excerpt from a poem by María Teresa Ramírez demonstrates these shifts (the standard Spanish version is given on the right):

Er día se gorvió noche y la noche maj ojcura solo voj porés clariarla con tus ojitos de luna. ¹³⁴	El día se volvió noche y la noche más oscura solo vos puedes clarearla con tus ojitos de luna.
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In this poem, composed in a manner that reflects the oral reality of Chocoano dialect, nonstandard phonetic forms appear in roughly half of the lexical items. It should be noted that there is no clear and consistent pattern determining when an "s" becomes a "j": the aspiration occurs in terminal prevocalic position ("maj" instead of "más" prior to the initial vowel of "ojcura") but not in the terminal prevocalic "tus." Likewise, it appears in the terminal preconsonantal position with "voj," but not in the similarly preconsonantal ending of "porés." This may indicate different possible processes in Ramírez's poetics:

¹³⁴ "The day turned to night / and the night darker / only thou can brighten it / with your little moon eyes" (cited in Krakusin 202).

either the poet is transcribing the effects of a “natural” voice that is not consistent in its deviations from standard Spanish, or she has selectively muted some of those deviations in order to produce a text that is comprehensible to a reader unfamiliar with the dialect.

The selective use of dialect, usually with little to no sacrifice in terms of comprehensibility, is a characteristic feature of Posso Figueroa’s writing. *Vean vé, mis nanas negras* is a polyvocalic text wherein the primary narrative voice is largely rendered in standard Spanish, while various characters’ thoughts and utterances are presented with varying levels of dialectal influence. Take, for example, this passage from the vignette “Olegaria Palencia”: “Se enamoraba siempre de amores imposibles, de inalcanzables amores; se enamoraba sola, con ver pasar un apuesto varón por la calle, aún sin saber nada de él y la mayoría de las veces sin que nunca hubiera mediado ni siquiera una palabra con el objeto del amor. Como dicen en mi tierra, *tenía arrechera con tontina*.” (*Vean vé* 60, Emphasis added). The first sentence of this passage presents nothing in the way of nonstandard spelling or vocabulary. The second sentence involves a shift to vernacular slang—“arrechera con tontina” is a local turn of phrase denoting intense sexual arousal—but without any words being marked by phonetic shifts. In this, it contrasts with the following passage from the last chapter of the book: “En un dos por tres puso a toro mundo a bailar sentaros y aprovechando la gente en rueda, los puso a jugar el juego del florón” (171). Here, both lexical and phonetic choices contribute to a strong sense of oral dialect; “en un dos por tres” is a colloquial expression meaning “in a flash,” while the use of “toro mundo” instead of “todo el mundo” and “sentaros” instead of “sentados” evokes the Chocoñol dialect. The rationale for rendering this passage in a more vernacular language than the rest of the narration appears to be that it represents a

deeper dive by the narrator into her own roots. In fact, the later chapters of the book seem on the whole to incorporate more frequent use of nonstandard linguistic forms in the primary narrative voice than do the earlier chapters, a trend that suggests that the process of writing (and reading) this book involves an increasing immersion in the local culture. Throughout the book, characters' voices frequently appear inflected in this manner, as does the more general voice of the people when the text describes rumors, popular beliefs, and expressions, but the primary narrative voice employs colloquial forms on a selective basis. Perhaps the most fundamental criterion for the choice of register is precisely in the musicality of the utterance, for in Chocó, "se cuenta y se canta"—stories are both told and sung.

This insight leads to another consideration for the translation of *Vean vé, mis nanas negras*: the book deserves to be translated in a manner that respects the writer's poetic craft, the idiosyncrasy of her particular approach to fiction and language. Of course, there is nothing remarkable about an approach to literary translation that seeks to preserve the author's unique voice, but in this instance, there is a risk that the idiosyncrasy criterion could be obscured by political and cultural interventions on the translator's part. The cultural hybridity of writing that oscillates between standard and dialect linguistic forms cannot simply be represented by aiming for an artificial equivalence between Chocoano Blackness and some particular, specific Anglophone Black culture. Rather, the complexity of the text could be more accurately reflected by a sophisticated strategy of enmeshment, whereby the distinctiveness of Chocoano culture is conveyed in a hybrid "neolect" that defies standard English without being reducible to any given, "pure" African American dialect.

As noted above, one of Glover's criteria for translating Haitian literature is "translating to and for a desired Afro-diasporic readership" (30). This reader-oriented criterion is a central element of the *skopos* of the translation of *Vean vé*. In the interest of producing a translation that conveys the Blackness of the original culture depicted in the book, Shanta Lee and I meticulously discuss word choices in terms of register, tone, and connotation. By working collaboratively, we are pursuing the potentially contradictory goals of artistic fidelity and accessibility. In our process, I produce a draft translation that is rather literal, flagging those areas of the text that are notably marked by colloquialism. Then, Shanta edits the text to make it speak—and sing—in Black voices. Then we discuss the details of what is going on in the original text, how significantly each passage departs from standard Spanish, and the particular forms that any such departures take. Overall, we aim to translate the text in a manner that preserves the text's polyvocality and thus the complexity of the world it depicts. Just as Amalialú Posso Figueroa enacts a creolizing gesture on her own national literature, we aim to produce a translation that engages with the spirit of Glissantian Relation to foreground the work's particularity and defiance of expectations associated with world literature.

CONCLUSION: CREOLIZATION, NURTURING, AND TRANSLATION

In his later writing, Glissant establishes a distinction between creolization as an existing historical process, which is politically and ethically neutral, and creolization as a utopian concept to counteract the reactionary and chauvinistic tendencies of hegemonic atavistic cultures. Glissant writes that for creolization to take place, the two elements in contact must be on equal footing: “For creolization presupposes that the cultural elements brought together must necessarily be ‘of equivalent value’ for this creolization to be truly realized” (*Poetics of Diversity* 7). This claim suggests a distinction between much of the creolization that has actually taken place and another, idealized form of creolization in which the factor of domination has been eliminated. Glissant goes on to qualify the claim: “if some of cultural elements brought together are seen as inferior to others, creolization does not really happen. It happens, but in a bastardized and unjust fashion” (ibid.). The notion that much actually existing creolization is a degraded form of cultural exchange evokes the possibility of a different, more desirable form. Further on in this passage, Glissant states that the creolization that has occurred in the Caribbean and Brazilian contexts, where Black and African cultural constituents have been treated as inferior, has led to a situation in which the balance between the interacting elements has had to be reset through revalorization of African heritage, through movements such as Negritude or the Harlem Renaissance.

A similar observation can be made about efforts to address the imbalances built into conventional discourses of mestizaje in the Spanish American sphere. If Vasconcelian mestizaje has by and large neglected to treat Indigenous worldviews as valid, if Mariátegui’s indigenismo reproduced the civilizing mission in the form of

assimilating modernization, and if Colombian mestizaje has been characterized by impulses to cultural and biological whitening, then where are the efforts to revalorize Indigenous and Black heritage so that these societies might make the transition from the unjust creolization of historical reality to the ideal creolization of equality? As I have observed in the chapter on Castellanos, the Zapatista movement represents a site of this kind of revalorization. Likewise, in Peru, the political efforts of the ONAMIAP seek a form of societal integration without the kind of assimilation that erases or discredits Indigenous knowledge. One of the central insights of this dissertation is that efforts to address these imbalances have also been enacted through a certain kind of literary mestizaje practiced by feminist writers with deep cultural ties to Indigenous (in the cases of Matto de Turner and Castellanos) and Black (in the case of Posso Figueroa) cultures. In all three of these writers, real-life childhood contact with these cultures facilitated the creolization of personal consciousness, and in their works, the trope of nurture kinship serves as a metaphor for the creolization of national consciousness.

In the chapter on Castellanos, I established a dichotomy between two different ways of reading the Global South: one which leaves the reader basically unchanged, and another mode that impels an irreversible transformation, a disruption of complacency. This transformation is what I call the creolization of consciousness. As Glissant puts it, “thought of the Other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without ‘prizing me open,’ without changing me within myself. [...] The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act. That is the moment I change my thought, without renouncing its contribution. I change, and I exchange” (*Poetics of Relation* 154). In the *Introduction to a Poetics of Diversity*, Glissant elaborates on this idea and its

implications for global shifts in consciousness: “today’s human communities are engaging in the difficult process of giving up something to which they have obstinately clung for a long time: that is, the conviction that the identity of a being is valid and recognizable only if it excludes the identity of all other possible beings” (6). Glissant describes this transformation as an “aesthetics of turbulence” (*Poetics of Relation* 155) and as a “painful mutation in human thought” (*Poetics of Diversity* 6). That is to say that the shift from root identity to relational identity involves turmoil, disruption, a challenge to conventional senses of self and belonging.

Glissant suggests that the artist is positioned to contribute to this transformation of consciousness: “It seems to me that this is one of the functions of the poet—and not only the poet, the artist—to contribute to the overthrow of [the atavistic/exclusionist] order of things. No longer to just leave it to humanism, kindness, tolerance, which are so fleeting, but to enter into the decisive mutations of a plurality to which we all consent” (*Poetics of Diversity* 34). Like other artists, the translator has a role to play in these processes: “The translator’s *langage* works like creolization and Relation in the world, that is, it produces the unforeseeable” (*Poetics of Diversity* 27). This model of Relation that lays the groundwork for an open-ended give-and-take between cultures functioning through reciprocity, developing knowledge through a palimpsest-like view of knowing, outside the binary of legibility and illegibility, a model of cultural knowledge that remains tentative and precarious, perpetually open to surprise.

I have observed literary examples in which nurture kinship serves as a medium for the creolization of consciousness. This connection between nurturing and the transformation of the imaginary suggests a potentially useful way of thinking about

translation: just as nurturing relationships between caregivers and children from different sociocultural backgrounds function as metaphors for the shift from atavistic to composite notions of collective identity, a nurturing approach to translation seems particularly well suited to the pursuit of a responsible engagement with alterity. The components of nurturing include nourishing, protecting, showing affection, and stewarding development. I have argued that intercultural nurture kinship can turn the creolization of consciousness into a component of coming of age. To put this insight to use in the craft of literary translation, it is useful to consider how nurturing has been conceived as a moral paradigm. Since the 1980s, the ethics of care has been articulated as a feminist alternative to moral philosophies focused on reason, such as Kantian deontology, and those focused on consequences, such as John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. In the intersections between care ethics and creolization, it is possible to outline a nurturance-centered, relational ethics of postcolonial translation.

The discourse of the ethics of care has its origin in the psychological development theory proposed by Carol Gilligan in her book *In a Different Voice* (1982), and in works of feminist philosophy by Nel Noddings (*Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education*, 1984) and Sara Ruddick (*Maternal Thinking*, 1989). These works describe an approach to moral reasoning grounded in a relational concept of the self, with a priority on preserving and enhancing specific relationships. The "different voice" identified by Gilligan departs from the rationalistic criteria characteristic of dominant moral philosophy, conceiving of morality as "a problem of responsibility in relationships" rather than as the impartial application of universal principles to ethical dilemmas (73). Gilligan developed the care ethics model as a means of criticizing the

limitations of the highly influential model of moral development proposed by Lawrence Kohlberg in the 1950s, which enshrines Kantian abstract reasoning as the highest level of development. Contrary to Kohlberg's model, Gilligan proposes an ethic of care as a necessary component of full morality. Gilligan criticizes the way Kohlberg's prescriptive model enshrines abstract moral reasoning as the benchmark for the highest stage of moral development and thereby offers a mechanism for the privileged few who attain this level to dismiss other people's experiences of oppression as mere particularism. There is a correspondence between the skepticism about marginalized subjectivities that Sealey describes as a component of dominant settler-colonialist ideology and the inability of universalist moral development theory to deal satisfactorily with questions of otherness and privilege.

In her book *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (1993), Tronto extends Gilligan's ethic of care into the realm of politics, asserting that the devaluation of real care practices such as childcare and direct patient interaction perpetuates the existing hierarchy of prestige that privileges rational decision-making and dismisses care work as a private concern. According to Tronto, the moral boundary between public and private life reinforces white male power by relegating the types of work most often done by women and people of color to a position of secondary value (53-54). Tronto observes that the "different voice" detected by Gilligan in studies of moral development is not limited to women, and that the values expressed by ethnic minorities are evidence that an ethic of care constitutes an integral component of certain non-dominant values systems (82-83).

Tronto's stated aim is to move the concept of care from its peripheral position to the center of moral life. As noted in Chapter 4, Black feminist scholarship has taken considerable strides in this direction, as thinkers including Stanlie M. James, Patricia Hill Collins, and bell hooks have asserted the centrality of community care practices in Afro-diasporic values systems. The compatibility between the concept of othermothering and Tronto's account of care ethics lends credence to Tronto's claim that Gilligan's "different voice" has precedent in the community values of people of color (83).

Tronto asserts that a fully developed personal ethic of care integrates four modes of caring: attentiveness ("caring about"), responsibility ("taking care of"), competence ("caring for"), and responsiveness ("being cared for") (105-108). These categories offer useful ways of thinking about a nurturing translation practice. For the first mode, attentiveness corresponds to Glissant's "thought of the Other"; for me, this implies a spirit of curiosity that seeks literary value outside of the Eurocentric canon. Next, the ethic of responsibility pertains to the practical concerns involved in nurturing a translation into existence: finding appropriate sites of publication, doing appropriate publicity work; in the case of Amalialú Posso Figueroa, it involves curating the author's reputation in the English-speaking world. Thirdly, Tronto places special emphasis on the criterion of competence, noting the moral imperative of cultivating the skills necessary for nurturing. This criterion was a factor in my decision to invite Shanta Lee to collaborate on the translation of Posso Figueroa's writing, knowing that I did not have the competence to represent the desired aspects of Black American vernacular.

Finally, Tronto's framework captures the universality of care in the notion of responsiveness: every caregiver must also be a care receiver at some time, in some form.

The ethic of receiving care implies an attitude of humility, the willingness to be nurtured in turn, which also means the willingness to change. This final turn is akin to Glissant's concept of the other of Thought. As we continue the work of translating Posso Figueroa's writing, we remain open to the ways this engagement may transform us; as Glissant writes in *Poetics of Relation*, "The other of Thought is always set in motion by its confluences as a whole, in which each is changed by and changes the other" (155).

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