



**Universidade de  
Aveiro**

**Ano 2012**

**Departamento de Línguas e Culturas**

**Ana Cristina Gomes  
da Rocha**

**Narratives of Women: Gender and Magical  
Realism in Postcolonial Texts**

**Narrativas Femininas: Género e Realismo  
Mágico em Textos Pós-Coloniais**



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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Ingleses, realizada sob a orientação científica do Dr. Kenneth David Callahan, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.



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“The universe, somebody said and I know now it is true, is made of stories, not particles; they are the wave functions of our existence. If they constitute the event horizon of our particular black hole they are also our only means of escape.” – André Brink, *Imaginations of Sand*.

**palavras-chave**

Estudos Pós-coloniais; Estudos de Género; Realismo Mágico; Identidade vs Alteridade; Memória; Hibridismo; Pós-modernismo; Literatura Contemporânea; Representações de Mulheres.

## Resumo

Este estudo centra-se na análise de diversos textos pós-coloniais que destacam a relevância de re-imaginar a História através de diferentes perspectivas, nomeadamente a re-invenção do passado com base numa abordagem feminista. A dissolução dos limites entre história e ficção é actualmente aceite como um indicador relevante da "metaficção historiográfica", conforme teorizada por Linda Hutcheon. As obras analisadas neste estudo são, portanto, variantes deste género contemporâneo e das suas interseções com Realismo Mágico. Estas narrativas também têm ainda em comum a preocupação com o papel das mulheres em contextos socio-culturais pós-coloniais, bem como as suas representações nesses mesmos contextos. O presente estudo investiga ainda a forma como determinadas representações são preponderantes na construção de identidades num mundo pós-colonial. As narrativas de mulheres engendram novas histórias que desconstróem, realçam e antecipam várias conclusões oficiais das narrações dominantes da história. Assim sendo, a ficção contemporânea incorpora o Realismo Mágico pelas suas possibilidades subversivas que resistem a um mundo singular com um único conjunto de regras ou leis. Deste modo, rejeita sistemas totalizantes e cria uma "espacialidade dual", onde diferentes realidades convergem. Em certa medida, o mágico funciona como um agente cultural, um constructo complexo através do qual vozes silenciadas podem contar suas histórias. Assim sendo, Realismo Mágico aparece ligado a estudos pós-coloniais, ao pós-modernismo, e a estudos de género. Os autores escolhidos justapõem estas características, de modo a criar espaços imaginários nos quais o real seja retratado mas que também seja sujeito a crítica. Além disso, as suas representações dialógicas permitem a possibilidade de um encontro entre o Eu colonizador e o Outro colonizado como momento potencialmente criativo e uma forma de (re)criar um "terceiro espaço" no qual seja possível inscrever a ambivalência gerada por esse encontro. Os textos seleccionados representam ainda a autoridade de vozes femininas e marginalizadas, tendo em consideração as vozes/estórias silenciadas e "outro subalterno". Consequentemente, a polivocalidade destas narrativas pode designar um potencial de resistência às convenções opressivas impostas por um poder hegemónico e eurocêntrico. Por conseguinte, estas narrativas têm em consideração o modo como diferentes culturas interagem e/ou se processam mutuamente sem se anularem. O estudo demonstra ainda que os textos partilham uma necessidade mútua em recontar os passados perdidos das suas personagens femininas, bem como as novas perspectivas que são geradas a partir daí. Estas narrativas e representações de mulheres assumem um papel importante na reavaliação da História como meio de recuperar e restaurar histórias silenciadas que fazem claramente parte de um processo de reconstrução de identidades pós-coloniais.

**keywords**

Postcolonial Studies; Gender Studies; Magical Realism; Identity vs Alterity; Memory; Hybridism; Postmodernism; Contemporary Literature; Representations of Women.



## Abstract

This study focuses on the analysis of several postcolonial texts that highlight the relevance of re-imagining History through different lenses, particularly the re-invention of the past based on a feminist approach. The dissolution of the limits between history and fiction is currently accepted as a relevant indicator of “historiographic metafiction,” as coined by Linda Hutcheon. The novels analyzed in this study are all variations of this contemporary genre and its intersections with Magical Realism. They also share a common preoccupation with the role of women in postcolonial socio-cultural contexts and the representations of women in these contexts. This study thus investigates some of these representations which are connected with the construction of identities in the postcolonial world. The narratives of women selected engender new histories which undermine, enhance, and pre-empt many official conclusions of the dominant narrations of history. In doing this, contemporary fiction incorporates magic realism for its subversive possibilities in resisting a single world with a single set of rules or laws. In this way it rejects totalizing systems, and creates a “dual spatiality” where dissimilar realities converge. To some extent, the magical works as a cultural agent, a complex construct through which silenced voices may tell their stories. Hence magical realism has been connected with postcolonialism, postmodernism and gender studies. The authors chosen juxtapose these characteristics in order to create imaginary spaces that both depict the real and subject it to critique. Furthermore, their dialogic representations allow the possibility of an encounter between the colonizing Self and the colonized Other as potentially creative and a way to (re)generate a “third space” where it is possible to inscribe the ambivalence generated by that encounter. Their texts also enact the empowering of female and marginalized voices, giving agency to the silenced and “subaltern other”. Consequently, the novels’ polyvocality may designate a potential resistance to oppressive conventions imposed by a hegemonic and Eurocentric power. Accordingly, the narratives dealt with take into consideration the way different cultures interact and/or process each other. The study shows that the texts share a mutual need to retell the lost pasts of their female characters and the new perspectives they generate. These narratives of women assume a significant role in the re-examination of history as they reclaim and restore unuttered stories that are clearly part of a postcolonial identity process.

**Narratives of Women: Gender and Magical Realism in Postcolonial Texts**



Henri Rousseau, *The Dream* 1910.



## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Chapter 1 – André Brink: The Tangible and Fluid Boundary between Reality and Myths.</b>	<b>19</b>
1.1. – Paradoxes of the Self and the Other: Challenging Otherness in <i>Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor</i>	<b>31</b>
1.2. – “Our Missing Store of Memories”: Female Voices and Storytelling in <i>Imaginings of Sand</i> .	<b>55</b>
<b>Chapter 2 – Entangled (Hi)stories, Intertwined Bodies: Fragmentation and Hybrid Identities in Kiana Davenport’s <i>Shark Dialogues</i></b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Chapter 3 – Negotiating Corporeality and Exoticism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s <i>The Mistress of Spices</i></b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Chapter 4 – Mapping the Exotic India: Body, (In)visibility and Fragmentation as Metaphors of Identity in Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi’s <i>The Last Song of Dusk</i></b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>143</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>155</b>





## *Introduction*

“We fabricate yesterdays for ourselves which we can live with, which make the future possible, even if it remains infinitely variable and vulnerable, a whole bloody network of flickering, and intimate lighting to illuminate the darkness inside.” – André Brink, *Devil’s Valley*

“There is no problem in the world that cannot be solved with a story.” – André Brink, *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*

Storytelling is a defining impulse of the human and it articulates a multiplicity of historical perceptions as well as their variations. Stories arise within us and our lives are encompassed and driven by them; they are made up of fragments and off-cuts of cultural memory and myths. However the landscape of contemporary literature has been shaped and transformed by a postmodern view of storytelling and the usage of “historiographic metafiction” as a device to cross the borders of nations and cultures. It is through this realm that stories may present certain affinities with postcolonial studies. Moreover, the proliferation of the realm of storytelling emerges in a process that has often entailed a return to origins, re-writing the past by including suppressed voices and exposing glaring discrepancies between personal and official histories. Storytelling is thus both an aesthetic exercise and a dialogic crossing to others beyond the self. Much contemporary fiction deals with the exposure of the “sins” of the past so the sins of the present can be explained and corrected. To some extent it can be asked how stories of the general overrun stories of the particular, and how micro and private stories do or undo the work of the public ones? We live our lives within stories and those (hi)stories frequently escape and recalibrate their own bounds, not as simple mirrors but mostly as a deconstruction and re-invention of a fluid myriad of representations that are in turn overtly politicized and inevitably ideological. By sending our lives on trajectories of meaning or fantasies of escape to enchanted realms, stories real and fictive may generate a palimpsest of transcriptions based on the conspicuous silence of History. There is thus a political dimension to telling, owning, circulating, or controlling stories, and this control is at stake in the selected novels, the way past and present manipulate what is told and what is “subalternized” or silenced and manipulated. Moreover the act of telling stories is an attempt to re-construct and re-create the past as André Brink puts it:

other cases of silence had to be discovered below the clamour that filled certain gaps: the clamour of official versions and dominant discourses, which caused such a din that one often did not even realise the noise existed, not for its own sake but purely as cover-up for the silences below (*Reinventing a Continent*, 9).

As a cultural construct, fiction and storytelling seem eminently suitable to maintaining the dialectic between documented history and the concept of “history as fiction” by exploring the boundaries of myth and history, and the multiple representations of class or gender.

The frontier between past and present is always blurred and history becomes almost inevitably analysed through a tangled web of subjective elements and documented events at the same level. The construction of identity and memory is framed by the ambiguous dimension of postmodernist storytelling and its magical realist devices. This attitude towards the project of recreating memory and identity can also be parodic and a commitment to duplicity as well as a declaration of cultural hybridity particularly in what Timothy Brennan named as “cosmopolitan writers” (171). Thus storytelling in India, South Africa, Australia, New Zealand and to some extent all around the world, possesses the power to speak to the present not just from non-European pasts, colonized and silenced ones, but from other present realities combining mythology, reality and fiction, in order to speak of other possible futures. Within a world inflected by moral chaos as the books dealt with posit it, it is possible to recognize that reality is a palimpsest of several types of accounts, that history “can only be meaningful when it is interpreted as, and interwoven with personal experience” (Marita Wenzel, 143). Moreover, magical realism and the fantastic narrative mode then have the capacity in part to motivate the reader in such a way that beauty and the repulsive are unified in order to re-educate humankind through a parodic analysis and reassessment of hegemonic and Eurocentric mythological conceptions of the world.

The novels can be inscribed in the ambivalent enunciation of the politics of representation. Identities and gender issues are clearly negotiable throughout the devices and mechanisms of magical realism, and in this area it is possible to dismantle monolithic perspectives. Although writers deploy different narrative techniques they explore the importance of fantasy, mythology, and language as well as the power of storytelling to negotiate the boundaries related with the politics of representation itself in what André Brink calls “stories of history” (“Interrogating Silence”, 21), a total re-imagining of the human experience that emerges not from an attempt to solve a mystery, but rather a way to demonstrate how historical mysteries are constructed. This is accordingly not a simple act of mirroring but a way to explore how narratives construct and structure the notions of the self and otherness, in the present as well as in the past. It is through the complexity of narrators that we are able to trace a history of colonialism and postcolonialism as well as a depiction of the various phases of imperialism and neo-colonialism. Yet a primary issue referring to narrators is the ambivalence of their speaking position, as André Brink explains:

the ambiguity remains vested in the role of the narrator, rather than the perception of the history as such – except if the interposition of the narrator between reader and story is to be read as a demonstration of the opacity of language, which presents language not as an access toward history but as a displacement of it (*Reinventing a Continent*, 22).

Moreover narrators from all the selected novels display authoritarian characteristics and attempt to steer the reader in a particular direction. The narrative strategy of reader invocation-implication is used by the narrators to draw readers into complicity with their purposes for reading the text. The framing narrators open and close the novels with a version of history that provides the context for the narrative and enfolds the story according to its pivotal passages. The cacophony of voices that can be heard in the novels can be explained as a space of ambiguities blending the real and the unreal, the possible and the impossible, the imaginary and the magical. Subsequently, the concepts of hybridity, fragmentation, postmodern identities, marginalized and exoticized otherness within the frameworks of magical realism and storytelling at different levels, further serve to raise consciousness about the situation of silenced and oppressed women. The novels are characterized by postmodernist tendencies of fragmentation, and historiographic metafiction is the genre *par excellence* chosen by some authors to a constant and ongoing questioning of cultural boundaries and subversion of a pre-established order. Moreover, the epithet postmodern is used by the authors not only to identify specific cultural features and the aesthetic of contemporary life, but also to draw innovative forms of theorization which are used to conceptualize the heterogeneity and fragmented nature of social, cultural realities and identities. As such, by moving away from realism, the boundaries of fiction, myth and history are explored and blurred creating a juxtaposition of fragmented pieces, a tapestry of untold stories, unuttered voices and mutilated bodies. It will be assumed that the palimpsestic characteristics of art and literature function both within and across cultures giving emphasis to the increasing fluidity of social identities in the contemporary era and their strategies of appropriation and hybridization. In this sense, the panoply of narrative strategies further reproduce the already abundant narrative times and spaces as Edward Said posits in his book *Culture and Imperialism*, “a contrapuntal approach which stresses the overlapping and intertwined histories of Europe and its ‘others’” (23).

From a postcolonial perspective this babel of subaltern voices and their silenced stories are given agency in a half-serious and half-parodic way in an ambivalent ground where the question “can the subaltern speak?” still remains problematic and as some critics have argued it is housed in an “identifiable margin” (Leela Ghandi, 84). However the borders that surround the margins are often crossed by playful textuality and parody that may free submerged voices. It is through a process of parody that writers such as Salman Rushdie play with history and depict reality creating this sense of playful textuality where intertextuality or even hypertextuality, as per Gérard Genette,



are the key points in a literary creation based partly on the concepts of the carnivalesque. Moreover, the silence that lies within the stories narrated is also manipulated and the indefatigable attempt to speak the unspeakable is manipulated by the imagination in order to elude and defy history in its multiple and fluid representations. In particular these representations of historiography address the double silence inherent in the marginalization of women and the master-narratives dominated by white male figures. Therefore novels combine past and present in order to create paths that provide scope for new perceptions of identity; it is this sensitivity towards social and political issues and the permanent dialectic between individuals and society that opens up the space for silenced and marginalized voices. Writers such as André Brink tend to put an emphasis on their female characters by giving them agency. He confronts the readers with a vivid and startling representation of female ancestors and their role in history that can be read as *herstory*, a hidden palimpsest in a phallogocentric history where women were largely excluded from official discourses. However, that silence has been interrogated and to some extent perceived as a second language itself. When referring to the functioning of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa, André Brink explains that “this is based on the assumptions that societies, like individuals cannot grow and mature unless they come to terms with the dark places – the silences - in themselves” (“Interrogating Silence”, 24), insofar as those dark places are paved by women so through the juxtaposition of history as fact and history as fiction unuttered stories are re-constructed and they try to restore coherence to a fragmented society. Consequently, social and political struggles are known for focusing their energies in such a way that they lead to the neutralization and the silencing of the sexually specific body as well as blunting the construction of their subjectivity

According to Elizabeth Grosz “the body is crucial to understanding woman’s psychical and social existence, but the body is no longer understood as ahistorical, biological given, acultural object” (18). Thus throughout the novels dealt with it will be possible to understand that to some extent, even though explored in different ways, a woman’s body is regarded as a political, social, and cultural object but not a neutral screen. The portrayal of women deals with the significance of their bodies “bound up in the order of desire, signification, and power” (Grosz, 19) which structure women’s political, sexual and intellectual resistance. It is perhaps through the construction and deconstruction of these sites in an imaginative way that the silences previously inaccessible are explored. The empowerment of female voices through dialogism invites new opportunities for activism and change, and it also implies an identity in a dialectic response that is always open and ongoing. Furthermore, it can be argued that reality and its diffused subjects may be perceived and (re)presented not only in a historical approach but by perceiving the world as a story or interwoven

stories that can be re-told and (re)shaped endlessly with an infinite capacity for renewal and (re)invention.

Novels are *par excellence* the site to (re)invent the world because they can be peopled by outsized and eccentric characters that plunge the reader into the polivocality of romance, the complexity of historical essay, allegory, magical realism or paradoxical political diatribe. This artistic utterance will lead to what Bakhtin suggests as a “hybrid construction”, an “inter-individual territory” where one’s own words mingle with the other’s word creating and recreating a panoply of new possibilities within the already well-known world history. As Salman Rushdie brilliantly mentions in his essay “In Good Faith” what appears is “a new and unexpected combination of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs... *Mélange*, hotchpotch, a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world” (394). The process of creation or rather re-invention occurs based on that *mélange*, which is also a process of transformation that writers seek to accomplish in their books by undermining and subverting the conventions and presuppositions as well as by attempting to “de-doxify our cultural representations and their undeniable political import” as Linda Hutcheon writes in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (3). Identities have been shaped by massive changes since the unbannings of liberation movements (India or South Africa) have morphed into neo-colonial states and the dramatic rearrangements of relationships between West and East, between the rich and powerful “North” and the poor and dominated “South” though this is a problematic designation given that Australia, for instance, is one of the world’s most developed and successful economies. Thus, from the rim empires write back and identities as a summarizing trope became fragmented and displaced which means that questions of belonging, hybridism, migration, exile, diaspora are the cornerstone of those cross-cultural identities. Hence the issue of identity is clearly controversial because the plural identities crosscut one another in multiple and tangible contexts. It is a point that cannot be considered outside the importance of storytelling and the contingencies of the past that it reorders which conduce ineluctably to the present. Such texts written from a postcolonial perspective are concerned with the development of a new relationship between self and place, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity that are viewed throughout storytelling which seems to be a choice that both embraces historical reality and the creative impetus of magical realism, thus shedding new light on the construction of postcolonial realities. Making use of magical realism, irony and discontinuous narratives writers construct separate and multiple worlds while the label of magical realism also situates the location of these narratives within postmodernism as will be discussed below.

Although separated geographically, the authors selected share related historical backgrounds and they also participate in the same view of deconstructing the colonizer/colonized binary through

deploying narrative techniques as well as problematizing essentialist myths in order to clear a new postmodern space. Hence contemporary fiction from a postcolonial context is, in part, a (re)telling of history from a postmodern perspective where difference and otherness are foregrounded. The point also made is that the individual emerges from a *mélange* of (hi)stories and cultures, a hotchpotch of religions resulting in an active mythmaking in the Barthesian sense; reality is turned upside down, emptied of history and re-invented through a different lens, opening up a space for resistance and contesting representations of culture. Reality is a construct in permanent movement and narratives are permeable to bending, adapting, and engaging with the enabling power of hybridity and intermingling. Linda Hutcheon has noted that postmodern fiction is an “uneasy mixture” of metafiction, parody, politics and history, and that this mixture is

probably historically determined by postmodernism’s conflictual response to literary modernism. On the one hand, the postmodern obviously was made possible by the self-referentiality, irony, ambiguity, and parody that characterize much of the art of modernism, as well as by its explorations of language and its challenges to the classic realist system of representation; on the other hand, postmodern fiction has come to contest the modernist ideology of artistic autonomy, individual expression, and the deliberate separation of art from mass culture of everyday life. (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 14-15)

From a philosophical point of view, postmodern fiction exemplifies that it is impossible to have direct knowledge of the world, that subjects are fragmented networks of desires and there is no promise of a utopian future. Languages, texts, stories told are the way we can know, they provide access to “reality” which is as Rushdie puts it an artifact. In order to explore the boundaries of fact and fiction, writers accordingly enter a process of making reality through metanarratives exploring the real and its complex binaries.

Some critics such as Ziauddin Sardar have contested that “the postmodern genre of magical realism aims at turning history into amnesia by deliberately and systematically blurring the boundaries of fact and fiction to show that reality is often imagined and imagination often becomes real” (8). However fiction is not concerned simply with the distortion of facts but with exploring human nature and the ideas through which human beings interpret their private and public experiences. Perhaps it would be helpful to take into consideration a novel by Gabriel García Márquez, *El otoño del patriarca*, in which the doubleness of the main character, the imaginary space where the novel takes place and its intricate plotline serve as a fitting allegory for the crimes perpetrated by real-life dictators and the final product is a universal story of the disastrous effects produced by the concentration of power on a single man and the construction of an apparatus of terror and political repression. Gabriel García Márquez parodies the practice of giving high military power to autocrats, portraying the corruption and the oppression of one of the most notable dictatorships in Latin America, one which carried out an uncountable number of murders and terror

campaigns. Salman Rushdie uses the same device in his novel *Shame* where two powerful men, based on real political figures, with their totalizing and tyrannical excesses, are implied in the novel's subtext. Following these two examples, it can be argued that instead of masquerading and turning history into amnesia, postmodern fiction subverts historical codes, and by deploying magical realism as a useful device gives new insight into hidden and unuttered historical realities. Within the postcolonial framework writers frequently create a narrative based on traditional storytelling but working through an imaginary/poetic invention which is recombined into new forms, episodes and situations. When referring to Salman Rushdie's novels, John Erickson suggests that

everything becomes a pretext for story-telling. We encounter a dynamic rush of narrative in a process of inventing itself, a grotesque and irreverent manner, a use of parody and travesty as regenerative forces seldom wielded with such power and purpose since Sterne and Diderot. (133)

Thus, resisting forms of culture are created out of this space of hybridity and "in-betweenness" which is the result of pre-texts outlined by storytelling. Said concludes *Culture and Imperialism* by stating that "yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities" (336). In the same vein, it can be argued that by the process of storytelling cultures are (re)constructed and (re)created within a frame that enables us to hear the voices of silence.

It is, therefore, the idea of parody and irony that subverts and undermines the patriarchal universe, leaving space to reconceptualise feminine subjectivities that somehow have always remained peripheral to history. Furthermore, the complex agency of storytelling as a valid framework that constructs social conventions is bound to the concept of postmodernism. Thus, Linda Hutcheon's describes postmodernism as a movement that uses and abuses, constructs and deconstructs, creates and subverts those social conventions. In exploring these bodies of work I want to show that contemporary fiction from a postcolonial world deploys history as a fertile ground to fabricate metaphors due to history's silences and palimpsestic discourses. Andre Brink argues that "if stories are retold and reimagined, the re- is of decisive importance: each new invention happens in the margin of the already-written, or against the background of the already-written" ("Interrogating Silence", 22). For instance, throughout sagas or family narratives, women are given agency and they are seen as speaking subjects, the margin of the already-written by a phallogocentric view is rewritten through the aesthetics of storytelling which becomes a private act of imagination and a public act of history. Since history can be in itself an exclusionary narrative, storytelling may include the cut pieces of hidden agendas, and the resisting and resistant bodies provide a site for an autonomous notion of female subjectivity, sexuality, and corporeality.

In spite of the ambivalent terrain of postmodernism, it clearly opens up space for a knowable "narratable" history which is perhaps a form of intertextuality having a status little different from that of fiction given that history may be analysed as a social and cultural construct. In

Hutcheon's perspective the concept of postmodernism goes in the direction of a consciousness-raising machine, exposing rather than abetting. Hence, the authors selected can be inscribed in this paradigm; the novels chosen deal with a kind of historiographic metafiction that subverts pre-concepts and the West's hegemony as well as problematizing the binary colonizer/colonized. While Linda Hutcheon recognizes the differences between postmodernism and postcolonialism, she also underlines that

the post-colonial has at its disposal various ways of subverting from within the dominant culture—such as irony, allegory, and self-reflexivity—that it shares with the complicitous critique of postmodernism, even if its politics differ in important ways. (“Circling the Downspout of Empire”, 135).

Within this framework postcolonial narratives find their ground to work on in a disseminated and fragmented world, they encapsulate salient aspects of national history, personal moments, and local struggles that have been viewed as peripheral. Beyond this, though, the novels can be read as affirming “alter-native” modes of history-telling. To some extent, the history of the colonized and its stories and myths needed repair after the fall of imperial rules, as Elleke Boehmer mentions: “for a people shipwrecked by history, a story of the past, even if wholly or in part fiction, again offers a kind of restitution” (*Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 189). Therefore, novels give structure to those shipwrecked narratives where a legendary past and shallow present mingle helping to clarify the foundational moments of colonized countries. Myths are one of the bases of these postcolonial narratives which are established as metaphors to rewrite history, to create and frame symbols. Saleem Sinai, the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, comments that “there are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours” (9), so that the main preoccupation is still to explore neglected, forgotten, and peripheral cultural archives. It is this excess that is also privileged when writers deal with history as part of a palimpsest crowded with characters, dreams and memories, resulting in the polyphony and dialogic quality of the novel as Bakhtin defined it.

Texts or narratives are embedded in mythical frameworks or in symbolic traditions, repetitions, contradictions, reality and fantasy, sympathy and satire, all entangled in a marvellous process that sets out as a project of the excavation of a people's history and which constitutes an ongoing dialogue exploring pertinent postcolonial and postmodern themes of migrancy, belonging and identity. To some extent, this process of storytelling with its dialogic characteristics leads to the depiction of an alternative “third space” (Bhabha) of postmodern hybridity in which disparate and dislocated peoples from various cultural, national, historical backgrounds interface, negotiate, transform one another and create meaning. Perhaps like Don Quixote, we may come to understand that life and somehow histories do not need to present an ultimate choice between what is real and the imaginary, but can give us both at the same time and within an identical mental construction.

Clearly, as the world grows even more globalized, and the limits and boundaries of public and individual identities blur, the need for understanding increases as well as the necessity to address and answer crucial questions related to notions of identity and alterity. Henceforth, the marginalized position of women is one of the issues that emerges from this study. Writers such as Brink, however, make female characters central in the role of storytelling and in perpetuating memory. They are given agency by telling a more private and unuttered version of the discourses of nation which involves producing new forms of representational practices outside of phallogocentric structures that used to ensure the impossibility of women's self-representation. Thereby storytelling is particularly pertinent to hybridized cultures because of its flexibility and tendency to cross cultural boundaries. Given that individual stories are obscure and complex because they go hand in hand with history, storytelling resists the assertion of authoritative versions of social and political contexts. It gives room for a closer exploration of women's creativity and sexuality, addressing the bounds between personal stories and public histories, between the domestic space and the nation, as is possible to see, for example, in the novels of Brink and/or Rushdie. Although women's storytelling "is marked by the legacy of the *querelle des femmes* and other misogynist discourses that historically have denigrated women's speech as trifling and vain, linking it both to promiscuity and to infertility" (258) as Emily A. Zinn suggests, it can also be argued that women are empowered throughout the devices of telling their own stories interwoven with national and mythical figures, breaking down the barriers of the obvious in order to reveal new possibilities of acknowledging details of the everyday lives of people. Thus stories dovetail into other stories such as, for instance, that of Ouma Kristina in André Brink's *Imaginations of Sand* who juxtaposes characters from a wide range of sources to frame her storytelling as a legacy from her female ancestors, and her stories are a vivid example of how tales can re-present a way of thinking that is inclusive and inquisitive, not tied up to simplistic binary oppositions. It is a mode of storytelling which constitutes an important gesture of resistance against a phallogocentric and authoritarian culture. In this way story-telling goes beyond the limits of metafictionality, it is a historical and political act; somehow narratives are located within past actions and future developments where multiple histories collide and intersect. Yet it is necessary to note that the construction of identity is based upon the duality of history as a public and communal construct and stories as a private device to overcome the genealogy of power relations. Thus it can be argued that identity is a labour of the imagination, fiction, a certain story that makes sense.

At this point it is relevant to pay some attention to Michel Foucault's work on the discourses of history and subjectivity which acknowledges that human history and the self should not be comprehended as constant or pre-destined. He intends to disclose the hidden or unnoticed

divergences or “accidents” of history that surface and challenge the “suprahistorical” conceptions of origins and the unity of identity:

the reversal of a relationship of forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it, a feeble domination that poisons itself as it grows lax, the entry of a masked ‘other’ (“Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, 88).

Foucault’s perspective on identity can be related with the notion of hybridity and storytelling as devices implicated in the (re)construction of private and public identities. Foucault’s work speaks to the hybrid reality of contemporary time with its discontinuities and fissures embodying the *mélange* and *hotchpotch* that Rushdie mentioned. Narratives are produced in the articulation of cultural differences and as Homi Bhabha noted “hybridity has no such perspective of depth or truth to provide: it is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (*The Location of Culture*, 113). However, the process of hybridization within the “Third Space” is a continuous dialogical negotiation and re-inscription of socio-cultural recognitions and construction of meanings that both develops and obscures the notions of individuality and identity. Moreover, postmodern fiction highlights a multiplicity of divergent perspectives, and novels are one of the most powerful and enduring means of cultural communication opening up new doors in our minds. In an essay about the politics of art “Outside the Whale” echoing George Orwell, Rushdie asserts that “there is a genuine need for political fiction, for books that draw new and better maps of reality and make new languages with which we can understand the world” (100), so that novels have become one of the central site for contestation, allowing for the possibility of social and political change, and also granting value to the margin of the Other. Henceforth, one of the primary issues of this work is to trace the ways in which the selected novels provide a discursive space for the enunciation of subaltern histories which have been silenced within the dominant socio-political discourse, a “heteroglot reality” in which it is necessary to deconstruct “whole territories of historical consciousness silenced by the power establishment and invaded by the dominant discourse in order to make them inaccessible to other voices” (Brink, “Interrogating Silence” 15). All the novels analyzed share this view, providing a social imagery that is rooted in the articulation of moments of history and culture, empowering dissident voices that emerge within the standardized boundaries of social discourse. By doing so, this “heteroglot reality” is central because it also deals with magical realism which is in itself a way of empowering silenced voices, creating a third space of contact, disturbing the concept of time, space and identity by underlining issues of marginality. Thereby “the structure of fantasy narrates the subject of daydream as the articulation of incommensurable temporalities, disavowed wishes, and discontinuous scenarios” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 260), and magical realist narratives attempt to map those “discontinuous scenarios”, so that each attempt blind-mapping of unexplored realities and untold histories sharing the fictional space with history,

yet the sense of an interchange of worlds within these different realities blurs the boundaries between fact and fiction, locating magical realism in the field of postmodernism. Even so, Wendy B. Faris gives a clear explanation of the magical realism narrative that “reorients not only our habits of time and space but our sense of identity as well”, and therefore, “the multivocal nature of the narrative and the cultural hybridity that characterize magical realism extends to its characters, which tend toward a radical multiplicity” (*Ordinary Enchantments*, 25). Moreover, such novels are structured as a double-voiced discourse representing an internalized phallogocentric culture, and also embody the emergence of a polyvocal feminist text, so that while magical realism deconstructs pre-conceived representations and empowers silenced voices, it also signals the possibility that the gap between the colonizer and the colonized is not unbridgeable, demonstrating the ambivalences on both sides.

The colonial encounter involved more than the quarrel between civilizations, for it also abided the transformation of identities through cultural contact, and hence magical realism emerges as a counter-discursive practice constructed around ambivalence and producing an effective mode of excess and parody where marginal elements are liberated, and also disrupting the authority of colonial discourse in order to partly reverse the process of cultural colonization. In Stephen Slemon’s formulation in a postcolonial context:

the magic realist narrative recapitulates a dialectical struggle within language, a dialectic between codes of recognition inherent within the inherited language and those imagined, utopian, local realism, and a set of ‘original relations’ with the world (411).

By placing magical realism within the realm of postcolonialism, Slemon is using the notion of the marginalized or the other that can be found in magical realist narratives, especially those from colonized countries. The near-merging of two realities, two dissimilar worlds, is another aspect of magical realism which is overtly inscribed in some postcolonial narratives, (re)creating a sense of in-betweenness, a space of all possibilities where another world penetrates our world, blurring the distinctions between the marvellous and the ordinary. The fantastic as a frontier between realities or parallel worlds seems to be a commonplace in some contemporary fiction. Doubt is raised as to whether the real is magical or the magical real. The question is exacerbated when combined with postcolonial and postmodern studies. Magical realism also seems to be the site and the trope for contesting and subverting pre-concepts of gender and class, for instance. Female voices break the silence through magic storytelling, embedded in the spell of Sheherezade myth, and those bodies of speech are more than vessels of sexual subservience, they become the locus of discourse. As Wendy B. Faris points out “female discourse is double-voiced because it encodes the ‘dominant’ mode and the ‘muted’ group within it aligns it with a polyvocal nature of magical realism” (*Ordinary Enchantments*, 173). In doing so, the trope of magical realism combined with postcolonial and postmodern theory opens up a dialogue with socio-political issues and historical reality, unsealing



the live absences, and inscribing them in the clashes that history had created. In fact, magical realist narratives serve to create a third space for feminist discourse because, to some extent, this genre “has been concerned with investigating possibilities for transgressing boundaries and limits, including, especially, the opposition between selves and others, and with questioning dualistic modes of thought” (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 170). Whereby the intermingling of ordinary and extraordinary realms or real and magical events is widely used to interrogate colonial subjugation, to parody phallogocentric societies and despotic regimes, so magical realism tends to be overtly politicized in its modes. According to Isabel Allende,

magical realism is a literary device or a way of seeing in which there is a space for the invisible forces that move the world: dreams, legends, myths, emotion, passion, history. All these forces find a place in the absurd, unexplainable aspects of magic realism... It is the capacity to see and to write all the dimensions of reality (54).

Although the formulation seems accurate, it also imbricates controversial aspects, as is the case of an excess of exoticism that may be problematic, seen as a kind of narrative primitivism, glossing Eurocentric perspectives on issues like native myths and the exotic or the fetishised other. In spite of being a contentious genre, what is important to highlight is its ability to combine myriad of points that are common in postcolonial and postmodern studies, such as the fragmentation of identities, history-fiction and the capacity to inscribe the silenced Other in the lack of historical facts, areas that are locked in a continuous dialectic. Hence, magical realist narratives also incorporate stories from the margins, from those who were deliberately dispossessed of their past, engendering “interstitial spaces” which are to some extent hybridized, and sites where identities are performed and contested. Clearly, cultures not only interact on the basis of “the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity. Accordingly, it is the ‘inner’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” as formulated by Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*, 38-39). It is through this process of generating a third-space that magical realist novels uncover binary opposition, or antinomies echoing a postcolonial discourse which also seek to recuperate the silenced other that imperialism pushed to the margins. Magical realism, commonly and geographically inscribed within Latin American fiction, seems to be a possible alternative genre in which postcolonial literatures in general can find a site for the reconstruction of polyphonic and dialogic texts where reality and the magical, two tangible realities, coexist.

Magic realism paradoxically juxtaposes the fantastic and the real. Normal everyday events coexist on the same level as the fantastic whose authenticity is never questioned. It seems to be a significant intercessionary force in postcolonial literature. Therefore, magical realism seems to investigate a multidimensional and multireferential reality and its several and different levels which are controlled by dissimilar types of logic. Contemporary fiction incorporates magic realism for its

subversive possibilities and mysterious perspectives in order to resist a unique reality with a particular set of conventions or laws. In this way it resists totalizing systems, it creates a “dual spatiality” where different realities converge. To some extent, the magical works as a cultural agent, a complex construct through which silenced voices may tell their stories. The authors dealt with apply the juxtaposition of these crucial characteristics to create imaginary spaces that depict the real and also give it a more powerful insight. Thus, to recapitulate it is argued that magical realism is a (p)art of postmodernism and/or postcolonialism. Magical Realism serves authors eager to denounce the level of political and cultural degradation, and it is often used as a construct that parodies a reality in many cases censored, tortured and marked by military dictatorships or colonized societies. Postcolonial writers of Latin American, African, and South Asian contexts who have chosen to write using the fantastic/magic have made a subversive option to depict the world in a deliberately non-Western manner; in effect, they use the fantastic and magical to problematize the notion of a single “real.”

This study of several postcolonial contemporary writers focuses on the manner in which they foreground their political and/or cultural concerns. The analysis includes both formal and thematic elements of the novels, which are closely entangled. A study of the critical interpretations of the fantastic and magic realism determines the theoretical framework for the discussion of imaginary places as well as the use of intertextuality and self-referentiality. Magical realism in its multiple assumptions challenges contemporary culture; it can be argued that is a singular method of interpretation that writes back monolithic and univocal perceptions of the world. It takes into account contemporary literary theory and dialogic readings. Furthermore, those dialogic readings bring the possibility of an encounter between the colonizer Self and the colonized Other as potentially creative speech and a way to (re)create a “third space” where it is possible to inscribe the ambivalence generated by that same encounter. It is also a way to empower female and marginalized voices, giving agency to the silenced and “subaltern other”. The novels’ polivocality may accordingly designate a potential resistance to oppressive conventions settled by a hegemonic and Eurocentric power. In this way, it is important to read the books to be dealt with according to a dialogic perspective, taking into consideration the way different cultures interact and/or process each other.

In sum, some postcolonial literature deal with the cultural identity of the subaltern in colonized societies and also the dilemma of developing a national identity after the colonial endeavour. These struggles of identity, history, and future possibilities are often present in magical realist narratives. Introducing magical characters and events with a narrative voice, the narratives seem to distort the traditional conception of reality according to Westernized assumptions. Moreover, this functions as a strategy of transgression since it allows for the voices of the under- or

un-represented to be inscribed in the gaps of history through the lens of parody and irony. In this way, the narratives dealt with can be understood as “writing back” from the periphery. However, as Boehmer brilliantly mentions that obscurities and silences of the past will always exist no matter how much study is dedicated to expose what is dim, or giving voice to what was silenced. Essentially, the gaps in the past are filled with stories as is possible to understand from the novels, which are not simply interesting stories of women or even the simple dissemination of historical facts; they are mainly extrapolations of culture upon which lies the survival of peoples. It seems clear from the examples of women telling stories that they are the evidence to the variety, detail and complexities of the analysis of history. Whereas the marginalized was often not given a voice or relevance in colonial and westernized literatures, postcolonial literatures refer insistently to and problematize the agenda of the “colonized other” who has been constantly “othered” and exoticized by imperial discourse.



## 1. *André Brink: The Tangible and Fluid Boundary between Reality and Myths*

“Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind’s eyes” –

Homi Bhabha

“... everything is simultaneously actual and illusory.” – Brian Friel

“Cuando la realidad se vuelve irresistible, la ficción es un refugio. Refugio de tristes, nostálgicos y soñadores.” – Mario

Vargas Llosa

André Brink is one of the most acclaimed and dissident voices of South African literature, an author whose writing participates in a development of the liberal tradition and which did much to further the cause of anti-apartheid internationally. Brink’s novels however are often controversial and include creative aspects whether on their thematic and technical narrative forms. His novels can be read as an exploration of the relationships among postcolonial, postmodern, and feminist discourses and they also demonstrate the pitfalls into which the principle of fictional critiques of racial, sexual, and colonial violence are frequently subjected to. Rosemary Jolly refers to Brink’s novels as attempting to “challenge South African political authority and encourage his readers, both in and outside South Africa, to do the same” (17). Indeed, Brink’s fictional and critical work exhibits an “aesthetic of response” against the outrages of a nation; it is a work that can be clearly located within the anti-apartheid field due to its consciously transgressive and resistant characteristics. In perceiving this, André Brink draws his own maps of South Africa, creating imaginary lands that work as metaphors and analogues of his country, once divided by an autocratic system, so that he also graphically portrays different images of South Africa. Brink’s main themes are related to the exploration of the self and the other whose (hi)stories of marginalized voices have been enmeshed in the incongruities of national history. During the state of emergency declared in the 1980s, several forms of civil disobedience took place and were crucial in protesting against both the Nationalist government and the politics of surrogate representation. For instance, some South African novels remain deeply committed to representing of the massive dehumanization and state sponsored violence— physical, mental and systematic— directed at people whose past apparently only provided a history of repression and dispossession on the one hand, and on the other, their perseverance, resilience and struggle for political and socio-psychological freedom. Moreover, it is

this moment of transition from a totalitarian regime to freedom that can be described using Homi Bhabha's formulation as a moment of "cultural uncertainty, and, most crucially, of signifiatory or representational undecidability" (*The Location of Culture*, 35). In doing so, Brink attempts to recreate that cultural uncertainty by deconstructing the past historical background of South Africa, merging dissimilar cultural perspectives, giving agency to subaltern voices. Therefore, he re-imagines and re-invents South Africa through its iconography, its cultural symbols and national fantasies, adapting and manipulating them to his narratives which are somehow trapped in the political and social issues of his country.

Among those acts, protest writers such as Brink were concerned with the politics of representation, dismantling the divisions through words, breaking down taboos and repressions. Writers became dissident voices adapting themselves and their stories to the historical context, including cultural debates over the construction of a space in which new formulations can be included and "can be earned - without imprisonment – by its ethical apprehension of the evils of the constructions of the race to which it, along with black South African subjectivity, has been subject" (Rosemary Jolly, 153). Thus, literature in its multiple genres became a favoured site for contestation; it is a medium in which the debate on the role of history to recreate a cultural identity may be productively sustained. Literature in general is particularly well suited to intertwining with complex social discourses. Martin Trump, in his introduction to *Rendering Things Visible*, notes that "literature works and their study offer particularly complex ways of describing society" due to "the hybrid, polysemic discourse of literature includes and might even be said to enlarge the epistemological realm of other discourses" (X). The heterogeneous characteristics of the novel generate an appropriate site to represent the gaps, silences and displacements experienced in oppressed societies. André Brink's novels accordingly offer an apt paradigm of the way in which socio-political principles are embodied in South African culture, playing a crucial role in the opposition to apartheid as well as in the representation of liminal people, in what Homi Bhabha posits as a "double-inscription as pedagogical objects and performative subjects" (*The Location of Culture*, 217). Among other things the reader is confronted with the significance of an oral historiographic tradition and the erasure of the female voice in history, in Brink's perspective of the culture of the Khoikhoi that has been "othered" and silenced as the "first inhabitants of Southern Africa" in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*.

Seminal aspects of Brink's oeuvre manifested in the novels selected will be interrogated ideologically, particularly storytelling, the position of women in a phallogocentric system, as well as the author's foregrounding of the previously marginalized Khoikhoi's cultural traditions. Brink in his novels suggests a similar emphasis on the importance of storytelling as a powerful device to re-

inscribe marginalized voices in the multiple and polyphonic discourse of the nation. Brink states in *Mapmakers* that our “entire empirical world is ‘storiefied’” (141). Once history can be manipulated and “storiefied” it is also made up of memories, stories, narratives, signs of the selves and others on which identity is constructed. It can therefore be assumed that through this manipulation of history, nation as Brink describes it can be conceived as a cultural artefact constructed by means of the invisible bounds of the imagination and in particular the horror of the stories of apartheid. Brink’s novels thus grapple with the necessity of acknowledging the incompleteness of historical representation, and the “Janus-faced” ambivalence of the discourse of the nation.

Mostly set in modern South Africa, Brink’s work calls up the notion of the collective knowledge articulated within the frameworks of oral traditions and storytelling, and permits the appearance of an alternative and revitalizing history that includes the perspective of the so-called other. André Brink, nevertheless, employs postmodern theory to disclose history as fiction, deconstructing colonial representations and without unmediated access to the truth. He elaborates on this notion in his essay “Reflections on Literature and History” in which he compares history to the childhood game of “broken telephone”:

Is that not the way in which official history, too, comes into being? A chain of voices – resulting in the babble of Babel. And yet if it is repeated often enough, and with enough emphasis, it is accepted as a canon of received wisdom. And whole societies base their way of life on these “messages” transmitted by official history.  
(137)

The postmodern use of parody in the work of Brink turns out to be one of the means by which culture deals either with its social concerns or with its aesthetic needs. Therefore the breakdown of boundaries throughout the playfulness of magic realism and the marvellous gives Brink’s novels a third space of contact where colonized and colonizer meet. Along with the “in-betweenness” generated out of this third space, different perspectives of perceiving the world also emerge with new and hybrid identities that alter the relation between the individual and the social. Frequently, this imaginative (re)making of the nation commences with crucial references to physical geography and with the subtle or overt alteration of symbolic space, its meaning, and the constitution of identities therein. It is in this way that the historical representation, despite being parodic, gets politicized, thus “parody, postmodernism taught, can be historicized as it contextualizes and recontextualizes” as sustained by Linda Hutcheon (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 178). By confronting the process of telling stories it may be possible to read the features that are taken as typical of the postcolonial and postmodern novel, such as their fragmentation and deliberate inaccuracy and contradiction, in terms of a focused repositioning or even reordering of individual and national histories, and consequently the Other as it has been commonly represented is “never outside or beyond us; it emerges forcefully, within cultural discourse when we *think* we speak most intimately

and indigenously ‘between ourselves’” in Bhabha’s formulation. (*Nation and Narration*, 4). There are real tensions arising from the relation between the Self and the Other; however they also foreground a process of negotiation between various competing and compelling identities. Indeed, South Africa’s late coming to democratic statehood is a fertile terrain for the recalling of forgotten, bypassed, and suppressed stories as well as the (re)invention of other stories forming a metanarrative that juxtaposes historical subjects and the myths of origin. By presenting multiple narratives as equally valid, Brink seems to be giving voice to a panoply of conflicting claims, unmasking the silenced other, explicitly women who repeatedly appear as doubly colonized. In so doing his novels as metafiction are intimately related with metahistory, problematizing and producing a series of diverse intersections of history, gender, sexuality, and nation which all participate in the complex politics of representation. Consequently, those narratives are not merely interesting stories or even the simple dissemination of historical facts; they encapsulate the exploration of personal and official histories in which the voice of women is reinscribed and revalidated calling for the excavation of those experiences in South African history. Brinkian fiction interweaves the public and historical material of South Africa into the realms of fiction, and by doing so he blurs the distinctions between them creating a subtext within the main narrative. According to Njabulo Ndebele

writing enables us to crack the surface and break through to the often deliberately hidden essence. What we find may either bring joy or sadness, hope or despair, but almost always yields insight. It is this masking and unmasking that often constitutes the terrain of conflict between the writer and official culture. Writers strive to remove the blanket which officialdom insists on spreading and laying over things (152).

Hence Brink’s narratives deal with the problematic relation between history and the histories of marginality, and they operate by altering or embroidering the facts to present fictions which are turned into discourses of emergent cultural identities. By doing so the peripheral people, in the guise of Brink’s narrators, return to re-write and inscribe their own history in the history of the metropolis which is in itself a process of hybridity that generates other sites of meaning and, in Bhabha’s words, “in the political process, producing unmanned sites of political antagonism and unpredictable forces for political representation” (*Nation and Narration*, 3). Brink clearly demarcates his position as novelist-as-witness because writing “becomes an act of defiance (...). Writing is an affirmation, not only of the individual, but, through him, of the nameless and voiceless multitude who must rely on him to define the validity of their right to be. (...) it goes beyond the surface of appearances and facts” (Brink, *Writing in a Stage of Siege* 206). Inevitably then, his works record narratologically the violence inherent in South African apartheid society, revealing what he named as polyphonic thinking which allows readers to listen to many points of view, and consequently inscribe themselves in the text. By doing so, Brink has developed an “aesthetic of response”, in which the implied reader is encouraged to respond to the outrages of the state. The author “encodes” the novels with

historical and anthropological intertexts, which the reader has to “decode” in order to unlock the novel, thus achieving a finely balanced interaction between fiction and so-called facts. The fiction of André Brink explores the uses of myths and history in order to comment on political practices, and on constructions of South African identity both within and beyond its boundaries. In his books he overtly describes calamities and absurdities perpetrated during the apartheid system with focused accusation.

Therefore, it can be argued that the juxtaposition of personal and unuttered histories told by female voices within the public facts of history reveal the need to look back and incorporate them into officially-sanctioned historical accounts, which is in Brink’s work both a feminist and a postcolonial project. Accordingly, Luc Renders sustains that the novels of André Brink “focus attention on the side of history which has remained hidden for all too long with the aim of setting the record straight” (104). His novels attempt to create heterotopic spaces where the social codes and categories of race and sexuality can be confronted and temporarily surpassed. In this process of (re)creation or (re)construction, these spaces are transformed into utopian enclaves, imaginary spaces, where in Fredric Jameson’s formulation “a space in which new wish images of the social can be elaborated and experimented on” (16). Moreover, in a broad sense South African literature is largely pre-occupied with dissecting the past. Thus far, writing and revisiting South Africa’s history, sometimes in fictional modes, seems to be the most effective way of confronting and coming to terms with centuries of injustice.

Brink states in *Reinventing a Continent*: “the local English tradition is being enriched even further through increasing translation of significant Afrikaans texts” (148). In relation to this study there is a necessity to elaborate on his assertion, as it can be assumed that the addition of as many storytelling traditions as possible further enriches South African literature; hence by recovering ancient myths and interweaving them with a number of contemporary issues, those related with postmodernism, feminism, postcolonialism and magical realism, Brink is given agency to explore untold stories, making them crucial in the acknowledgement of the other side of the history of the colonial encounter. Brink elaborates on this notion:

The fact that both District Six and Sophiatown (here I would venture to include orality and storytelling) enriched an evolving tradition of local English fiction has helped to accelerate the breakdown of colonial tradition which, in so many parts of the world, have been paralysed by the persistence of old distinctions between centre and margin between metropolis and (elsewhere) colony (“Reimagining the Real”, 147).

The type of history that does not permit an alternative to the story of the colonizer deceives a “particular repugnance to conceiving of difference, to describing separation and dispersions, to describing the reassuring form of the identical (...) as if we were afraid to conceive of the other in the time of our own thought” (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 13). Brink challenges this notion



by not being afraid to envisage the other, either the woman as other or the Khoikhoi people. Not only does he address the otherness of women in an androcentric society, he also interrogates the otherness of the Khoikhoi culture within a South African historical context. By implication he also emphasizes the relevance of oral tradition and storytelling as part of the South African cultural inheritance both black and white. Indeed there are “real tensions between history and fiction as they have been institutionalized, probably because, from some perspectives, they are so closely related” (122), as Michael Green explains when referring to the new South Africa as a fertile ground for the reorganization of the past events which become an issue in the politics of the present. However Brink subverts the conventions between history and the historical markers of nationhood, for he also includes other versions, and other stories shaping identities in what Njabulo Ndebele defines as “an additional confirmation of the movement of our society from repression to expression” (20). Consequently, it is important to note that at the same time that historical discursive practices facilitate one mode of conceiving of historical persons and events, it also truncates other forms and modes. In *Reinventing a Continent* Brink cites William Ray, author of *Story and History* on fiction versus social reality, to explain that “fiction suddenly emerges in the critical discourse as the primary vehicle for representing contemporary social reality, and even shaping reality” (140). It is through the cultural process of imagining, (hi)storicizing and remembering that stories are validated, that identities are inscribed upon them. “Imagining the real” is one of the main concerns in Brink’s work, particularly in a repressive society and through representation protests against that same society, so that his work can be commonly described as *littérature engagée* due to its characteristics that partake in what Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin described as “a continuing process of resistance and reconstruction” (2). Furthermore, his preoccupation with the past is not only based on postmodern or Western influences but also tied up with the South African context, given that his narratives are sites of reconstruction or even resistance within an always politicized polity.

Following the view of Linda Hutcheon that there are strong links between postmodernism and postcolonialism, André Brink’s novels also partake in this view in the sense that the two effectively compliment the other, so he inscribes in his narratives the subaltern other by opening theories of discourse to the voices of those constituted as the Other. Nevertheless, the blurring of the boundaries between history and storytelling can be classified as a typical postmodern phenomenon and Brink’s fiction plays with the postmodern truism of reality’s fictitious characters which encode public and private experiences, installing and destabilizing convention in parodic ways, which means that his narratives hint at the possibility of a dialogical bridge between different conceptions of reality. Accordingly, Linda Hutcheon observes that “they are all overtly historical and unavoidably political, precisely because they are formally parodic” (*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 23). It is

precisely this parodic element that is at stake in some of Brink's novels and which to some extent links them to other authors such as Salman Rushdie, Umberto Eco, Mario Vargas Llosa or Gabriel García Márquez. In fact, the dialogue with the past and the social is reinstated through parodic references inscribed into history, and it

offers a new model for mapping the borderland between art and the world, a model that works from a position within both and yet not totally within either, a model that is profoundly implicated in, yet still capable of criticizing, that which seeks to describe (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 23).

In a typical postmodern way, Brinkian narratives disseminate past, present and future which thereby challenge and play with the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction, and they become historically aware, inclusive and hybrid. Even more significantly, the mode of storytelling works to reconstruct fragmented moments of history where "memory plays a central role: both the material and cultural memory of the users of the site and the collective architectural memory of the place" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 31-2). Using Brink's terminology the past referring to apartheid thus no longer needs to be recorded or represented, instead it needs to be "reimagined" or "reinvented", so that the reinvention of the past implies an appropriation of cultural memory. Andreas Huyssen claims that "the past is not simply there in memory, but it must be articulated to become a memory" (3) represented as much as recuperated. Throughout this process of researching readers clearly decode South African history as an inscription of received truths in the landscape of memory, and it is precisely this landscape that Brink develops and explores in his novels. Instead of a simple recuperation of memory and history, *Imaginations of Sand* and *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*, for instance, deal with the re-construction and nurturing of memory. T'Kama and Ouma Kristina, two of the main characters of the novels, reinscribe themselves with their versions of history in the cultural memory of the country, and both novels artfully establish the oral mode in their narratives, while borrowing the techniques of postmodernism. Perhaps these two characters exemplify the unuttered voices which try to talk of the "*différend* on its borders" (Simon During, 128).

Gradually, Brink explores his Afrikaner colonial background as well as his experiences of living abroad. By exploring and questioning, his works dismantle monolithic perceptions, avoiding closure and fixity, a process which involves the ongoing process of re-reading history as a counter-discursive framework with a strong preoccupation with dispossession, silencing, displacement, and marginalization. However, the permanent search for identity is clearly at stake in Brink's novels, almost a cultural schizophrenia based on the strains of two sets of cultures, one referring to the moment before apartheid and the other one after that which can be seen as continuum process of reconciliation. Indeed, the pre-texts and the competing narrative voices so common in Brink's novels aim to draw attention to the political implications of both historical moments of South Africa, and the links between history and fiction whether in the collective history of peoples or in

the private history of individuals. Thus, although each novel takes place in a different context of time and space, they “write in” the silences and omissions left by history and their postmodern figuring of the other. According to Brink there is a need to storify in order to keep the equilibrium and the sanity of communities and his crafted narratives gloss what Michael Vaughan refers to as the fact that “storytelling requires precisely the cultural insight or capacity for imaginative analysis – analysis which engages seriously with the resonances of popular experience – that has been wanting in the literature of African writers” (188), and clearly there is an implicit political agenda in this mode of storytelling. In fact, it is the relationship between fact and fiction that enables the appropriation of the past through an imaginative understanding. Therefore, the construction of hybrid identities is embedded in history and storytelling which cannot be understood as dichotomies but as collaborative elements in that process. The compelling but also confused stories skilfully orchestrated by Ouma Kristina in Brink’s *Imaginations of Sand* represent to some extent the blanks left by history and the need to fill them with different versions of the past in order to prevent marginalized voices from collective forgetting, and that reconstruction of history is not a mere repetition of the past but an opened door to the present. In this way, the sense of displacement felt by some characters in Brink’s narratives is counteracted, or perhaps resolved, by storifying the past whether it is individual or collective, so that it becomes a fabric woven of self-reinforced illusions. Brink juxtaposes the national history of South Africa and the fabrication of myths about the intervention of supernatural gods based on oral tradition in order to problematize the inner life of his characters and their relationship with the world around them, exemplifying certain ambiguities and silences whose cultural resonance is vividly dramatized in the stories. Furthermore, the process of storytelling is in Brink’s work as well as in that of Salman Rushdie or Kiana Davenport a mode to establish the conceptualization of history and also a means to problematize political thoughts. It can be argued that (hi)stories place the dimension of culture on the political agenda by challenging and subverting predominant ideals, as well as engaging in a process of literary decolonization which involves dismantling Eurocentric codes. Based on the binary conceptualization of colonized/colonizer, Brink’s work portrays the brutalities and the cultural denigration that affect(ed) South Africa. Moreover, he also explores the racialized interferences and the assumptions implicit in the representation of the female body as a site of cultural identity which has become the common trope of the feminizing of the colonized territory. It also became an unstable arena of scrutiny and meaning, as Kadiatu Kannesh brilliantly explains: “female identities are not simply figurative or superficial sites of play and metaphor, but occupy very real political spaces of diaspora, dispossession and resistance” (348). This is precisely what is at stake in Brink’s novels where his female characters represent a complex site of endless analysis based on the consequences of cultural

intervention into the constitution of the values attributed to the female body, the fetishism and the exotic embodied in controversial issues of master/mistress – slave relationships and the theme of betrayal of the colonized by the colonizer. In particular, and also establishing a dialogical bridge between Brink's work and that of Rushdie, Divakaruni, Davenport or Dhanvant Shanghvi, the gendered female body has regularly been the site for contestation, the metaphor of dislocation and possession. The body is perceived as home, as house, and as prison, but at the same time, denying access to the world, it is portrayed in a variable relationship of hermeneutic objectification. At some critical point, Brink's oeuvre comprises a chain of postcolonial African voices who write back to the monolithic views of imperialism; his female characters are inscribed in history through storytelling and magical realism, claiming their place within the nation's official history in a process of intercultural hybridity.

When referring to the notion of postcoloniality, Elleke Boehmer asserts that:

Rather than simply being the writing which "came after" the empire, postcolonial literature is that which critically scrutinizes the colonial relationship. It is writing that sets out in one way or another to resist colonial perspectives. As well as change in power, decolonization demanded symbolic overhaul, a reshaping of dominant meanings. Postcolonial literature formed part of that overhaul. To give expression to colonized experience, postcolonial writers sought to undercut thematically and formally discourses which supported colonization – the myths of power, the race classifications, the imagery of subordination. (*Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 3)

This is exactly the basis of Brink's oeuvre that has become part of a postcolonial discourse through his politically engaged texts that undermine and deconstruct the colonial discourse, a polyphonic commentary on a colonial society. However, these aspects also serve to outline narratologically the violence in the South African neocolonial apartheid system along with a wide mixture of cultural influences. Skilfully, Brink manipulates history, excavating the inner landscape of individual stories, blending it with public facts. In so doing, female characters are assigned to take control of their part of history; they reject the limitations of conventional and pre-established behaviour and take control of their own lives and their own bodies. By crossing the boundaries of their sexual identities, those female characters speak out in resistance against phallogocentric societies. Although they seem to fight back against this monolithic view their gendered bodies may continue to be the marginal spaces that they occupy, and Brink's novels are precisely about these "ex-centric" elements of society, often excluded from history.

Brink's narratives seem to be tied up with a set of social and cultural assumptions, beliefs in origins and ends, representation and truth which challenge history to make sense of the past, because history and fiction are discourses, and both are systems of signification tinted with irony and parody which open up new magical or mythical perspectives on reality. Yet, he problematizes the notion of historical knowledge, probing that there is not such a concept of "genuine historicity". In

fact, by manipulating and storifying reality through parody, Brink's oeuvre encompasses the trope of magical realism in its several and complex assumptions and the definition given by Maggie Ann Bowers that "magical realism relies upon the presentation of real, imagined or magical elements as if they were real" (22) can also be largely applied to André Brink's narratives. Thus partly magical realist postcolonial novels such as *Imaginations of Sand* for instance, brings forth unuttered voices in order to be recuperated, relating individual identities with the surrounding world, the perception of the self and the other and how these two elements interact creating a third space of contact. Similarly, *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* touches issues of identity and alterity, the self perceiving the other, the assimilation of their differences deconstructing the colonial discourse, albeit in a very different historical context. By doing so, they put the past into perspective with its multiple viewpoints, and somehow in distorted chronology Brink's narratives envisage the future with a great diversity of approaches. Moreover, it can be argued that the use of the magical realism and ambivalence are major discourses to outline the complexities and uncertainties that were features of the apartheid period, thus the novels as a space of indeterminacy pre-empt the reconstruction of history as a non-contradictory one. Richard Samin asserts that

The paradox of today's fiction lies in the fact that its predominantly dialogical mode questions the fallacy of a direct, univocal access to truth precisely at a time when the construction of the truth is the order of the day. (...) It simply means that in coming to grips with the ambivalence and complexity of today's changing reality, contemporary fiction is trying to create new modes of representation which provide discursive room for contradictory voices to exist. (88)

This perspective glosses the concepts of postmodern theory, and magical realism has begun to inform certain narratives with its ability to find room for new perspectives or contradictory voices. Even so, the sense of interchange of worlds and realities that pervades some of Brink's novels encapsulates the vitality of magical realism as a decolonized mode which dismantles simplistic dichotomies of Eurocentric stereotypes and particularly socio-political obsessions because "the magic frees the discourse, the history grounds the story, and the vitality of the text depends on keeping the lines open between them" (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 165). In fact, Brink's discourse in his novels is vested in mythology and historiography, and the combinations of both lead to the examination of the past, the shifting boundary between what has been said and what has been omitted from history, and they are the vehicle for the strengthening of those silences as well as criticizing a repressive political system. Magical Realism thus disturbs what has been taken to be real, challenging major political issues and representing the cultural metaphor of marginality of decolonized fiction. According to Elleke Boehmer in *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, she notes that magical realism

represents the take-over of a colonial style. By mingling the bizarre and the plausible so that they become indistinguishable, postcolonial writers mimic the colonial explorer's reliance on fantasy and exaggeration to describe new worlds. They now demand the prerogative of 'redreaming' their own lands (236).

Therefore, Brink's narratives take part in this perspective of the multivoiced migrant novel with a special focus on the constructed nature of identity by redreaming reality and history. However this process embodies the juxtaposing of apparently reliable, realistic elements and excessive fantasy, presenting two distinct views of the world, one rational and discursive, the other magical and instinctive, as if they were not contradictory. Graham Pechey suggests that "it is at the heart of the ordinary that the extraordinary is to be found". He observes further:

Post-apartheid writing turns from the fight against apartheid, with its fixation upon suffering and the seizure of power, into just such stories as these: stories which then open out to transform the victory over apartheid into a gain for postmodern knowledge, a new symbiosis of the sacred and the profane, the quotidian and the numinous. (58)

Thus, the juxtaposition of realities and spaces foregrounds a rich mosaic of individual heritages which is at stake in multicultural societies such as those portrayed in Brink's novels, and the mode of storytelling allows them to participate in a sort of submerged territory of imagination where reality and the marvellous seem to coexist. When referring to the work of Ivan Vladislavic, also South African, Valeria Guidotti states that

Following the South American tradition of magical realism, Vladislavic's fiction not only makes its ethical position with regard to political and social liberation clear, it also chooses as its priority the freeing of the stunted, oppressed imagination. Thus, while the South African urban context, with its suffering and unease, provides the internal link in the stories and allows for some convincing realistic effects, the ironic lightness of his fantastic and magical touches takes the unsuspecting reader into a world where extraordinary people and events appear normal, where everyday norms of behaviour may be transgressed. (239)

In the same context, Brink takes part in this perspective because his narratives through storytelling and hints of sublime magical realism with a Bakhtinian carnivalesque twist explore the peripheral and marginal voices and bodies in order to understand the deeper nuances and painful undercurrents in South Africa during the late apartheid and transitional years. His narratives also participate in García Márquez's strategy of creating imaginary places where stories are inscribed and validated. In those imaginary spaces, female voices are nonetheless connected to historical facts, where the preponderance of the heretofore hidden and silenced other offers a palimpsest of competing pasts. Perhaps, Brink's narratives by exploring the paradoxical concepts of magical realism and adapting them to a South African context, are also celebrating the proliferation of cultural hybridities and the fracturing of cultural boundaries which are an increasingly global intricate social fabric.

The following chapters will focus on the analysis of two novels in which Brink adopted postmodernism writing strategies, played with magical realism, as is possible to see by the interwoven, interdependent presence of the real and the marvellous in the narratives. Both novels show a sort of interrelation between the ordinary reality and the mythical-magical features inscribed in South African cultural traditions. In the words of Valeria Guidotti, “magical realism, in a context as multicultural and multifarious as is South Africa, seems a mode suited to creating spaces for the interaction of ‘difference’, for dialogue in a world of strangers” (230). Thus, these narratives make use of magical realism through storytelling; stories that demystify the myth of apartheid as a master narrative, embedded in the possibility of presenting and representing South African reality within a new aesthetic discourse. In a century marked by political instability and profound socio-political changes, this transition portrays a process of metamorphosis, not only political or existential, but also creative.



## 1.1 – *Paradoxes of the Self and the Other: Challenging Otherness in Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*

“Eu sou aquele oculto e grande Cabo  
A quem chamais vós outros Tormentório,  
Que nunca a Ptolomeu, Pompónio, Estrabo,  
Plínio, e quantos passaram fui notório.” – Luís de Camões, *Os Lusíadas*

“But we know that for every person there is a wind which has been made just for that man and woman. This wind follows you like a shadow. And when you die one day, your wind comes softly to blow across your tracks and cover them with sand. Afterwards it goes on blowing your story through the world to make sure that distant people will pick it up.” – André Brink, *Praying Mantis*

“From a certain point of view the universe seems to be composed of paradoxes. But everything resolves. That is the function of contradiction.” – Ben Okri, *The Famished Road*

*Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*, written by André Brink in 1993 is a playful and postmodern novella that “writes back” to Camões, in a form of a hybrid short-narrative that deals not only with the cantos composed by the first Western poet who crossed the equator, but skilfully uses a magical realism topos to re-imagine and reinvent the past. Thus, in its textual strategies, the novella is postmodern while in its context it is overtly postcolonial. He clearly novelizes the beginnings of colonial history, debating national allegories in a lingering exoticism which has also served the work of Salman Rushdie or Gabriel García Márquez, for example. Paradoxically enough Brink employs postmodern theory in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* to reveal history as fiction. Postmodern literature can be seen as an attempt to destabilize the foundations of conventional means of thought and experience as well as to expose the “meaninglessness” of



existence and the essential “abyss”, or “void”, or “nothingness” on which any supposed safety is generated to be precariously suspended. Brink’s fable of T’kama – Adamastor illustrates how postmodernism renders our frames of reference and sense of security meaningless and, at times, even useless, through the subjectivity associated with history, and as Brink also asserts that in recent years “postmodernism has opened our eyes to the way in which our entire world is ‘storified’” (*Reinventing a Continent*, 142), which is precisely the mode of “storifying” the world that is at stake in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*. Through both parody and allegory, the narrative of T’Kama-Adamastor also deals with the atrocities of apartheid, and Brink explains that he took two Eurocentric myths and tried to re-tell them from the colonized point of view. In this novella, he is mainly preoccupied with the dialogue between European ideas and South African identities creating a counter-narrative where alter/native views can be represented. On the one hand, Brink revisited the myth of Africa as the “heart of darkness”, mysterious but at the same time threatening. On the other hand, the idea of the black male’s sexual aptitude that is portrayed by the enlarged penis of T’Kama also embodies a threat to the white and civilized European man, and the role that sexuality plays in the construction of the history between white and black males and the tension of meaning generated out the encounter between black bodies and white bodies that exacerbates “not Self and Other but the otherness of the self inscribed in the perverse palimpsest of colonial identity” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 63). An analysis can also be established with some of Freud’s theory concerning the girl who realizes her difference of not having a penis as a lack. To some extent this can also be applied to the colonizer who perceives the prowess of black males as superior to theirs. In fact, other parallels can be drawn with, for instance, the narrator in *Midnight Children* who believes his private history is intrinsically intertwined with the emergence of modern India; in his own words he is “handcuffed to history”, so Brink’s protagonist is also “handcuffed” to the history of South Africa to the extent that he encapsulates the myth of origin that is at the basis of the T’kama-Adamastor figure. He is also “handcuffed to history” because presumably he will live many other lives, and metaphorically speaking his own story of violence will resonate through the coming centuries. Whereby his actions back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century may have influence in the future of the history of South Africa, though the child that represents the “coloured” people is also a way to handcuff him to history. Consequently, he was also handicapped by the obsession that Europeans show towards African sexual prowess that he embodies when the Portuguese sailors tied him and left him on the shores of the Cape to be devoured by vultures, hence that last image of his body is used at the tragic end of the tale to justify the sort of colonial violence perpetrated against T’kama. The novel also deals with issues of miscegenation and the fear of contact, and the difference in the fantasies of sexual communication with the other. Given that most of Brink’s novels problematize

and portray the sexual encounter between black and white figures, it is important to note that during apartheid sexual intercourse between members of groups classified as distinct was forbidden. The “Immorality Act” branded interracial sex as miscegenation and an act of betrayal, so writing about such relationships was a way to subvert the law, and it is a very common trope in Brink’s narratives. For instance his novel *An Instant in the Wind* (1976) refers to the doomed involvement between a higher-class white female, Elizabeth, and a slave, Adam. In fact, placing T’Kama “which means big bird” as a central hero as well as black male in love with a white female is ambiguous in the sense that the protagonist’s hyper-eroticized body and threatening behaviour towards the white woman is depicted, but also the racial stereotyping in which the black is over sexualized in a way that the white is not, also reverting to an excess of exoticism. However, the myth of the giant penis is also parodied in the Rabelaisian excess of the novella, while the multiracial relation between T’kama and Khois does not subsist because of cultural misunderstanding or the navigators’ greed, and she deliberately returns to her people. Nonetheless, while Brink leaves the trace of the absolute failure of the Portuguese to impose their principles on Khoikhoi culture, both parts seem to misinterpret the nature of transition in relation to the female body because T’kama somehow also failed his relationship with the white woman.

Brink’s novella attempts to (re)constitute the historical vertigo that results when the native people have seen the caravels, the wagons, and the men in broad-brimmed hats who speak a sort of bird language intruding on the land of the Cape, evoking a sense of utter newness in the encounter. Moreover, there is an attempt to reinscribe the moment of the colonial encounter and the invasion by re-telling it through a different perspective and discourse. However, when telling the reader that “I cannot say for sure today that they were Vasco da Gama and his men on their way to or from the East” (*Cape of Storms*, 13), this is a double-edged sword in T’Kama-Adamastor’s speech, both revealing and hiding as history itself does. Although the narrator cannot be sure if the navigator is either Bartolomeu Dias or Vasco da Gama, though he had seen paintings representing the two Portuguese navigators but one cannot trust a painting made so long “after the event” (*Cape of Storms* 12-13). In fact, the narrator leaves this sense of mysterious uncertainty throughout his narration. He is not sure about the navigators’ identity or he does not really find it interesting enough to be ascertained since his own identity is not a European concern either. By not telling for sure who they are, T’Kama is erasing them from his own history, putting not only emphasis on the woman he loves, but also on his pre-colonial culture, showing the displacement of his people, the assimilation which is the basis of the colonial encounter as well as problematizing the notion of “first contact” as encountered in European historiographical narratives which describe voyages of discovery, instantly conjuring up an unequal relationship between “discoverer” and “discovered”. In contrast, Brink’s

fable parodies the encounter, reversing the moment which is initially friendly but later on develops into a battle as the navigators try to subjugate the Khoikhoi people by means of Christianization, imposing religion at the same time as introducing weapons and alcohol to corrupt the native people, while raping the women. The moment the navigators interact with T'kama's people generates a tragic-comic scene, and as soon as T'kama realizes that the men are interested in the Khoikhoi women he starts to negotiate the bride price for each but he becomes bemused when watching the odd ritual: "a few drops spattered on their faces while the men mumble something and touched their own foreheads and chests and shoulders... naming them Maria this, Maria that... each time they took a woman to the bushes they paid the price anew. A man could get rich like that" (*Cape of Storms*, 10). In a midst of surprise, ingenuity and irony, the Eurocentric and phallogocentric supremacy is criticized in a matter-of-fact way that uncovers the hypocrisy that was beyond the colonial endeavour.

When referring to the Aboriginal peoples in Australia, Gareth Griffiths points out that "it is therefore a powerful need of such peoples to re-assert their pre-colonised cultures and struggle for the recuperation of their cultural difference and its resilience in and through the local and the specific" (241). This formulation can be extended to Brink's fable in a way that his narrative is framed within the challenge of imagining the country's pre-colonial past without erasing the past and its assumptions, for perhaps such reimagining encapsulates the variety and disarray of South African identity and memory. By doing so in a parodic way, Brink criticizes the Eurocentric disdain with which the black "other" is treated and described, and that description, as well as re-imagining history, proves to be effective to the extent that it allows conflicting versions of history to co-exist within the same realm, and ensures that the crumbling of boundaries between the self and the other is no longer a threat. It is also important to note that through parody and satire Brink inverts the image of white people entering "mother Africa". T'Kama's description of the navigators is ironic and resembles the way Europeans used to describe indigenous peoples. Kate Darian-Smith et al when referring to the entrance into the southern hemisphere by Europeans point out that the colonial encounter "was observed in ritualized, carnivalesque forms by sailors and passengers alike" (5), and paradoxically this is the way used by T'Kama to describe the navigators. By doing so, Brink is reversing the paradigm and the exoticism embodied in the colonized becomes a feature of the colonizer.

In the autobiographical tale of the protagonist, T'Kama portrays the story of Adamastor, the Titan who fell in love with a sea nymph Thetis and who was condemned by Zeus because of that love and was sent to the seas of the Cape metamorphosed into an immense stone-creature to haunt the navigators. It is interesting to note that Brink reinscribes Adamastor as one of many Adams in

his oeuvre that to some extent alludes to the biblical figure. In this particular case, the fable is told by a reincarnation of Adamastor in one of his many lives. As the narrator explains in the beginning of the tale, T'kama is the re-creation of the “untamed” and “savage” giant alluded to by Rabelais in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532) and also developed by the Portuguese poet Camões in *Os Lusíadas* (1572). Brink employs the mythical figure that Camões had used to hunt the navigators, as well as the seafaring identity of the Portuguese explorations, and it is interesting to note that at the end, when T'kama and Khoi finally manage their sexual encounter and when Khoi, deliberately or not, as the explanation for her departure is too ambiguous to be taken for certain, leaves him and returns to her people, the lament of T'kama echoes through the Cape. Blackmore brilliantly posits that it resonates like an old “cantiga de amigo”, the medieval songs or poems in the voice of women who refer to abandoned lovers which were written by troubadours. The introduction and the footnotes, that are *per se* another sub-text, clarify his intention to give another perspective of the myth based on another view but they also demonstrate that he is using the Portuguese poem, and some of the European mythopoeia, to give his own version of the events.

In this novella, the story of T'Kama resembles the ancient Greek myth, for the leader of Khoikhoi people also falls in love with the woman brought by the navigators to the Cape, and gets duly punished. Brink developed and manipulated the two figures of the European Renaissance, creating his own version of the Titan and re-creating his own version of the colonial encounter in order to map out new imaginary terrains, and also in order to inscribe in a particular moment of history how the silenced stories of the Khoikhoi people, myths and storytelling described the landscape before the colonial encounter. There is, for instance, the reinterpretation of ancient myths within a magical realistic envelope which plays an emblematic if somewhat enigmatic role in the novella. It is also a way to deconstruct the colonial encounter as well as a metaphor of apartheid and the recovery of memory. The novel, as with most fiction, permits a certain inventive expression and it is clearly engaged with the edification of memory as well as the re-construction of history, inscribing on its lacks unuttered voices, the marginalized other. The concept of memory needs, as André Brink has clarified, to be reconstructed and completed in the imaginings of narratives. Brink notes that fiction “reaches well beyond facts: in as much as it is concerned with the real (whatever may be ‘real’ in any given context) it presumes a process through which the real is not merely represented but imagined and reconstructed. What is aimed at is not reproduction but an imagination.” (“Stories of History”, 30). T'Kama-Adamastor does not clearly reproduce the moment the presumably Portuguese navigators reached the shores of his land, for naturally he focuses on his own history and the memory of his people that was altered the moment they had contact with the colonizer. The novella confronts the customary rejection of the complexity of the country's history

and its former circumventing a multiplicity of voices. As, Brink implies, any storyteller or historiographer makes a selection out of reality when narrating, so T’Kama-Adamastor as the narrator of the fable makes his own selection from a reality that is endowed with exceptionality from his specific point of view. By doing so he is reconstructing a suppressed identity, and rehearsing the trauma of first contact. It follows that identity is established, not only by telling personal stories, but also by interacting with the narratives of the other; to some extent, an ongoing process between identity and alterity. A process that is in permanent construction rather than being static, this negotiation between self and other is always in the making, and it is also a dialectic between the subject and discourse which contributes to reconfiguring the past and the present by an incessant restructuring of (hi)stories intertwined with myths. To some extent, “there is a need in societies of sharp inequalities for a humanism of reconstruction, in which damaged identities are reassembled, silenced voices given speech, and causes rooted close to home in the priorities of the local scene examining itself as its relations to any international counterpart” (Michael Chapman, 93). However, more than a “humanism of reconstruction”, what is at stake in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* is the postmodern view of history as a metanarrative of turbulence and fragmentation where silenced voices may be inscribed, proving that history is multifaceted rather than monolithic, so that there is a preoccupation with those silences as well as the need to fill out the picture of what comprises South African identities. In a sort of “hermeneutic of suspicion” (Ricoeur), Brink thereby redefines a particular moment in history etching in the blank spaces the untold stories, creating a dialogue with the past which creates a bridge between the self and the other, and this hybrid and polysemic discourse works better to generate the complexities of national identities. In *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* and in a more recent novel *Praying Mantis* (2005), Brink, in the context of contemporary South Africa more than ten years after the decline of apartheid, problematizes the question of identity framed by social and political unresolved inequalities, and the “narrativization of the self” that has its focus on identity constructions framed by the incompleteness of historical representation. Both protagonists T’kama and Cupido Cockroach, a somewhat schizophrenic character, belong to the Khoikhoi people and they are depicted as confident in their local identity which appears to safeguard them, given that instead of undermining their political effectiveness, these constructions are located in a space for subversion or transformation within the symbolic and the imaginary alike. Therefore, in both of these novels and in other works as well, it is clear that the question of origin and primacy is not the only one implicated but the relation between South African authority (whether colonial or apartheid) and the South African individual, in order to disenfranchise unconventional voices within a multivoiced narrative. These two stories reveal identity as permanently re-constructed and re-invented, framed

within the realm of magical realism and storytelling that crystallizes local myths in the light of the dynamics of the hierarchical opposition between African mythology and a Western rationality relying on the encroachment of what is held to be the unreal on the real.

“Once upon a time there was and there wasn’t” (*Cape of Storms*, v), a postmodern metaconstruction which is the ambiguous first line in the (hi)story of T’kama, the leader of Khoikhoi people. The ambiguity lies in the fact that storymaking re-creates events in the narrative, and several “truths” may be operating simultaneously, discourses that are possibly equally legitimate, or equally illegitimate, because in this text “everything is possible because everything exists for the sake of my story” (*Cape of Storms*, 29). Yet, it offers a palimpsest of competing pasts, and Brink’s narrative also explores the subjectivities of those like T’kama-Adamastor and Khoi, the woman, who were the very embodiment of otherness, depending on the perspective. In fact, “reconfiguring historical subjectivities has sometimes entailed a reading of epic events and relations” (Jean Comaroff, 139), as a reading that is the basis of *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*, in which colonial history has been rewritten in a parodic way incorporating stories from the margins in a field of interrelated narratives. Hence, Homi Bhabha has formulated that cultures interact not on the basis of “the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s hybridity” (*Location of Culture*, 38), concluding that “it is the ‘inter’ – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (39). Thus, fictional characters become hybridized, and their interstitial identities are located on the thresholds which are the sites where those cultural identities are performed and contested, as well as celebrating the increase of cultural hybridities and the rupture of cultural boundaries. Although the narrative of T’kama-Adamastor can be seen as a reconstruction of the past, it also offers a new metaphor which may contribute to a wider understanding of history, without completely deconstructing old myths; instead the narrator presents counter-myths, and the need to storify the past might be an urge toward the entertaining of several realities. Nonetheless, the fable of the mythical creature, T’kama-Adamastor, indicates the need for old myths to be re-examined through a different lens in order to facilitate new postcolonial beginnings.

*Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* encapsulates Eurocentric myths of origins that are Africanized by suggesting that Adamastor’s first life was that of T’kama, and it also shares cross cultural links with South American literature in its use of magic and the mythical to explain events in the daily life of its characters. Profoundly postmodern in its textual strategies, the fable challenges realism by parodying history through magical realism, and generates a fascinating story that at times glosses the carnivalesque and the bizarre embedded in the relationship between T’kama and Khois. Their story is somehow peripheral, and becomes an allegoric record of a traumatic quest of love or

as Mario Vargas Llosa has pointed out, an “allegory of the relationship between dissimilar races and cultures” (25) which is also common in other Brink’s narratives, as is the case of *An Instant in the Wind*, and it generates a complex transtextual interaction between narratives. Vargas Llosa also refers to the symbolism of this encounter as the “rapprochement between human beings of different skins, languages and customs is impossible, for even with the best will on both sides it will inevitably be frustrated by cultural conditioning” (25). However, this formulation is highly questionable in several aspects not only because it is overtly essentialist, but also because one of the characters in the fable explains that “she did not go willingly, T’kama” (*Cape of Storms*, 121), after learning how to deal with him and their incompatibility, and later on T’kama sets his hopes on the child born out of their relationship who embodies a cultural fusion based on Bhabha’s theorization of hybridity. The narrator asserts that “all I ever had ran from my empty hands. All of it. Except this: somewhere, in the land, I knew, somewhere, behind the thickets of euphorbia and burning aloes and undergrowth, was the child. He would live on. They could not kill me” (*Cape of Storms*, 128). For that matter, the child represents hope in the future, that he might transcend the colonial power and its racial restrictions. This notion of transcending and subverting the pre-established rules is always a current theme in Brink’s books. The forbidden love affairs between white and black people might be acknowledged as his affirmation against apartheid laws, uncovering their inadequacies when referring to people’s choices in terms of sexuality. Though he clearly points out when referring to the love and relationships in his books that they are “a point of departure only, from which to explore a condition that transcends the *faits divers* of sociopolitics. Human solitude, and the urge to reach out and touch the Other, will remain long after its political metaphor, apartheid, has disappeared” (*Reinventing a Continent*, 15). Nonetheless, the text as polyphonic construction is the “discursive site” where a diversity of multiple postcolonial meanings is generated, and the sexual relationship between characters also assumes specifically postcolonial dimensions as well as sociopolitical ones that cannot be simply excluded. Henceforth, from the colonizer’s perspective, land and women are mutually reinforcing possessions; consequently the land is reshaped and possessed according to their own desires and fantasies partly based on the exoticism embodied in the colonized other, in which they appropriate and operate upon the women’s body also in order to colonize and repress it. The involvement between T’kama and Khoi is predominantly based on sexual interaction, and that physicality incorporates and deals with the acceptance of each other’s differences, hence they acknowledge the others dissimilarities throughout corporeality rather than psychological insights.

In the Portuguese version of the myth, Adamastor is referred to as a gigantic creature imprisoned on the shores of the Cape who continues to be tantalized by the nymph Thetis who

keeps appearing in the weaves. However, in Brink's appropriation of the mythical figure, his T'kama-Adamastor is somehow demythologized by means of parody to the point that only a single part of his anatomy assumes legendary proportions causing him great difficulties every time he tries to consummate the relationship with the white woman, and once again the magical events highlight the extraordinary nature of reality. Whilst "magical images and events, glowing alluringly from within the realistic matrix, often highlight central issues in a text" (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 9) thereby suggesting that they facilitate strategies for diverse postcolonial traditions, dealing with a "world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural displacement" (Bohmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* 4). Crowded by disembodied figures of colonial history with its persistent myths, and also portraying pre-colonial Khoikhoi mythology, Brink's novella seems to claim the right to use the marvellous even as it also frames the fable within postmodern "world literature". Even as Brink taps several reservoirs of pre-colonial South African mythology, this novella tackles the original melodrama of Camões and his version of Adamastor; to some extent the excess of T'kama – Adamastor's anatomy and the grandiosity of the Cape as a mythical place also find a physical analogue in the Portuguese architecture of the time, the excessive and imbricated Manueline and Baroque style where "something of the original melodramas shines through it, as baroque and exaggerated as the arches and architraves, the sheer excess, the inspired bad taste of the Manueline churches and cloisters in Lisbon or Oporto" (*Cape of Storms*, xi), the fantasies of the empire expressed through magnificent monuments. However, this mythical figure and his fantastic body is also a metaphor of Africa, a grotesque dramatization of the continent that Brink explores and seeks to dismantle through the playfulness of magical realism.

While Camões's Adamastor remains captive in the Cape, T'kama explores the landscape, and combines dissimilar historical moments and encounters, a sort of terrestrial odyssey that leads his people into the wild interior of the Cape. All the boundaries that they cross, real or imaginary, are also crossed by evoking oral narratives as a dialogue between ancient and modern. Given that, it is crucial to mention that the stories and the histories told either by T'kama or the wise man of his people establish an alter-native mean of conceptualization of culture, placing it on the political agenda, and in Michael Vaughn's formulation "oral storytelling tradition give expression to ways in which societies with a predominantly oral culture understand this question of the human subject" (202). It serves the purpose of inscribing other cultures within the mainstream, informs the silenced voices that were left on the margins. Even if T'kama's story is mainly the story of a failed love between a white woman and a black man, in its subtext it is a metaphor of the decay of totalitarian regimes and the colonial encounter, as well as a kind of counter-history to imperial expansion.



Ironically, Brink goes further by questioning the Portuguese text and its origins, maybe indicating that the material appropriated by Camões in his text is just fictional and not a historiographic text:

bearing all this in mind – and reacting to suggestion of Eurocentric revulsion implicit in that image of the cape, occult and grand, with its deformed stature, frowning visage, squalid bear, black mouth and yellow teeth – I have nagged for a long time now by a particular question: from what “raw material” could Camões have fashioned his typically sixteenth-century version of the story? Is it possible that behind it looms an original, an unwritten Urtext? (*Cape of Storms*, xi)

Though the point here is not the answer but what he explains next that maybe this myth has survived through the ages and maybe there is another version of it as valid as the one described in Camões. It is important to note that *Os Lusíadas*, also used by Brink as a palimpsest, can be read as an allegory of European expansion and the fantasies of empire. By doing so, Brink is overtly locating his tale within the history of European expansionism, giving his male character a prominent status in order to tell another version or another life of the mythical figure, also enabling awareness about what writing history entails, an excavation of the other, neglecting other versions of the colonial arrival. Ironically, the process of telling a story is done through the framework of magical realism and parody just as Gabriel García Márquez did in *Cien años de soledad* or *El otoño del patriarca* where implausible situations happen on a day-to-day basis and are accepted as ordinary facts, while history is revealed throughout the lens of parody and carnivalesque situations.

It is a quintessential magical realist moment that after T’kama being bitten by a crocodile causing him the loss of his penis, the wise man through enchanting tales and a prosthesis made of clay restores the lost member, giving him back his virility. However, the process is only completed after Khoi accepts T’kama as her man, the sexual encounter between them closes the circle of enchanted powers, and it is clear when the woman states that “There’s only the two of us, T’kama. It’s up to us.” (*Cape of Storms*, 109). Indeed to prosper and to lead his people into another journey, T’kama needs Khoi, and that will be the only moment when the female character is relevant. In fact, and contrary to other Brink novels, this short fable does not give much agency to any of its female characters. Moreover, Khoi is only visible when attached to the man who abducted her; she is also powerless with only two exceptions in the fable which are when T’kama needs her to have his masculinity restored and when she leaves him by her own choice. Otherwise she is peripheral and powerless, acknowledged as a victim. In other words, she is not given much relevance as a subject. However when Khoi addresses T’kama her words raise controversial issues of displacement and dislocation

My God,” she said softly. “Don’t you understand? I couldn’t bear it any longer. I can’t do anything right. I understand nothing about you and your people or this god-damned country. There’s nowhere I can go to. My own people abandoned long ago. Everything is impossible. I have nothing left, no possessions, no future, no hope, no faith, not even clothes. What am I doing here? (*Cape of Storms*, 93)

Rather than being acknowledged just as a victim of the colonial endeavour, she is locating herself on the threshold of the process, clearly stating that she belongs neither to her people that abandoned her, nor to Tʼkama’s people. Although the relationship between Tʼkama and Khoi appears to be a source of cultural problems, it can also be read metaphorically as they are connected because the imaginary frontiers that History had enshrined and deemed uncrossable had finally been infringed.

In 2002 Cyril Coetzee, a South African painter, influenced by the novella written by André Brink, painted what can be designated as an appropriate ekphrastic understanding of the literary, and Tʼkama who argues that in one of his several afterlives he had seen paintings of other people portraying (un)known navigators, can today be seen in the amazing canvas at the Willian Cullen Library, University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg (Fig. 1). The visual narrative created by Cyril Coetzee is part of a triptych that includes two other paintings, “Colonists 1826” by Colin Gill (1934) and “Vasco da Gama – Departure from Cape” by John Henry Amshewitz (1935), and just like Brink’s fable, the three mural-like paintings form a dialogue between them. The story they tell is similar to the one that Brink describes in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*. For instance, Cyril Coetzee’s painting embeds some of the Renaissance iconography which Brink had overtly inverted by placing it not in the features of the colonized but as features of the colonizer. Hence it can be assumed that in both the narratives embodied a kind of fetishization and exoticism, hiding desire and eroticism that are fundamental in colonial fantasy. Graham Huggan asserts that “clearly, fetishism plays a crucial role in colonialist fantasy-structures, which draw on the relationship between the exotic and the erotic to set up the narratives of desire for, and partial containment of, the culturally othered body” (18), yet this desire encapsulated in the exotic whiteness of the woman is what moves Tʼkama who is astonished by her difference. Nonetheless, the painting also exposes some other sources that can be traced within the European tradition, as is the case of the parody of errors made by early natural history books which depicted native people, the fauna and flora of unknown places in very gauche ways, and the phantasmagorias of Hieronymous Bosh, or the winged images resembling saints often introduced in colonial territories to convert native peoples. At the centre of the picture, the figures representing Tʼkama and Khois resemble an Eden-like portrayal, and following the myths of origins, they can be understood as the African god and goddess of creation, which also draws on William Blake’s painting, *Adam Naming the Beast* (Fig. 2). Yet, instead of the fingers raised in signal of blessing, Tʼkama has his arms raised as if singing and perhaps dancing with Khois, inscribing her in that process of creating. Perhaps, this visual element illustrates a passage in Brink’s fable in which his protagonist joins in a sort of singing moment with the earth in an incantatory celebration, a trance-like instant:

I sing my land, in my tongue and throat I give it sound, I name it. I say: wood, and turn to wood. I say: mountain, ill, rock, river, sea, and become each of them in turn. I say lion, jackal, mockingbird, partridge,

*kiewiet*, I say *kombro*, I say *dagga*, I say *kierie* and *kaross*, I say *khuseti*, I say *t'gau*, I say *k'hrab*, I say *k'arabup* (...) I say creature, I say man, I say woman (...) I say plains turning into flesh, I say blood and bleeding, I fill the day with names, I inscribe the plains like a sheet of paper (...) I say everything that is still to happen and everything no one has ever thought up. (*Cape of Storms*, 36)

In a very García Márquez tone, T'kama's gaudy discourse, combined with such lavish visual fantasia, all reverberates with magical realism that is used to voice both a pre-colonial culture and the colonial encounter. In this way, Brink also inscribes South African literature within the satirical and parodic modes of the marvellous and the fantastic. In contrast with Aureliano Buendía (*Cien años de soledad*) who after the plague of insomnia and amnesia was compelled to name common daily life phenomena in order to establish connections between language and the world, preventing his world from disappearing, T'kama sings the world almost in a messianic way to make his reality exist outside the realm of language. He sings to create reality, where Aureliano names everything to save his reality from being eroded. By singing, T'kama is standing up to decode the emptiness and the possession of the destructive nature of the colonial enterprise. The visual narrative by Cyril Coetzee resembles a carnivalesque dance turning the world upside down, and leaving a trace of a topsy turvy reality of utter disorder and confusion where everyone and everything is parodied.



Figure 1 – Cyril Coetzee, *T'kama-Adamastor*, 2002.

It is important to note that Cyril Coetzee gives emphasis to the two main characters, and he recreates a sort of chaotic scene around them while they dance, and they seem to bless the world resembling an act of creation, the exotic and the fantastic play along to underline what Brink has already written as the way of fantasy and extravagance to challenging monolithic views of reality. In fact, it is the context of parody that liberates submerged voices, as in the example of T'kama in his otherness, but also Khoi. Moreover, the polyvocality of both narratives, visual and written, indicate impending resistance to oppressive conventions, as well as incorporating multiple voices of the cultural web.



Figure 2 – William Blake, *Adam Naming the Beasts*, 1810.

*Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* re-presents a dialogue across the Atlantic and Indian oceans, and it presupposes an expansion within the “shadowlands between myth and history” (*Praying Mantis*) which mixes literary ancestry, history and myths, glossing not only the text written by Camões but also giving voice to neglected South African voices and to a wide variety of contemporary dialogues framed by postmodernism and magical realism, thus suggesting again how Brink envisions literature as a work of collaboration and collective redress. It can therefore be assumed that identities are constructed through the conjunction of diverse elements, and the notion of history depends on contact or even previous acquaintance of others. In fact, identity, memory and history are central issues in Brink’s narration of South Africa, specifically in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* where he focuses on South Africa as the centre, not the periphery. Furthermore, the main characters are indigenous people, and it is through their eyes that the event of the colonial encounter is told, through their storytelling the reader acknowledges the moment when two cultures met, addressing issues of representation as construction which explore narrativized trappings of the historical archives. Brink’s fable combines dissimilar influences, creating a kind of postmodern melting pot of narratives. In the words of Linda Hutcheon when referring to the narrativization of past events: “the events no longer seem to speak for themselves, but are shown to be consciously composed into a narrative, whose constructed – not found – order is imposed upon them, often overtly by the narrating figure.” (*Politics of Postmodernism*, 63). The (hi)story that T’kama narrates is not an imposition of his voice over colonialism, and it does not seek to dominate, though reveals specific subjectivity within a framework of unmasking and interrogating historical silences, not a simple repetition of issues as miscegenation or the fear of the first contact but a parody of them. Indeed, it is through the trope of parody that Brink analyses and subverts the mystification of Africa, and instead of a monster his protagonist is a man with an anomalous penis, the only part of his body that is grotesque. T’kama-Adamastor’s stupendous body (“estupendo corpo” in Camões description of his mythical figure) and his grotesqueness reveals a certain

fascination with monstrous bodies that was part of the European imagination during the Medieval and Renaissance periods, though from Brink's perspective it is the mocking of those presumptions that are encapsulated in the character. T'kama's embodiment of the mythical figure that has hunted the imagination of navigators can be acknowledged at first as the fear of the unknown, but ultimately it may suggest "new epistemologies or ways of knowing the world" (Blackmore, 124).

The problematic but also bizarre sexual encounter between T'kama and Khoi involves a major concern with the dialogical representation of different bodies and the differentiation of them. First acknowledged as strangers "bodies materialize in a complex set of temporal and spatial relations to other bodies" (Sara Ahmed, 40). Khoi can be read as a body out of place, and thereby the contact with other different and strange bodies is both de-formed and re-formed. Initially, T'kama perceives Khoi merely in terms of her corporeality as inassimilable, untouchable, then and after the making out of the boundary lines between them she becomes familiar, assimilable and touchable. Hence, it is also relevant to mention the body as marked by skin, given that T'kama is mesmerized by Khoi's whiteness, and she is noticed as a visual pleasure, an object embodying the fetishism inherent to difference and/or otherness. To some extent, she is the main element of the play of that difference. In Ahmed's formulation, "the skin is also a border or a boundary, supposedly holding or containing the subject within a certain contour, keeping the subject inside, and the other outside" (44-45). Despite the parodic mode of the narration of the events between the two characters, Brink tackles controversial issues that are at the basis of some colonialist philosophies, such as differentiation based on skin colour. Though seen as a border or a frame, in this specific case, skin functions as a destabilizing logic which questions the exclusion of the other as well as it ensures that the individual body is also a politicized body. Accepting that Khoi is for the most part peripheral in the personal (hi)story of T'kama, it is clear that she becomes central if one considers the relation between corporality and formulation of the body-politic. The moment of sexual access to the body of the other is crucial in the fable and imbricates the idea of the exotic other and the fantasy of sexual communication with that exoticized other. When referring to the dialectic relation between blacks and whites and the figure of the dissent Afrikaner, Rosemary Jolly points out that

Desire for the other, then, is reconfigured to express the desire to save oneself from becoming / remaining one of the tribe. Yet fascination with the origin of the self as master, even when it is phrased in order to understand and redesign that sense of self for a different future, complicates the very end to which it aspires. (30).

The story of Khoi and T'kama encapsulates the desire motivated by fascination, and their relationship is linked with the land. Moreover, T'kama's desire is described in purely sexual terms and Khoi's body serves as the trope of the land as being colonized, as the narrator suggests when referring to the coastline of his land "our shore was exposed and open, like a woman already taken. The way it had been it could never be again" (*Cape of Storms*, 120). Likewise, when their encounter

was achieved successfully, T'kama's giant penis was replaced by a more conventionally-sized one made of clay by the medicine man of the tribe; the land that had suffered several droughts was finally blessed with abundant rain: "but the land has been generous and kind ever since the day I first entered the woman" (*Cape of Storms*, 120). The analogy between the land and the woman is evident, and it participates in the idea that either land or women belong to men, whatever side they are on.

Brink's intention is to make the reader aware and perhaps choose between an entire spectrum of available narratives that constitute the historical record. *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* constructs an alter-native and consistent version of the events, but those events were told from another point of view. The novella of T'kama-Adamastor and Khois employs postmodern writing devices in order to highlight and undermine the authority of historiography such as that endorsed by the apartheid government. Above all, the author has explored postmodernism and magical realist features such as multiperspective narration and "the conjunction of two worlds" (Maggie-Ann Bowers, 83) with a special concern for the incorporation of female voices. Moreover, Brink's turn to postmodernism and magical realism can also be seen as an attempt at rehabilitating Afrikaner identity on a national and international level, so that the use of magical realism adds a new and enriching dimension to the culture and history of the country. This argument is supported by the formulations of Stephen Slemon who has discussed the critical points of magical realism understood as a postcolonial expression of resistance. In his essay "Magical Realism as a Postcolonial Discourse", he discusses the fact that magical realistic narratives depict the rebuffing of ethnic cultures by Eurocentric criticism, and that it is a mode where marginalized cultures find assertion. As he comments:

The incompatibility of magic realism with a more "established" becomes itself interesting, itself a focus for critical attention, when one considers the fact that magic realism, at least in a literary context, seems most visibly operative in cultures situated in the fringes of mainstream literary traditions. As Robert Kroetsch and Linda Kenyon observe, magic realism as a literary practice seems to be closely linked with a perception of "living on the margins". (408)

In fact, either the male narrator of *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* or the female narrator of *Imaginations of Sand* partake of this perspective of "living on the margins" given that they use magical realism and the marvellous to portray the lives of their ancestors or their own experience as the reincarnation of a mythical figure. Hence the necessity of the revision of history is necessary, but it had been increasingly neglected, as is the case of the oral traditions of the Khoikhoi people or "the people of people", later derogatorily called Hottentots by the colonists in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Brink reverses the course of history by placing T'kama at the centre of it rather than on the margins, but he also recuperates the myths and stories of the native people.

T'kama just as Caliban in Shakespeare's play, is charged with an attempted sex crime. However, the supposed crime that T'kama is accused of deals not only with his physical desire of penetrating the white woman but it mainly deals with the metaphor implicit in it, that is the desire of penetrating the West, which from the navigators' perspective represents the ultimate fear of miscegenation and the fear of being invaded by the black other. However, Brink is preoccupied with the way in which the encounter between colonizer and colonized would have been from the perspective of the colonizer, given that through this Pantagruel-like grotesque, yet amusing, fetishization of T'kama's penis he seems to suggest that, from a male standpoint, identity may be synonymous with a sexuality that is identified with mastery and domination. Furthermore, the inability of consummating his relation with Khoi due to the excessive size of his phallus, and later the incident with the crocodile that ended up causing the resizing of T'kama's penis, also encapsulates a metaphor of re-education or the taming of his monstrosity. Perhaps Brink is suggesting in a parodic and ironic way that the "black savage" needs to be re-educated in order to be able to "communicate" with the civilized other. Obviously, the origin of these relationships between colonized and colonizer are based on sexual intercourse and how it influences the interaction between self and other, thus the encounters whether sexual or not are overtly parodied and to some extent fetishised. As Lacan comments on his conception of desire:

It is in this erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the energy and the form on which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego is based. This form will crystallize in the subject's internal conflictual tension, which determines the awakening of his desire for the object of the other's desire: here the primordial coming together (concourse) is precipitated into aggressive competitiveness (concurrency), from which develops the triad of others, the ego, and the object. (15)

The (hi)story that T'kama tells evokes a genealogy engendered only by male figures in opposition to the stories recalled by Ouma Kristina in *Imaginations of Sand*, and deals for the most part with the eroticized male body eager to achieve the female body, the thwarted desire that was awakened because of her otherness, her white and perhaps exotic features if compared with the women in T'kama's tribe. However, the novella encapsulates this primordial idea of "aggressive competitiveness" and the horror of miscegenation when the white navigators return to take the woman back to the ship and they trap T'kama, presumably assuming that they were teaching him a lesson "that will teach you to consort with our white women!" (*Cape of Storms*, 127). Their supposed superiority is taken into consideration when they sexually abuse the "coloured women" taking them as property or as the exotic savage that must be colonized and tamed on the account of their "lustful bestiality". T'kama's body has been hypersexualized, rendered rapacious and monstrous in a Rabelian sense of the world, and to some extent his body encapsulates the fear of the other white

men being possessed by his prowess and not only being dispossessed of a supremacy that is intrinsically associated with power and masculinity in terms of sexuality but also carries the fear of being physically invaded by the black figure who is seen as an uncivilized savage. Indeed, it can be argued that this primordial fear of contact hides homophobic assumptions, that it presumes that all sexual contact between people with different skin colour seems to be embodied in “phobic ability to think of interracial sex in any other than violent and abased terms” (Lucy Valerie Graham, 7). There is thus homophobic agenda somehow hidden as a common subtext in some postcolonial literature, ultimately representing the fear of the white self being possessed by the black grotesque other. According to T’kama his name means “big bird”, clearly referring to male genitalia and he seems to be proud of it until he realizes the incompatibility between him and the woman that is not imbricated in their cultural differences but also in his gigantic phallus as a sign of monstrous alterity. Accordingly, Lucy Valerie Graham refers to twin penetration anxieties related with the colonial encounter and the revulsion caused by the other, thus “not only is the white settler threatened with engulfment by the alien land into which he has thrust himself, but his women are in danger of being penetrated and contaminated by the monstrous other who inhabit this territory” (18).

The overlapping of myths is constant throughout the fable that starts with the myth of Adamastor and ends with the evocation of Prometheus after T’kama has been chained by the navigators and left alone in the shores of the Cape till he eventually dies or is born again, because this was only “one of his many lives”:

It was a great boulder to which they had lashed me with their seaman’s ropes, my arms and legs stretched out, the knots so tight I could not move, no matter how fiercely I pulled and struggled. (...) A black shadow came swooping down from above. A vulture. Then another, and several more. (...) Eat my heart, I thought, tear out my liver, devour my intestines. You won’t ever kill me dead. Tomorrow when you come back I shall be here again. You will have to start anew on me. And every new day when the sun comes up. I shall never die. Not for you. (*Cape of Storms*, 126-7)

T’kama’s rebellion against the gods’ will resonates with the myth of Prometheus and his upheaval affirms the eternity of his acts and he turns out to be indestructible either because he refuses to die and metamorphoses into the Table Mountain or because he effectively had already planted his seed, the son conceived with Khois “somewhere in the land (...) somewhere behind the thickets of euphorbia and burning aloes” (*Cape of Storms*, 128), so that he will live on through the child. Nevertheless, in both cases the myths of Adamastor and Prometheus are ultimately used to express the resistance to colonialism and tyranny. Thus it also hints that the reintegration of history in contemporary societies can be achieved in a successful way through the imaginings of literature, and it is the multifarious approach to the past that permits a re-imagining of history in terms of beliefs, stories or perceptions from various angles.



Mikhail Bakhtin's formulation of the dialogic imagination of novels as hybrid creations that include the ability of one voice to ironize and unmask the other proposes the possibility of Brink's narrative undoing authoritative discourses by allowing a renewed contact between the pretext written by Camões and his own perception and re-interpretation of myths and the descriptions of colonial encounters. Given that, Brink's novella does not simply mimic the mythical voyage of the Portuguese navigators as described in *Os Lusíadas*, but challenges the perilous presumptions on the idea of "first contact" as embodied in the cultural notion of "discoveries", earnestly questioned in T'kama's discourse. Characterized by a plethora of narrative voices, the short fable of T'kama-Adamastor manipulates the reader into complicity with his points of view, and it also develops the idea of polyphony as Bakhtin has theorized. Therefore by means of storytelling T'kama provides the context for the narration of European myths and the folk tales of his native people which are the basis of the origin of his country's cultural identities. Brink is aware of the importance of the narrative and the social implications of his fable so that when discussing the Titans from whom Adamastor originated, the narrator states that "some of them, as we know from Greek mythology, are buried under huge mountains" (*Cape of Storms*, viii), possibly alluding to the crimes perpetrated during apartheid and that are left untold.

The account of the arrival of a woman aboard an exploratory caravel is noted with some strangeness by the narrator who speculates about such a situation:

You may well ask me what a woman was doing on those ships. It is a question that was often plagued me in my later lives. Nowhere have I found any evidence that da Gama or Cam or Dias or d'Almeida or any other seafarer of the time took along women on their ships or brought them home from elsewhere. On the contrary, such a practice would have run counter to all social, economic, moral, religious, or pragmatic considerations of the time. (*Cape of Storms*, 13)

In fact, his suspicions are accurate; women were not commonly seen travelling in explorers' ships. Occasionally it may have happened but it defied all the social, moral and religious considerations of the time. However, the narrator promptly dismisses his beliefs: "it hardly matters what history records" (*Cape of Storms*, 14) because in terms of his story the woman was effectively there, "in the midst of all those outlandish men, there *was* a woman" (*Cape of Storms*, 15), whom he found or "discovered", to use Western terminology associated with the exploratory voyages across the world. In this way, T'kama-Adamastor may be conjuring up events that may or may not have happened, setting up his own logic as an ultimate authority, even if the events he recalls conflict with official historiography. In fact, the first line of this narration "once a upon a time there was and there wasn't" (*Cape of Storms*, v) is explicitly advising the reader that it may contain some ambivalent ideas of what may or may not have happened or what may or may not be the truth, if there is one. Nevertheless, it is precisely this ambivalence that motivates his story as well as all the stories of

women that are narrated in *Imaginations of Sand*. History does not really matter if one considers that its records have overlooked female figures for centuries, but it does not mean that they were not part of it whatsoever, whereby Brink included Khois in T'kama's story. Her presence, for the most part a physical and objectified presence, is required in the novella in order for it to develop, though she becomes the reason of T'kama's downfall. In the presence of her beauty and overwhelmed by it, T'kama neglects his duties as the leader of the tribe, actions that result in chaos and hardship for his people. The impact of the Portuguese arrival is harmful for native people's daily life. Chaos and the rage of the gods are intrinsically associated with the white woman and her inability to behave according to their mores. In a semi-anthropological way T'kama describes the genealogy of his people and how rituals have always been performed. The moment he decides that the woman is meant to be his he changes the course of his people's history and the journey into the hinterland, a common trope in Brink's novels. For instance, Elizabeth in *An Instant in the Wind* dives into the wild as an ultimate escape from the phallogocentric society she lived in. Ultimately, T'kama and Khoi's journey represents escape but also the attempt to inscribe Khoi in T'kama's history. However, neither she can assimilate his customs nor can he deal with her otherness, and all those unsolved issues cause the breakdown of the hierarchical order of the group. Ironically the succession of misunderstandings conducts the tribe in general and T'kama in particular to chaos and all sorts of magical happenings that culminate in the loss of the wholeness of the tribe and T'kama's authority as leader, so that the journey is a wandering through the "shadows of the Valley of Death" pursued by evil spirits and Gaunab, the god of darkness. In that matter, the white woman is deeply connected with the inexplicable disorder and tribulations that befall the tribe even though they make their journey further into the interior and keep worshiping their pantheon of gods in order to overcome their condemned faith. Despite T'kama's desire for Khoi their relation seems to be doomed and it is perceived as unnatural by all the external elements that surround them. Brink employs magical realism in order to emphasize the challenging agency that lies behind the relation between his black-male protagonist and his white-female character. The quest for interracial "*jouissance*" seems to upend the natural order of the world, with unexpected trees bursting into flames, rivers boiling, bushes and thorns that grew faster overnight, and people fighting without a reasonable explanation. After trying to understand their misfortune, Khamab, the medicine man, tells T'kama that "this may be a thing of blood and years" (*Cape of Storms*, 26). In fact, his presaging of events that resonates like a Greek chorus inevitably culminates in a battle between the white navigators and the native people, though this is a battle that has had its manifestations throughout the following centuries. The mismatch of T'kama and his white lover had terrible consequences and led to T'kama's death (one of many) at the end of the fable. Paradoxically, T'kama and Khoi live on

through their child, and Brink seems to imply in a utopian mode that either white or black people may free themselves from prejudice and discrimination and learn how to cope with otherness and alterity as Khoi did with her black suitor after she had learnt to overcome their sexual difficulties. Despite the utopian tone of the novella, miscegenation seems to be the cause of destruction the text implies. Still in the epigraph using the words of T. S. Eliot in the third movement of “Little Gidding” in *Four Quartets*

This is the use of memory:  
For liberation – not less of love but expanding  
Of love beyond desire, and so liberation  
From the future as well as the past.

Brink may be suggesting that through memory, the recalling of stories-myths and therefore the acceptance of the past, identities can be re-constructed within a frame of tolerance and liberation. The unity between self and other in its several guises is thus seen to be the source of South Africa’s identities. Sue Kossew, when referring to the trope of miscegenation in Brink’s oeuvre points out his awareness of cross-cultural proximity as a strategy to highlight the inventive potential of subversion.

Ultimately, in colonial discourse, the horror of being polluted and contaminated by the black-other is explicitly connected with interracial sex, and in order to prevent that the state sought to regulate it by means of the ideology of normativization through which social behaviour was supervised, as Robert Young explains in his book *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. Given that the legislation of sexual activity became a pivotal rule in some societies, consequently that was the rule that was overtly subverted in fiction. The colonial practice of controlling sexual behaviour was typically aimed at the perilously wild sexual appetites of women and their hyper-eroticized body. Ostensibly, *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* endorses the image of the white woman as both lacking sexual desires and objectified as the black male’s subject of yearning. However, initially the white woman is not even perceived as a woman. From a certain distance T’kama could not recognize if the body bathing on the shore was male or female because he was not familiar with European traditions of clothing, he had the impression of observing another man, albeit with longer and more colourful clothes. Once he recognized her sexual identity he felt compelled to approach her, obviously with the intent of a sexual encounter, stating that “this rearing mamba in my loins – erect like the tall cross now planted in Heitsi-Eibib’s sacred cairn – would not know any peace again before had come to rest deep in the *keloof* made for it” (*Cape of Storms*, 18), though he could not foresee the hazardous consequences of his impetuosity, and he eventually duplicates the behaviour of the navigators who have chased the native women. Critics have noted that Brink’s depiction of the relationship between T’kama and Khoi somehow validates the colonial stereotype of the sexual prowess of the black male who desires and hunts the Western and white

female. Hence the erotic can usually be related with the discourse of power and possession, and clearly though Khoi is a peripheral character in terms of psychological depth, her body is relevant given that she is etched in a system of differences in which the male holds power. The fact that Tʼkama imposed himself on her by abducting her and stating that she belonged to him encapsulates controversial issues, metaphorized in the colonization of her body and the dispossession that she was subjected to. Furthermore, the parodic mode employed to describe Tʼkama’s gargantuan phallus that quite often pops up throughout the novella can also be analyzed as a Freudian symbol of fetishisation and multiple manifestations of desire. Yet, it is the parodic trope that prevails as a framework to destabilize pre-established conceptualizations of male and female genitalia, and consequently the role of sexuality in the constructions of identity. Brink’s employment of parody to depict Tʼkama’s inability to achieve a proper sexual encounter with Khoi is also used as a way to ironize the intersections between colonial power and colonial desire, claiming otherness and alterity in terms of cultural differences and the need to demystify it. Borrowing Bhabha’s assertion that bodies engage in all possible struggles of identity and difference, Brink’s novella seems to have opened up a new space for negotiating both identity and difference as well as issues of representation, and thus history-mythology took on new dimension and illustrates the paradox of the distortions of recording history both private and public. Perhaps, parody and magical realism are utilized in order to investigate the margins between self and other and to some extent how they can be opened, subverted and altered. Moreover, it re-creates alternative spaces through that “contestatory nature of parody” (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 109) being capable of a political and phallogocentric critique. Brink in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor and Imaginings of Sand* has successfully used postmodernism as an enabling channel for magical realism to explore and undermine the “richness of reality” in Capentier’s words, insofar as the typical spatial and temporal fragmentation engendered within the narratives in Hutcheon’s formulation thus “underline and undermine the notion of coherence, self-sufficient subject as the source of meaning or action” (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 104). Brink emphasizes the idea that culture in the present is a product of previous representations of history which he clearly exploits and comments on critically through parody and irony. Nevertheless, within the realm of fiction he recuperates ancient myths and fills the vacuums left by history with the voices of marginalized groups. Accordingly, it is the juxtaposition of body representations and the eroticism conveyed either in male representations of the female body and those of colonial self-representations that are at the basis of the encounter between Tʼkama and Khoi.

Stories, like origin myths, are conjured out of the conterminous subsistence of disparate realms of the reality and the magical, and consequently that interaction shapes and perhaps

reconstructs the physical reality that is at the basis of Brinkian narratives. Questions related to issues of identity and alterity are re-addressed through fictionality where the boundaries of public and private identities blur in order to generate other meanings. Thereby, Rushdie posits that “given the gift of self-consciousness, we can dream versions of ourselves, new selves for old” (*Imaginary Homelands*, 377). Assuming that different versions of reality can be dreamt, and perhaps acknowledged as valid ones, Brink’s narrator represents himself and his people, the myths and history with the power of storytelling. Clearly an issue foregrounded in that process is that of narrative and power, which Brink has developed through re-imagining history in which, in his own words:

the best we can do is to fabricate metaphors – that is, to tell stories – in which, not history, but the imaginings of history are invented. Myth may have preceded history, but in the long run it may well be the only guarantee for the survival of history.” (“Stories of history”, 42)

His narratives can be described as a search to understand the present through the recreation of the past, hence they explore narrative constructions of gender and race whilst considering the cultural and social background that give rise to such depictions. The controversial relation between T’kama and Khoi ultimately suggests that the world and its cultural aspects permeate private life and the way locations can shape not only merely desires but also questions regarding alterity and its multiplicity. Paradoxically, T’kama and to some extent Khoi are acknowledged along the axis of an “authorized version of otherness” (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 86) because both remain in the realm of otherness that is feeble at best when they see each other as strangers, and it seems that the ongoing dialectic self/other is disrupted by the consideration of their mutual differences. Indeed, T’kama’s blackness defines itself not only in its own expressions but also in antagonism to the other, Khois, as the white other that in turn defines her-self against his black otherness. Hence their identities have to be understood in relation to each other, and they question identity in relation to alterity; they carry the ambiguity of foreignness that can also be understood as otherness which at first makes them physically different, and consequently, it is this sense of otherness that disrupts a monolithic construction of the real where the boundaries between self and other can be deconstructed. Thereby, Brink shifts the common focus from the perspective of the white male’s interactions with the black female subject, who suffers doubly both because of her gender and on account of her race, and it is Khoi who in a way embodies the figure of the black woman, though at no stage had she suffered any sort of sexual violence and T’kama pronounced his love trying his best to communicate with her. However, there is the issue of being taken to the interior against her will that to some extent can be read as a metaphor for the native women who really have been assaulted and suffered all sorts of violence. The paradoxical nature of this ambiguous relation can be perceived in terms of power and resistance as well as “the desire for the unknown” (Lyotard, 67) within the postcolonial

context, a paradoxical nature that according to Bhabha entails the urgencies of desire, anxiety and the ambivalence of affect. Surely there is the risk of reinserting the essentialist fallacies of opposition – male versus female, blackness versus whiteness or identity versus alterity – although Brink strives to avoid them, seeking a vision of the “equality of cultural identities” but glossing Nietzsche’s formulation that there are no facts, “only interpretations”, a formulation that was developed by Lyotard in a very utopian mode and intersecting it with postmodern perspectives in which he speaks of cross-cultural contact between uneven “traditional” and “modern” cultures. Brink’s narrative partakes in this idea of cultural identities and facts being merely interpretations; hereby it also portrays the “traditional” and its oral traditions and folktales in contrast with a kind of civilized and Westernized reality that serves as a metaphor of the “modern”. Memory and historiography deal with present predicaments that seem to evoke the dislocations of the past, and thus the fragmentation of the colonial past points to a neocolonial present and how they relate one another. Either *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* or *Imaginations of Sand* evoke “a soberba tradição do relato oral” in the words of Plínio Apuleyo Mendonza when referring to García Márquez’s oeuvre. Brink’s skilful way of deploying storytelling and oral tradition conveys the characterization of places and people through myriad of methods utilized in postmodern novels. In fact, Brink develops the concept of “in-betweenness” as a third-space of contact between different cultures in order to include marginalized groups that are given full insight as well as new agendas through the tropes of magical realism. Moreover, he places his characters in a position of liminality which represents “a productive space of the construction of culture as difference” (Bhabha, “The Third Space (an interview)”, 209) that inevitably emphasizes alterity or otherness. In sum, Brink’s novels depict identity as neither monolithic nor stable, rather as multiple, oscillating between dissimilar elements, continuously changing, and migrant identity that excludes fixity, a (de)construction that oscillates between different components socio, political and cultural, in the words of Salman Rushdie to whom identity-fragmentation is a key issue in his novels “*I’m not myself today*, he thought. The heart flutters. Life damages the living. None of us are ourselves. None of us are *like this*.” (*The Satanic Verses*, 65). Eventually, Brink’s characters take part in this fragmented notion of the self, the same way they reinforce in a parodied form the fiction of Orientalism in which places like Africa or India are depicted as dark, superstitious and deeply mysterious, causing a double sense of repulsion and profound curiosity from the colonizer’s perspective. Moreover, postcolonial intertextuality in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor* assumes a variety of forms, tactically deployed allusions, intertexts as structuring frameworks for the plot, the juxtaposition and parody of those intertexts to generate meaning, and the dialogic engagement between the novella and aspects of cultural discourse such as the master narratives of history. Essentially, postmodern and postcolonial theories acknowledge the

importance and the power of re-imagining history which Brink skilfully manipulates and transforms through his novels, as will also be seen in the example of *Imaginings of Sand* with its multi-layered narratives, and the overt reinvention of new historical paradigms.



## 1.2 –“Our Missing Store of Memories”: Female Voices and Storytelling in *Imaginings of Sand*

“Everyone has a story to tell.”

“But not everyone is a storyteller.”

“Fair enough. Everyone has a story, full stop. Someone might have to tell it. That’s where you come in.” – Ivan Vladislavic, *Double Negative*.

“We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories.” – Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*

“La vida no es la que uno vivió, sino la que uno recuerda y cómo recuerda para contarla.” – Gabriel García Márquez, *Vivir para contarla*

“Once a upon a time there was and there wasn’t”. That is how Brink introduced the story of T’kama in *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*. This tangible and paradoxical idea that (hi)stories were and were not at the same time, that some voices are inscribed in them and others are overtly marginalized, living in the gaps of stories as Margaret Atwood puts it, is also a constant issue in *Imaginings of Sand* where the history of a country is told by women or “the people that who were not in papers” (*The Handmaid’s Tale*, 57). This is the first novel by Brink published after the end of apartheid era, but like all his profuse output since the mid – 1970s, *Imaginings of Sand* burrows back into South Africa’s history during the apartheid period, the preceding centuries and the first free elections in 1994. The narrative takes place during this turning moment in the country’s history when Kristien returns to her grandmother’s house in the fictitious Karoo town of Outeniqua, settled in an imaginary geographic space. Brink entails the idea of “imaginary homelands” or imaginary places already developed by García Márquez in *Cien años de soledad* where he created Macondo or as Salman Rushdie had also introduced in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* the city of Benegali, just to mention a few. Those imaginary lands serve as an interstitial space of contact where reality and fantasy mingle to parody and criticize autocratic systems.

Past and future go hand in hand throughout the novel; on the one hand, the stories narrated by Ouma Kristina can be seen as reminders of past events calling attention and giving emphasis to the marginalized voices in the history of the country; on the other hand, the free elections function



as a bridge to a new era, new hopes and expectations. While drawn into the march of events towards the future beyond 27<sup>th</sup> April 1994, Kristien is also reintroduced to her own past, her family history, as Ouma Kristina narrates the tales of various women, and delegates to her granddaughter the heritage of memories of unuttered and unseen female figures of her family and consequently the narration of her country's historical records. Nevertheless, the novel is a testimony of a dying woman who wants to tell her life, the ordinary facts and the extraordinary fiction that embellished her long life, in the surface the stories may serve to help Kristien to come to terms with her own story, deeper those tales are the nations' history with its sins and secrets. After being faced with her private past and her country's future, Kristien will be asked to decide whether to stay in South Africa or to return to England where she lived in a self imposed exile, and she must negotiate several external and conflicting forces: the resistance of the conservatives led by Casper, her sister's husband, whose commando group goes out in acts of paranoia to retaliate for the fire-bombing of the house; and the imminent arrival of an ANC delegation that includes her former lover, Sandile. Once again Brink incorporates the issue of an interracial relationship between a white woman and a black male. However, Kristien also has to deal with private conflicts involving her grandmother's tales, the house and its inhabitants who are Trui and his family and the old black man hiding in the house's secret rooms, as well as her own past and the life she had left behind in England. The novel is dedicated to the reconstitution or unravelling of the histories of Kristien's ancestors through a female genealogy, so that the narrator and the focalizers are for the most part women. Hence, that female genealogy should be read as a sort of postcolonial fantasia, an imaginative exploration of the possibilities of connectedness sharing a vision of hope founded on powerful female voices. The novel highlights the importance of the oral tradition of women in order to fill the gaps of history with the stories that have been ignored or written out by phallogocentric and nationalistic discourses.

Brink is well-known for his postmodern opinions related to history as a construct, and *Imaginations of Sand* is not an exception. By including these concerns, the novel re-writes male history as a female genealogy of eight generations of woman who are engraved in South African history. The stories told by Ouma Kristina are an imaginative reconstruction of the past, which does not mean that it is a repetition of history. Instead it opens up new perceptions to the present. Moreover, the stories of women that are narrated to Kristien do not appear in chronological order, and contemporary events such as the fire-bombings or the elections are used as a background to clarify Kristien's identity, family histories, and the public history of her country which appears "to make space for the intertexts of history within the texts of fiction" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 83). Brink supports the idea that history can be reduced to story and "inventions and fabrications of

narrative” (*Reinventing a Continent*, 22). In fact, by appropriating the past through imaginative ways, he explains, this will “open the door to comparative reading”, also suggesting that:

The new text has to be evaluated against the whole spectrum or palimpsest of available text, and so a polylogue is opened through which versions of the past are drawn into the present, confronting the reader with the need – and above all with the responsibility – to choose. And because the text is not offered as definitive, final, absolute, but as the exploration of a possibility among others, it invites the reader to keep his/her critical facilities alive, knowing that neither its history nor its moral boundaries are fixed or final, but remain constantly to be reinvented and, in the process, revalorized. (23)

Thus, that process of reconstructing enables the creation of hybrid identities that, to some extent, need a hybrid past, or, rather the possibility to choose. Kristien who is a transitory character also portrays a hybrid identity because both her home country and England where she lives and where she joined an activist group are alien territories to her; she is not able to feel that she belongs to any of them. In other words, her sense of displacement leads to the idea of living in-between. However, to be part of the “real world”, she explains that a “miracle” will be necessary. In fact, that miracle is put into motion by her grandmother’s storytelling offering her an alternative history in contrast with male-authored versions, thus also erasing the male genealogy from her family history as she explains that:

surnames are of no importance. Those have all been added on, you can’t rely on them. Every time a man becomes a father he’s all too eager to get this his surname into the picture. But how can we be sure that he put in is the same as what comes out? We’re the only ones who can tell for certain, and sometimes we prefer to keep it secret. It’s us I’m talking about. The womenfolk. (*Imaginations of Sand*, 174)

Controversially, the words of Ouma Kristina (re)constructed a family line through a female genealogy opposed to a conventional male one; instead she traces ancestry through the mothers, reinforcing the idea by stating that men should be kept out of this, and indeed that paternity is always uncertain, contrasting, for instance, with Rushdie’s novels that encapsulate an immense preoccupation with issues related to paternity. Clearly, Brink is subverting the idea of the founding fathers, and he replaces them by family mothers or founding mothers because one of the stories goes back to one of the native peoples who inhabit South Africa. These female figures stepped out of the confines of their imposed private sphere and made their own way into the country ruled by men, as in the examples of Wilhelmina or Petronella. The tales that Ouma Kristina passes down to Kristien contradict dominant historical discourses in as much as they contradict each other. As the ancient grandmother explains: “I have an amazing memory. At times I even surprise myself. I can remember things that never happened” (*Imaginations of Sand*, 4). Further on she asserts that “There is so much to tell. All the stories. The whole history” (*Imaginations of Sand*, 88), referring to the fact that there is not much of a difference between history and story. *Imaginations of Sand* overtly criticizes the notion of an unequivocal and inclusive South African historiography, creating an interstitial space

for overlapping histories instead. In the essay “The Riddle of Midnight” in *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie, when referring to Saleem the narrator of *Midnight Children* and the distortions of memory as an imaginative truth that is suspect and honourable simultaneously, explains that “his mistakes are the mistakes of a fallible memory compound by quirks of character and of circumstances, and his vision is fragmentary” (10). To some extent, the tales of Kristien’s ancestors and the fact that her grandmother mixes them up glosses the idea that not only is memory fallible but that also history may be a fragmentary process inscribing certain voices and leaving others out.

Sue Kossew in her essay “Reinventing History; Reimagining the Novel: The Politics of Reading André Brink’s *Imaginings of Sand*” explains that the narration of *Imaginings of Sand* is twofold. On the one hand, the reader is confronted with Kristien’s personal life as a dissident, a rebellious woman living in England and a member of the ANC, also struggling to come to terms with her history; on the other hand, the stories or the legacy that Ouma Kristina wants to pass to Kristien before she dies are paved with magical realistic moments. The frequently occurring birds or the marvellous and adventurous story of Ouma’s marriage resembling the tales of *The Thousand and One Nights* are just a few examples of how the fantastic mingles with the real. Paradoxically, Brink juxtaposes history as factual and history as fiction in order to restore the silenced voices either of women or the native people, indeed seeming to privilege storytelling and myth-making over history, giving emphasis to the need to storify the world. Moreover, the family saga parallels that of the nation as is common, for example, in South American narratives as *La casa de los espíritus* by Isabel Allende or *El amor en los tiempos de cólera* by García Márquez. Ouma’s tales challenge and undermine some of the principles that were the basis of apartheid doctrine such as the myths of racial purity and the prohibition of interracial relationships. By revealing the family secrets of miscegenation, incest, and by erasing men from their genealogy or tracing the family line back to a Khoikhoi woman, Kamma, Ouma Kristina suggests that their “story is different, it doesn’t run in a straight line” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 174). However, facts and fiction complement each other; the private (hi)story of the family may be acknowledged as mere fabrications but they also function as metaphors of the nation. Even the diaries of Kristien’s mother that were written in a very personal and introspective tone entangled with a fabled reality rather than records of truth prove that “the truth masquerading has so many sad lies” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 126) as does the nation’s history itself. Nevertheless, history and stories are ambivalent, dubious, opaque and are not totally clear, like Ouma Kristina’s narration. Acknowledging this ambivalent nature of her tales she tells her granddaughter, “I’m not asking you to believe me, Kristien. I’m only asking you to listen to me” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 109). Although the stories articulated a paradoxical reality they give Kristen the feeling of recovering something, her past as well as *herstory*, mostly because they question the relevance of facts, the reliability of official

male history. In Linda Hutcheon's sense, the act of storifying the past draws attention into "the act of imposing order on that past, of encoding strategies of meaning-making through representation" (*The Politics of Postmodernism*, 67). Consequently, we are confronted with the idea that the postmodern self is left with only two options: either reacting to and transforming the crisis of identity or dismissing the self as an empirical reality. However, Brink seems to accomplish the transformation of the self, and points out that "only by dreaming and writing the impossible can life be made possible once again" (*Reinventing a Continent*, 202). Andreas Huyssen asserts that "there is a deepening sense of crisis often articulated in the reproach that our culture is terminally ill with amnesia" (1). In that sense, Brink works to overcome the idea of forgetting the past, and rather than ignoring it or simply lamenting it, the past and its history are used as "a powerful stimulant for cultural and artistic creativity" (Huyssen, 3).

In the time of deep socio-political changes that followed the fall of apartheid, Brink calls attention to the hidden crimes perpetrated and the need to make them visible, healing through the process of telling traumatic experiences as was done by the TRC. To some extent, Brink overtly shows that the novel is also a site for rewriting and reinventing history while at the same time emphasizing the fictionality of both discourses. This paradoxical view can be applied to the reading of *Imaginations of Sand*, so that Brink asserts that:

the compulsively narrating grandmother, mouthpiece of a long line of silent and / or silenced women in South African history, no longer relies on 'evidence' or 'references' of any kind: her narratives are their own *raison d'être* and derive from the individual's need to insert herself or himself, through storytelling, within the larger contexts of space and (historical) continuity. (*Reinventing a Continent*, 22)

In fact, facts and fiction create a subtext in the book's digressive and extradiegetic narration. In this sense, the novel is a hall of mirrors reproducing images, a chamber of echoes with multiple voices giving the text a palimpsestic nature. It is a process of re-presentation and re-creation of multi-layered identities constructed through a process of self-referentiality and intertextuality. The intensity of each story deals with a skilful combination between historical moments and the use of magic realism in order to make speeches and interior monologues even more interesting, blending the real and the unreal, the logical and the illogical. It encapsulates postmodern devices which defy linearity, and it proves that there are no new stories, just the retelling of old ones. Brink gives agency to marginalized voices and female characters are empowered in dissimilar ways to challenge and confront, it subverts and questions the established phallogocentric order revealing a heteroglossic dialogism that resists closure. And yet the stories narrated by Ouma Kristina have as their goal the understanding of the place of women in cultural contexts as neither absent or totally repressed or punished, but rather as active participants in the construction of their own "psychosexual identity". Therefore the novel also subverts the stereotype of women as helpless and in danger or as purely

sexual beings for whom marriage doesn't seem to be an escape, though it is the choice embraced by all the women as a means to achieve their own aims.

I married him for the same reason Petronella married Hermanus Johannes Wepener. For the same reason, I suspect most of us marry.

Which is?

Because we're not permitted to lead a worthwhile life on our own. So we put up a front. As long as we can derive our worth, our authority from someone else, from a man, we are accepted. Mrs Cornelius Basson. How I fought and fought against that name. It was like cancelling myself. But what choice did I have, in 1921? With that name I could face the world. (...) But one is not free to go it alone. No, no. You see, when we try to do on our own we can shout our heads off no one pays attention. Not because we don't speak, but because no one will listen. So we try to survive, by hook or by crook. The first step is the worst. The rest is subterfuge.

(*Imaginations of Sand*, 115)

However, the novel emphasizes the importance of relationships and the interface between private and public spheres, it endorses a particular position on sexuality or sexual representation and the female characters unravel a complex web of attitudes and cultural practices such as privacy or the regulation of sexual activity, the putting into discourse of sex, and the privileged verisimilitude of sexual imagery.

André Brink's post-apartheid novels have been motivated by new strategies of re-telling history, a sort of historicizing fiction which adopts the fantastic and magical realism as a genre in order to inject a fresh energy and identity into his writing. Indeed, each story in *Imaginations of Sand* becomes a metaphoric intervention, an account of reality told with the intention of dismantling the real or designating it in other words throughout tortuous and humorous journeys of the imagination. What emerges from Brink's aesthetic is the constant deconstruction of silence, and marginalized subjectivities are his central concerns. Therefore, most of his novels partake a peculiar interest in the representation of subversive female figures, as it is clear in *Imaginations of Sand* or, for example, *The Other Side of Silence*. By doing so, he overtly pursues a deep interest in the link between woman and history, as women tend to be a presence largely excluded from official discourses in general. Focused on the psychological liberation of women who suffered various forms of colonialist violence, exploitation and denigration his novels reimagine history as herstory, a feminist project directed at inscribing the accomplishment of women through the long history of Afrikanerdom in particular, and the geographical territory of South Africa in general. Given that, he is aware of the dilemmas of those who Spivak coined as subaltern, and hence his novels recognize the gaps, the absences and silences produced by the colonial encounter. Therefore, by acknowledging female pasts Brink attempts to counteract a totalized version of collective memory. Nonetheless, the feminization of history also has its pitfalls, and sometimes it reproduces certain clichés associated with women which Brink's novels are not totally free of.

It is relevant to the ongoing analyses of the female characters in the novel that Brink manipulates and re-imagines history through magical realism and postmodern devices, so that to some extent the text becomes a site for acts of remembering or “un-forgetting” as a postcolonial reinvention of the past. According to Stephen Slemon the postcolonial narrative typically employs magical realism in its “resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems” and he explains that read as a postcolonial discourse, the magical realist narrative might “comprise a positive and liberating engagement with the codes of imperial history and its legacy of fragmentation and discontinuity” (422). Following Slemon’s explanation, it can be argued that Brink’s novel embodies the binary oppositions of past and present, and he also suggests that “the future requires revisioning the seemingly tyrannical units of the past in a complex and imaginative double-think of remembering the future” (422). Informed by a feminist world-view, the narrative also explores the declining of the boundary between Self and Other as Kristien clearly realizes that “I can no longer be detached, apart. I am not simply the result of those who have gone before: if I need them, as I need Ouma, they also need me” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 338). This postcolonial fusion of self and other, and the preoccupation with the future, may be somehow problematic if analyzed through the perspective of Anna, Kristien’s elder sister, a bitter woman depicted as the traditionally compliant wife, bullied into submission by an abusive and violent husband, on whom fear and betrayal were inculcated to such an extent that she ends up committing an act of extreme violence by killing her husband and the five children. This may also suggest her own moment of rebellion against the state, so that she can be read as a kind of metaphor of the future that is poisoned. By not being able to cope with the uncertainty of the country and its traumatic history of violence and crimes, Anna destroys everything around her, leaving the sense that there is no hope in what may happen after the elections. Sue Kossew, when referring to Anna’s crime, points out that it was

her own ultimate identification with these women rebels in a narration which could be said not only to be reinserting the silenced voices of Afrikaner women into South African history but also to be deproblematizing the nature of these voices, which, after all, have a complex history of complicity in the construction of apartheid state. (122)

Besides the point that Anna might represent the voices that were also involved in the construction of apartheid, she is more immediately perceived as a victim of an abusive husband who commands a vigilante group of people who had no further intention other than revenge by any means, showing paranoia and fear through their attacks on presumably innocent black people. To some extent she was always manipulated, and left out of her own history, and the only odd way to state her point was through extreme violence. She was once so full of hope and she is an abject mother at the end, incapable of coming to terms with her past, somehow unable to take the step further into the reconciliation of the old and the new South Africa, ensuring that throughout the destructive end

there is no future for her children. Because she could not cope with her reality and did not believe in the future of her country, Anna committed such a violent crime against her children, silenced them, erasing them from history so in this sense she can be read as an abject mother. Anna thus underlines a tragic way of dealing with conventions, and Kristien assumed that it was too late for her sister to deal with the present, and perhaps with the uncertainty that is always inherent in the future, also assuming that Anna or her or any other human being are by-products of social, political and cultural influences:

But for Anna was too late. (...) It was her only, ultimate, accomplishment; the least I can hope for is that she did it lucidly, courageously. If your tongue is cut out you have to tell her story in another language altogether. This carnage is the only sign she can leave behind, her diary, her work of art. She couldn't have done it alone. Countless others have, converged in her to do this, to articulate. There were many women in my sister, as in me" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 331)

Her crime expresses her desperation, and symbolically her tongue was cut out, but not as Kamma who had hers really cut out. Both characters portray the ways silence can intervene in the feminine space which "in this scheme is to be located in the gaps, the absences, the unsayable or unrepresentable of discourse and representation" (Mary Jacobus, 300). However, it cannot be argued that she was empowered through that violence; rather she stepped out of history, making herself doubly silenced, thereby making the gender politics of the novel problematic. Ironically, the book's ambivalence referring to the gender issues echoes the ambivalence about history, myths and storytelling, alongside the need to legitimate the past in order to make it right.

The mosaic of Ouma Kristina's stories proceeds from the dual hypothesis of truth and "untruth", and like the narrator, the reader is left with the alternative of either recognizing the narration as historically fictional, or to refuse it as fictionally historical. The magical realistic exuberance of the narrative is a device used to depict the extreme violence and uncertainty that characterized South African society. Given that, Ouma Kristina uses oral storytelling techniques to express a certain cultural context challenging the hegemony of a phallogocentric state. Thus the novel tells the unuttered stories of several generations of women living on the margins of their families as is the example of Rachel and her erotic paintings, which resembles the *leitmotif* of the "madwoman in the attic", or living on the margins of society as is the case of Lottie the woman without her shadow, "Lottie walked as if her feet did not really touch the ground, and her slight body cast no shadow at all" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 303). The ethereal that characterizes Lottie works as an allegory of women being invisible in societies, is a very common device used in some magical realistic Latin American novels, such as the example of the lightness of being illustrated by Clara in *La casa de los espíritus*. Magical realism in Brink's work is an effort to reexamine the position of women in societies as well as the situation of Afrikaners in the recent cross-cultural South Africa in

order to highlight the importance of the past to the present. Moreover, the ambiguity and/or ambivalence of what is told by Ouma Kristina undermine notions of history and reality, yet the magical realistic incidents such as the ones related with the mysterious birds or Ouma's disappearance after her death are trivialized by Kristien who matter-of-factly avoids explaining them via a rational way. Nonetheless, the ambivalence encapsulated in the narration can be explained as Maggie Ann Bowers posits:

The storyteller, who can alter the story each time it is told can be asked questions by the listener who thereby guides the storyteller. This interactive storytelling is thought to promote communities by binding people together in a creative act. Moreover, because each time the story is it is altered, it is understood that there is no one correct version of the story and that in fact, there are many. (90)

In fact, Kristien asks about the veracity of the stories when the ancient grandmother promptly answers that the truth is not important, and every time she confuses the stories she proves that there is not a single and monolithic version of the facts, that "everything is simultaneously actual and illusory" (170) as Brian Friel asserts in his play *Dancing at Lughnasa*. Perhaps, the stories establish alternative means of conceptualization, and by doing so, those stories place the dimension of culture on the political agenda, as they serve to liberate the female voices from the authority of male dominant societies. It is, indeed, the premise based on female corporeality and sexuality that consequently leads to the challenging agency of the women in the novel who are empowered through the trope of magical realism, in order to portray their controversial relation with the world around them. It also is this concern with inner life that provides coherence to each story. When referring to Barthes's theorization of daydreaming, Homi Bhabha asserts that "the structure of fantasy narrates the subject of daydream as the articulation of incommensurable temporalities, disavowed wishes, and discontinuous scenarios" (*The Location of Culture*, 260). Thereby Brink's novel encapsulates the juxtaposition of fantasy and a kind of daydream, and reality is accessible as a kaleidoscope of jumbled mirrors where everything may or may not happen. Likewise, the carnival sense of the world in Bakhtin's formulation is, to some extent, present in the way Ouma Kristina portrays the reality of the women of her family, as is the example of Wilhelmina and her adventures. In accordance with this carnivalesque realm, it is clear that there are always layers of truth and as David K. Danow suggests:

The carnivalesque is animated by a certain, perhaps periodic, human *need* to dissolve borders and to eliminate boundaries (...). Hence, the carnivalesque is designed to allow one extreme to follow into another, to provide for one polarity (the official culture) to meet and intermingle with its opposite (unofficial culture), much as individuals engaged in dialogue exchange points of view that may on occasion converge or coalesce into a single perspective. (25)

It is precisely this dissolution of boundaries that is at stake in Ouma Kristina's discourse which introduces into the mainstream culture not only the voices of women but also the voices of native



people, concluding that reality, history and truth are for the most part unknown. However, Danow's formulation is somehow problematical when dealing with what he has designated as a "single perspective" which is exactly the opposite of what Bakhtin formulated as heteroglossia and dialogism, and it cannot be directly applied to Brink's novel because *Imaginings of Sand* partakes of the notion of polyphony and multiple perspectives and perceptions of the world. Adopting Bakhtin's model of dialogic discourse in order to clarify the tension within magical realist texts, Maggie Ann Bowers notes that "there are two discourses in the narrative but each with a different perspective, the magical and the real, and that neither is dominant but is in constant tension with and opposition to the other" (98). In a postcolonial context this binary embodies the ever-present, ever-opposed colonized and colonizer relationship.

In the context of the new South Africa, magical realism as a genre that questions the pre-established socio-political order is relevant to such a hybridized culture due to its flexibility and tendency to cross cultural boundaries. Moreover, there is a number of important points raised by the novel in relation to both magical realism and gender issues, and to some extent magical realism participates in the female component of postmodernism. Wendy B. Faris asserts that

Although the narrative mode of magical realism belongs, in a sense, to both genders, it may be possible to locate a female spirit characterized by structures of diffusion, polivocality, and attention to issues of embodiment, to an earth-centred spirit world, and to collectivity, among other things, that is active in magical realism generally, regardless authorship. (170)

Therefore, *Imaginings of Sand* blends many kinds of discourses that can upend ossified hierarchies in favour of more transgressive and multifaceted stories. The stories of Kristien's ancestors portray images of voicelessness, such as the Khoikhoi woman, Kamma who got her tongue cut out and was somehow forbidden to tell her story, and it is also a metaphor for the native people who lost their voice and were dispossessed of their lands due to colonialism. It is also relevant to mention that Kamma, later re-named Maria by her husband Adam, was extraordinarily beautiful. However, every time a man tried to possess her whether by force or not, he suffers some weird accident or ends up dead, whether attacked by black ants, by tortoises, or by a "rabid meerkat", or gets a deflated scrotum. Given her stubbornness she was repeatedly beaten with a "sjambok" made from "the penis of a buffalo". Therefore, her story is not included in the narrative accidentally. Men were deeply attracted to her, and because of that they would invade the community where she lived. Clearly this draws attention into the genesis of miscegenation and problematizes the colonialist encounter between natives and settlers as well as issues of rape and violence against native women. Adam appears again as the embodiment of the biblical figure, though every time he enters the community where Kamma lives he spreads chaos with a mirror that was not an object the natives were familiar with. Ultimately, his behaviour contrasts with the magical figure of the woman who "changed into a

tree, a small tree, with ample space for the birds in her branches, and shadow below for her two mahems” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 192). Her lycanthropic powers allow her to vanish from earth taken by birds. It is interesting to note that in Ouma Kristina’s stories women do not die, they mysteriously disappear, sometimes leaving no trace, and at other times appearing to other women whether through mirror’s reflection, in the form of birds or ghosts, empty coffins are buried and even Ouma’s body disappears to appear later on in a form of a bird, though all men die in physical terms either murdered by the women they colonized or by natural causes. In sum, Brink inverts the conceptualization of history as mainly a place of men, so that women are preponderant in the course and developments of history. Nonetheless, the narrative is not freed from controversial aspects, even though it is a female story within the framework of documented and historical facts where women gain a site for contestation and a way to inscribe their voices within a certain context, for at the end they disappear, rendered silenced. Ultimately it can be argued that though there is a site for contestation that is widely used, women seem to remain peripheral and manipulated in a phallogocentric society. Meanwhile, other women populate Ouma’s narratives, as is the case of Lottie whose body has no shadow, embodying an significant tale of the incapacity of people to leave their print on the world. If the two women re-present the silenced voices of history, Wilhelmina, Ouma Kristina’s great-grandmother, embodies the female figure who by any means was willing to make history fighting against the British occupation of Natal in 1843, leading a women’s movement as an engagement in anti-colonialism. Through her ghost-like figure we are told that she definitely tried to make herself heard within a crowd of male dominant voices:

Wilhelmina was the only woman in our family who actually played a part in recorded history. Not because she went on the Great Trek, many others did the same; but because she was not content to remain in the shadows and allow men to make their habitual mess of things. She intervened. She became involved. She took charge. For some time at least. (*Imaginings of Sand*, 268)

It is important to note that ghosts prosper in magical realist fiction and are important to define magical realism as a literary mode. According to Faris, sometimes the cultural regeneration in a colonized society surfaces after an encounter with death:

In this context, the fact that the cultural pasts and beliefs present in magical realism often include encounters with the dead takes an additional significance. In a process analogous to initiation rites that enact ritual experiences of symbolic death and rebirth, readers and their societies strengthen themselves through narratives that bridge the worlds of living and eclipsed or dying cultures. Thus colonized societies may undergo an experience that approximates a kind of symbolic death and reconstruction of their cultural bodies through these narratives, which rediscover and affirm extinct or vanishing indigenous beliefs in the face of colonial ones. (*Ordinary Enchantments*, 137)

Given that “ghosts make absence present”, Lois Parkinson Zamora asserts that “they foreground magical realism’s most basic concern – the nature and limits of the knowable – and they facilitate

magical realism's critique of modernity" (498). As stated by Zamora, they "embody the fundamental magical realist sense that reality always exceeds our capacities to describe or understand or prove and that the function of literature is to engage this excessive reality, to honor that which we may grasp intuitively but never fully or finally define" (498).

Paradoxically, and despite the attempts to invert or alter the course of history, some pages further on Wilhelmina states that "regrettably, the confrontation made no difference at all to the course of history. It was not even recorded." (*Imaginings of Sand*, 288), and at the end her story is greatly parodied in what the narrator refers to as a "shit-storm" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 291). Wilhelmina undergoes a metamorphosis during her life: initially described as a very strong and powerful woman, a magical healer surrounded by animals and bearing children all the time, at the end she becomes a tyrannical mother who forbade her children (male and female) from getting married. It is interesting to note the fact that this metamorphic process occurs when she realized that the course of history could not be changed, that women had little power left to fight back, and consequently she turned to eating, "reaching elephantine proportion" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 290) like Boony in Rushdie's *Shalimar, the Clown*. By doing so she became a grotesque figure, and consequently her abject female body can also be acknowledged as a metaphor of the country's degradation and collapse. Both characters, Wilhelmina and Boony, lost hope in the future so they made themselves mute by ingesting excess food and inevitably they lack the will to leave the confines of an enclosed space, showing a complete lack of interest in the outside world. In gender-concerned philosophy, the notion of the abject body is wisely and extensively developed in the studies of Julia Kristeva, and it is important to note that

There looms, within abjection, one of those violent, dark revolts of being, directed against a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable. It is there, quite close, but it cannot be assimilated. It beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire, which, nevertheless, does not let itself be seduced. Apprehensive, desire turns aside; sickened, it rejects. (*Powers of Horror*, 1)

Insofar as the abject body functions as a differentiation between the "self" and the "other", it causes exclusion and feelings of uncanniness, and produces as a result a "radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either. A 'something' that I do not recognize as a thing. A weight of meaninglessness, about which there is nothing insignificant, and which crushes me" (Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 2). Moreover, abjection functions as a demarcation or disruption of categories, within its transgressive assumptions it interrogates the central formations of ideology by intimidating the integrity of subjecthood. At the end, Wilhelmina became that meaningless "I", that objectified other or a liminal figure parodied in a grotesque death, a "shit-storm" that erased her from her own story, "Wilhelmina was buried under the rubble, sinking down, down into a seemingly bottomless pit, like a whale returning to the deep. It was her final shit-storm" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 291). Nonetheless, for

each tyrannical mother there is a subversive daughter. In Wilhelmina's case it is the eccentric Petronella who defied her mother and become the mistress of their own destiny, engendering her life according to a calculated but failed marriage, foreseeing it as a way to guarantee her role as a public performer. She became well-known because of her prophecies and her intention to go all the way to Egypt, a kind of promised land that she never managed to reach because in the meantime she got married and only travelled to Algoa Bay. After the incidents with the ark she built and the flood, which resembles Noah's biblical figure, she swore that indeed she had reached Egypt. However, the veracity of the facts was contested:

There were, inevitably, those who ridiculed the story, insisting that the ark came to grief in the storm barely a hundred yards from where the flood first shouldered it, and that both the occupants were so grievously injured that by the time they set out, on foot, for the Promise Land their hold on the real world was, to say at least, tenuous. This might explain why, when they surfaced in the civilized world again, completely off course, in Algoa Bay, almost two years after the flood, Petronella mistook the wide tract of sand and dunes along the Eastern Cape coast for the Sahara or the Sinai desert or the shore of the Red Sea. (*Imaginations of Sand*, 101-102)

Mistaking the sands of Algoa Bay for the sands of Sahara, Petronella apparently never gave up on the idea that she had travelled to that Promised Land, whilst she built a magnificent palace later termed as Sinai, though she always regarded the farm as "a place of temporary sojourn" (*Imaginations of Sand*, 104) because she was a traveller married to someone who had promised to take her back to the sea, she always felt displaced. However, as Ouma Kristina retells, he failed her and she never left the ex-centric palace, and still she became a matriarch ruling the family and covering their shameful sins. Obviously, in Petronella's story there is this sense of displacement, and dislocation which was overtaken by maternity and the duties of the wife of a prominent Dutch consul. In spite of being a powerful woman, Petronella was confined to the narrow space of the house, silenced by the contingencies of an epoch when women were mere pieces of decoration.

Magical realism registers a discourse of plurality, of disagreement which frames the female voices in order to empower them, and it is also an instrument to emphasize the expression of female desire and power as is exemplified through the stories that Ouma Kristina tells. While Kristien becomes the repository of the memories of these female voices, Ouma Kristina is the mediator of all these stories which can be analysed as a result of the encounter between different cultures developing a "place of hybridity" where alterity may be revealed in order to affirm the contingencies and particularities of South African identities. The chaotic reality of Kristien's life is highlighted through the dream-stories and the imagination of her grandmother's discourse. There is also a sense of love in times of terror when referring to Kristien's lover, Sandile, a theme always present at Brink's novels. However, much of what is not told by Ouma Kristina remains peripheral. Though Brink's narrative takes place during a turning point in South Africa's history, what really is at stake is

the past of the country. Nonetheless, the narrative discloses a submerged politics of appropriation. Aligned with magical realism, the storytelling process encapsulates an initiation into womanhood, and the portrayal of a complex South African reality, showing that to some extent identities are for the most part based on stories that are changeable, effectively multiple and not stagnant. The magical realistic events related back to the extraordinary lives of the eight women, stories that are told and appropriated by a not less eccentric character, Kristina, who is always accompanied by birds, and when asked about them by her granddaughter she promptly explains that “the birds are the spirits of dead women” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 237). Ellen Moers elaborates on the bird symbol and the connection to women as follows: “of all creatures, birds alone can fly all the way to heaven – yet they are caged. Birds alone can sing more beautifully than human voices – yet they are unheeded, or silenced” (293-294). Henceforth, Moers extends the metaphor of the birds to imprisonment and torture which can also be extensively applied to the women in Brink’s novel who despite their attempts to subvert their reality are to some extent imprisoned in a phallogocentric society, and some of them even tortured physically and psychologically as is the case of Rachel who was locked in a room for being different. Like the “little idiots” she was

kept locked up in the cellar, looked after by orphan girls from the cities. (...) Except for one hour a week, from two to three on Sundays, when everybody would be asleep, stupefied by the huge Sunday dinner. The hour of the idiots, they called it (*Imaginings of Sand*, 87).

Rachel is Ouma’s Kristina biological mother, the one who hides a story of rape and consequently the revenge between a white man and a black one. Hers also is a story of shame and madness. The matrilineal side of the (hi)story is the one that Ouma gives emphasis to by denying and hiding the fathers’ lineage from the women’s histories because “surnames are of no importance” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 174). Paradoxically, the male figure is always preponderant and who ends up determining the course of some of the stories. Ouma uncovers the lie of her real mother, saying that

Hermanus Johannes Wepener had tried to seduce Salie’s daughter Lida who was a mere child of twelve or thirteen. Tried to bribe her with beads, with gold sovereign, even a ring with bright stones. She refused. She was terrified. He paid no attention. He had the *droit de seigneur*. So he raped her. (*Imaginings of Sand*, 112)

Therefore this “droit of seigneur” had unforeseen consequences: “there was nothing Salie could do. Not directly. The only revenge he could think of taking was to do the same to Hermanus Wepener’s daughter. That was Rachel” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 113). Given that Ouma is the offspring of an act of sexual violence, and mixed race, her grandmother Petronella had to silence and hide Rachel in order to save her family from public shame and disgrace, and people “were given to understand that Rachel had run away” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 88). By doing so, the house became a prison to Rachel and her marvellous-erotic paintings “images of tantalizing obscenity, a cavorting of fantastic sexual creatures” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 8), a way to escape that enforced captivity, yet one day the paintings

also disappeared mysteriously. The house is an interesting place as well, representing a pastiche of several architecture styles. With its non-linear shapes and mysterious rooms, the labyrinthine corridors, it also illustrates the ideas of postmodern novels, “the house resembled nothing else on this planet” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 7). While the house hides the family shameful secrets in its enigmatic rooms which clearly mimic the human mind and the subconscious, it also is a metaphor *par excellence* of the nation and identity, revealing how memory and narrative are entangled with the construction of identity, and “the whole house was a living treasury of stories, unto each room its own, but all culminating in the ghostly presences and imaginings of that lugubrious cellar, inhabited – still – by a long-dead Girl” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 8). The chaos of several architectural genres whose corridors and rooms reawaken Kristien’s memories of her childhood provides the palette of stories where ghosts, birds and women communicate. To some extent, the palace built by an eccentric woman contains a sort of allegory for the secrets and crimes of apartheid, as is the example of sexual discrimination. Thus the satire caused by the excessiveness of the “House of Birds” which is “big enough to hide a multitude of sins” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 113) serves as a political commentary on the machinations of an autocratic system. In fact, the narrative encodes other elements that are crucial to perceive a sort of female cartography such as the symbolic use of birds as metaphors of the women’s spirits who are engaged to protect the house; the mirrors, that fascinated Lottie and other women, are magical, resembling the mirrors in fairy tales. They can ultimately be read as disrupting the boundaries of identity and difference, exposing the other as the same. Moreover, mirrors can be read as the emergence of identity, and all the women experience *jouissance* by staring at their own reflection, perhaps realizing that it is not an other but the doubleness of themselves. While it is a very feminine object, mirrors reveal identity, suggesting the doubleness of the world and also alluding to the idea of observing and being observed as an inscription of the body in the landscape. Lottie without a shadow could only see her reflection in the mirror, and like Narcissus she fell in love with that reflection because it showed a reflection which is the only proof that she really existed. This enigmatic and secretive woman used to leave the house in search of her shadow, leaving messages written in codes across the valley in order to inscribe her presence in the world.

The codes she used sometimes resembled the trails of snakes or lizards on the sand, or at other times the tiny tracks of ants, or birds, or field mice, or meerkats. All the day long she would write these messages for the small creatures of the wild to convey her shadow: signs inscribed on the leaves of succulents, the bark of trees, the mottled surface of the rocks, or on tracks of sand. (...) Since she had no shadow, any sign she would leave of herself, of her whereabouts, of having been there, would do. (*Imaginings of Sand*, 303-4)

Lacking a shadow, Lottie also lacks a language so symbols would be enough to express herself. Obviously, the implicit idea deals with the controversial issue that the colonized communicating using the language of the colonizer. To some extent Lottie refuses to articulate her experiences and

her speech in the language of the oppressor; she constructed her own language in order to make her-self visible. Lottie is a native woman living with Boers, with a man who was married but took her as a second wife, a man that also has sexual intercourse with his own daughters. Through Lottie's story Brink raises issues of incest and problematizes the absence of women's rights, always subjected to a patriarchal order.

Ouma Kristina's stories are framed by magical realism not only because of the panoply of magical events that they contain, but because those stories partake of the sense of discontinuity or disconnection that are features of magical realism. Thus the world is presented through a new lens, and through which "the antinomy between the irrational and the rational would have been abolished" (David Reddall, 377) accepted by her granddaughter but refused and seen as just stories by Anna. So the real becomes fictional, and fictional real, the codes and conventions are blurred, and assumptions or pre-concepts left to be re-examined. Paradoxically, it is this entangled web created around the female characters that create a more accurate and inclusive portrayal of the world. Every time Ouma Kristina mentions certain facts referring to her ancestors, she ends up altering them, leaving behind the sense of shifting sands after a storm. In sum, her-story is (in)formed by texts and palimpsests, the discourse of a nation intertwined with personal histories. Her stories are an "erotic struggle to create new categories from ruins of the old" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 162). While imagining an alternate version of reality with her corporeal self, Ouma Kristina also asserts in her storytelling that identities are fluid, and they undermine the rigid boundaries between subjects and objects. It is interesting to note that the mode of storytelling employed by Ouma Kristina creates a Russian-doll effect that goes from the acceptance of myths as a cultural element to the acknowledgement of historical changes that have shaped South African identities. Instead of being a mode to amuse children, storytelling becomes a crucial endeavour to inscribe female voices in patriarchal worlds, fictional or otherwise, and those voices create a "third-space" where phallogocentric principles do not apply or impose themselves. According to Annette Horn and Peter Horn the intention of Ouma Kristina to help reconcile Kristien with her Afrikaans identity based on her magical stories deals with the "retelling of history in which ordinary women and men of all races are inextricably bound up seems to be the precondition of a fully democratic South Africa" (115).

*Imaginations of Sand* situates itself on the verge of the post-apartheid period, and suggests a set of ways to deal with issues of gender and magical realism by stressing the relevance of feminism and storytelling. Ouma Kristina's tapestry of stories focuses on attitudes towards her gender and sexuality, as well as towards the imminent chance of social changes regarding women's position within socio-political contexts. The celebration of women's sexuality pervades the whole narrative; hence it is extensively conveyed when Ouma Kristina refers to her fantastic marriage with Jethro,

the father of Louisa and Kristien's grandfather. Her description of the events surrounding their life together, juxtaposes the ordinary life of a woman who had gone against her family, and the magical of fairy tales with flying carpets and amazing creatures in extraordinary places. By blending these two elements there is a sense of familiarity and wonder. She tinges the complexity of a forbidden relationship with the colourful imagery of Scheherazade's tales,

And Bagdad was full of merchants, travelling across the seven seas and back. As a matter of fact, the man who first put us up was called Sindbad. Not *the* Sindbad of course, but a descendant. He lavished all kinds of splendid gifts on us and showed us all the sights. The days were hot, but the evenings were divine. We used to stroll to the outskirts of the city and watch the sunset, when all the camels would climb into the palm trees and sing hymns in Latin. Every night there was a party, either at Sindbad's palace or at one of his friends. With – what do they call those girls? – obelisks, and eunuchs, and veiled dancers, and storytellers, and the most exquisite food and drink, and opium pipes, and perfumes wafting about. (*Imaginations of Sand*, 109)

Later on Kristien realizes that Ouma's tale of burning love was not that colourful and reality had other less magical contours, Jethro was indeed her lover and the father of her nine children, but Ouma's life was quite different from the one she described. However, Ouma Kristina repeatedly asserts that she is telling stories which may or may not be the truth. In fact, the magical interwoven with the real works as a filter or a lens through which atrocities are masked and parodied. Reality suffers some alterations through the fantastic mode in order to make it acceptable. Ouma Kristina clearly creates a "third-space" of contact where female voices are etched, and there is a sense of in-betweenness that characterizes some contemporary fiction.

The female body is perceived as a site for contestation as well as being doubly colonized, and it is often used as a metaphor for the imagining of the nation. Likewise, stories of women are pivotal in portraying and contextualizing the female body as sexually powerful, and the idea that the female body and magic are allied perpetuates the tradition of male fantasies and fears regarding women's sexuality. Brink's female characters are always powerful ones, capable of telling their story and rejecting the silence that phallogocentric societies impose on them. Hence they seek to challenge and rupture the boundaries of identities based on gender, class and location. The eroticized body is, then, an effect of signification, in which case Judith Butler asserts:

The mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue performative, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that claims to find prior to any and all signification. (*Bodies that Matter*, 30)

It is precisely this idea of the body as performative that is revealed through Ouma's stories, women are not mere ciphers, they matter, which means that they are politically engaged with history. The imbrications of the feminine body are evoked as the other, a space of transgression and desire. Therefore, through a spectacle of excess of pleasure and pain, the stories call attention to the social



codes of normativity and how these codes are transgressed, so that they herald new configurations of history, reflecting possible chances and the relationship between women and the nation identity. Elizabeth Grosz brilliantly interrogates Foucault's formulation of the body as a *tabula rasa* by observing that

do sexually different bodies require different inscriptive tools to etch their surfaces? Or rather, is it the inscription of power that produces bodies as sexually different? (...) If the writing or inscription metaphor is to be of any use for feminism – and I believe that it can be extremely useful – the specific modes of materiality of the page / body must be taken into account (156)

Consequently, the notion of inscription of bodies may be helpful, for the body inscribed in Brink's novel is not a *tabula rasa*. On the contrary, it is the body of several women with different backgrounds but a common struggle which also allows the investigation of the gendered implications of female sexuality as censored. All the women in *Imaginations of Sand* exceed and thereby refuse the structures of a patriarchal and colonial society. For instance, Samuel inscribed herself in the margins of society by hiding-erasing her sexual identity as a woman, choosing a male name and dressing like one, and by having a lesbian relationship after her husband mysteriously died, presumably murdered by her. The trope of storytelling serves to highlight the conflicts that were the basis of the lives of these women, an entangled web of narratives that draws on the bodies and on their memories in order to construct a matrix of polyphonic stories. Inasmuch as the female bodies of the novel are inextricably bonded to Ouma Kristina, she functions as a repository of a subaltern history inscribed in the blank spaces of the official one, or borrowing Foucault's formulation in his essay "Of Other Spaces", this women's history can be read in terms of the fact that "a whole history remains to be written of spaces which would at the same time be the history of powers" (24). Independently from her referential world, Kristien ends up accepting Ouma's stories as the facts of the lives of her ancestors, though those lives contain for the most part marvelous elements. By accepting the conventions of the magical within the real, she is engraving the extraordinary in the realm of her personal story. *Mutatis mutandis* this process of juxtaposing expresses a sense of unreality, instilling the ordinary with mystery. In fact, magical realism discloses the need to explore and transgress borders, facilitating the communication between irreconcilable realities. Thus, whatever may be the truth in those stories is not a priority, for what seems to be relevant is the desire to restore and preserve the past while locating women in the centre rather than in the margins. In spite of being a male writer focalizing through a female protagonist, Brink employs a feminized magical realism in order to give agency to female figures as a technique to call attention to often trivialized subjects. Through this storytelling strategy, Brink also amplifies the parameters of reality; instead of a monolithic perspective of history we are given a dialogical "diversity of social speech types" (Bakhtin, 236). Yet, each of Ouma Kristina's tales reacquaints Kristien with a story

that had been erased from the official records as well as serving to help her to come to terms with her own (hi)story and identity as Afrikaner.

The title of the book should also be a motive of analysis which is not occasional or destitute of meaning. Rather it is *per se* a relevant metaphor of history that can be altered according to different tellers and their perspectives. History can be acknowledged as being unstable; rather, as Brink asserts it needs constant interpretation by re-imagining. The shifting sands and the sense of fluidity that pervade Ouma's Kristina discourse encapsulate the fragmentation and inconstancy of the construction of identities. Whereas histories are revealed as dichotomies, the ones referring to men are accepted as a master-narrative, "theirs [men] the monuments for the ages; and ours the imaginings of sand" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 330). The heroic male pathway contrasts with the transitory and shifting impressions that women have left in history, only acknowledged and recuperated via oral traditions of storytelling. Nevertheless, there is a permanent feeling of movement or continuity, the idea that past and present are interwoven, and the need to storify history discloses the past as a preponderant aspect in outlining the present. Like desert sands which are shaped by the wind and do not remain the same, identities are also engendered according to different perspectives, rather than a process based on objectivity, so that history is for the most part a subjective fabrication of memories: "history is not an impersonal force that sweeps us along like a flood, it is real and physical as this body, which so serenely enfolds all its past selves. Hers, mine, yours." (*Imaginings of Sand*, 336). Ironically, this conceptualization of history as physical as bodies is portrayed by the incident in the airplane when Kristien was travelling back to South Africa, while sitting between two men who both attempted to grope her and who, on being foiled, called her "bitch" or "witch". She could not be sure what the words were they used because both have similar meanings. History has shown that female bodies exist to be possessed sexually or not by men. Hence Kristien analyzes the behaviour of these men by reckoning "I am female flesh, I may be invaded" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 4). Again, Brink problematizes the female body, this time as an object-site that can be desired, and ultimately possessed and invaded by males which resembles the land that can be taken from its people and colonized. Traversed with this incident, Kristien recalls her childhood memories and her relationship with her father and the sense of being a disappointment for being born a girl. She is as Rushdie describes in *Shame* "the miracle that went wrong" (92) when referring to Sufyia. Kristien imagines what her father had thought as "seeing me born, like my predecessor, without the distinguishing appendance of the right sex, he retreated in disgust and pretend I hadn't happened" (*Imaginings of Sand*, 3). Clearly, she is on the one hand the undesired daughter to whom the mother figure will remain involved in a sort of mysterious layer, while on the other hand the fairytale-like stories that Ouma Kristina has reserved for her will be the passage into her womanhood, revealing family

secrets and diaries as parallel worlds, so that it is also her identity that should be recovered after listening to the stories. Although the female characters are crucial and their stories are the main issue of the novel if compared with males, who are “incidents”, there is a controversial agenda behind some of those stories as is the case with Louisa, Ouma Kristina’s daughter. Paradoxically enough Louisa was only able to tell her story through her mysterious diaries which represent a parallel reality within the confines of a marriage that served to render her mute. Ouma Kristina refers to Louisa in an ironic tone

Of all this there is no big sign in Louisa’s story, it is as if she’s never been there, never looked over his shoulder. All she could leave behind was the diaries, and those were too private for the eyes of the others, flights of the imagination described on the tablets of her secret resistance and suffering, worthless to outsiders. (*Imaginings of Sand*, 124)

The diaries imbricate an ultimate way to tell her story but even though they were preserved by Ouma they were destroyed after the fire accident, so somehow the incident caused by political instability made her story vanish. Louisa embodies the stereotype of the woman-artist who could only find expression either in music or writing; she became a “shadow”, living a life of total seclusion after discovering that her husband’s political campaigns had ruined their finances leaving nothing but debts. Given that, Brink is implicitly stating that women may well be the bearers of men’s disgrace.

The narrative is set within a female *corpography* and the body is often acknowledged as a site of contestation but also objectified by the male gaze and desire, and representations of women have been predominantly challenging in certain postcolonial texts. Hence, Brink informs his novel within a central theorization of gender power where women embody subversion, resistance and survival enacted through their bodies, though female bodies also encapsulate different polarities as Elizabeth Grosz asserts

On the negative view, women’s bodies are regarded as an inherent limitation on women’s capacity for equality, while on the positive side, women’s bodies and experiences are seen to provide women with special insight, something that men lack. Both sides seem to have accepted patriarchal and misogynist assumptions about the female body as somehow more natural, less detached, more engaged with and directly related to its “objects” than male bodies. (15)

Accordingly, to encode several meanings onto the body and the various ways that oppression is materialized through bodies find support in Ouma Kristina’s eccentric actions regarding her body fluids and maternity. To a certain extent Ouma Kristina is endowed with an independent notion of female subjectivity, corporeality, and sexuality.

For all the fertile years of her long life Ouma stored her bloodstained towels as a silent testimony – proud, defiant, shocking, but silent – of her womanhood. But then it died up. No longer fecund, she broke out in her stories. (*Imaginings of Sand*, 331)

Perhaps as Mary Douglas suggests in her seminal work *Purity and Danger*, the cyclical flows that pour from a women's body are still a mode of representation of uncleanness, or being dirty. Thus she locates that idea of uncleanness as danger and the conceptualization of purity as the basis of the relations established between male and female counterparts, so that "such patterns of sexual danger can be seen as to express symmetry and hierarchy" (Douglas, 4). Douglas describes the connection between the social and the physical body by stating that the boundaries of the physical body decided upon within culture are taken up in discourse to represent necessary social limits:

ideas about separating, purifying, demarcating and punishing transgressions have as their main function to impose systems on as inherently untidy experience. It is only by exaggerating the difference between within and without, above and below, male or female, with and against, that a semblance of order is created. (5)

Therefore, the dichotomy between "order-purity" and "disorder-pollution" as theorized by Douglas emphasizes male authority over women by transferring to this system symbolically into the female body. Of particular peril and consequently of symbolic loading are body fluids, and in agreement with Kristeva there is a connection between the integrity of the body and the integrity of the self, so that both Douglas or Kristeva shed light on the representations of the female body and how abjection works as source of revulsion and separation in socio-cultural terms. Within a cultural framework menstrual blood, saliva and genital excretions, but not woman's tears are regarded as shameful, but also disgusting and containing the power to contaminate as explained by Elizabeth Grosz. However, this room full of bloodstained towels does not necessarily embody shame or impurity, rather it works as an affirmation – this is my life and I have been here seems to be the idea that pervades Ouma Kristina's discourse, and by stowing all those rags, a lifetime of her female condition, she is clearly demarcating her position as a woman. Additionally, it is relevant to refer to Kristeva's formulations on that matter

Excrement and its equivalents (decay, infection, disease, corpse, etc.) stand for the danger to identity that comes from without: the ego threatened by the non-ego, society threatened by its outside, life by death. Menstrual blood, on the contrary, stands for the danger of issuing from within the identity (social or sexual); it threatens the relationship between the sexes within a social aggregate and, through internalization, the identity of each sex in the face of sexual difference. (*Powers of Horror*, 71)

Instead of feeling embarrassed she is declaring the beginning of her adulthood, and then by asking Kristien to destroy the content of the room she is accepting her ephemeral condition and the eminence of her corporeal fragmentation. Subsequently, she subverts the idea that the abject aspects of the female body should be denied, transgressing the confinement of idealized body but mainly reinforcing the idea of inscribing herself against phallogocentric conceptions of purity and impurity related with the female body and the way it is acknowledged by others. Moreover, while describing her experience of being a mother Ouma Kristina gives details about the pleasure of it, an absolute physical pleasure

Also discovered that I loved being pregnant (...). Not the bringing up of the children afterwards. And certainly not having the fathers around. (...) But being pregnant – that feeling of wholeness, of being totally self-sufficient, of folding myself around my own centre. To feel my body growing heavy and to ripen like a big fruit, the fruit of myself, to feel my breasts swelling with milk – I love lying in my back and seeing the milk trickle from my nipples across my body and under my arms, and pushed myself up on my elbows, over my belly and round my popped-up navel, and into my pubic hair, and down the sides – to imagine it flowing from me, over the floor and out of the doors and across the veld (...). – That was a fulfillment I could never have in any other way. (*Imaginings of Sand*, 114)

The description glosses an autoerotic pleasure in the presence of maternal milk; female corporeality is identified through body fluids, blood and milk, and they incorporate several aspects of cultural constructions. Nonetheless, in Ouma's discourse is clear that the idea of impurity and uncleanness is subverted. Both moments referring to menstruation and motherhood are seen as rites of passage and totally accepted as being part of womanhood, and her corporeality insists on an alterity which, according to Elizabeth Grosz, "is a conditions but is also a product of the pliability or plasticity of bodies which makes them others than themselves, other than their 'nature', their functions and identities." (209). Thereby Brink's novel strives through its representations and constructions of identities, as well as those mementoes of womanhood, to map the multidimensional contours that female corporeality may take in different places and different times.

Edward Said has formulated the importance of writers being engaged with history, referring to texts as bearers of their socio-political circumstances, time, place: "texts are worldly, to some degree they are events and, even when they appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted" (*The World, the Text, and the Critic* 4). Therefore Brink's novels assume a role in contesting the totalitarian discourses of apartheid, revealing a "historical experience of resistance against empire" (*Culture and Imperialism*, xii) as well as coming to grips with the necessity of recognizing the incompleteness of historical representation. Moreover, and by using ghosts as imminent figures of the past, Brink may be also suggesting that the recovery of South African history is in fact a matter of acknowledging its ghostly past instead of hiding it. The traumas inscribed in the inner landscape of South African people should be worked out and accepted. The trope of miscegenation is also crucial in the novel. Ouma Kristina's assertion of her family as of mixed origin is significant if related to the story of the country, effectively countering the interpretation of identities diffused during apartheid. Conceptualized as a "point of no return", elections are introduced in the novel as a moment of hopes and expectation for the country, but also as a moment of in-betweenness and uncertainty clearly portrayed by characters such as Trui who problematizes the position of "colored people", pointing up the complexity in the construction of identities. She is aware of the liminal status of "colored" South Africans when she promptly responds to Kristien that "the blacks have

never cared one bit about us colored, Miss Kristien. First the whites gave us hell, now it's the blacks. For us in-between people nothing will ever change" (*Imaginations of Sand*, 169). However, according to Bhabha's theorization liminality allows new social structures to emerge, though it also signifies being between two places, of dwelling in a moment in which something becomes something else. This ambiguity is encapsulated by Trui's speech which underpins the complexities of interactions between identities, and cultures that are categorized according to binary oppositions. Nevertheless, these binary oppositions can be questioned in the ambiguity of "liminal spaces" as Bhabha explains: "liminal spaces, in-between the designations of identity (...) open up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy" (4). Equally, while Trui suggests that their liminal and hybrid status still represents a nation's taboo the narrator deconstructs that by locating her within the realm of the family saga, advocating that a mixed population is part of South African identities and that there is no such a thing as racial categorization or classification.

As mentioned, Brink in his work is overly preoccupied with gender issues, with "bodies that matter" in a socio-cultural context. In the socio-political context of a globalized country as it is the case of South Africa, political contentions of the past with its atrocities continue to be prominent, and class, race and gender cleavages still persist:

It was not until the introduction of the Bill of Rights that all women in South Africa received formal recognition as equal citizens. Women – under the social and even legal control of their fathers or husbands - were second-class citizens for many years. Black women were obviously doubly disadvantaged as a result of their race and their gender. The law, in various forms, has had a significant role in this prejudice. Customary law, for instance, gives black women the status of minors and excludes them from rights regarding children and property. South Africa's common law deprived white women of guardianship and various economic rights. Nowadays women and black women in particular, are still economically disadvantaged: they make up a disproportionate section of the unemployed and tend to occupy more of the lower-paid jobs, as domestic and farm labourers. And they often earn less than men for the same tasks. South African women also have to contend with extremely high rates of rape and domestic violence. (quoted from <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/womens-rights-and-representation>).

South Africa, or the rainbow nation as it is known worldwide has a "hybrid legal system" (statutory and customary law) which seems to be ineffective in implementing laws to protect women. Even though some improvements have been achieved, every year the rate of violence and intolerance against women no matter their skin colour remains high. It is interesting to note that under customary law, polygamy is allowed, although it is rarely practiced. Indeed, the current President, Jacob Zuma, whose major role is to guarantee the application of the Constitution, providing for equal rights between men and women, overtly supports polygamy and married his fifth wife in 2010. Like any other country-nation which had in its history autocratic political systems, South Africa is

still in a process of recovering, rebuilding its foundations and improving the enforcement of protective laws. However injustice, poverty and crime are major issues in the daily life of its citizens. Despite the attempts at improving the position of women in the fields of *inter alia* domestic violence, sexual abuse and family law, women still constitute one of the most marginalized and exposed groups in South African society. Parallel bridges can be drawn and crossed from history to fiction, and as mentioned previously novels have chosen to play that role, and writers are often the voices heard, acting like ciphers to decode the silences of marginalized people, exposing the atrocities of tyrannical figures. In that respect, André Brink has committed himself to that role of exposing the silence.

Brink's way of depicting women and sex has however always been controversial. Critics often point out that his female voices are hypersexualized, with accusations of sexism and obscenity. Indeed, there is a sort of politics of excess in his way of representing females in terms of sexuality. However as readers we are told that if we "object to descriptions of sexual intercourse... [this] prompts the question whether such a reader shouldn't skip the whole book" (*Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*, 110). In this small chapter, Brink is clearly responding to such critiques, affirming that perhaps some of his books are overly sexualized but that should not posit a problem as during decades people were controlled and silenced in that matter. Once again, he is writing back to a regime that was so controlling in terms of people's sexuality, writing back to the incongruence of the policy expressed in the "Immorality Act" passed by the apartheid system. From a gender-based perspective, *Imaginations of Sand* negotiates the resisting forces that derive from embittered women who try to find expression within a repressive white phallogocentric culture. Homi Bhabha's thoughts regarding the narration of nation and the "incomplete signification [that] is a turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated" (*Nation and Narration*, 4) can be applied to Brink's narrative, given the focus on the lives of nine women to whom "a luta continua", a struggle to be inscribed in history that can be acknowledged as the passing of boundaries. Those unuttered voices have been given agency through the process of storytelling. Embedded in the excess and the fantastic, the tales are crowded by issues such as incest, sexual abuse, miscegenation, eroticism, love, homosexuality and loss, as well as reconstructing and re-evaluating the place occupied by marginalized subjectivities, particularly those of the native people and women, through the tropes of magical realism that ultimately works as a decolonizing mode. Brink's ironic narrative voice and his emancipatory venture aim to question fundamental dichotomies as masculine/feminine, real/magical, history/story in a postmodern approach. In sum, the hybridized mode of storytelling used by Brink aims at exploring women's creativity and their position in society while it also highlights the possible connections between

personal histories and public history. Moreover, the stories evolve into the trope for the ways colonialism and the apartheid system has shaped women's sexuality and the modes of culturally representing them. The novel brings into play the cultural horizon of how women have been neglected in societies, and to some extent it opens up new ways of acknowledging the implications of misrepresenting the other as well as being an attempt to re-imagine history and reclaim the past as a viable entity. That is to say that culture consists in a tapestry of stories accessible in myths, norms and ideals, but also the deconstruction of those concepts. Brink also emphasizes the notion that there is no such a thing as national identity but a web of elements that make possible the diversity of identities within the same realm, glossing Bhabha's notion of identity and cultural diversity which is also

the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity. (...) The need to think the limit of culture as a problem of the enunciation of cultural difference is disavowed. (*The Location of Culture*, 34)

In fact, the stories of history function as "interstitial passages" or the "in-between spaces" where Brink re-imagines the cultural background of South Africa, and where he can enrol the subalternized voices of women or native people, creating a hybrid reality that can be seen as a "third space" because "these in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society" (*The Location of Culture*, 1). *Imaginations of Sand* alludes to the playfulness of postmodernism and its disruption of the notion of meaning as a whole, thus creating a sense of fragmentation. History is acknowledged as less fixed through the fabrication of Ouma's tales, the narrative becomes more of an open-ended text.

In its magical realistic techniques, the novel recuperates history by playing with reality; it problematizes issues that deal with gender, and also the importance of inscribing marginalized voices in the official history. Storytelling that is at the basis of Ouma Kristina's discourse may be also analyzed as an act of mourning, or an act of reinventing through personal narratives as was the aim of TRC. According to Els van Dongen while referring to art in general, sustains that "writing in particular, makes more than the naked reality. It brings a certain version of the truth into the open, which is also shaped by private motivations, hidden agendas, prejudice, biographical manipulations and suspicion" (127). Hence, every personal story in the milieu of South Africa becomes a political story and Brink is visibly preoccupied to uncover the hidden agenda of women and natives in order to make them part of national identities. By telling those magical tales that are articulated with the political context, Ouma Kristina is giving emphasis to women as crucial elements in an unbiased society, but she is to some extent grieving the atrocities perpetrated against them, so that



remembering is also an act of mourning. In the beginning of the novel, Kristien shows her interest in knowing more about those women, presumably because they present extraordinary and magical feature but also because they are part of her-story, and by doing so she is evoking their stories in an act of remembrance:

Ouma Kristina, tell me about the woman with the hair as long as a river – the girl who killed herself in the cellar – the woman who built the palace – the one that was strong as a buffalo – the one who came from the water – the one who wrote in sand – (*Imaginings of Sand*, 5).

In an almost provocative and quasi-polemic tone, Brink intersects in his narrative the magical and the real to give agency to a plethora of eccentric women with extraordinary abilities, and a myriad gender issues are overtly at stake in that mode of narrating the history of a nation. Yet it seems that there is a serious attempt to blur gender boundaries, so that instead of a female body perceived only as a “flesh-and-blood entity”, they should be acknowledged as a “symbolic construct” that “exist[s] for us in some form of discourse; and discourse, whether verbal or visual, fictive or historical or speculative, is never unmediated, never free of interpretation, never innocent” (Susan R. Suleiman, 2). This discourse finds assertion within magical realism and the non-linearity of storytelling with birds, ghosts, mirrors, empty coffins, long and magical blond hair, mysterious rooms, labyrinthine corridors, all the imagery converging to create this sense of fragmentation in time and space, while it also indirectly affirms the importance of magical realism in determining the “truth”. Whereas initially there is a rejection of the magical elements contained in the stories, later that juxtaposition between the ordinary and the marvellous seems to facilitate the understanding of the past as an operative element within the present as a way to make individuals responsible in the process of construction identities. Therefore, Brink creates a meta-history imbricated with female voices that allows women to be acknowledged in the South African historical context. However, the analogies between the past and the present are clear. For instance, the Anglo-Boer war, the saga of the Great Trek, thus the confusion of those historical moments resembles the present moment in Kristien’s narration of her condition as an ex-exiled woman but also the state of mind that prevailed before the elections. It is possible that Brink is suggesting that history repeats itself, the same old mistakes occur no matter the centuries that separate the past and what he depicts as the present in a time of siege. Likewise, there is a persistent suggestion about history and its repetitions that encapsulates the sense of “yet another skeleton in yet another cupboard” (*Imaginings of Sand*, 104). To uncover the skeletons of the past, Brink puts into play the experiences of individuals opposed to the political and ideological sphere of the country, and therefore the re-invention of history informed by female discourse attempts to fill the gaps in South African history that occurred with the silence or silencing of gender. At the same time, by tackling the secrets-skeletons of the past and reimagining liminal and female positions within society, the novel offers a new insight and a new way to understand national

identities. The use of imagination and magical realism permits the co-existence of conflicting versions, also ensuring the downfall of boundaries that subsist between the self and the other. As a cultural construct, novels should keep the dialectic between history and the present, hence opening up room for new assumptions of identities and the understanding of socio-political interferences and fluctuations. Njabulo Ndebele asserts that “by rediscovering the ordinary, the stories remind us necessarily that the problems of the South African formation are complex and all-embracing, that they cannot be reduced to a single, simple formulation” (57). In fact, the stories narrated in *Imaginings of Sand* partake of this multiple formulations of identities, and that by “rediscovering the ordinary” there is an implicit but conscious challenge to create a new society. Meanwhile, in his commitment to create a literature of protest and a site of struggle, Brink challenges pre-established “truths” and undoes the binary opposition of centre and margin. Accordingly, Richard Samin claims that “the rhetoric of memory, the writing of history, generic hybrid have become topics which are currently debated along with the concept of literature whose content is re-examined given the wide range of practices it subsumes” (81). Brink develops that “rhetoric of memory” through the stories in *Imaginings of Sand* and his female narrators, dealing with some of the possibilities that were excluded from official documents. His novel does not simply re-create life during apartheid and the socio-political turmoil after its demise, though it seeks a self-reflexivity within a textual practice that fuses imaginary loci which are more permeable to discourses of gender for instance, with the socio-political and cultural aspects of South Africa. Brink’s deployment of magical realism in his narrative in order to explore the silences of history makes this genre a relevant manifestation in the aesthetic of representing the post-apartheid imagination, and it becomes “the territorialization of the imaginary” (Amaryll Chanady, 125) where characters possess metamorphic powers and they easily change into flora or fauna elements, exemplified by Kamma the woman-tree and Ouma who became a bird as other women before her. Ultimately, *Imaginings of Sand* revisits history with a critical lens, and it provides a discursive site where contradictory voices may exist and subsist without being constantly denied. Although Brink always returns to the past, most of his work envisages the future in a positive way: for instance, when Kristien decided to stay in South Africa even after Ouma’s death and Anna’s vanishing. She is committing herself to the future of the country, and in that choice she is hoping that the future would be better for everyone. Thus, it is her statement that that place also belongs to her as it belonged to all the women of her tribe, of all tribes

For too long the women of my tribe, of all tribes, have been forced to suffer and to rebel in the small private space allotted them by the powerful males who ruled the world; I do not intent to run off in search of a shadow, or to change myself into a tree, or to be buried in shit, to embroider my name on a sweet little cloth, and especially not to vent my rage by wiping out my family with myself. (...) There are points of no return that mark the beginning, not the end, of hope. (*Imaginings of Sand*, 348)

Perhaps, the cacophony of female voices with their marvellous and/or grotesque features and their abilities to contest and subvert the roles imposed on them by a phallogocentric society serve as a pre-text that Kristien has to decode in order to accept herself not as woman but as an active participant on the course of her country's history. The pre-text created through the stories can be analyzed as "cultural signs spoken at the margins of social identity" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* 257). Inevitably, the open-endedness of the novel makes room for these cultural insights to take place as is implicit in Kristien's discourse. The "margins of social identity" are a fertile ground for unuttered (hi)stories, liminal voices that need to be decoded and re-inscribed as well as proving that gender is an axis of identity. Insofar as fiction can claim the space for those possible situations that were denied or silenced by official documents, it also functions as an approach to keep the interpretation of the past open to other formulations. In that matter, Brink gives emphasis to the role of literature in reshaping history, and "not simply escaping from the inhibitions of apartheid but to construct and deconstruct new possibilities; to activate the imagination in its exploration of those silences previously inaccessible (...) and to risk everything in the leaping flame of the word as it turns into world" ("Interrogating Silence" 27). Brink's narratives focus on the sublimated and politicized desire of women and their bodies as the locus of power politics. Therefore, informed by a female oriented perspective, means that his characters through storytelling open up room for new erotic codes, so that thereby they code and re-code the "colonized territory" of the female body that is framed or coded as erotic male fantasies, and re-coded here in terms of female experience.



## 2. *Entangled (Hi)stories, Intertwined Bodies: Fragmentation and Hybrid Identities in Kiana Davenport's Shark Dialogues*

“The entire world was like a palace with countless rooms whose doors opened into one another. We were able to pass from one room to the next only by exercising our memories and imaginations, but most of us, in our laziness, rarely exercised these capacities, and forever remained in the same room.”— Orhan Pamuk, *My Name is Red*

“The past is home albeit a lost home in a lost city in the mists of a lost time” – Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands*

In *Imaginary Homelands*, Salman Rushdie referred to the notion of memory in the construction of identity as follows

So it is clear that redescribing a world is the necessary first step towards changing it. And particularly at times when the State takes reality into its own hands, and sets about distorting it, altering the past to fit its present needs, then the making of the alternative realities of art, including the novel of memory, becomes politicized. (14)

André Brink's novels partake in the same notion that identities are constructed based on a past which is, according to Rushdie, somehow manipulated, so that narratives help to create those alternative realities where marginalized groups can be inscribed, as analyzed previously. Kiana Davenport's *Shark Dialogues* in its multiple and polyphonic narrations offers another case of the influence of memory in the construction of alternative realities, as well as of the refurbishment of the development of cultural memory that had been disturbed by colonial arrangements. Davenport's narrative is overtly what Rushdie has formulated as a “novel of memory”. As a native Hawaiian author, Davenport explores the colonial and neocolonial experience and history in Hawai'i by introducing Hawaiian women with complex identities as authoritative participants in the history of the nation as well as detailing their active participation in the future of the people. She posits her female characters within the realm of resistance against phallographic and colonial systems and reaffirms cultural, national and ecological integrity. Moreover, the novel is engaged in the politics of gender, cultural resistance, and environmental issues. Davenport is unafraid of redefining history from a peculiarly Hawaiian perspective. It is also crucial in the narration of a nation's history which is framed by postmodern historiographic metafiction and myths of origin. Her *écriture féminine* does

not only refer to the female body in “biological terms, but it is enveloped, produced and made meaningful by language” (Grosz, 144). Thus, it is through women’s voices and bodies that the history of abuses is depicted, while they also enable alteration through regenerative and artistic stimulus. Although at the basis of this regenerative process the binary relation of women/nature can be perceived, an ecofeminist minefield that encapsulates certain essentialist assumptions regarding female sexuality. However, it is also important to infer the visible connections between women and nature as one of many preconditions to analyze their cultural subordination in a postcolonial context, if one has in mind that, for instance, women are also for the most part symbolically related to the land that is colonized. Observing the related oppression of Hawaiian women and environmental issues activates the multifarious history of vast cultural dispossession that Hawaiian people had suffered, perhaps still suffer with the presence of tourism, which is particularly embedded in the experience of women. Rob Wilson when referring to the feminization of Hawai’i within the milieu of indigenous cultural recovery, asserts that

The push globally to market Hawai’i’s special appeal as a beautiful, multiculturally appealing, and world-class Pacific woman was happening at a time when many... were beginning to feel a lost sense of place... place-bound consciousness was being lost in the simulacrous circuits of global imagery, where iconic values are repeated until it displaces or replaces the actual. (xvi)

In fact, this feminization of the islands imposes on native peoples a necessity to validate their history, a feminization that occurs through the phallogocentric exoticization of women’s bodies which can be perceived as an extension of exploitation of the islands. Consequently, sexual, cultural, and racial hegemony are pivotal means used by phallogocentric systems in order to subjugate women as well as minorities and even Hawaiian ecological integrity.

Davenport’s fiction is, partially, a re-telling of history from a postmodern perspective in which heterogeneity and difference are foregrounded. Her response to the politics of memory and the construction of identities which range from nativism to nationalism appears to embrace difference and cultivate hybridity. And it is from this space of hybridity or in-betweenness that resisting forms of culture are produced, successfully undermining fixed patriarchal discourses. Accordingly, Davenport’s discourse is rooted in the dialectic of cultural resistance, exposing the debilitating sense of cultural loss for Hawaiian people in the aftermath of colonialism; she articulates a gender-based approach to social change. The complex intersections between gender, sovereignty and land dispossession are examined through the prism of feminist theories that reinforce the notion of women’s body as a site upon which several forms of violence and oppression are expressed, but also as sites of contestation and protest against racism and sexism. *Shark Dialogues* linguistically combines Pidgin, the Hawaiian language and English, which facilitates the creation of new forms of cultural expression as well as working as an assertion of Hawaiian cultural aspects that

Kiana Davenport finds important to represent symbolically in terms of language. To some extent the narrative depicts the hybridization of language as a means to conceal cultural metaphors, mythology and history. However, it is through hybrid identities, mongrel-marriages, that pre-colonial and colonial history is told as also the global context of imperialism, so that the effects of neocolonialism brought about by dispossession are some of the main themes that texture Davenport's narration of Hawai'i. Accordingly, the narrative is told through a female-oriented perspective, and as in Brink's *Imaginations of Sand* the nation's history is the sub-text, a historiographic metanarrative in which women are inscribed and able to utter their stories. Always, entangled with the family stories, is the history of the Islands that is told from a native Hawaiian perspective, and of a land and people who are being overrun by the white colonizer. Mainly in its plot, *Shark Dialogues* is an epic tale of the history of Hawai'i, a family saga of several generations of strong, magical women.

The first group of Europeans arrived in the Hawaiian Islands in 1778, and navigators were mesmerized by the natural beauty of the islands. However that signalled what culminated in a cultural catastrophe of European and Native Hawaiian relations. The arrival of explorers and later missionaries began a disastrous chain of events that nearly destroyed Hawaiian culture, as colonial exploitation forced the native people to radically alter their spiritual and societal relationships. It defied their traditional customs, beliefs, and practices, and led to the dispossession and the dislocation of the people from the land that had sustained their ancestors from the time of their arrival in the archipelago, and aside from the cultural degradation, diseases were brought by the sailors and spread among the native people decimating part of the population, "sailor's pox", "always fatal to the natives, that they were spreading it island to island as a way to conquer the Pacific" (*Shark Dialogues*, 39). The relations that Hawaiians had established as the basis of their social and cultural integrity were disrupted by the British and American colonial power, and in the aftermath of colonial conflicts and the American annexation they were left with diseases, dispossession and a decimated population. Davenport makes her point about all these controversial issues by locating her narrative within the frame of historical context. Moreover, Davenport emphasizes the importance of redefining the role of native people in transnational and postcolonial dialogues. She overtly explores the essentialized connections between women and nature glossing the theoretical underpinnings of ecofeminism, to foster a female perspective and, perhaps, a critical consciousness that has the power to dismantle male dominance and to envisage the future without women being oppressed. The truncated stories told by Pono, the matriarch of the family, tend to highlight the bonds between women, the notion of family and the political issues that they face as individuals whose lives have been shaped by colonialism and neocolonialist regimes. Hidden behind the layers of magical realism and storytelling, Kiana Davenport exposes the controversial aspects of

tourism, prostitution, and the excessiveness of exoticism associated with female bodies that seem to encapsulate the notion of otherness as a site of male fetishism, as well as a form of exotica for the gaping visitor. Needless to say there is a fantasy of sexual desire and territorial repression arising out of this encounter between male colonizers and native women. Accordingly, Leela Gandhi mentions that “masculinity of empire was articulated, in the first instance, through the symbolic feminisation of conquered geographies, and in the erotic economy of colonial ‘discovery’ narratives” (98-9). Indeed female characters in *Shark Dialogues* encapsulate a multiplicity of cultural histories in their agency and they are portrayed as metaphors of a colonized country dealing with the fragmentation of identities. Hence, the social context is crucial to delineating women’s position in society, as Elleke Boehmer says: “the symbolic economy or drama of nationalism would thus appear to be sharply delineated by gender, or, more precisely, by tropes that match up with prototypical categories of sexual difference” (*Stories of Women*, 28). However, competing desires find utterance in competing anxieties as well as the imposition of the colonizer over the colonized culture. *Shark Dialogues* illustrates the manner in which its major characters perceive and manipulate history, as is also the case of Brinkian characters, for instance. Thus, for the most part, past, present and future literally interwoven, it is a hodgepodge version of history in which en-gendered identities are constantly altering. In fact, the novel’s polivocality mediates those several discourses, and it reinforces the notion of hybridity which is explored through an ecocritical and ecofeminist perspective.

The novel, indeed, becomes extremely critical of what colonialism and neo-colonialism have caused to the native people, along with the devastating consequences of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the imposed participation of Hawaiian men in the Vietnam War and the corollary violence caused by traumatic experiences, and the hazardous decision to fight back the white supremacy through terrorist attacks. The narrative moves back and forth in time, the same way it moves from the historical level to the fictional one, that so creates a sense of non-linearity which helps the construction of characters in their private spheres within a tapestry of sub-plots. And history becomes personal, subjective, analyzed through the lens of individuality which at the end crafts a big picture where private and public assume a complementary relation. Furthermore, it can be seen that there is a struggle that takes place with the anxiety of identity, which is followed by the realization that the land defines the person; for instance Toru, Run Run grandson and Pono adopted son, is asked to settle down and cultivate his own piece of land. The novel corroborates the importance of the environment to native people, and this acknowledgment is a basis of the perseverance in land claims and for sovereignty. However, before Toru became a landowner, he was a member of a group of native people who were vindicating the right of their lost lands by bombing hotels. The spiral of paradoxes involving the claiming of what belongs to the native people of Hawai’i and the

ultimate use of terrorist acts to make a statement against international trade and the appropriation of land gives the novel a problematic agency. Davenport uncovers several layers of exploitation such as the ones referring to the possession of land, or the exploitation physically or not of women's body, equally colonized and taken as a property. Likewise, the Polynesian women's body is objectified and excessively exoticized as well as eroticized. This lust for the exotic imbricates the presumption that not only are women objectified, but they are also despised because of their dark complexion. The Symbolic Order as formulated by Lacan constructs femininity in terms of objectification, and therefore the notion and stereotype of femininity is itself assembled within the web of ideological forces which outline subjectivity. Whilst women are grasped in this web, they are the constructs of desire, predominantly the desires which are allowed approval and material consent because they neatly fit the interests of socio-political power. Specifically, Davenport discusses the manner in which the competing agenda of women's representation interacts with the construction of social and cultural aspects of Hawaiian history, suggesting concerns with representation and ethnic marginalization. There is a praxis for cultural and gender liberation that finds its major utterance in Pono's histories as well as in the continuous attempts to recuperate the past as a means to construct identities, and a way to deal with the present. Accordingly, and as well as in Brink's novels, *Shark Dialogues* embodies Derrida's formulation that "all stories and histories are a perpetual revelation of the past, yet obstinately turned toward the present" (314). In the "Author's Note" at the end of the novel, Davenport clearly claims that "the overthrow of our queen, Lili'uokalani, in 1893 by forces seeking an American alliance, and the illegal annexation of the Hawaiian Islands by the U.S government in 1898, is documented fact" (*Shark Dialogues*, 491), the same way she validates the facticity of the history of leprosy and the Kalaupapa settlement on Moloka'i described in her novel. It overtly participates in both the realistic illustration and the culturally grounded magical realism that emphasizes the native links to the land. Therefore, Davenport generates a situated understanding of history and the conditions of the Hawaiian community framed by contemporary reality and identity.

The novel revolves around the life of a family, their private histories and the history of the country as polarities of the same reality, so that history is re-interpreted in terms of native values. Oscillating between these two metanarratives the novel foregrounds the relevance of Hawai'i as a postcolonial space in which deep-rooted experiences of loss, cultural dispossession and exploitation have profound implications in representing private and public memories. Identities are shaped by the entanglement of history and memory whether private or public, in the process of which Davenport reimagines Hawaiian identities by rereading history and the socio-political context of a contemporary Hawai'i. The novel overtly highlights the relevance of social movements and tries to



create an alternative site for cultural dialogues. Whereas Davenport does not necessarily search for the recovery of an essential “genuine Hawaiian identity”, she considers the native heritage as crucial to the stability of society as a cultural body. Given that her female characters, in general, are character-subjects, not purely literary objects, in the way that they possess an extraordinary freedom and are not merely subordinated figures, they highlight fundamental issues of hybridization as a considerable cultural element in a globalized reality. For instance, Pono, the matriarch and by far the most complex character in this entangled web of female voices, is introduced as a “pure-blood Hawaiian”, though she is descended from a Euroamerican grandfather and a Polynesian princess. Despite her origins, she is deeply critical firstly of her daughters, and secondly of her granddaughters, who felt judged and not loved by their tyrannical grandmother. All of them are byproducts of mixed-marriages, “their mothers’ revenge” (*Shark Dialogues*, 6). Hence, in due course, they have to come to terms with their hybridity which occurs through the recovery of their untold past, and they return to Pono to recover that past, the histories of their ancestors, in order to “know how to live, how to not be brutalized” (*Shark Dialogues*, 20). The process of recovery of the family histories is achieved through the stories outlined by Run Run, Pono’s best friend and old time confidant. It is Duke, Pono’s lover and the girl’s grandfather, who seems to be able to make that process less painful to the girls by accepting them as the results of what in the future may be a melting pot of fluid and hybrid identities, “You’re hybrids, all of you. You’re what the future is” (*Shark Dialogues*, 371). This comment evokes Bhabha’s idea of liminality and interstices. In the contact zone of cultural differences, colonial and postcolonial subjects are bound to experience the process of hybridization. The family saga in *Shark Dialogues* embodies a liminal space where hybrid identities are particularly intricate. Moreover, Pono eventually realizes that she and Duke should provide their daughters with cultural memory, otherwise they will be “women without history” (*Shark Dialogues*, 282). Thus, it is clear that hybridity signifies a freeing of voices, as Boehmer posits it when referring to art, largely applied to Davenport’s characters as “a technique for dismantling authority, a liberating polyphony that shakes off the authoritarian yoke” (*Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 232). It is precisely this polyphony that dismantles authority, thereby the dialogic nature of language and (hi)story that also enables the creation of a resistant and hybrid text. Ultimately, this hybrid textualization which results from a postcolonial discourse is inferred by Jess at the end of the novel who “drew from her bag a pen and a sheet of paper. She would start with the story she knew best. Pono and Grandfather. She would work her way backward. What she did not know they would tell her” (*Shark Dialogues*, 480). Jess is the family keeper, and the one who better understood the power of telling memories in order to resist and construct identities. The latter part of the novel “*Ka Po’e Hapa Hawai’i o Ka Honua Hou*” – Hybrids in the New World – focuses on issues of cultural

identities and its relation to resistance against exploitation. Pono reveals her strong ideas on that matter, though Duke tries to dissuade her by emphasizing that her granddaughters are the only hope for the continuity of the family legacy, so that he tells her that

each of these girls are half of something else. Duke said she had to learn to accept this, that the true, original blood of their ancestors, the only one she recognized, was dying. Their granddaughters, Duke said, were hybrids of the new world. *Their* offspring were even more alien, Hawaiian blood blurred into quarters, someday eights. A world Pono didn't want to know. Yet, now she was asking them to bring that alien, that mixed-mongrel world, home. (*Shark Dialogues*, 231)

The hybridity, suggested in the novel, does not tend to give a fixed subjectivity or a homogeneous cultural identity, leading to Linda Hutcheon's formulation of culture as "a flux of contextualized identities: contextualized by gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexual preference education and social role" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 59).

The mixed-blood characters' genealogy goes back to the nineteenth-century when the Polynesian princess and Mathys, Pono's grandfather, meet after having escaped from the lives that had been imposed on them; Kelonikoa was running from an arranged marriage leaving behind the life of a wealthy princess, solely taking with her a small bag with mysterious black pearls; Mathys was escaping from his job as a seaman in a whaleboat because he could not deal with the murder of such beautiful creatures. After the journey into the hinterland and in contact with wildlife thinking that he might be already dead without knowing it, he saw her, "she came to me from the sea. God had finally forgiven me" (*Shark Dialogues*, 36). With her dowry of black pearls they made their living, Mathys became a wealthy and prosperous businessman, but their private life was overshadowed by the death of their first three children from measles and smallpox, diseases introduced into the country by explorers, sailors and settlers. Kelonikoa's beliefs contrast with the deaths caused by the diseases brought by colonizers, hence she makes her first sacrifice to the deities in order to save the coming babies, and the growing family prospers. Their children demonstrate a multiplicity of ethnic identities in their attitudes of love, rivalry, and side-taking; it can be argued that they are the first family's generation of hybrid identities. While the family grows richer Mathys and Kelonikoa's relationship cools off. She had a Russian admirer who honours her with a precious and symbolic gift, an ancient Japanese diary made of jade containing what seems to be one of the novel's mottoes "Perhaps she wrote that life is really lived through dreams and intuitions not fate and circumstances" (*Shark Dialogues*, 114). Intertwined with love stories, Davenport emphasizes the historical events that were crucial to Hawai'i as that of the *Great Mabele*, or the Land Division, in 1848 "officially separating Hawaiians from their lands" (*Shark Dialogues*, 56) which made land available to be purchased and owned by foreign residents instead of native people, or the way native culture was marginalized by missionaries when they imposed on native people their beliefs, "Hawaiian children

were forbidden their Mother Tongue. In school and church they were taught about Jesus, a *haole* child, while Hawaiian gods and ancestors were forgotten” (*Shark Dialogues*, 56). This first part of the novel “*Ka ʻŌlelo Makuahine*”, Mother tongue, is therefore, an accurate description of how native Hawaiians have lost their immaterial and material ties to the land, and their attempts to develop resistance against that loss caused by colonization. Consequently, Davenport’s narration focuses upon a society based on class division in which labour exploitation has also featured. The colonizers flourished from the plantation economy, while natives and immigrants suffered harsh living and working conditions. Being aware of those extreme inequalities, Pono’s mother, Lili, reacts against that discourse of discrimination “*Nānā i kaʻili!* Look at the skin!” she cried, pointing her arms. “We will never be *haolefied*” (*Shark Dialogues*, 79). The novel revitalizes one of the native values, *aloha ʻāina* or Love of the Land and how people interact based on that principle. Moreover, some characters such as Toru who is descended from the immigrant population but certainly a “local” in his awareness of cultural and socio-political changes, and Vanya, are moved to resist against the destruction of the environment and the appropriation of land to implement and develop tourism, resisting socio-political marginalization for non-dominant cultural groups. Perhaps, Davenport is suggesting how difficult and sometimes even hopeless native peoples may feel about protecting themselves, their culture and their land in face of the exploitative systems of colonization. Nevertheless, the narrative does not legitimize terrorist actions but, as in Rushdie’s novel *Shalimar, the Clown*, the reader is left to decide what is behind such atrocities, such as personal histories of anger and the need to survive, and both writers try to convey how terrorism functions. However, both novels reject the idea that all means might be valid to achieve a goal, and rather they foreground the need for, and signification of, the articulation of identities in resistant practices. Like Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture*, both Davenport and Rushdie question and recognize ambivalent and paradoxical spaces in the modes of thought where culture is a site for struggle and contestation. By doing so, this novel thus discloses how resistance against environmental destruction is correlated with resistance against socio-political marginalization, so upon knowing about the shark hunters, Duke angrily says: “They’re rinsing us from history. All we can do is fight, until the end. That’s what our children must remember. We fought valiantly, honorably, until the end” (*Shark Dialogues*, 281). Similarly, it should be read as a kind of mimicry and thus an act of resistance against imperial power as articulated by Bhabha:

Resistance is not necessarily an oppositional act of political intention, nor is it the single negation or exclusion of the ‘content’ of another culture, as a difference once perceived. It is the effect of an ambivalence produced within the rules of recognition of dominating discourses as they articulate the signs of cultural difference and reimplicate them within the deferential relations of colonial power – hierarchy, normalization, marginalization and so forth. (*The Location of Culture*, 110-11)

While emphasizing the need to resist all kinds of colonial and neocolonial domination, Davenport draws attention to another significant issue, the relation between memory, history and identity. Furthermore, as male or female subjects actively resisted cultural assimilation at different levels, native culture did not disappear, though it was subordinated, battered, and eroded by the colonial endeavour. Hence, Run Run insists on the importance to clear the family histories in order to create a connection between the granddaughters and their land as well as to attempt to recover ancient forms of knowledge

You do it for *kabe koko*, flow of blood, for *kabe 'aumakua*, flow of ancestors. Dese t'ings you gonna tell dem been waiting all dese years. Written by yoah mot'er's mot'er's hand. Dese girls been livin' empty-handed in da world. Now you gonna' give dem dere destiny. (*Shark Dialogues*, 322)

This legacy referred to in Run Run's speech is consensual with the relevance of preserving cultural and historical memory to be able to construct identities. Run Run is definitely the storyteller, perhaps one of the most relevant characters in the novel if we consider the importance of keeping the family together. Without her these women's stories would have been lost. She clearly manipulates what she knows about each of them, focusing on their special features, and she manages to give each woman a different point of the story, but at the end all of those peculiar aspects converge on the wellbeing of the family history. Pono seems to be aware of that as well, though the process is not that simple due to her problematic agency when referring to motherhood "there are women locked in my womb forever, the memory of their birth. All I can do now is liberate the *fruit* of their wombs. And it may be too late" (*Shark Dialogues*, 322). Fittingly, Kristeva outlines that the maternal body becomes the *chora* where the primordial repression lies: "before being *like*, 'I' am not but do *separate, reject, ab-ject*" (*Powers of Horror*, 13). It was her castrating power that forced her daughters to escape from the confines of Pono's household; she clearly rejected her daughters imposing on them her expectations, but mostly by hiding the paternal link she leaves a trace of doubts and untrustworthy behaviour. In such a vibrant and diverse reality, the *sempiternal* love between Pono and Duke is the source of her strength, what makes her endure against all adversities, but paradoxically it also alters her behaviour with her daughters; thus Pono obviously reinforces the fact that "she would break the rules for him" (*Shark Dialogues*, 138) but the same cannot be applied to her daughters, and consequently Duke "would be the background for all her thoughts and recollections, her griefs, her pathologies" (*Shark Dialogues*, 137). To some extent, the narrative of memory and family identity and heritage is profoundly centred on the importance of the male figure as a source of love and equilibrium between all the elements. Davenport obviously deconstructs the notion of motherhood, partaking in the idea that "womb-women" can lock their children in either to protect or to manipulate them. Pono as a mother figure is duplicitous; therefore she ultimately ended up castrating their daughters' identities. While they were also unable to resist

her powerful enchantments, Pono got a second chance with the four granddaughters who visited her every summer looking for answers about their family's history in order to complete the cycle and come to terms with their hybrid identities "like dey addicted to Big Island. What I t'ink is, dey addicted to Pono, like swimmers addicted to da sea. Yeah, shoah, sea mot'er of us all, but you no can tell, sometime da botton drop, suck swimmers down, grip de flesh till not'ing left but bone" (*Shark Dialogues*, 179). Interestingly enough, it is Run Run, with her funny Pidgin, her references to a "Mot'er God", who bridges the years between the untold memories of the past and the nowadays adult grandchildren who metaphorically represent Hawai'i in its ethnic multiplicity. Pono encapsulates Kristeva's formulation on the maternal body and consequently its authority: "Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self's clean and proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws within which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape" (*Powers of Horror*, 72).

Mingling magical realism and historical facts, joining contemporary realities with ancient, mythical civilizations, fracturing realistic notions of time and space, *Shark Dialogues* clearly explores the multi-perspective in that in-between position occupied by marginalized voices who restlessly cross borders and whose histories collide. Davenport places her magical realism in the context of a family saga which allows the inclusion of historical facts described by the female elements of the family. Pono seems to be the major character in the novel, she is a *kahuna*, the Hawaiian word for healer, someone with supernatural powers, who has psychic powers from birth and as an adult Pono found the ability to transmogrify into a shark deity, which ultimately can also be recognized as a form of hybridism. However, Davenport debunks the ambiguity of that metamorphosis in a very magical realistic way, when she describes the moment that may have been caused by the hallucinogenic power of some seaweed that Pono had ingested, so that the reader is left to decide whether it was a hallucination caused by a drug or a real metamorphosis, "then she remembered she was asleep, that her shark form was imagined", and yet she woke up on the sand, she observed her body taking its human shape, and she could still taste blood and fish in her month "and, though she was in the world of humans, she was no longer wholly of that world" (*Shark Dialogues*, 102). Rather than a mere "mythologization" of the events, Pono's supernatural powers, and her ability to transform in to a shark are treated as realistic, though ambiguous, as any other ordinary events of her daily life. The dialectic between natural-real and supernatural-unreal is emphasized and the narrative fuses dissimilar realms where (im)possible things happen constantly and are treated as being quite plausible. Additionally, the "unsettling doubts" common in magical realism are an effort to make sense of two separate realities, or perhaps a way to "reconcile two contradictory understandings of events" (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 17). However, in *Shark Dialogues*, it is clear that instead of the reconciliation of contradictory events, there is an overt acceptance of the co-

existence of two realms that the narrative completely amalgamates. In doing so, Pono's interaction with nature and shark deities, her metamorphosis or even her *kahuna* powers, and Jess's clairvoyance are assumed as matter-of-fact matters. In various ways, these aspects of the novel highlight the complicated ethnic historical interrelationships inextricably intertwined with gender-based aspects, and how character-subjects rescind grief and horror by retreating into memory. Davenport's narration skilfully unfolds events in a kaleidoscopic retrospective of the past, storytelling, dreams and visions, thus intermingling facts and fiction, past, present and future into a complex whole that cannot be disentangled. She reveals concern towards the destruction of ecosystems by the introduction of foreign elements that have not only damaged nature but also people, as well as the way people have responsibility for the continuing neocolonialization of the country due to the massive increment of tourist resorts, and how native people perceive the process of dispossession and cultural assimilation. Additionally, there is an impression of the cyclic nature of the world, a sequence of recurring patterns such as all-encompassing love, running and hiding in the islands' forests, spiritual gifts, the sea as a healer and strong women. In this way, for instance, when Pono meets Duke he immediately thought that "She came to me from the sea" (*Shark Dialogues*, 103) echoed Mathys's encounter with Kelonikoa three generations before, so the narrative is framed through diverse temporalities. Thus, the novel not only underscores the connections between people and land but also the notion that life is a circle. However, it seems clear that there is also an allegory of the past repeating itself as the same mistakes are made.

The issues of marginality are highlighted by the direct introduction of magical elements in the narrative, the clearest evidence of which are Pono's powers as a fortune teller. Insofar as she was abandoned by a parent, a "woman without a clan", she posits herself in a state of marginality towards society, and ultimately she re-presents a cultural metaphor of marginality. Thus she is feared and sometimes antagonized by others who seek her wise advice on personal matters. Her clairvoyance is similar to the ability of Tilo in *The Mistress of Spices* to help people by manipulating the spices. Both characters seem to be familiar with a magical reality. However neither of them are capable of foresee their own future. Even so, Pono's wisdom is located in the realm of the ancient native knowledge, this being the reason why she is named *kahuna*. In that respect, Wendy B. Faris explains that:

Beyond the connection to primitive cultures or mythologies, magical realism is a narrative in which, as in a shamanic performance, the viewing or reading community experiences a discourse that suggests the existence of a different kind of reality contiguous to or within their ordinary one. This form of discourse with its magical images of uncertain origin can also be seen to continue the tradition of a shamanistic visionary or vatic stances (*Ordinary Enchantments*, 75)

Overtly, the realm of the ordinary and the realm of the extraordinary, two distinct realities, are imbricated one within the other in order to avow the particularities and the contingencies of Hawaiian identities. Accordingly, magical realism underlines historical atrocities, as is suggested in Brink's novels for instance. Given that, Davenport combines mystical realism based on ancient Hawaiian beliefs and the westernized forms adopted by magical realistic narratives, revealing a submerged politics of cultural appropriation and dissemination, and an unconcealed politics of personal solidarity and resistance. However, magical realism does not restrain or even dissolve impulses towards social disruption, political issues or gender-based questions. Rather it frequently generates narrative spaces that cast light on and interrogate those issues, and it hints at the possibility of a dialogue between singular conceptions of reality: "it seems as though the magic frees the discourse, the history grounds the story, and the vitality of the text depends on keeping the lines open between them" (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments* 165). While the female discourse determined in magical realistic narratives is "double-voiced", in Faris's formulation it encapsulates both the "dominant mode" and the "muted group". However, this emergence of a polyvocal feminist narrative serves as an encouragement to the rise of "ethnic literatures" which are at the basis of a decolonizing practice within their own cultural contexts in which alternative options can be imagined. Following the notion that magical realism appears to be the site to contest and decolonize, female writers have found the mode to tell their (hi)stories disrupting realism's domination of representation. In an underlining of bodily inscriptions in Davenport's novel analogous those observed in Brink and Divakaruni's narratives, the magically real bodies of their female protagonists are literally etched with their socio-political, cultural and geographic locations, and they constitute a sort of "embodied subjectivity" and "physical corporeality" (Grosz), and thus "the stories and the bodily events combine into their joint lived experience" (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 191). Likewise, the female body is associated with the "decolonizing force" of the genre adopted by certain writers, whether male or female. Perhaps, informed by a feminocentric orientation, the stories narrated by female protagonists tend to locate marginalized voices in the centre, and the stature of women within the narration of history encodes an essential critique of phallographic discourses, as well as a parodied mode of depicting erotic upheavals and the tradition of male fantasies and fears regarding female sexuality. Davenport creates through her magical realistic narrative an interchange between worlds, and forges links between bodies, lands, and languages that function as an oppositional consciousness in which her female character-subjects negotiate different realms.

When referring to Native American women and gynocratic systems, that is women-centered societies in which exist matrilineality, female deities, and women's control of household and resources, Paula Gunn Allen asserts that "the colonizer saw (and rightly) that as long as women held

unquestioned power of such magnitude, attempts at local conquest of the continents were bounded to fail (3). In fact, several authors have commented on this notion of women as central and influential in certain societies as well as the need to circumvent them in order to conquer the inlands and subjugate their male counterparts. More specifically, the process of the inferiorization of female subjects was bound up with the procedure of enthroning male hegemony, and once the colonized had lost their sovereignty would look to the colonizer for advice. One of the most vivid and recent examples of women being manipulated, among so many others, is the case of Darfur. During the conflicts in 2003 between local parties women were sexually abused so as to bring shame to them and to their offspring, for if women were raped and impregnated nothing but shame would be felt by their male counterparts disallowing them to retaliate, and making their confidence weaker because confidence and power are partly associated with the newborn who represent the future. The genocide in Darfur is a valuable example to show how societies operate, and how women have been treated for centuries, assets in wars or manipulated elements to control societies. This can also be related to the way women are depicted in their sexuality and corporeality, for it is clear that it is the female body's capacity for birth that makes women vital in the preservation of integrity and purity within the community's frame. Consequently, rape and mutilation of women mark them as "taken" by the other side and make them indelibly "polluted" and impure. Both female sexuality and the female capacity to give birth have been acknowledged as grounds for affirming either the power or the value of the female body, insofar as female sexuality is celebrated for its power and its supposed capacity to escape from structures of dominance and submission. Despite women's maternal bodies being seen as a foundation of positive values to set against male dominant rules, to some extent their engagement with the reproductive process was also regarded as anchoring both anti-militarism and a respect for the natural world, which puts them at the forefront of ecological movements according to some ecofeminist perspectives. However, such approaches also suffer from the dangers of homogenizing and essentializing what can be considered as variable experiences of sexuality and maternity. Given that women perceive motherhood-childbearing differently and perhaps controversially too, it can be seen both as the source of greatest delight and as the root of their worst suffering and their subordination to men, and the best example of this duplicity is encapsulated by Pono through whom these notions display traditional assumptions of gender and particularly of motherhood as cultural constructions. The female body acknowledged in its Otherness has been conventionally described based on erotic impulses, reproductive features and sexual deviancy inviting both colonial and sexual conquest. Similarly, it is the locus of fetishization, commodification, and objectified sexually. Likewise, these bodily and corporeal re-presentations can even mirror grotesqueness in the Bakhtinian formulation, but they can also function as a discourse



to dismantle misogynist and phallogocentric discourses. Motherhood understood as the ultimate feature of women's body and deeply connected with love, affection or emotional satisfaction is one of the key issues raised in the novel, but it is also the account of a less blissful moment as is inferred in Pono's actions towards her daughters. Although these are accurate definitions of motherhood which are clearly imbricated in characters like Kelonikoa, it is however less probable that those formulations include all the feelings of pain, discomfort, or the biological process that involves body fluids such as blood, urine and excrement, and/or the frequently irrevocable marks it leaves on women's bodies, insomuch as maternity cannot be simply understood only as giving birth and as the most joyful moment in a woman's life. However, the biological involvement and the detached way certain women deal with pregnancy are the basis of Pono's contentious agency, and she retreats in silence every time she knows she is going to give birth, not seeking the company of other women as would be expected in such a ritualized moment, rather alienating herself, behaving like an animal that seeks seclusion and privacy. Pono's personal account of her-story overtly deals with the darkest side of childbirth and motherhood. The descriptions of those moments are merely physical, a bodily experience in its utmost physicality without any touch of romanticized ideas, and that also delineates the relationship between mother-child in Pono's case. After being brutally abused by the *haole* landowner of the sugar plantation where she worked, Pono got pregnant and subsequent to all the attempts to induce an abortion "nothing helped. Not crushed roots of poison fern, not drafts of caustic soap. Not prayers, nor Buddhist neighbors chanting. Again her *mana* failed" (*Shark Dialogues*, 128). The white *haole* had definitely planted his seed on her. She did not strangle the child to death in her womb as happened to Bîlquis's first born in Rushdie's *Shame*; Pono murdered the boy-child without hesitation or regret: "An infant bleat. And then a smaller strip of sheet into its tiny mouth, round its tiny neck" (*Shark Dialogues*, 129) as an act of revenge against not only the rape but also against the colonial endeavour, the white supremacy imposed on native people, and

She screamed for the indignities, the years she died innumerable. She screamed for her grandmother, Emma, dead of plague, her grandfather, murdered in cold blood. She screamed for strikers murdered in their sleep, and women forced to lie with syphilitic strangers. (*Shark Dialogues*, 129)

Davenport's description of Pono's cry is the ultimate cry of people being exploited and murdered, women who have been raped and who die infected with diseases. The narrative blatantly exposes these issues within the realm of representation and processes of signification which comprise the space of the political. To a large degree, Pono's cry is invested in those dehistoricized figures, "the other", women, natives, the colonized who were deprived of their history and culture.

When referring to Kristeva's analyses of the maternal body and language within the Lacanian Symbolic Order, Judith Butler asserts that "the maternal body and a concomitant deindividuation of the ego, poetic language becomes especially threatening when uttered by women" (*Gender Trouble*,

117). Butler supposedly reckons that poetic language is both framed by displacement and maternal dependency, “hence, poetic language and the pleasures of maternity constitute local displacements of the paternal law, temporary subversions of which finally submit to that against which they initially rebel” (*Gender Trouble*, 119). Accordingly, the mother figure is such a complex one in the analysis of Pono and the relationships established with her daughters; since she refused to nourish them, they were invested with a sense of lack of maternal care that seems to challenge the notions Kristeva formulated regarding the maternal body. It is thus possible to ascertain a parallel with the oedipal process as formulated in Lacan and Freud’s theories. That at an initial stage children have searched for the mother as a source of nourishment intimately correlated with breastfeeding. However, the mother’s inability to cope with the children’s need for affection can be regarded as a lack, and that lack is represented by the absence of the father to whom they imaginarily transferred their love. Consequently, they have rejected their primary self constructed within the mother’s realm or the Imaginary Order in Lacan’s terms, and part of their earliest subjectivity seems to operate within fissured foundations. Lacan assumes that the child’s pleasure is found on the repudiation of the maternal body assuming a form of *jouissance*. In both cases – Freud’s oedipal stage and Lacan’s *jouissance* in separation/rejection – it is interesting to note that the construction of a separate and independent self-identity occurs after the acquisition of language entailed in the notion of Symbolic order, the Law of the Father (Lacan), and subsequent to a complete separation from the maternal body. To Kristeva it is precisely this repression and separation that contributes to the foundation of identity. It is possible, then, to assume that given their fragmented identities caused by an unbalanced relation with the mother figure, they have mimicked that lack, projecting it onto the relation that they had established with their own daughters. It is still relevant to note that Pono’s eldest daughter, Holo, had experienced a traumatic event when she saw her mother killing the boy-child “and saw. A doll. An artifact. Blood-spangled white, and dangling from mother’s fist. Pono shock it, making sure. Shook and shook.” (*Shark Dialogues*, 129). The words doll and artifact are not used accidentally. They metaphorically refer to the way women were viewed and treated by white men, *baole* like the one who abused Pono. However, that moment of tremendous violence has also culminated in the proximity between both mother and daughter, albeit leaving a trace of the ambiguity which is the main feature of mother-daughter relationships:

Her mother’s body surrounding her. Protecting her. Warmth and mothermilk weeping into Holo’s hair. Her mother O so tenderly! giving her her breast. This would be Holo’s memory. Terror. And mother love. And running. (*Shark Dialogues*, 130)

Nevertheless, maternity can also be acknowledged as a metaphor for too much proximity and closeness which tends to lead to the erasure of boundaries and culminating in the fusion of the *self*-mother and the *other*-child girl, as is the example of Pono’s relationship with her daughters who

disrupted and challenged her authority, which seems to be framed within a patriarchal order, and dominated by castrating drives. Accepting Lacan's conception referring to the Symbolic as the phallic order and the Imaginary as connected with femininity, it can be inferred that in a wider sense Pono juxtaposes the dialectics between the Symbolic and the Imaginary orders as she encapsulates both the mother and the father. Thus Kristeva postulates the notion that it is the maternal body "that mediates the symbolic law, organizing social relations, and that turns out to be the ordering principle of semiotic *chora*" (*Revolution in Poetic Language*, 95). By stepping out of the pre-established social order Pono remains outside of the symbolic order, though she is not totally freed from it because she depends on Duke in issues related with her private life. However, she becomes totally independent and transgressive when it comes to dealing with public issues. She is thus powerless in her private life, even obedient if Duke asks her to be, but entirely challenging of male discourses in a social and public realm. Acting in accordance with a male discursive practice encapsulated in the Symbolic order, women may lose their motherly self embedded in any form of femininity, so perhaps Pono controversial behaviour lies in the assumption of loss related to motherhood but it cannot be argued that she has lost her femininity, at least in the bodily expression of an eroticized self.

The novel's temporality is challenged by its non-linearity; thus, there is a sense of hybridized time related to the present where the four granddaughters are inscribed. Within a frame of mixed-identities as the ultimate result of interracial marriages and the fragmentation of personal histories, Jess, Ming, Rachel and Vanya follow Pono's orders trying to find the clues to their pasts. Their lives are remembered and recorded in retrospect or in dreams. They are the little tribe as Run Run describes them in their multiplicity and difference. Ming, Chinese-Hawaiian, struggling against *lupus*, a curious woman in her introspective way of holding the clan together, mystical in the eyes of the others. She is also described in her use of drugs, Dragon Seed that helps her deal with physical pain and the loss of family. Moreover, it was Ming who exerted Pono to reveal the family history and take Duke home. Vanya, Filipino-Hawaiian, a prominent lawyer who works as an advocate of native rights throughout the Pacific. She has grown up feeling inferior because of her "coloured skin", and it is the contained anger of years of discrimination that propel her to join the group of activists. Jess, *hapa-haole*, a successful New Yorker veterinarian, has always tried to make up for her mother's humiliation at being rejected by her white-American in-laws, and she was always "overwhelmed by this sick, doomed tribe she was part of" (*Shark Dialogues*, 286). Thus she always feels compelled to return to Pono's domains every time she is asked to do so. However, she seems to find her solace and peace in contact with the land, seeking advice in the ocean as her ancestors had done. Rachel, Hawaiian-Japanese, never met her father, and thus replaces the father's absence by marrying a

mysterious *Yakuza*, member of the Japanese mafia, twenty years her senior. Her life is embellished with luxury, refinement, lust and eroticism. Conversely, she is the objectified doll in-waiting of a possessive husband, sexually objectified and onto whom Hiro projected his *phantasies* and paranoia. She was his eroticized child, “*the toy he dresses, undresses, attaches strange things to*” (*Shark Dialogues*, 209), always so “*ready for passion, ready to take and take*” (*Shark Dialogues*, 210). Triggered by curiosity, and fear she remained attached to this hyper-tattooed man, but the moment he was found dead instead of breaking the tie she asked an anatomist to remove Hiro’s skin so she could keep it as visual memory of her captivity as a woman. Rachel continues the reenactment of the marriage in other pivotal moments of her life, such as her own desire to pursue her husband’s business in order to prevent and dismantle the trade of children for prostitution. The four elements together compose a tapestry of (hi)stories, revealing singular characteristics which create a sense of hybridization and fragmentation of female selves. And as the narration moves into the present time, the early 1990s, their lives are being further entangled into a whole, into a sort of puzzle construction, perhaps mirroring the cultural variety of identities in Hawaii, “each of us wanting something of the other. Sometimes in dreams becoming the other... Run Run saying we’re all one thing, the sum of Pono...” (*Shark Dialogues*, 217). Perhaps, being the sum of someone else is too reductive or even essentialist, and what seems to be relevant is the constant desire to be the other, the permanent curiosity to acknowledge alterity as site for contestation and improvement. Yet, even after secrets have been disclosed, even after the establishment of links, generations or people in a wider perspective cannot be fully understood or comprehend each other, and ambivalence or double-edged divergence are the core of their bound-togetherness. Pono evidently acknowledges that “mothers are the last riddle, the worst horror, the only consolation” (*Shark Dialogues*, 371). In fact, mothers seem to be major riddles in the novel, that of Kelonikoa who sacrificed herself to keep the family together, and Pono with her castrating behaviour and her four daughters, Mina, Edita, Holo and Emma, each of them escaping from her mother’s home never to return but also failing with their own daughters.

Davenport’s narrative is postmodern in that it does not offer solutions or answers at its end, and in its genre, historiographic metafiction, which is delineated by its self-conscious display of historiography as narrative, by its depiction of dissimilar versions of history, disclosing in turn discourses of power. Additionally, in Davenport’s as in Brink’s case, history as is presented can be coined as *herstory*, although in Davenport’s narration men are not excluded from female genealogies as is implied in Brink’s *Imaginations of Sand*. For instance, Duke, Mathys, or Toru are relevant in the family tree which flaunts the predominance of female characters but which posits some emphasis on the male’s role in the course of women’s histories. Ultimately, Davenport challenges narrative singularity in order to achieve multiplicity and disparity that characterizes postmodern works. Hence,

instead of mere abstraction she portrays fictive corporeality which tends to fragment or render uneven the traditional coalesced identity or subjectivity of characters. In Linda Hutcheon's terms "there is a view of the past, both recent and remote, that takes the present powers and limitations of the writing of that past into account. And the result is often a certain avowed provisionality and irony" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 90). Moreover, Davenport's metafictional narrative averts the suppression of marginalized groups and environmental concerns, insofar as it can be inferred that as a postmodern metafiction, the novel elevates "private experience to public consciousness" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, 94). Thus it underlines the past of the previously excluded ex-centric, and history is told in terms of the unuttered (hi)stories of women interwoven with the construction of hybrid and postcolonial identities. It can be argued that female experiences of oppression by and subjugation to an imperial and phallic order have been major factors in constructing identities of women in (post)colonial cultures. Women writers have supposedly been underlayering the palimpsest of the phallogocentric culture by incorporating the ambiguities, filling the gaps of historical accounts, transgressing taboos, interrogating otherness and in-betweenness. The female body became entangled with histories which have repositioned women's role as crucial producers of culture and of history. Accordingly, Haunani-Kay Trask in her book of essays on Hawaiian culture and sovereignty, *From a Native Daughter*, notes that the women who cooperatively come together to contest global neocolonialism accomplish their own mode of feminism assembled from their own cultural struggles. Trask points out that women need to support each other in order to "create alternatives" and "to fashion new ways of resisting" (108) because "to be doubly colonized – as woman and as an indigenous nationalist – means to struggle twice as hard, twice as long..." (15).

Concerning the relationship of women with cultural and socio-political frameworks in their wider sense, Davenport seeks, rather, to render the particular and horrifying conditions of women's subjugation through a resolute indictment of a neocolonial culture that closes itself off from the whole range of the social, cultural, and political networks. Elsewhere in women's writing the central trope, as in Davenport, remains one of colonial violence and dispossession, but this is often similarly set alongside the theme of internal, often sexual, violence wherein women are *othered* by phallogocentric exploitation. Clearly, new symbolic orders of experiencing, speaking, feeling or other behavioural patterns are generated, and these "historical upheavals and changes" find utterance in social realms culturally, psychologically, educationally and politically. Writing back to colonial violence and dispossession, speaking out against patriarchal violence and rewriting traditional myths and women's position in historical contexts, comprise forms of refusal but also forms of doubleness that engross greater or lesser need for interaction with (or denunciation of) these colonialist and

phallographic frames. Hence, the writer's socio-political and cultural contexts, in fact, produce multiplicity in this counter-history's perception and the writing of it. The novel suggests that enunciations of the local and the global increasingly bypass or attempt to transcend national cultures as a key organizing category for identities, thereby it is also worth recalling Elleke Boehmer's considered defence of a reconceptualised nation as a potentially enabling *habitus* for women (*Stories of Women*). Therefore, history is populated by "tongueless women" as Davenport describes, although it is through the reconceptualization of culture and the continuous re-reading of history that women are given new insights.

In the analogous context of postcolonial studies, borders are the "interstitial" spaces where marginalized identities are performed and contested. Moreover, as previously analyzed Pono's confrontation of the notion of hybrid granddaughters, and mixed-marriages responds to the idea that purity and naturalness are at the basis of paradigms of national cultures, while hybridity is marked as unnatural, even grotesque or monstrous. Thus, it can be argued that hybridity is double-edged; on the one hand, it represents difference, the subject that inhabits an in-between reality; hybridity opposes the ideological conceptions of the myths of purity, and cultural authenticity. On the other hand, by externalizing that difference it allows the conceptualization of impurity, consequently a threat to pre-established order, hence it blends syncretism, the impure and the heterogeneous. Nevertheless, according to Robert Young, hybridity generally "enables a contestatory activity, a politicized setting of cultural differences against each other dialogically" (22). At the end of the novel, Pono seems to accept difference, the hybrid identities of her granddaughters in their plurality of mixed influences. However, she demarcates the idea that even though they are different, they also encapsulate that impurity that has disrupted the dominant culture of her country. Perhaps Pono concedes hybridity as the disowned other, and consequently there is also the notion that "in-between" or hyphenated people seems to dwell in a displaced position which eventually can provoke a sense of fragmentation, discontinuity and dislocation. For the most part, Pono is herself a migrant woman in her own home-country. Despite her strong personality and her magical powers, after being abandoned by her parents she was propelled into a life of wondering, and she lived always with a sense of displacement until she finally accepted to return to Duke's coffee plantation.

The social issues which are analyzed by Davenport in her narratives are frequently mediated through the human body as metaphor, and thus as in Divakaruni, Brink or Rushdie there is a use of corporeal symbolism. On the one hand, an extended interrogation of Western constructions of the female exotic body are offered in Davenport's text, and on the other, she uses the human body as a vehicle for presenting new conceptualizations of the position of women in a contemporary Hawaiian society. As Bhabha asserts, within colonial discourse "the body is always simultaneously (if

conflictually) inscribed in both the economy of pleasure and desire and the economy of discourse, domination and power” (*The Location of Culture*, 96). In Bhabha’s study, he recognizes the corporeal criteria upon which the construction of otherness frequently depends within the colonial milieu, and it also renders the connection between sexual desire and the desire for supremacy.

Kristeva argues that the preservation of the symbolic order, which refers to both the individual psyche and the social system, depends on a demarcation of the “clean and proper body” (*Powers of Horror*, 72). The abject body disrupts this order, attesting to its temporary nature and displaying the impossibility of an obvious separation between the pure and the impure, order and disorder, clean and unclean (Douglas). Kristeva’s theories of the opposition between abject and socially adequate bodies can be helpful as a means by which to analyze the responses to leprosy in Hawai‘i. In view of that, Kristeva explains

How can I be without border? (...) In that compelling, raw, insolent thing in the morgue’s full sunlight, in that thing that no longer matches and therefore no longer signifies anything, I behold the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away. The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. (...) Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is not lack of cleanliness of health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The inbetween, the ambiguous, the composite. (*Powers of Horror*, 4)

In fact, Davenport glosses the theories of abjection and impurity as borders between the social order and the disorder caused by body’s pollution. In *Purity and Danger*, Douglas argues that physical taboos metaphorically represent social boundaries and forms of segregation. These taboos are frequently centred on bodily orifices which are seen as the margin between the inside and outside of the body, and are liminal spaces that represent a threat to established social separation. Douglas explains that what is categorized as “dirt” does not necessarily have this value; it is “the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter” (35) which consigns to dirt a harmful character. Filth and bodily fluids are intimidating because they have the potential to “confuse or contradict our cherished classifications” (36), and because they are “in-between” and therefore essentially “undefinable” (96). Douglas recognizes that compartments referring to bodily margins and the fluids they generate vary according to different cultures, but she asserts that body fluids emanating from the anal and genital area “the bodily functions of digestion and procreation” are acknowledged as particularly perilous or repulsive (125). For the most part, it is the female that is described as abject or the locus of impurity; however in *Shark Dialogues* it is a male body, Duke’s body that is at the centre of the discussion. Leprosy was one of the diseases introduced during colonial expansion, and it caused the decimation of entire populations. Metaphorically Davenport expands the notion that leprosy depicts the degradation of the country in its foundations, the disruption of order induced by the pollution brought by colonialism. Thus, Duke’s body is eventually colonized and

distorted by a Western disease which slowly transforms him into an abject person. Pono is immune to the disease though she tried hard to contract it so she could be taken to the island where lepers were isolated and used in medical experimentation, places that are *per se* spaces of otherness. Davenport constructs acute description of those places of alterity where rules and hierarchies function as common denominators of power relations.

The novel ends with the Hawaiian word for hope, *Imua*, leaving a sense of optimism and endurance. Davenport's narrative reiterates the necessity for equilibrium between people despite their fragmented and hybrid identities. Therefore, that balance is achieved by means of a normalized heterosexual relationship, which could be vastly problematized and discussed if one bears in mind, for instance, the pivotal studies of Judith Butler on the matter. Despite these notions of sexuality, it can be inferred that Duke and Pono engender the metaphor of gods Ku and Hina, and according to Martha Beckwith

Ku and Hina, male or husband (kane) and female or wife (wahine), are invoked as great ancestral gods of heaven and earth who have general control over the fruitfulness of earth and the generations of mankind. (...)

Together the two include the whole earth and the heavens from east to west, in a symbol also they can include the generations of mankind, both those who are to come and those already born. (12)

Though Beckwith's formulation may contain some contentious aspects, not to mention the sexist use of "mankind", her book provides clear explanations of Hawaiian deities and rituals which can be metaphorically applied to Davenport's descriptions of her characters, mainly if we consider the mysterious way they vanish into the ocean as if returning home in a wider sense, and the influential kinship they maintain with those who surround them.

In Homi Bhabha's perspective, *Shark Dialogues* can be read as metaphor of dissemination, and a sequence of moments of "the scattering of the people that in other times and other places, in the nations of others, becomes a time of gathering," and also of "other worlds lived retroactively." (*The Location of Culture*, 139). When Run Run as a narrator evokes and describes Pono's journeys into the hinterland and all the family (hi)stories, the novel becomes an intersection of mirrors, a *mise-en-abyme*, an infinite regress in time and space, an endless succession of internal duplications. Ultimately, the narrative draws on many female bodies and their memories in order to construct a matrix of polyphonic narratives that reverberates through the text and lends efficacy to Pono's biography and the history of Hawai'i. It is relevant to briefly note the importance of the family, whether a happy or a terrible one, is a crucial organization in any socio-political realm. It is one of the major social elements in any community, and entails a powerful metaphor of the nation in its internal struggles. Thus, it is also the first locus of development; the family endows its constitutive elements with nourishment and sets the conditions of growth as well as integration into social networks. Moreover, the family performs another important purpose, passing on and reconciling the



memories, and myths of previous generations and those referring to collective memory and history. Rituals, customs, spirituality, morality and religion all have variable places within the family structure which constitute family fictions of a unique and communal nature. Those family fictions thus outline the ties in the sequence between the past and the present and the future, in a fragmentary narrative of both personal concerns and interests, but also, and possibly more significantly, of the wider interests of the public and social-political context. Clearly, Brink and Davenport essentially posit their concerns within this notion of family kinship also as an allegoric site of historical knowledge either individual or collective, so that these family networks serve as allegories of postcolonial nations. Their narratives entail the private (hi)story of families within the public realm where they are inscribed. Both writers make their point clear by writing the female voices into the fissures of their postcolonial background. As human beings fabricate their own history, they also create and reconstruct their own cultures and identities. Deciding to distinguish culture as a construct rather than as a naturalized event opens up room for resistance in which the contesting representations of marginalized elements may endure. In sum, by writing history from a female angle, both writers reiterate that women have been central markers of identity, despite being objectified; they have also been agents in the process of constructing identities. Davenport contributes to the understanding of complex identities and to the “*métissage* of cultures”, and thus within a postcolonial context women’s writing reiterates how character-subjects are multiply organized across cultural boundaries in order to find room for different approaches to the past.



### 3. *Negotiating Corporeality and Exoticism in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's The Mistress of Spices.*

“...this body, with all its capacities, seemed nothing - nothing at all. She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown...”

Virginia Woolf, *Mrs. Dalloway*

“It strikes me that, like every where I've resided, this body, too – my final, crumbling palace – is beginning to fail me.” –

Chitra Divakaruni, *The Palace of Illusions*

“Our thoughts have bodies...” – W. H. Auden, “Spain”

Postcolonial studies have focused on the representations of otherness in literature and arts in general, and that representation takes several and distinct aspects that deal with gender based issues and also the way master narratives are undermined within the frame of postmodernism and magical realism. Contemporary scholarship on postcolonial women's literature is often preoccupied with questions related to identity, according to which class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity are largely understood discursively. In *The Mistress of Spices*, Chitra Divakaruni heralds her intention to transcend consciously the established boundaries of the real and to devote her literature to magic and spirituality. This “involves bridging barriers, doing away with boundaries: not only boundaries between life and death, the everyday world and the mythic one, but with the thought that perhaps the boundaries we created in our lives are not real. I'm talking about the boundaries that separate communities and people” as she explains in an interview. Accordingly, when dealing with magical realism in West African literature, Brenda Cooper explains that the notion of hybridity is “a fundamental aspect of magical realist writing” (32), related to the notions of transition, change, crossing boundaries, and ambivalence that are portrayed in Divakaruni's fiction. Cooper brings to a close that “such zones occur where burgeoning capitalist development mingles with older pre-capitalist modes in postcolonial societies, and where there is the syncretizing of cultures as creolized communities are created” (15). Divakaruni's origins go back to her Indian roots which are constantly revisited in her fiction through memory and imagination, and thereby the concerns over the other become a pivotal issue immersed in a complex web of narrative progression, characters and

characterization. Spatial and temporal manifestations are assembled and displaced in the author's paradoxical constructions of parallel realities. In fact, it is in this way that hybridity and the "celebration of mongrelism as opposed to ethnic certainties" (Brenda Cooper, 32) can be assumed as relevant aspects of magical realist novels. In tandem, *The Mistress of Spices* articulates a set of exotic and to some extent essentializing aspects within a magically transformed context such as Eastern sensuality represented by Tilo's physical appearance when she was a young woman; Indian cuisine and the practical use of spices; the problematic role of arranged marriages in families with siblings who are born in the USA but who are also caught up in the traditional customs of South Asia; popular but also controversial constructions of South Asian diasporic culture in the West. These tropes operate within a set of cultural symbols that are at the service of discursive practices of diversity which present a plethora of ethnic scenarios such as hypersexualized representations of women, and the colourful trappings of exotica. Nevertheless, the narrative of Tilo's journey from different realities is also used to reconstruct culture as a meaningful semiotic structure. Ultimately, Divakaruni blends typical issues concerning migrant-identities and cultural diversity framed by postmodernism and its fragmentation of personal and social identities. It can also be argued that like André Brink, Chitra Divakaruni also underlines interracial relationships as being a crucial way to overcome racism and the problematic agenda engendered by multicultural encounters. Accordingly, Fatimah Roy explains that "history was composed of histories: the history of racialization, the history of a people, the history of individuals, and the necessity to bear witness for the future" (194). Divakaruni thus articulates histories with narratives of homeland, creating an environment that suggests both cultural diversity as well as a sentiment of nostalgia. She invents a discourse grounded in a diasporic space, creating multiple valences of desire of the migrant-self. The invention of an imaginary place or a third-space of contact where female voices are inscribed appears within a magical reality that is encapsulated in the confines of Tilo's shop as well as in her magical journey across the ocean in the company of snakes. Divakaruni clearly employs magical realism in order to empower marginalized voices in the global context of diaspora and the Indian community living in the USA. Moreover, it can be argued that once again the presence of two opposing discursive systems of the magic and the real in *The Mistress of Spices* depicts the anxieties between the colonized and colonizer discourses in a postcolonial context. From one postcolonial angle, realism represents the hegemonic discourse of the colonizer while from another angle, magic is a strategy of resistance, of exposing social and political wrongs. Consequently, in a postcolonial context, magical realism offers a mode to fill in the fissures of cultural representation by recuperating the fragments and voices of forgotten histories, and it may provide a "transformative decolonizing project of imagining alternate histories" (Faris, *Ordinary Enchantments*, 136). If one considers magical realism from the place of the other and

recognizes that magical realism brings in a non-logical and non-linear account of things, it is possible to acknowledge that the transgressive power of magical realism provides a means to contravene the postulations of the dominant culture and logical truth. Thus magical realism generates a decolonized space of narrative where divergent realities converge without annulling each other. The use of magical realism and its “dual spatiality” in Divakaruni’s work serves as a “defocalization” as Wendy B. Faris argues that “the defocalized narrative and bridging techniques of magical realism challenge the colonial authority of European realism by disengaging it from the empirical basis on which that authority seems to be built” (*Ordinary Enchantments*, 154). According to her:

In magical realism, the focalization - the perspective from which events are presented- is indeterminate; the kinds of perceptions it presents are indefinable and the origins of those perceptions are unlocatable. That indeterminacy results from the fact that magical realism includes two conflicting kinds of perception that perceive two different kinds of event: magical events and images not normally reported to the reader of realistic fiction because they are not empirically verifiable, and verifiable (if not always ordinary) ones that are realism’s characteristic domain. Thus magical realism modifies the conventions of realism based in empirical evidence, incorporating other kinds of perception. In other words, the narrative is “defocalized” because it seems to come from two radically different perspectives at once. (*Ordinary Enchantments*, 43)

The novel inscribes multiculturalist and gender agendas where women seem to exist in between categorical constructions of sexual identities within a frame of magical realism. In fact, the multiple and often contradictory perceptions of Tilo’s identity are generated not only through her own analyses of her migrant self but also partly based on the opinions of her customers and the society she lives. Tilo, who has born with shaman-like powers, has the ability to travel between different realities, perhaps parallel ones, re-inventing her body-identity and her lifestyle, and in that process she ends up mirroring and consequently distorting the reality created by the Great Mother. However, her experiences are not definite, and each life tells a story that is based on a process of personal, perhaps spiritual growth based on her metamorphosis. Space as a physical element is opposed to time that is psychological and can be controlled by magic. Tilo’s shop encapsulates both time and space that are manipulated by her desire and her duties to the people that visit the shop, so that past and future are reconstructed by the sheer determination of her customers’ wishes and by her own dreams. Divakaruni brings into play characteristics of Hindu mysticism through the narration of Tilo’s life, metonymically connecting the spices to Hindu principles in cyclic sequences of creation, preservation, and destruction. Effectively, spices encapsulate negative or positive traits depending on the way they are manipulated. Tilo is a puzzling woman invested with a magical and dynamic power who teaches her customers how to emerge into the limelight of their own stories. Therefore, she is able to wield the spices and to use them to cure maladies according to the needs of each customer who is for the most part a dislocated immigrant, and trying to blend into the society

they currently live in. Thus, in Divakaruni's narrative, Tilo engenders the future of her clients by infusing them with hope, clearly resembling the cook in *The Moor's Last Sigh* who in an act of "culinary magic" adds "a generous sprinkling of hope" to the present life of her customers to "cook up with the happy future" (*Moor's Last Sigh*, 273). Tilo's crossing the two different realities functions in a metaphorical perspective which depicts diasporic journeys. However, and contrary to other characters, she does not feel the loss of home, but rather sees that passage as a way to find a place that she can call home. Moreover, she is inextricably involved in the workings of diaspora, and her sense of dislocation is transformed into an intangible condition of being in several places.

The island where Tilo stayed before she was guaranteed her own bazaar in Oakland encapsulates a controversial location. On the one hand that other space or parallel reality that it represents is the locus of femininity, a liminal place where new identities are nurtured and reconstructed through a process of learning magic. On the other hand, it also encapsulates the power of castrating the will of those women by forging new personas, and somehow indicates that the past has been relegated to memory, or something that should be forgotten in order to assimilate the new self in a new context that is the passage to another country. Women seem to be escaping from their previous life, passing through different stages until they reach their final destination. Furthermore, the main figure on the island is known as The First Mother, and as well as the island she also imbricates a problematic agency. She is an old woman portraying the traditionalist notion of women being confined to a domestic sphere, yet she outlives the boundaries of the conventional. Additionally, by perpetuating the notion of a traditional South Asian woman, she is manipulating and silencing "her mistresses", enclosing them into a semi-domestic space instead of allowing them to be independent. Although the island is constructed within the frames of woman and motherhood, it also includes to some extent the disempowerment of those women when they are forbidden to step across the line that was pre-established, running the risk of being severely punished. Hence, they are manipulated and (s)mothered by the holy power of a mystical woman who in a very patronizing way teaches those women how to be subservient. However, Tilo will subvert the roles, slowly imposing her desires, and wielding the powerful spices according to her own perception of the reality that surrounds her. By doing so she may be defying the position she was guaranteed when she started taking care of her customers but she is also giving herself the option to choose and how to act according to the situation instead of mimicking or following instructions, but it cannot be argued that she has been fully empowered through her rebellious approach. Perhaps, she re-presents all women that defy pre-establish norms. Although she was a beautiful woman and she was aware of that, after she crossed through the fire she immediately lost her corporeal beauty to awake in the body of an old woman. To some extent, from being deprived by her features her sexuality becomes

alien to her and will only be acknowledged by her young American lover. Her past and her previous life are articulated and performed by spatialized narratives, and at some point Tilo will reveal that even she, who is not an ordinary person, can experience displacement and dispossession, mainly related with her physical appearance. Divakaruni posits her narrative within the realm of magical realism in order to represent new homelands, and the mutability and fragmentation of gendered identities, so that her magical role of being a mistress of spices serves as a trope through which dissimilar worlds coalesce. She advocates that the magical places, the shop and the island, redefine human abilities and communication within a third space that allows for the renegotiation of the individual hybrid and migrant identity as was perceived in André Brink's novels. The narrative reveals many layers like Pandora's box, and Divakaruni clearly uses magical realism to empower her female protagonist, though she also depicts the way people can be manipulated, and how the multiplicity of realities interpenetrate. Thus, it is this multiplicity that propels Tilo to oscillate between her life and the lives of her customers. However, at the end she finds her way and successfully deploys the conceptualization of a person's self-positioning as a migrant in a foreign culture who does not need necessarily to fully assimilate but rather to re-invent herself, and ultimately Tilo encapsulates the juxtaposition of the "old world" and the "new".

Magical realism is used in this way to enhance the postcolonial ontology of the novel, and the magical space encapsulated in the bazaar is an alternate reality that informs and influences reality in general, another but equally valid reality, an interstitial space where migrants may become reconciled to exile in what seems to be an alien world demonstrating that "migrants of necessity make a new imaginative relationship with the world" as Rushdie comments; "the migrant suspects reality, having experienced several ways of being, he understands their illusory nature. To see things plainly, you have to cross a frontier" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 125). This is the place where reality and imagination coexist, and the anthropomorphized space becomes a magic shop which may represent an escape from the real world. This re-invention of reality resembles the poetics of post-expressionist painters who observed so-called ordinary reality but immediately transformed it into something extraordinary. In this way, Divakaruni creates a semi mythological universe, and the dialectic of these dual realities is the unifying thread along which the narrative is constructed. Thus metamorphic transformations that lead to sequences of fragmentation and the reconstitution of the female body are necessary for Tilo to enter into contact with different levels of reality, enlarging her perception of the reality lived by the other characters. Those moments of transformation are carried out through rites of passage involving fire that to some extent resemble the rituals of *sati*, the Hindu custom of widow sacrifice of being burned alive on the husband's funeral pyre, an act seen as

positively transformative. Hence, Tilo's passage through fire is also a transformation after which she was reborn in a different body. David Kinsley asserts that

Sati's death is thus transformative. Through her death she provokes Siva into a direct conflict with the sacrificial cult and then the accommodation with it. In this way Siva is brought within the circle of dharma, within the order of established religion. Similarly, Sati's corpses or pieces of her corpse, sacralize the earth. In dying she gives herself up to be accessible on earth to those who need her power or blessing. In transplanting or transforming herself into the earth, she also brings into the sphere of human society the invigorating power of Siva in the form of the linga. (40)

In fact, the common point between Tilo's rite of passage and Kinsley's formulation, informed by religious myths of India is clear. Accordingly, Divakaruni is foreshadowing the development of Tilo's identity via the mythical fire as a metaphor for the reconstruction of the self and representing identity as erratic rather than stable. Moreover, according to the myth of Siva the remaining pieces of the body were spread and the location or *pitha* are sacred places which also resemble the ultimate function of the bazaar as a sacred place where the female's body-mind perform her healing powers. However, and in a less mythical perspective Ania Loomba points out the connections between widows' immolation and a male anxiety about female sexuality. Further on she asserts that

the sati is produced by and functions to rearticulate ideologies which target and seek to position a larger body of women, whose experiences, articulations and silences are crucial to understanding the relations of power and insubordination which are central to any analysis of 'the subaltern'(254).

Tilo epitomizes the sacred woman reborn after the fire had consumed her young body, and perhaps by accepting the aged one she was also forced to reject her sexuality and erotic self. She had to be re-written in a disembodied way, absent from any desire and assuming that as an aged woman she was not capable of awakening any sort of desire from a male, although this presumption will prove to be wrong when Raven, a Native American young man, could see her under her imposed mask. Nonetheless, she also embodies the female body as a subaltern site where silence and subversion are performed. The first assumption would highlight that, despite the magical and mythical frames, she can overcome death in order to be reborn as a healer, detached from all mundane and physical needs; the second would indicate the ways in which female agency is wrought out of socio-political intervention. Tilo encapsulates the objectification of women's bodies by creating the need to make herself attractive. Indeed, the corporeality and the body's giving itself over to the work of pleasure as well as pain comprise a significant issue in Divakaruni's construction of female identity. However, there is also a politics of provocation that are wedded to the notion of the body's materiality in a set of regulatory practices that at once define it and free it from societal pre-concepts. In fact, it is the body's *mattering* that is reinforced in Tilo's journey from the magical reality to the bazaar in Oakland. Following Butler's theoretical analysis of the body in her seminal work *Bodies that Matter*, it can be inferred that the body is, then, an effect of signification

the mimetic or representational status of language, which claims that signs follow bodies as their necessary mirrors, is not mimetic at all. On the contrary, it is productive, constitutive, one might even argue *performative*, inasmuch as this signifying act delimits and contours the body that it then claims to find prior to any and all signification. (*Bodies that Matter*, 30)

It is the pre-discursive condition of the imagined body that is at stake in Butler's formulation, a sort of practice that attaches the body to a gendered matrix and subsequently envelops the gendered corporeality in a process of deconstructing phallographic discourses. Accordingly, the gendered body is produced within the axis of a multitude of competing elements and power relations. Having posited the body in a dialogical position between Butler and Divakaruni's character, it is relevant to acknowledge that Tilo's features grounded in diasporic context imbricate the spectacle of the female body as its pleasure and pain raise attention to social codes and the way those codes are transgressed. Hence, the ultimate need to become beautiful and exoticized culminates in Tilo's artificiality that transforms her into a fearsome person, exactly because she converted her body into something unreal, but not immaterial: "It is a face that gives away nothing, a goddess-face free of mortal blemish (...) Only the eyes are human, frail" (*The Mistress of Spices*, 199). Her momentary inhumanness is caused by the power of spices that were manipulated in order to create that illusory instant and her doubts about what she had done is one price to pay for her (transitory) beauty. Nevertheless, that moment is dissipated when Raven perceives Tilo as a mere woman and not that artificial and hyper-eroticized person he firstly desired.

The narrative and Tilo's actions before she reached the island and when she woke up in the bazaar reveal many layers like a Pandora's box. This dichotomized existence transcends notions of geographical borders, and limitations of identity but also the legacy of belonging to two different worlds that is articulated by "a leap of imaginative empathy" (Boehmer, *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature* 239). In fact, the mythical world of the island and the harsh reality of inner-city life are bridged by the space occupied by the spice bazaar that functions as gate through which Tilo can negotiate her identity, thus by travelling from one place to the other it can be argued that it is analogous to women's position, for the most part located on the edges of societies. The bazaar works as a heterotopia in Foucault's formulation of a space that "is capable of juxtaposing in a real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" ("Of Other Spaces", 25). It is the *locus foci* where marginalized voices within the society where the shop is located are engendered and empowered, resulting in an alternate third-space of postmodern hybridity in which dislocated people negotiate and transform one another. However, the shop seems to encapsulate the conceptualization of a "third-space" of contact for it is also linked to "the contemporary massification of exotic merchandise – to the range of often tawdry 'ethnic' goods which, filtering through global channels, eventually land in a shop or shopping mall or street market near you"



(Graham Huggan, 68). It is worth pondering though Divakaruni's ability to recycle certain clichés that are at the basis of Orientalist representations as formulated by Said, and to some extent her novel seems to link the mechanism of the exotic and the Western assimilation and marketing of Indian literature in English, so that Huggan notes: "so India, it seems, is more available than ever for consumption; and more prevalent than ever are the gastronomic images through which the nation is to be consumed" (82).

Tilo's contradictory emotions and the inconsistency between her *self* and her duties as a mistress derive from the diasporic experience of space, the permanent feeling of displacement which mirrors the anxieties of her customers who seem to live in an interstitial space where home and traditions do not exist except within the frames of idealizing memory. Incapable of perceiving and understanding her *self*, Tilo transports her clairvoyance powers to read her customers' thoughts and by reading into their lives she is able to use the appropriate spice to heal them or fix issues that are related with categorization in terms of class, gender, sexuality and racial discrimination. As heterogeneous group differing in gender and also class, Tilo's customers highlight the common problems that diasporic people face, but they also portray the pressures of traditional notions. These issues are for the most part emphasized by women who suffer from sexual and domestic violence or who are forced to embrace arranged marriages. The generation gap is also a difficult topic in the novel, mainly associated with young women who become independent and want to study instead of devoting themselves to a domestic and demure life within the confines of a house ruled by a patriarchal figure. Nonetheless, men also seek for help but their concerns are mainly associated with lack of power or the total disempowerment of their supposed authority in the society they live, to some extent this lack of power becomes problematic because it is connected with the colonialist presumption of dominance and the taking away of the manhood of the colonized that prevails even after the dissolution of empires. Furthermore, the novel seems to outline "the paradoxical fact that the nation is often a cosmopolitan construction, imagined by diasporic elites working at a distance from their homelands" (Boehmer & Chaudhuri, 278). In fact, these diasporic elites do not only construct the nation from a distant reality, but they clearly outline the process of adaptation to the nation, and Divakaruni overtly points out the fissures generated by these processes of construction and adaptation.

The narrative is extensively marked by the sense of being "in-between" which is inherent in Tilo's perception of her sexuality but it is also a stage that she will overcome by accepting her aged body, and later by manipulating the spices to give her all the beauty and exoticism able to mesmerize Raven, albeit also highlighting the fetish-character of India. Subsequently, her body matters as it is the space to transgress and break out from a patriarchal structure. Ironically, Tilo is not defying a

phallogocentric order, for, as it will be possible to see also in *Shark Dialogues*, sometimes female characters have to fight castrating mothers, as is the case of The First Mother who encapsulates the traditional notion of “Indianhood” and the claim that women should serve their husbands and families. She explains that Mistresses are not relevant compared with their duties to help customers:

Remember, said the Old One, the First Mother, when she trained us on the island. ‘You are not important. No Mistress is. What is important is the store. And the spices.’ The store. Even for those who know nothing of the inner room with its sacred, secret shelves, the store is an excursion into the land of the might-have-been. A self-indulgence dangerous for a brown people who come from elsewhere, to whom real American might say *Why?* (*The Mistress of Spices*, 5)

This excursion into the land of the might-have been embodies the nostalgia for a lost homeland that characterizes diasporic identities. Moreover, Tilo also wonders about that in-betweenness provided by the constant need to re-interpret the needs of her dislocated customers.

Tilo and the other female characters step out of the pre-established and confined sexual boundaries that define the role of Indian womanhood. Judith Butler mentions that “not only did bodies tend to indicate a world beyond themselves, but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appeared to be quite central to what bodies are” (*Bodies that Matter*, ix). Therefore, the body is acknowledged as a multi-discursive site, a construction in itself that encompasses “the myriad of bodies that constitute the domain of gendered subjects” (*Gender Trouble*, 12), and thus it is not a merely instrument of signification. However, cultural alterity and hybrid identities encompass the deconstruction of socially constructed boundaries that are experienced within a field of multiple negotiations between dissimilar cultures, and gendered identities. Minh-ha also deals with the idea of cultural alterity, when she refers to the deconstruction of the insider/outsider identity, and asserts that “she who knows she cannot speak of them without speaking of herself, of history without involving her story, she also knows that she cannot make a gesture without activating the to and fro movement of life” (375). Divakaruni’s narrativization of an exotic and spiced India through the figure of a woman tries to unmask the interlocking oppressive effects of gender, race, and social class framed by neocolonial influences, such as globalization and transnationalism. The novel convincingly illustrates the lives of both first and second generation of Indian migrants in the USA, depicting their daily life. There is a constant appraisal of wealthy Indians for example: “the rich Indians rarely speak, as if too much money has clogged their throats” (*The Mistress of Spices*, 75). They seem to despise the shop as a link to their country, and they only buy expensive items that contrast with their ordinary lives with ordinary problems that Tilo easily acknowledges the moment they enter the shop, “rich woman I thank you for reminding me. Beneath the shiniest armour, gold-plated or diamond, the beat of the vulnerable flesh” (*The Mistress of Spices*, 77).

Chitra Divakaruni employs magical realism to comment on racism in multi-ethnic America, and the exoticizing of spices that are largely connected with India serves as a metaphor for the colonial past of the country based on the trade of spices and consequently the exploitation of people, so that again the trope of magical realism is deployed as a political device. Thereby the magical powers of the spices and the colonial symbolism they encapsulate become forms of alternative realism, and as a jigsaw puzzle Tilo intertwines her personal story with the medicinal properties of the spices, giving the sense that she also needs them to fix her past. In fact, Wendy B. Faris notes that it is precisely the familiar event or object that is endowed with magic that is crucial in magical realistic narratives. Hence, Tilo manipulates spices within the realm of magic when she addresses them in the secret compartment of the shop. However, she also introduces them to the customers in their everyday use, though each customer only gets the spice that suits his or her situation. For instance, Tilo uses *fennugreek* to heal Ratna, “burning from the poison on her womb, legacy of husband’s roving” (*The Mistress of Spices*, 47) or Alok who loves men and was abused, “he showed me the lesions opening avid as mouths on his skin and said, ‘I guess this is it’” (*The Mistress of Spices*, 48). Its medicinal properties are used to calm body injuries at first, then it is used as a magical component that can “render the body sweet again, ready for loving” (*The Mistress of Spices*, 48). The narrative is paved with examples of magical spices; actually, each chapter describes a different spice and its effective properties as well as the magic ones, and each customer’s story behind the excuse for being in the shop only to buy missing items in their kitchens. Thus, by conflating the medicinal with the magical capacities to evoke feelings and ways to heal the immaterial element of bodies, Divakaruni’s character merges the two distinct realities. As Faris explains that “wonders are recounted largely without comment, in a matter-of-fact way, accepted – presumably, as a child would accept them, without undue questioning of reflections” (“Scheherazade’s Children”, 177). There is a stress on the magical powers carried by the spices that can create and destroy, or even reorganize the world’s order. This is an interesting assumption if the world’s history is to be taken into consideration, for the spices as inquisitive elements in Tilo’s life, almost enslaving her within the confines of the bazaar can be read as an allegory of imperial power after the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the maritime quests enacted by Vasco da Gama. After the circumnavigation that led the Portuguese navigators to India, the world’s geography and cartography were reorganized, opening the gates for Western empires to have access to the wealthy and exotic East. However, tracing the routes of spices and their history is also a way to map a cultural geography, as well as to note that spices were crucial to the economic commodification of South Asia as an instrument of the colonial enterprise. Accordingly, spices function as a double metaphor: on the one hand they mirror India and the power of Tilo to help people, a sort of mystic power

linked to the Orient; on the other hand, they work as a colonial metaphor of power and domination by enslaving people, as in this case of the female body that is used in its exoticism to become socially armed in order to survive on the fringes in an alien country. Furthermore, within the framework of embodied corporealities the female body always gestures towards other fields of meanings, and those bodily realities cannot be understood as absolutely given but as tangible and substantial categories of varied cultural experiences.

Food metaphors are common among postcolonial and magical realistic narratives. If Saleem Sinai in *Midnight's Children* gives a “chutnification of history” or Baby Suggs in *Beloved* cooked food to nourish the bodies of men and women she has helped, just to mention a few, Tilo and her spices’ narratives present an exoticized diasporic journey in a magically real bazaar that inflects reality with female domesticity. Such explorations of the diverse roles of spices contribute to debates about identities in contexts of globalization, migrancy and tradition, and each chapter devoted to a different spice resembles a miniature painting portraying narratives about cultural identity. Moreover, Divakaruni’s novel reveals a special interest in the subjects of taste, flavours, spices and sensuality in order to evoke dissimilar spaces and identities that may offer complementary views of Indianness within a context of Western values and traditions. Thus, to some extent those “gastronomic images” as Huggan writes are clearly a way to depict a national identity and a way to advertise it. Although some of these issues are not freed from certain problematic resonances, and the narrative is framed in ambiguity, as in the case of Tilo’s sensuality and the fact that she is enclosed in the shop, a prisoner of her body as well, which ultimately partakes in a master-slave relationship. For the most part she offers recipes for the deconstruction of repression, violence against women, racism and intolerance, namely the use of the adequate spice, as a labour of love that, in turn, generates compassion and more love. But when the spices are used for her own good that will generate chaos, which can ultimately be analyzed as a cyclical process of reconstruction. Susanne Freidberg points out: “food has become the flash point of many different struggles in defence of particular cultural norms” (4), and if that is so spices may crystallize the sense of home and the notion of a multicultural society. Therefore, there is an intimate connection between food, in this particular case spices, gender, and ethnicity, performing cultural identities and establishing alternative networks between different realities. Spices are crucial to the narration of events and are used as a means both of excavating people’s histories and their notions of homeland and of imparting their magical powers to be shared with the reader. Tilo engages with the notion that the tropology of spices participates in discourses of sacred presences, perhaps mythical, exoticism, liminality, commerce and imperialism, framed by the polyphonic significance of displacement and nostalgia. Spices emblemize these links, and they should be read as cultural texts, in relation to

debates about lifestyle and national identity; they evoke an elaborate scene of home. In exploiting the magical potential of spices, Divakaruni asserts that such cultural texts also tend to reinforce the romanticized, domesticated, ritualized image embedded in Indian food. What is also striking is the extent to which the narrativization of spices seems to debunk the myth that there is an authentic, fantastical, pure food from India, though in a diasporic context “food from home” can only be recreated as an untainted memory, or as form which allows nostalgia to thrive, and thus the symbolic usage of spices can apparently consolidate social and family ties. The tangled cultural suppositions and ideologies surrounding food framed by the tropes of magical realism are well illustrated in Laura Esquivel’s *Como agua para chocolate* for example. Tita, the main character and the cook, could only find expression through the preparation of food. Love, anger, sadness are feelings that go into the dishes, and which could trigger the same sort of feelings in those who ate them. Thus her rebellion against her castrating mother or her immense love for Pedro were spread among the people who visited her when they ingested the delicacies she prepared, causing all sorts of reactions from sadness to erotic upheavals. Indeed, food and cooking are the nexus that unites Tita and Pedro; the same way spices are the nexus that bond Tilo to the diasporic community in Oakland, the spices’ narrative embellished with magical realism is ultimately concerned with the construction and empowerment of diasporic identities that fall into the duality of two disparate realities with their diverse cultural tones, the West and the memories of the East. Accordingly, it can be argued that to some extent food/cooking function as ways to empower female characters, though the specific case of Divakaruni’s character cannot be read as linearly as that. There are nuances that dilute such an assertive assumption, such as her being denied her sexual and gendered autonomy that would be finally restored when she renames herself and intentionally engenders a new perception of self. Tilo’s identity is based on an Indian element and an American element; it is a transnational hybridized self. Moreover, the significance of her new name, Maya, is particularly important at this stage. It is interesting to note that the name that Tilo chose resembles the word magic, a name that means “illusion, spell, enchantment, the power that keeps this imperfect world going day after day” (*The Mistress of Spices*, 317). The idea of hybridity is undoubtedly connected to the newly acquired name. Furthermore, all the process of creating a new self out of a fragmented world is achieved by means of magical realism. Divakaruni overtly employs magical realism as a means to blend divergent conceptions of the world and to advocate eclectic perspectives of a transcultural reality. In Brenda Cooper’s words,

magical realism attempts to capture reality by way of a depiction of life’s many dimensions, seen and unseen, visible and invisible, rational and mysterious. In the process, such writers walk a political tightrope between capturing this reality and providing precisely the exotic escape from reality desired by some of their Western readership (32).

It is precisely this notion of intertwining different perspectives that conducts the novel to the idea of a “new world” born out of the destruction of pre-concepts and discrimination. In that way, the magical utilized in the narrative assumes a political contestation, and as seen before, the inscription of marginalized voices in the mainstream culture without annihilating any of their characteristics.

The enigmatic appearance of Tilo and her magical power to read people’s minds engenders fascination, awe, and fear among the people who visit the shop. In fact, it is the exotic power that gives her agency and consequently empowers her. The magic endowed in the spices enables women to fight phallogocentric Indian tradition, as in the example of Lalita who had an arranged marriage, and who was abused by her husband. She encapsulates in the broadest sense the women who escape from silenced violence, and she contradicts the “stories of women who went back and were beaten to death” (*The Mistress of Spices*, 272). The exposure of violence against women and the controversial issue of arranged marriages give the narrative a gender-based agenda. Divakaruni’s discourse takes part in the empowerment of female voice through magical realism and Bakhtin’s notion of dialogism which allows the encounter of otherness through the potential of dialogue rather than opposition. Thus the novel proposes that identities in general, and diasporic ones in particular are constructed in dialectic response, always open and ongoing. In the introduction to *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, Susan McKinstry and Dale Bauer explain that “dialogism, Bakhtin’s theory about encountering otherness through the potential of dialogue, is central to feminist practice because it invites new possibilities for activism and change” (2). Therefore, Divakaruni’s work can be read as dialogic writing because it explores the multiplicity of being Other in oneself and in the relation established with others, and it also challenges certain monolithic assumptions in contemporary culture. It is a “discourse-in-process” and in progress that enacts the interaction of multiple voices, the “heteroglossia” that is also present in Brink’s narratives, for instance. However, like the carnivalesque laughter that Bakhtin hears in the Novel, “the female voice laughs in the face of authority” (Diane Herndl, 11), given that there is an intimate connection between the novel as “zone of dialogic contact” (Bakhtin, 45) and women, and as for Bakhtin, the marginalized voices can be not only inscribed but also heard by the attentive ear. Although Bakhtin has not referred specifically to any work by female writers, his contribution to understanding the dialogic counterhegemonic discourse of the novel and the connections between marginalized voices is of great value.

Diasporic identities are constantly constructing and reconstructing themselves anew in resonance with the identity of homeland. Authors like Divakaruni testify to the complexities entailed in the process of representing the diversity of those identities as a result of a collective memory. Despite the complexities of representation Divakaruni’s characters are not monolithic subjects

though they partake of certain stereotypes of womanhood. In this regard, Sangeeta Ray explains that ideas of Indian womanhood have always been connected with Indian nationalism

Women have been variously implicated in nationalisms. Even though they are often active participants in national struggles, the gendered and the sexed female body is made to bear the burden of excessive symbolization – as biological producers of the boundaries of national groups, as active transmitters and producers of national culture and as *symbolic signifiers of national difference* (135).

Consequently, the rejection or challenge carries great difficulty as these women are depicted as existing in a state of tension between tradition and modernity, duty and self-fulfilment, as is clear through the examples of Lalita who left her abusive husband. Nonetheless, she described the process as painful, mainly because she felt that she was betraying her parents by not being a good wife; or Geeta, a young woman who defied her family to pursue her love for a chicano man; or ultimately Tilo who follows her own desires, disobeying the orders of the First Mother, and choosing the Native American lover. In addition, the refashioning of the identities of these female characters is often evident in the crossing of sexual boundaries through interracial sex. Thereby, given that these women cross physical/territorial and psychological/philosophical frontiers, they become conscious and critical of their identities, undermining the symbolic status and the expected behaviour that is embodied in the notion that Ray has introduced. Even in a diasporic social context, the representation of Indian woman has been used to represent nationalism, in which women were assigned to the home where they were expected to be responsible for the protection of Indian spirituality, as is the example of Tilo who retains her “Indianness” in the inner realm of her group while attempting to assimilate to Western discourses in the outer realm. Nonetheless, Tilo rises up against her pre-established condition through the exploration of her sexuality and by reclaiming her body at a younger stage. By extending the boundaries of her sexual identity, it can be argued that to some extent Tilo speaks out in opposition through the language of her body which seems to be the marginal space that she dwells in. In fact, the female body and its senses are thus poignant signifiers of *differance*. In other words, it enacts difference and deferment in a dialogic assumption of its mobility and displacement. Hence, the hermeneutic objectification of the body takes place with regard to the phallogocentric control of it and its limitations in terms of its sexuality. Framed by a postcolonial feminist discourse, the female character of *The Mistress of Spices* highlights the structures of feeling that exist in her cultural inscription and expected patterns of behaviour, which are now at last re-defined within new spaces and by crossing the boundaries that govern that pre-established behaviour. It becomes evident that Divakaruni’s female characters confront and examine displacement, and their position between cultures and societies. Indeed, the location of women in the threshold of society is crucial in the narrative. However, they overcome that by resisting the dominant power embedded in their traditional role. Thereof they are given agency within the

American mainstream context which suggests the rethinking of sociality. Divakaruni has made the marginal space resistant, allowing the characters to cross cultural borders that are ambivalent and multiperspectival spaces. By doing so, the multiple perspectives are clear in the different stories revealing characters' plural identities and the permanent re-fashioning of those identities.

In relation to this, borders are a crucial aspect in the novel. Firstly, they can be physical borders or imaginary ones where a multiplicity of factors, such as race, gender, identity, memory or history, diverge and intersect. Secondly, they can be either a connection or a division between "home" and "elsewhere", the recognizable and the unknown. Therefore, the subjectivities emerging from these spaces are interstitial, and the processes of assimilation or the journeys, metaphorical ones or not, that some characters go through generate hybridized identities within the discourses of history and culture. Accordingly, Stuart Hall points out that "the boundaries of difference are continually repositioned in relation to different points of reference" (227). It is through the travelling within imaginary landscapes that the encounters between Self and Other are possible, and in which cultures "recognize themselves through their projections of otherness" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 12). Divakaruni's characters are to some extent governed by a sense of displacement interwoven with the notion that India is a construct of their imagination, a predicament that can be explained using Rushdie's words: "the past is a country from which we have all emigrated, that its loss is part of our common humanity" (*Imaginary Homelands*, 12).

Tilo negotiates her fragile subjectivity and corporeality in her encounters with Raven, and she indulges his interest in her without revealing to him that she actually enjoys his attention, even though she knows that mundane feelings are forbidden to mistresses. Tilo is aware of her responsibilities as a Mistress of Spices, but a rising need to indulge in passionate love leads her to the point that she has to decide between a life of magical powers and one of ordinary love. The love story between Tilo and the Native American Raven inscribes the atmosphere of cultural diversity that the author wanted to create in the novel: "I extended my subject matter from dealing exclusively with the Indian-American community to include three other ethnic groups living in the inner city" ("The Spice of Life"). As a Mistress of Spices, Tilo must follow certain conventions according to which she is not allowed to pursue her own happiness but instead she can only help others to achieve theirs, and ultimately she is not allowed to fall in love with a man, not even leave her shop under any circumstances. Conversely, her personality has always been characterized by rebelliousness, as The First Mother soon notices: "You've been nothing but trouble ever since you came, rule-breaker. I should have thrown you out at our first meeting itself" (*The Mistress of Spices* 41-2). Accepting Raven and longing for him is the first move to have her world crumbled and fragmented. The development of that involvement and consequently the notion of stepping across



the line that was initially imposed on her constitutes a different and contradictory reality from where they communicate. Elleke Boehmer asserts that “it is difficult, though not impossible, to conceive (of) the nation without the inscription of specific symbolic roles of male and female historical actors” (*Stories of Women*, 5), and in fact the sexual binary is deeply entrenched in Divakaruni’s narrative. It is precisely the essentialist perspective of the heterosexual relationship which seems to be the axis to create a new order, a new world perhaps a better one as is suggested at the end of the novel that seems to imply a certain controversy. However, that last moment is a metaphor of the Indian life cycle that contemplates creation, preservation and destruction. Consequently, after having renounced the magical power of spices, Tilo decides to create a “dream land” out of the ruins with Raven. The novel does not promote discarding old traditions but it emphasizes an ideology that is able to accommodate the old with the new, the West with the East. Furthermore, that gendered relationship evokes recognizable familial forms that deal with the construction of nations that continue to be based on discourses polarized by masculine and feminism binarisms.

The performative body of Tilo challenges the Cartesian dualism which subordinates body and mind. Instead the body is postulated as central subject through which power relations are both formulated and resisted. However, in the beginning her incorporeality assumed in the imposition of a sexless aged body by the First Mother can be read as a metaphor for the rejection of the socially defined exoticism imbricated in women’s bodies. It is important to note the intersection between gender and postcolonial theories regarding the categories and institutions, knowledge and power play by means of which social dynamics are structured and synchronized. For instance, Foucault has exposed the embeddedness of bodies in politics and the relations of power, and Judith Butler has also made compelling arguments for the social constructivist nature of gender and sex, as well as the *performativity* of gender in order to re-conceptualize human agency. Tilo’s invisibility in terms of beauty, if compared with the “bougainvillaea girls”, beautiful and young women who never dare to enter Tilo’s bazaar, derives from the fact that she dwells inside a sphere of authority generated out of the almost mythic personality that she assumed when sent to the bazaar, and the sort of authority that her customers attributed to her, that of an old and wise woman who keeps the traditional values of India as Geeta’s grandfather has described her. Yet she has to renounce her sexualized body to en-gender the form of maternal figure, the nurturing presence that binds an imaginary homeland and the diasporic reality of her customers. Effectively, the novel seems to propose the incompatibility of Tilo’s corporeality viewed in terms of sexuality and eroticism when set against her ability to heal and nurture the people who look for her help. This is reinforced at the end when she has to choose between her magical powers or Raven’s love. Informed by the multifaceted signs of a diasporic community, the female body operates almost as a national construct re-created as the “archetypal

embodiments of woman” (Boehmer, *Stories of Women* 26) that primarily should not be polluted, and it presupposes an emblematic symbol of maternity, or virginal pride. However, Tilo’s rebelliousness becomes her singularity. Detaching herself from these presumptions, she assumes her own choices, and affirms her need to recover a younger body by manipulating the spices. What seems controversial here is the fact that she does that after falling in love with Raven and not exactly because she deeply wanted to, although throughout her narration, she refers to the “bougainvillaea girls” in terms of their beauty and eroticized movements. The need to subvert the roles that were pre-established by the First Mother was engendered after the moment she met Raven. It can be argued that the novel is thus to some extent rooted within binary terms, such as male/female, which is based on another dichotomy, the feminine-private and the masculine-public. Therefore, bodies are inextricably related with representation, and are crucial when associated with identity politics. Unsurprisingly therefore, the gendered bodies of women have played an important role in the illustration of iconographies cherished by nations.

In sum, the female body reveals its complexity as a palimpsest of dissimilar symbolic representations, such as mother, land, lover, flesh, and thus it is unveiled and consequently divided into multiple micro-narratives that serve as metaphors for the bodily-national venture. Divakaruni’s characters are positioned within criss-crossing cultural webs of transnational and national interrelation that are framed by the politicization of bodies and desires. Accordingly, Boehmer points out that

The stories through which women narrate their subjectivity, like the diverse groups and communities through which they may seek to wield power, are characterised by such iconoclastic, *heterogeneous identifications* – moulded, too, by where women situate themselves along the axes of differentiation of race, religion, region, sexuality, class and nation. (*Stories of Women*, 209)

In fact, women writers, through the medium of layered narratives, magical realism and storytelling often claim several social spaces at once, and these spaces intersect with a transnational world. Therefore, combining the frameworks of magical realism and the “heterogeneous identifications” related to women’s corporeality, Divakaruni portrays a female sexuality that is celebrated for its power and its supposed capacity to escape from structures of dominance and submission.

Elizabeth Grosz refers to “the irreducible specificity of women’s bodies, the bodies of all women, independent of class, race and history” (207). The ultimate nature and the certainty of sexual difference is attached, for Grosz, to bodily processes of reproduction, although she recognizes that the modes these are experienced in are not universal. Nonetheless she claims “sexual difference is the horizon that cannot appear in its own terms but is implied in the very possibility of an entity” (209). Sexual difference, however, does not necessarily generate sexual identities or assembles the way in which women accept and experience their bodies, for these will be socially and

historically changeable. Divakaruni's characters experience their corporeality within the constraints of a regulated society, and sexuality assumes a preponderant role in the narrative of Tilo's journey. Women are largely viewed as wives and mothers, lacking all kind of authority in their lives, which seem to be motivated by the conceptualization of the notion of "Indianness", and the values embedded in the idea that effectively women are the keepers of domestic life, connected with maternity as their ultimate role. Despite this initial notion of submissive women, it is also possible to be confronted with women who fight back against the phallogocentric reality they live in, as is the case of Tilo, Lalita or Geeta. Perhaps, the narrativization of these women encapsulates the notion that bodies and identities within their sexuality are fluid and likely to be changed, not by disobeying but by means of seeing things through a different perspective from the one that is assumed as the "correct" and traditional one. As Judith Butler suggests, gender is a "cultural configuration" (*Gender Trouble*, 190), and following that assumption it can be argued that Tilo's identity is constructed on the dialectic relation between the two realities she lives in and later shaped through her relation with Raven. Butler notes that "the foundationalist reasoning of identity politics tends to assume that an identity must first be in place in order for political interests to be elaborated and, subsequently, political action to be taken" (*Gender Trouble*, 181). In this light, she supports the idea that in the present socio-cultural "configuration" a subject should be examined as such – be culturally identifiable – in order to begin to perform political change. The relevance of Butler's formulation is, in short, that gender is culturally given to a subject in order to give that subject particular characteristics. For Butler, gender identity can be understood as a kind of performance:

Consider that a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a "natural sex" or a "real woman" or any number of prevalent and compelling social fictions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another. If these styles are enacted, and if they produce the coherent gendered subjects who pose as their originators, what kind of performance might reveal the ostensible "cause" to be an "effect"? In what senses, then, is gender an act? As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated* (*Gender Trouble*, 178).

Consequently, as Butler goes on to point out, the notion of the performative

moves the conception of gender off the ground of a substantial model of identity to one that requires a conception of gender as a constituted *social temporality*. Significantly, if gender is instituted through acts which are internally discontinuous, then the *appearance of substance* is precisely that, a constructed identity, a performative accomplishment which the mundane social audience, including the actors themselves, come to believe and to perform in the mode of belief (*Gender Trouble*, 179).

Although Judith Butler did not fully agree with Kristeva and her notion of "body politics" seeing its inadequacies within the politics of subversion, what is important to note out of such theoretical approaches to the body is that, on the one hand it dwells in a conceptualization of individuality as

“cultural configuration” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190), and on the other hand becomes through language a crucial site of contestation, that can be acknowledged as body of politics as theorized by Kristeva. Butler advocates that the gendered body is performative, insofar as the “essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (*Gender Trouble*, 173). If the bodies we inhabit are perceived in terms of their gendered performativity, subsequently “the political regulations and disciplinary practices” (174) that produce the gendered bodies may be made noticeable, and critiqued. The question then becomes, what language can be used to critique these bodies, and whether the subject may ever be engaged in undermining the rules while staying intelligible by the same rules. It can be argued that Kristeva’s subject in process also goes through that way of undermining the rules using several strategies of language. Ultimately, the task has been the creation of a language in Kristeva’s terms that would, paradoxically, operate under these same cultural codes, a language which is able to expose and to change. According to Judith Butler, the categories of gender and sex are merely performances which gain their authority through reiterative practices; therefore the reiterative practices can be achieved through language as Kristeva posits it. Nevertheless, it is through a reading of Kristeva’s subject theory, which is itself a reformulation of Lacanian theorization, that the tools for enacting the subversive critique sought by Butler may be uncovered. Thereby, it is important to note that Divakaruni’s novel bestows the formulations of an appropriate language that becomes the prime maker of newly, gendered bodies in order to contest and expose the gendered performativity of, above all, female bodies. However, the female body is a site of a conflict between cultural expectations and personal needs. Additionally, female bodies/subjects negotiate identity through constructions of corporeality. In Grosz’s words, bodies “are not only inscribed, marked, engraved, by social pressures external to them but are the products, the direct effects, of the very social constitution of nature itself” (x). Self-identity, as formulated by Kristeva, underpins the signifying process *vis-à-vis* general theories of meaning and theories of the subject that are based on the pleasure of signification, the pleasure of identification with others, but also the pleasure of differentiation which seems to work through the relation of the subject and the participation in the social world. Kristeva and Butler meet but they do not necessarily divide. It can be assumed that their complementarity makes them useful in the analysis of Divakaruni’s writing.

*The Mistress of Spices* deals with re-imagining nationality, subjectivity and sexuality as a response to the disillusionment of globalized identities. Thus it can be inferred that Divakaruni’s writing emphasizes the concept of nation and diaspora “not as a static but as a relational space” (Boehmer, *Stories of Women* 17). The dialogical and polyphonic forms that illustrate magical realism are also part of Tilo’s storytelling in a structure of tales of spices that embody the fragmentation of

identity as well as magical journeys across parallel universes. Tilo negotiates borders between cultures and individuals within her sphere of influence that serves a decolonizing function where alternative possibilities can be envisioned. In addition, Tilo's journeys may function as a kind of female *bildungsroman* allowing her to develop until an ultimate stage when she becomes more mortal and less magical. Actually, it is only the name that she chooses that links her to that magical instant of her existence. Nonetheless, the ambivalence of those journeys and the contradictions that Tilo believes that make her insubstantial are, paradoxically, the foundations of her identity. Hence, rather than a unified identity, she embodies identity based on multiplicity and ambiguity, and her self-perception is a matter of acknowledging the diversity of factors that influence identity formation. Yet, in her several processes of transformation, Tilo's awareness of her own corporeality changes according to the cyclic process reinforcing the notion of fluid identities. As she goes through different processes of metamorphosis, that are inner and outer ones, Tilo in due course accepts that fragmentation of selves in permanent construction in place of a unified identity. It is interesting to note that the recurrence of metamorphic processes in contemporary literature provides conditions for the inclusion of postmodern narrative strategies, predominantly the ones shared with feminist and postcolonial concerns.

The female body becomes essential in Divakaruni's description of Tilo and Raven's relationship. Hence, initially it assumes the position of the exotic other. Although Raven had perceived Tilo in terms of her inner self, he could not avoid a certain curiosity in the exoticism of "Indianness". Consequently, Tilo manipulated the spices to achieve the appearance that was expected of her in order to please Raven's fetishization of her body. In spite of re-defining herself through a corporeal metamorphosis, Tilo clearly emphasizes the notion of the obsessive gaze of the exotic other, "each of us loving not the other but the exotic image of the other that we have fashioned out of our own lack" (*The Mistress of Spices*, 310). By doing so, the female body is coded as an erotic male fantasy, and later is re-coded in terms of female experience. It can be inferred that erotic desire, to some extent, convenes political and historical realities, which ultimately raises the question of desire and its gendered politics as well as the politics of its representation. However, this process of representation is framed here by magical realistic elements that assume a preponderant influence in the way characters interact. Tilo is a cross-cultural woman with a political agenda related to gender and the marginalization of cultures. Perhaps, the employment of magical realism as a strategy is used by women writers to "reflect the complex and sometimes paradoxical multiple cultural influences that they experience" (Maggie-Ann Bowers, 58). In effect, the "in-betweenness" generated by magical realism allows the resistance to monolithic cultural structures, the same way it allows gender-based resistance. Tilo's clairvoyant skills, the magical powers of spices, her ability to

travel from one reality to other may be a confusing context, although her customers are not aware of any of those aspects of her life, and so Tilo's bazaar and the spices are duly trivialized by them. As, Lois P. Zamora explains, "the propensity of magical realistic texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among these worlds" (*Magical Realism* 6).

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, Kristeva formulated the notion of strangeness, wherein she posits that the recognition of strangeness could lead to a politics of cosmopolitanism that evades the erasure of difference, instead outlining difference as an inevitable and important facade of everyday life in the globalized world. Hence, "a paradoxical community is emerging, made up of foreigners who are reconciled to themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners" (194). To suggest that the notion of alterity is en-gendered in this formulation of strangeness immediately raises the spectre of a codification and consequently a de-codification of that alterity in terms of a gender-based agenda. Divakaruni's narrative merges diverse and specific migrant and diasporic experiences that are not always chosen, and seem to be distinguished by gender and class, into one metropolitan migrant tale. Although the commodification of alterity and exoticism transforms ethnicity into a "spice, a seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream white culture" (bell hooks, 21), the impulse to appropriate it should be questioned in order to protect a sense of subjectivity rather than its complete assimilation by one more generalizing term. *The Mistress of Spices* depicts the subjectivity of each character in the context of dissimilar situations, as well as identities in permanent production, thus implicitly constructing their detached "imagination" though the tangible boundaries of culture. In the space of the other, Divakaruni gives shape to the lived experiences of character-subjects within the realms of domestic space, sexual desire, and agency that is for the most part covert. As a diasporic female writer she produces her work within a project of decentring, perhaps revising and re-imagining the presumptions of a multitextured centre.

When referring to *Jasmine* and *The Mistress of Spices* Inderpal Grewal asserts that the novels depict specific diasporic realities, and they are to some extent worlds apart. She analyses Divakaruni's novel as utilizing "an exotic aesthetic" based on Hindu mysticism and ancient wisdom from India which authorizes the protagonist to "resist the colonial discourses of the victimized Indian woman" (75) by manipulating spices for both traditional cuisine and the spiritual ceremony of healing:

This narrative of the ancient and the modern (...) sutures the world of late-twentieth-century cosmopolitan travel and cuisine with American cultural feminism's new transnational spiritualities that enable empowerment through discourses of premodern and nonwestern goddesses. Exotic power is empowerment, and feminism and exoticism are first demarcated and then reconciled. Exotic spices enable women to become

feminist subjects by using their magical and healing qualities to fight patriarchal Indian tradition. (77).

The novel describes distinct stories of women's adversity, women who for instance escape the tradition of arranged marriages, come to grips with abusive husbands or conservative grandfathers. Grewal argues that

*The Mistress of Spices* (...) represses the violence of the modern history of spices by enabling them to appear magically in the United States through the cosmopolitan discourse of the "healing powers" of eastern tradition, the feminist politics of empowerment, and the cosmopolitan enjoyment of Indian cuisine. (76)

Divakaruni conceives her characters as individuals that are immersed in certain contexts but who also try to prove their self-reliance and individuality as they embrace American life without eliminating their Indian heritage while negotiating their identities between cultures, histories and traditions. In a postcolonial context, Tilo encapsulates the notion of a "new Indian women", a constructed identity that aims to reconcile the traditional and modern in a diasporic realm, and to some extent overcome the actual conflicts lived by women in contemporary societies. Tilo's development from a sexless and mythic old woman into a mortal woman contrasts with the idea of women as time markers and responsible for the observance of rituals which have conferred a sense of religiosity on women's bodies in caste and culturally specific ways, such as the example of the First Mother who portrays this notion of a sacred female figure. However, Divakaruni seems to subvert that formulation by depicting Tilo as an independent woman eager to find her way, her place in a cosmopolitan society, as well as emphasizing female sexuality and corporeality as mediums through which boundaries and identities come to be negotiated. As Said posits in *Culture and Imperialism*,

Gone are the binary oppositions dear to the nationalist and imperialist enterprise. Instead we begin to sense that old authority cannot simply be replaced by new authority, but that new alignments made across borders, types, nations, and essences are rapidly coming into view. (xxiv)

In fact, Said's formulation may be at the basis of the work of female writers who demonstrate that new alignments may be voiced across gendered borders through magical realism and storytelling. Divakaruni as well as Davenport share the notion of reconstructing cultural histories by placing emphasis on the individual, by creating postmodern metafiction where the destabilised subject becomes crucial to the interpretation of history, and to the inscription of female bodies within the coded language of history. In sum, female bodies and corporeality inhabit the construction of narratives in ways which double their functions: they represent the real, and mediate the possible. However, these processes of representation entail entire re-definitions of female subjectivities whose identities no longer depend on representation of the body emanating from established phallogocentric discourses.



#### 4. Mapping the Exotica India: Body, (In)visibility, and Fragmentation as Metaphors of Female Identity in Siddharth Dhanvant Shanghvi's *The Last Song of Dusk*

“For loss we have music”, Mr. Hajj said. “And that is why we have music. For love and for devotion and for sorrow. Tonight bring your violin.” – Janette Turner Hospital, *Orpheus Lost*

“She wore flowers in her hair and carried magic secrets in her eyes. She spoke to no one. She spent hours on the riverbank. She smoked cigarettes and had midnight swims...” – Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*

“All day, the colors had been those of dusk, mist moving like a water creature across the great flanks of mountains possessed of ocean shadows and depths.” – Kiran Desai, *The Inheritance of Loss*

*The Last Song of Dusk* is Siddharth Shanghvi's debut novel, written when he was 27 years old and revealing a plethora of issues that populate novels by Rushdie, García Márquez and Roy, encapsulating issues that are at stake in several postcolonial discourses. From a postcolonial perspective, the novel outlines the contours of an ethical approach to a non-Western *Otherness* based on multiple representations of imperial history, identity and culture. It overtly encompasses a valid example of how Western representations exoticized India, and to that extent it interrogates the constitutive role of representations in Indian identity discourses. Shanghvi gives an interesting account of the major cultural sites through which the fabric of India and Indianness have been discursively woven within a *post-imperial* discourse. His novel patterns a realm of intricate relationships of love and loss, of bright and colourful or shady or even darker aspects of the characters' identities. It is through the explorations of sexuality and innocence, friendship and solitude framed by magical realism that Shanghvi displays the tale of the Gandharva family, blending the darkest moments with humor and exuberance. The narration of an imperial reality and the unusual life of an upper-middle class family is set in the 1920s, and it mainly revolves around the lives of disparate elements of the Gandharva family who are blessed and cursed by magic. The novel is told in a magical realist tone that reiterates the exoticism of the characters and the celebration of the mundane, disrupting and altering the boundaries of the acceptable, crossing and re-crossing the



frontiers between illusion and reality. Thus Nandini, the feline-girl and her enigmatic paintings, the incantatory powers of music, the healing storytelling, the *djinn*s or evil spirits, the ghost-like house and the terrible mother-in-law are framed in a context of magical realism that gives them coherence and coexistence in the same realm. Zamora and Faris brilliantly explain that magical realism

often facilitates the fusion, or coexistence, of possible worlds, spaces, systems that would be irreconcilable in other modes of fiction. The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among these worlds – in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism. (5-6)

Shanghvi, in a wise post-Rushdie narrative style, mingles realistic portrayals of ordinary events, and extraordinary characters with elements of fantasy, creating a rich, often disquieting world that is at once familiar and dreamlike, in which he overtly juxtaposes political commentary with magical realism. Shanghvi deploys the juxtaposition of an apparent reliable, realistic recount of reality and extravagant fantasy in order to describe the life of two women. Conventionally and as already analyzed in other narratives, myths and rituals have been prone to this kind of depiction of societies and to the re-imagining of ossified representations of history, and therefore the logic operates within the communication between these two axes so that it introduces a supplement to the dominant world view. Narratives that employ magical realism as a strategic device to subvert pre-conceptions of the world thereby suggest that cultures cannot be neatly divided into binary ways, but that certain patterns of meaning-making are constant and seem to persist even if they are incompatible with the dominant perception of world. Accordingly, magical realism is, first and foremost, an “amalgamation of realism and fantasy” (Angel Flores, 112), and consequently the conceptual world appears on a par with the material reality. Frequently, notions of otherness are drawn in magical realistic narratives from a postcolonial context, using the visible markers of ex-centricity such as physical grotesqueness or the lycanthropic abilities of some characters for example, or even madness and the carnivalesque laugh that pervades certain narratives. In fact, the feline-like girl imbricates this notion of the carnivalesque laugh, so that her eccentric features and behaviour, and her disembodiment in relation to pre-established social rules, reinforce the cultural constructions of alterity as irrational and impulsive. Subsequently, she subverts those categories and marks the narrative with a laugh as a response to horror and a means for survival, the carnivalesque sense that Bakhtin has explored, and her final degradation and invisibility is infused with laughter directed to a pre-assumption of otherness and the social roles envisioned by women. However, in that vein David Danow centred on Bakhtinian formulations, sustains that the carnivalesque is dualistic, and that the dissimilar poles connect themselves instead of annulling each other “birth and death... blessing and curse... praise and abuse, youth and old age, top and bottom, face and backside, stupidity and

wisdom” (Bakhtin, quoted in Danow, 12). Nandini in her exotic *ex-centricity* reiterates the dualistic aspects of the carnivalesque in order to afford a “dialogic exchange” between her corporeality and the (un)official modes of cultural expression. Consequently, the categories of the ex-centric and the carnivalesque highlight the exoticism encapsulated in certain magical realist narratives in order to subvert marginalized constructions and confront them with other traditions. Given that, ex-centricity adds new perspectives to magical realist discourse which are *per se* framed in terms of postmodern notions of sexual orientation, class and ethnicity. Accordingly, Theo L. D’haen sustains that

To write ex-centrally, then, or from the margin, implies displacing this discourse. My argument is that magic realist writing achieves this end by first appropriating the techniques of the ‘centr’-al line and then using these, not as in the case of these central movements, “realistically,” that is, to duplicate existing reality as perceived by the theoretical or philosophical tenets underlying said movements, but rather to create an alternative world correcting so-called existing reality, and thus to right the wrongs this ‘reality’ depends upon. Magic realism thus reveals itself as a ruse to invade and take over dominant discourse(s). It is a way of access to the main body of “western” literature for authors not sharing in, or not writing from the perspective of, the privileged centres of this literature for reasons of language, class, race, or gender, and yet avoiding epigonism by avoiding the adoption of views of the hegemonic forces together with their discourse. (195)

However, magical realist narratives, rather than merely present voices from the margins, work essentially to withdraw the discourse of central literary movements. Moreover writers are able to dissociate themselves from a strictly colonizing perspective and endow their work with discourses based on contemporary notions of gender and sexual orientations, geographies, landscapes and spatialities, ultimately rejecting the *status quo* by inquiring the underlying assumptions of a privileged centre. By incorporating in his narrative motifs of an imperial Bombay, traditional stories and histories, authors like Shanghvi are partly mimicking the mainstream in its genre, but he is also subverting it by means of a certain exoticism and the preservation of local cultural aspects, to some extent ensuring the survival of those cultural particularities, and bringing into question the complete notion of a dominant culture.

When the astonishingly beautiful and talented Anuradha moves to Bombay to marry a man she had never met before, Vardhmaan, a charismatic young doctor and storyteller, their life together encapsulates all the contours of a fairy tale. However, when their firstborn son Mohan mysteriously falls from a window and dies, tragedy converts their marriage into a bleak landscape of silence and sadness. Vardhmaan continues to be haunted by Mohan’s death for years, also losing his ability of telling stories which causes an emptiness that destroys his relationship with Anuradha, and Shanghvi posits a crucial question: can love be sublimated and survive only in silenced manifestations? The novel does not provide the answer for that, but leaves room for speculation that perhaps external factors are crucial to the way Anuradha and Vardhmann learn how to deal with loss. Moreover, the

ghost-like house they choose to inhabit is filled with the “wretched, infectious sadness” of ancient memories of an unrequited love, haunted by the white ghost of Europe, and it seems to take on a sinister life of its own when their second child nearly dies at birth. Whereupon the supernatural element is introduced via the house and its capacity to tell the story of Edward, the young British man who died of waiting for his Indian male lover, functioning as a second narrator. As Todorov says “the intervention of the supernatural element always constitutes a rupture in the system of established rules” (Todorov, “The Fantastic in Fiction” 89). The house is an intriguing construction in the narrative, as it has a life of its own, and it manipulates the happiness of their owners conspiring against them, asking for sacrifices in order not to harm the new born boy. In fact, houses are key elements in all the narratives dealt with. They clearly encapsulate the metaphor of nations and the controversial space where people hide or seek for refuge. They also have hidden compartments, rooms within rooms, complex architectural structures, endless corridors which leave the sense of labyrinthine constructions resembling the complexities of minds, identities and nations. This “fantastic reality” that the novel summarizes, captures the experience of living in a contemporary and fragmented reality, or as Moraes Zogoiby explains this poetics in *The Moor’s Last Sigh* “unnaturalism, the only real ism of these back-to-front and jabberwocky days” (5). Hence *The Last Song of Dusk* becomes one more postcolonial tool with which to understand and represent that reality as well as the limitations of knowing the world. Shanghvi constructs the narrative of the events in Anuradha’s life based on some of the generic conventions of fairy-tales and magical realism, the cruel and manipulative step-mother, fate conspiring against the protagonist’s happiness, the extraordinariness of the characters, or even the haunted and mysterious are all elements that articulate the life of the characters, but paradoxically, unlike the realm of a fairy tale, it is the life of the characters that is invaded by strangeness that it clearly accepts as ordinary facts, with the narration provided by the ghost-like house the most prominent magical realistic aspect of the novel. Furthermore, music also plays a preponderant role in the lives of characters in opposition to the harmful deeds perpetrated by the house; music heals and saves as Anuradha puts it:

The songs are dowry of magical arias handed down in my family. Each woman came with her own tune (...). My mother, for instance, knew a song that the trees flower. (...) In our life, my mother once told me, because we cannot alter our kismet we *must* know a way to tide its ruthless currents. And the songs are that one device. For us, the women in my family. (*The Last Song of Dusk*, 46-7)

Shanghvi’s emphasis on female uniqueness through the distinguishable feature of music seems to take part in the notion that there is a strong heterogeneity in the female’s imaginary that invites reflection on the position that women occupy in the represented society. As the story unfolds, characters are propelled into a chain of hazardous events, and the idyllic milieu they live in is disrupted leaving a constant sense of depression and melancholia, or *tristes incurabilis* “a condition of

the heart. They say the heart can break. That someone can dent it. Or gouge it. And then it is never the same” (*The Last Song of the Dusk*, 116) as one of the characters had defined it. Kristeva describes melancholy as

amorous passion’s sombre lining. A sorrowful pleasure, this lugubrious intoxication constitutes the banal background from which our ideals or euphoria break away as much as that fleeting lucidity which breaks the trance entwining two people together. Conscious that we are destined to lose our loves, we are perhaps even more grieved to notice in our love the shadow of a loved object, already lost. (“On the Melancholic Imaginary”, 5)

In fact, Shanghvi’s portrayal of his characters and the events in their lives is deeply rooted in this melancholia described by Kristeva, the permanent sense of loss tossed and drifted by the ill-fate that befalls them.

The concept of the exotic has a comprehensive etymology that comprises historical engagement with, and a participation in, critical and theoretical discussions. Therefore, its diverse definitions designate its multiple uses in political and aesthetic contexts. Edward Said gives to exoticism an important role in the discursive representation of the Orient. It is significant to note that exoticism is central not only in the way the Orient is represented, but in the representation of alterity and otherness in general which can be applied to postcolonial representations. In Said’s Orientalist discourse colonial and postcolonial, predominantly female, subjects are predisposed to be represented by an ambivalence of desire and disdain. Some Orientalist stereotypes can be found in the novel, which, endlessly repeated in other narratives, concern a universe of wealth and well educated characters from an upper-middle class milieu, the exotic life styles of artists and the decadent sensuality of Eastern peoples. Shanghvi’s deployment of exoticism deals essentially with his female characters and their re-presentation as gendered (post)colonial subjects. Graham Huggan notes that “the exotic functions dialectically as a *symbolic system*, domesticating the foreign, and the culturally different” (12), thus “exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception* – one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticate them, and which effectively manufactures otherness” (13). India has been a site, or a geographical space to map some of these considerations of the exotic other, and Shanghvi seems to be aware of those possible sites of contestation but they are not freed from the essentialist binarisms that have been analyzed. Hence, his approach to exoticism may be acknowledged as a strategy to examine caste and gender agendas within a certain cultural context. Such a strategy also raises questions about the degree to which the author may be involved in or conscious about the exotic projections of the text, as well as the fabrication of its “exotic otherness”, as a postcolonial discursive practice that seems to enable rather than restrict fertile readings of the local perspective without disregarding its correlations with a globalized context, and ultimately, the trope of the exotic consents to an assessment of

disempowered subjects. Nonetheless, the exoticized cultural images are, to some extent, not only the (re)presentation of marginalized bodies, but also the reiteration of certain socio-cultural aspects such as those referring to women's corporeality and its consequent objectification, aspects that are often wrongly assumed as the quintessential cultural product of postcolonial cultures. Consequently, a certain cultural symbiosis is achieved by the narrative's creating fertile ground for the production of the exotic as a clear manifestation of the embodiment of the writer with a cultural context that aims to be represented. Huggan in his insightful analysis links the postcolonial exotic with notions of fetishism, like "mystification (or leveling out) of historical experience; imagined access to the cultural other through the process of consumption; reification of people and places into exchangeable exotic objects" (19). Chris Bongie further suggests that

exoticist discourses have tended to emerge at moments of extreme historical anxiety, partly as a means of gesturing back toward a time or place simultaneously recognised as lost. Exotica thus flourished at around the time or when it was feared that the Empire might have ceded its authority (quoted in Huggan, 267).

Hence, the exotic encompasses a looking backwards or outwards in order to legitimize and to reiterate both the visibility and invisibility of female subjects through oppositional binary descriptions. Throughout the narrative, discourses of otherness and the female exotic body reinforce the line between postcolonial ramifications and problematize ideas of gender objectification. Whereas the constructions of the exotic other may fall into a paradox, on the one hand those constructions have been developed to emphasize a certain subjugated and subalternized position of female subjects; on the other hand, this phenomenon of exoticization has also been applied to examine critically the position of the otherness in (post)colonial frameworks so that it can also be read as an agency of empowerment. Subsequently, the increasing materialization of multicultural, hybrid and postmodern identities facilitates the conception of an "enunciative space" from which the exotic is re-articulated and deconstructed. In other words, a subversive postulation of the exoticism encapsulated in the conflictual nature of alterity is enacted. Nevertheless, the narration is characterized by ambivalence and "constantly marked by an acute awareness of the very process through which the subject matter (in this case exotic otherness) is constructed" (Celéstin, 23). Moreover, when referring to the tourist gaze, Huggan quotes Todorov who provides insight into the workings of exotic tourist discourse through parallels with colonial discourse:

The exotic novel glorifies foreigners while the colonial novel denigrates them. But the contradiction is only apparent. Once the author had declared that he himself is the only subject... and that the others have been reduced to objects, it is... of secondary concern whether those objects are loved or despised. (quoted in Huggan 184).

The objectification of people in general and women in particular thus continues in the representation of them as exotic components of en-gendered cultures. Consequently, and according to Huggan, Gayatri Spivak rejects the "*exotic* —as a vehicle for patronizing views of minority

representation and recruitment in the academy and, above all, as a legitimising category for palatable versions of cultural otherness in society at large” (23). Although Spivak’s assertion is valuable, it also posits certain problems; on the one hand, excessiveness in the deployment of the exotic reiterates the cleavages between East and West, other and self, demarcating the strangeness of the other as exquisite and consequently its objectification. On the other hand, this “postcolonial exotic” is a site for contestation within certain codes of representation that are either deconstructed, or disembodied for the purposes of unmasking the discrepancy in relations of power, and thus the exoticism in *The Last Song of Dusk* can also be understood as an instrumental extrapolation of the fetishistic colonial construction of fixity. Bearing in mind Judith Butler’s formulations on the materiality of bodies, it can be deduced that the exoticization of bodies is a component of the materializing process through which bodies come to matter, and intrinsically the erotic is accessed via the exotic.

There are two female protagonists in *The Last Song of Dusk* who are relevant to the analysis of the employment of corporeality to resist phallogocentric order and who attain psychic agency, though they operate in dissimilar ways; Anuradha whose fabled beauty is such that birds of Udaipur gather to say farewell to her, and who is gifted with an even more extraordinary voice. She is the mother figure, a well educated woman who got married after she graduated from university. At the other pole of the narrative there is an artist, Nandini, who refuses to have any kind of school education but who has won the attention of people because of her eccentric manners and her exquisite paintings. She has a penchant for panthers and can walk on water

Seven generations back, on Nandini Hariharan’s maternal side, a woman had coupled with a leopard in the mountains of Matheran, and to this day, the family could not rid the bane of cat’s blood in their veins. Blood that made the women gorgeous and selfish and recondite, and eat all sorts of things. (*The Last Song of Dusk*, 90)

Though they are profoundly different, they complement each other, and the life of Anuradha was to some extent more pleasurable in the presence of her cousin Nandini, the fascinating artist whose erotic escapades are a mask for the unspeakable darkness of her past. Nandini in her complexity as a child-erotic-artist as well as in her precocious attitudes resembles Aurora da Gama in Rushdie’s *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Her erotic canvases are perhaps the full expression of her past, her escape or alienation from reality, and break away from her traumatic experiences. Glossing the Rushdian palimpsest in *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, Shanghvi’s feline-girl re-imagines and re-creates her own vision of private and public life through her paintings that are *per se* a heterotopia of entropic characteristics based on Nandini’s “secret identity”, side the reality of dreams. This becomes the crucial space of the novel or at least the place from where certain significant events are triggered. This is partly due to the fact that in the narrative, the diversity as well as the (in)visibility of female characters are introduced as a double-edged metaphor: they can represent freedom and inclusiveness, but they can also represent a paradoxical visibility that encapsulates weakness and vulnerability. As far as

Nandini's background is concerned, from an earlier age she has been influenced by a mish-mash of ideas and assertions based on her family environment and the societal context of a near independent India along with the remaining authority of the British empire which has left its indelible prints, an aspect that is deeply criticized in Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* in the words of Francisco da Gama "what are we but Empire's children? The British have given us everything... civilization, law, order, too much" (18), and expressed in Shanghvi's novel as well. Nandini is otherized by her lovers whether male or female, and thereby she seems unable to pursue her talent going from one thing to the other while her fame and popularity among the artistic community goes into decline, and eventually she metaphorizes the migrant self which also allows her to re-imagine the world. However, her attempt to settle down and marry the aristocratic young English man was nothing but an astute and elaborate plan that went wrong at the end. Her choice to defy conventions is definitely an effort to challenge the assumption about her of the aristocratic woman who manipulated her son but who mostly perceived Nandini's independence and rebellion as the grotesque features of a hyper-erotized and devilish creature. Moreover, Nandini, who is meant to depict the visibility of the artist woman in a phallographic society and the crossing-of-boundaries, is at odds with a life of wandering, and at the end of the novel she is nothing but a shadow, an elusive memory. Ironically, she had sought recognition and her creative self was envisioned as eccentric and exotic, but she vanishes at the end reinforcing a certain idea of invisibility that is imbricated in the novel.

The female body in the narrative turns out to be a means for opposing physical, psychological and economic totalization and generating agency in the individual female subject. According to Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Mohanty's words in the introduction to *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* agency occurs when "Women do not imagine themselves as *victims* or *dependents* of governing structures but as agents of their own lives" (xxviii). In that perspective, agency seems to be linked with "the conscious and ongoing reproduction of the terms of one's existence while taking responsibility for this process" (xxviii). Moreover, Mohanty's conception of agency functions as an active re-shaping of a subject's position by the individual, although it is also important to refer to Elizabeth Grosz's re-thinking of female subjectivity that is centred on the body rather than the derivation of consciousness exclusively in the mind. Grosz asserts that "all the effects of depth and interiority can be explained in terms of the inscriptions and transformations of the subject's corporeal surface" (vii). Bodies, she maintains, "have the explanatory power of minds" (vii). One of the major issues of Grosz's argument lies in her explicit attention to "sexual difference" (vii). Focusing on the body permits feminists to analyse "sexual difference," in terms of physical and cultural constructions, "in a way that the mind does not" (vii). Within this feminist debate, the re-conceptualization of individual identity based on the division

between body-gender and the mind leads to a more complex conception of the self, than the single, stable unit it was previously supposed to be, and the possible fragmentation of the self into various features enhances the ability to perform diverse roles as well as explore different aspects of subjectivity within a higher degree of self-awareness, which allows characters-subjects to cross the pre-established boundaries related to culture and gender agendas. Besides, the “corporeal schema” that derives from the combination of Grosz and Mohanty’s formulations refers to the essential sense we have of ourselves as physical presences; a sense which enables us to intermingle and engage with the world around us. In fact, it is exactly this physical presence of the female body and the fragmentation of the self that allows Shanghvi’s characters to reiterate their inscription into a socio-cultural context, in addition to his narrative from a female-oriented perspective emphasizing the interaction between gendered-self and social codes, and as a consequence of that it can be inferred that women’s identity is not a passive product of the assimilation of those social codes. Therefore, bodies indicate a “world beyond themselves” as sustained in Butler’s formulation “but this movement beyond their own boundaries, a movement of boundary itself, appears to be quite central to what bodies are” (*Bodies that Matter*, viii). Whilst the body as a location for power relations also systematically provides the ground which that power traverses, it is also always engaged with other bodies as social and political institutions. Anuradha and Nandini are situated at opposite poles though they complement each other in their independent way of dealing with public and private aspects of their lives, but they are separate in their acceptance and subversion of social roles, and essentially they combine two dimensions of female identity. Firstly, Anuradha is the embodiment of the beautiful woman, devoted wife, and loving mother. To some extent, Anuradha depicts the idea of women as a metaphor for the purity and chastity embedded in the symbolic status of femininity that stands as a “sign for nation”, a kind of symbolic status that has led Indian women to their oppression, an image of womanhood primarily based on family, chastity, sacrifice, devotion and benevolence. However, Anuradha subverts that notion by leaving her husband when he is not able to comfort her and seeking refuge in the house of her parents after the death of Mohan. While described as woman of mesmerizing beauty with magical powers in her songs, Anuradha also seems ethereal in that beauty, not real, though she finds a contrast in Nandini, a dazzling and devious artist, who sparks riots with her lascivious (behaviour) garments, the mini sari designed for her and shocking the most traditionalist elements of the Bombay society, and who emerges as a national figure so important that even Gandhi wanted to meet her. Nandini rebels against the imposed oppression in her life through the exploration of her sexuality in its multiple aspects and by reclaiming an absolute control of her body as a sexual identity, proving that gender is a cultural construct. The implication is that she nonetheless falls into an objectified identity, and thus this



objectification makes her invisible in the public realm where she was trying to affirm herself. Despite Nandini's problematic agency and a certain lack of coherence in her behaviour, her visibility entailed in her subjectivity can be acknowledged as an echo chamber filled with the voices of other women in which re-presentations are always mediated by the words of male voices, or by normative discourses that attribute certain cultural properties to women. Nandini's duplicitous nature challenges the hegemony of reductive dyads. It also undermines the apparently unbridgeable gap between what she is expected to be as an eccentric artist and what she actually desires which brings about a sense of inner fragmentation, and ultimately her exoticism and eccentricity are not signs of her virtue but a mark of her rebellion, although by constructing a fictitious world of eccentricity, her rebellion ends up in annihilation. Accordingly, it can be inferred that Nandini is "not quite the Same, not quite the Other, she stands in that undetermined threshold place where she constantly drifts in and out" (Trinh T.Minh-Ha, "No Master Territories" 218), so that she overtly undercuts the binary opposition of being inside or outside of the dominant and fixed cultural notions about gender issues. Moreover, for Nandini the right to control her own body is at the same time the right to make alliances, and also the alienation that imprisons and fragments her. Despite her inner contradictions, Nandini portrays a woman-focused and transgressive paraphrase of the imperial and colonialist discourses that may serve as a restitutive impulse to look for other, albeit controversial perspectives on the roles on women either in the public realm or in the private sphere of their domestic lives. These two women undergo journeys of identity that clearly begin at the point they recognize that their identities are primarily constructed out of the ideology of Indian womanhood and its historical and social attachments to nationalism. It is precisely these constructions of womanhood that Nandini overtly subverts through the empowerment of her "opaque exquisiteness", and her hyper-eroticized body; from another angle, Anuradha, rather than subverting identity constructions re-defines them by accepting her arranged marriage but nevertheless, and in a humorous way, tests the groom when she decides to eat chicken club sandwiches in a provocative act. To the extent that the image of the submissive woman and its (im)personal nature gives great symbolic and representative value to the oppressed female voice, Anuradha's subjective independence in relation to certain social protocols disembodies the female voice that alternately seduces and keeps a distance. Shanghvi approaches gender issues with a high level of awareness of their complexities, contradictions, ambiguities and ironies, though he also manipulates the subtleties of the agency of the female body as a subject that matters to comprehend cultural flows and identity constructions. And, indeed the body is in his narrativization of it an *effect* of signification that simultaneously sustains and constrains it. Thus, the female body as an effect of signification participates in the intersection of conflicting voices in order to clarify the multivocal empowering of women through a discourse in process

which seems to “laugh in the face of authority” (Diane Herndl, 11). Thus, Shanghvi’s attention to the position occupied by women within the Indian social context situates his concern at the point where the marginal and the centre convene in a “contact zone” that produces a dialogical resistance to the hierarchical subordinations of official modes of history and phallogocentric discourses. The female body, which has conventionally been both the object and the subject of male assumptions and representations, is preponderant in the analysis of postcolonial and postmodern re-configurations of history and identities. Nonetheless, *The Last Song of Dusk* shows an engagement with gender-based issues, sexuality as a determinant aspect in characters’ identity, and the constant excavation of personal (hi)stories which are entailed in the construction of *glocalized* identities. Hence subaltern voices, particularly female voices, emerge out of the construction of those identities provided by the flexibility of fictional narratives and the ability to re-imagine the past, so that fiction reveals the constructedness of its pre-texts. From a postcolonial viewpoint, it can be argued that the subjectivity of Shanghvi’s female characters lies on their ability to transport themselves from the invisibility of the domestic sphere into the partial visibility entailed in the public realm where they generate new perspectives on the notion of Indian womanhood. Notions of identity and otherness are immediately questioned and deconstructed, and a sort of strangeness becomes visible as a dual construct which is framed in its subjectivity and its objectification. Tangled up in a twofold trap, the construction of these female identities emancipates and highlights the individual rather than limiting them. Identities therefore become the synthesis of several sets of gender-based and socio-political agendas. Consequently, hybridity inherent to identities underpins the permanent negotiation between dominant and subordinate positions which crosses cultural borders, and merges from different cultural traditions. Hence, the otherness implicit in the female body, its intimate and social configurations become the place of narration, and paradoxically those configurations enable the perception of the body as either individual or also as a collective metaphor of several identities. However, those images of the body cannot solely be acknowledged as isolated entities of representation, for they occur within certain contexts of cultural frameworks that construct identities. By becoming a signifier, the body is the intercessor between itself and the surrounding world, so that its significance opens out to a myriad representations. In this theory of writing the female body, phallogocentric discourses have objectified and kept women at a distance although certain narratives have allowed the deconstruction of those pre-assumptions, as is the example of *The Last Song of Dusk* in its multi-layered depictions of female characters. Even though it is clearly problematic to depict women as the other and to regard them as a homogeneous group, those representations of the gendered subject are often done in terms of survival and resistance, and magical realism in its multiple devices is deployed as a way of countering phallogocentric discourses and

also a means to transgress the oppression imposed on marginalized subjects. Within the matrix of representations of the female body, the constitution of identities is achieved by juxtaposing specific characteristics of social and cultural conditions which are the determinant elements in that process as well as the bridges between them. Predominantly, the interconnectedness of gender and relations of power are closely linked to the mutual formations of the Self and Other. Moreover, gender identity is included in the discourses of postcolonial writers, and in the agendas of marginalized subjectivities, as it also contributes to the formation of alternative standpoints in history. To the extent that female subjects are described as fragmented or hybrid, their re-creation goes through the subversion of colonial and totalizing discourses. Strategically, Shanghvi repositions women in the centre of his narrative, and dismantles the logocentric categories upon which colonial power was based, so that Nandini and Anuradha's story ultimately explores the border conditions that define categories such as gender and nation, and their imbrication heightens the implicit liminalities forged in the historical backdrop of imperialism, crystallizing the conceptualization of gender and cultural borders. Significantly, it is magical realism that may shed some light on Shanghvi's ability to decode the unuttered stories of women. Therefore female characters in Shanghvi's narration refuse to reduce themselves to a monolithic or simply hyper-sexualized Other, and their reflections span from the mere outsider's objective to a complex insider's subjectivity.

The role of women used to be culturally defined in terms of marriage and childbearing. However those pre-established categories are strategically deconstructed and relocated within new en-gendered realities which underscore the desire to represent the predictable fallacy in which sexuality and women's roles in society is reduced. The permanent categorization based on gender differences has always been used to annihilate women from the public realm, and therefore that procedure has also demarcated the social inequalities of misrepresentations of the female body which inevitably led to an unstable arena of scrutiny and objectification. Nonetheless, female identities are not merely figurative sites of play or metaphors. Rather they occupy deeply real political spaces of dispossession, resistance and diaspora. Shanghvi's female character-subjects embody the charm of the exotic that overtly attracts attention to their subaltern condition sculpted in the social milieu they are part of. Gradually, they step out of a submitting position in order to take part in history as active figures that mark the current socio-political context. However, the ambivalent terrain of female representations mediated through narratives emphasizes the competing voices of subalternities while contesting the phallographic standpoint adopted by national historiography. Hence, it is the image of the oppressed, particularly women, that speak out the silences that are hinted in Shanghvi's novel. Moreover, through the female British characters, Lady Worthington and Lady Miller who are peripheral for the most part in the narrative, Shanghvi is

giving two perspectives of how the Empire was conceived and maintained, suggesting therefore ideas of superiority (Lady Worthington), or a profound alienation and melancholia (Lady Miller), offering an insight into the imperial imagination, and ultimately the conceptualization of alterity based on those notions of superiority and estrangement, concluding that

A long time ago, Lady Worthington had come to the conclusion that inside all Indians lived something feral and fearful. A jungle waiting to happen. A beast eager to jump out. And although she might agree to meet the odd native or two – at such soirées, for instance – real prudence lay in keeping miles away from them. (*The Last Song of Dusk*, 125)

Even if self-identity is, as Lacan has postulated, constituted not only but also within the gaze of another the Indian woman is clearly apprehended as the subaltern subject, almost a dangerous creature through the gaze of the White British woman. Perhaps, that gaze is conceived through its superiority, and relies on images of allure and threat that function as a distorted mirror from which strategies of silence and metamorphosis are offered, ultimately subverted by the exoticism implicit in the otherness of characters such as Nandini who, therefore, is a “child of Scheherazade” in the sense that she imbricates the sensuality and opulence of the latter as well as a mesmerizing beauty used to manipulate those around her, used to survive instead of being annihilated. The symbolic complex of the other as Elleke Boehmer sustains is “always with reference to the superiority of an expanding Europe, [for] colonized peoples were represented as lesser: less human, less civilized, as child or savage” (*Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 74). Thus Nandini is objectified primarily by her sexual lovers because she becomes the object of their desire and their gaze, and then by the imperial stereotype expressed in the words of Lady Worthington who ultimately imbues the image of aggressiveness with a sense of national mission that characterized the colonial policy in Asia.

In the ambivalence that has always characterized the transgressive desire between colonizer and colonized, whether the desire is expressed to female or male elements, it is relevant to note the brief allusion in the narrative to the homosexual relationship between Edward and the Indian man, that articulates the implicit desire in relation to the Other. It is clear that Shanghvi has inverted the common characterization of the Indian man as effeminate and weak, a womanish figure who fell for the masculine, robust and powerful British figure. This inversion overtly deconstructs and demythologizes the power of the invader and the weakness of the conquered. Sexual metaphors and sexuality are in general associated with relations of power and the imminent fear of the unknown leading to misrepresentations of subjectivities, whether feminine or masculine, in which ideologies of colonial supremacy were layered. Subsequently, Elleke Boehmer points out that “images of the native, alien, or other, reflect *by contrast* Western conceptions of selfhood – of mastery and control, of rationality and cultural superiority, of energy, thrift, technological skilfulness” (*Colonial &*

*Postcolonial Literature*, 78) contrasting with the abjection and inferiority portrayed by the colonized other which has as its basis a strong conflict between competing virilities.

In sum, Shanghvi's narrative acutely deploys magical realism in order to create a sense of exoticism that clearly empowers his female characters, although the excessiveness seems to operate in the opposite direction when referring to Nandini. However, Arunadha and her magical healing songs seem to reinforce the importance of motherhood and the bonds between women as child bearers, their prominent role whether in public or private spheres. It also reiterates the differences between colonial power and the Indian traditions described on the level of the fantastic, so that it is precisely this discursive mode that subverts normality and parodies imperial rules that Rushdie has also manipulated in his narratives. Shanghvi also manipulates history as an artifact that can have multiple interpretations and meanings. Besides certain essentialist perspectives that may be found in his narration, he vests his discourse with the same intensity, but not complexity, that perhaps characterizes Roy and Rushdie, whose narratives clearly lie behind Shanghvi's writing. Female characters in their multifarious conceptions and identities are crucial in *The Last Song of Dusk*, and they operate as elements that embody family metaphors for the equilibrium of society, at the same time as they portray the disruption of socio-political boundaries imposed by the Symbolic order. Ultimately, it is the eccentricity and exoticism embodied in Nandini that serve as a paradox of being visible and silenced at the same time. It is an unsolved paradox, thereby suggesting that female subjects can either disturb order whether private or public, or they can vanish by reason of excessiveness, and ultimately the exoticism encapsulated in female characters contends with the objectification that it tries to undermine.

In sum, *The Last Song of Dusk* is one of a type of postcolonial novel that uses and also deconstructs socio-political and cultural pre-conceptions based on gender. Consequently, while narrating India as a locus of objectified exoticism within which female identities are inscribed, the novel circumvents a process of subverting paradigms related to the representation of women within Indian traditional contexts, so that explicitly gender-based issues confront the politics of imperialism and nationalism. Accordingly, Shanghvi's constructedness of female characters empowers Bakhtin's formulations of the body of bearer of meanings specifically located in certain socio-political and cultural contexts which generate a variety of assumptions and set the parameters of gendered women as subjects and/or objects. Moreover, the sort of mystification of sexuality entailed in Nandini is double-edged as it reinforces self-control of the body but also objectifies it. Further, circumscribed spatial boundaries whether in private or public spheres are subverted by means of undertaking traditional roles that are at the basis of woman's responsibility in societies. Therefore, deploying postmodern frameworks of identity representation, Shanghvi's novel gives emphasis to

the fragmentation of the self as a constructive device, and by allowing the characters to move from one reality to the other criss-crossing its frontiers, he also reveals a set of interlocking ways by which female subjects are connected to the surrounding world. From a postcolonial perspective, *The Last Song of Dusk* articulates cornerstone issues of memory and history evidencing the constructedness of gendered identities and the sphere of power relations in (post)colonial contexts, and ultimately creating an embodied reality where female voices and unuttered (hi)stories are inscribed through the magical devices of storytelling and healing and enduring songs of love that seem to be the ethereal link between mother and son(s), and wife and husband. It is, then, the need to endure love in a fragmented and chaotic reality that eventually connects all the characters at the end. Shanghvi promotes the idea of family survival in times of chaos, the bonds between people preserved through memories and storytelling, this last aspect intimately connected with representations of women and their ability to hold fragments together in order to recuperate thwarted realities. Both Shanghvi or Divakaruni unpack complicated notions of gender in their na(rr)ations, demonstrating how history and fiction are crucial to fill the empty spaces of dominant historical representations from which women were deliberately excluded. Narratives in a broader assumption become the locus in which all the songs may be heard, and perhaps accepted as equal instead of mere attempts to inscribe subaltern figures. Nonetheless, their depictions of female subjectivities are vested in pivotal assumptions that power relations are for the most part shaped by binary oppositions in which gender differences are crucial to access power. However, it is also the deconstruction of those conceptualizations in the narratives that reveals the fallacies and inadequacies that they entail, giving room for new forms to acknowledge cultural aspects of postcolonial societies.





## Conclusion

“It is about the other that all the stories have been composed.” – M.M. Bakhtin

“Sobrevivemos porque somos eternos errantes,  
caçadores de acasos, visitantes de lugares que ainda  
estavam por nascer.”

Mia Couto, “O Incendiador de Caminhos”

It is the sense of being errant explicit in the epigraph that induces people to either search for their own identity or to recover it from collective memory and history. In a cross-cultural world identities are inconstant, fluid, and transitory and mainly in permanent construction as seen through the examples that populate the novels dealt with. Moreover, the construction of postcolonial writing and theory deals for the most part with notions of decentered and fragmented subjects which are, among other principles, borrowed from postmodern theories. This line of thought differentiates itself through its motivations either of conferring voice to silenced subjects, particularly women, denouncing the violence perpetrated and perpetuated during (and after) colonial hegemony, valuing local histories and traditions as in the example of storytelling, or the permanent attempt to reconcile the individual subject with her/his multiple fragmentary selves.

The conjectures articulated in the narratives are not just related to the “women’s question” *per se*, or even with national history where women become representative of subaltern identities, but also to the articulation of these things through the conjunction of phallographic discourses within the Symbolic, which is encapsulated in these discursive practices. It is clear though that writers question the constructedness of gender, along with categories of identity and history. Consequently, the borders of femininity are rendered unstable to the extent that discourses of identity, history and nationalism are also gendered. Besides, certain enduring concerns expressed in the narratives have been to conceive the possibilities for female agency, a process that requires the deconstruction of an evidently debased and debilitated discourse based on historical frameworks and the contentious silences of marginalized elements. Perhaps the ambivalence implicit in those discourses and their consequent deconstruction are necessary facets of understanding cultural locations in terms of gender, ethnicity, class and history, which glosses Homi Bhabha’s formulation of ambivalence and “time-space” in postcolonial discursive practices. Accordingly, Bhabha sustains that



The bared Nation It/*Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space that is *internally* marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference. (*The Location of Culture*, 212)

In fact, this is the space that narratives occupy or straddle in order to claim new insights into history, rearranging the way women are inscribed in to it. Assuming that postcolonial discourse confines itself to the grammar of otherness, it can be inferred that in a wider sense it is overdetermined by gender and class as well as nation and ethnicity, along with the articulation between the *différance* contained within cultural identities, selfhood and otherness in order to re-map contemporary landscapes, and negotiate layers of collective and personal memory. It may be that from these strategies, a more lucid and wholesome vision of reality will be acquired. These forms are the product of crossing borders, a merging of dissimilar cultural insights, negotiations between dominant and subordinate positions, and the re-coding of representations and signification processes. In this way, bodies matter as signifiers, and thus become places of narration and subversion. Clearly, the novels present a polyphony of voices which meet, and blend together proposing a multiplicity of perspectives, and thus challenging any claim to a monolithic assumption of history, but also suggesting the failure of phallographic and misogynist discourses. Although authoritative voices have been imposed in order to dominate and subjugate the other, in postcolonial (and postmodern) writing the silenced voices of history become visible and heard and offer alter-native counternarratives. The chorus of collective and/or personal female voices thus overcomes not so much an imposed silence but demands a commitment based on the acknowledgment of otherness, so that identity, memory and history are reconstituted.

Nevertheless, none of the authors offer easy answers to the problem of historical representation. Indeed, forgotten and erased lives are retrieved and reclaimed, not necessarily as coherent and unified wholes but as a myriad of voices and *herstories* which function as sources of dialogism and political metaphors. The deconstruction of dualism and the frontiers between self and other are always controversial. Furthermore, female subjects seem to be intricate, multiple, and highly changeable, and hence the complexity of their identities is highlighted in numerous ways. For instance, the metaphor of women's metamorphic ability to turn into animals (felines or sharks) hides a kind of hybridism that revolves around the motifs of identity. Bakhtin sustains that such transformations tolerates the representation of the development and change of the subject's identity. In this respect, Bakhtin notes that "metamorphosis serves as the basis for a method of portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of *crisis: for showing how an individual becomes other than what he was*" (115). Although Bakhtin never referred to female subjects or even narratives written by women his formulations are highly important and extensively relevant to the analysis of the female characters in the novels dealt with. Those metamorphic processes effectively

question the notion of the self as stable, self-contained identities by depicting the drastic changes taking place within subjects during their lifetime, and ultimately it encapsulates the notion of secret identities behind which people may hide themselves, perhaps in order to cope with the harsh reality that surrounds them. This metaphor also shows how transformations can be a way to challenge the duality between self and other, and a way to interrogate the boundaries. Within the general framework of the narratives, (hi)stories of the female protagonists assert the right to be told and to inscribe themselves in the collective history of their societies. Consequently, magical realism and storytelling seem to be useful forms for representing the fragmented histories of postcolonial societies. Each woman's story is made manifest by the articulation of both concealments and revelations, and storytelling controls the narratives as a device used to give credence to those (hi)stories told by female subjects. The alternative angle presented projects the voice of unuttered stories, and the complexity in which women and their stories are recovered and inserted into the "alternate" history of nations, although it should be taken in consideration that "every story one chooses to tell is a kind of censorship, it prevents the telling of other tales..." (71) in the words of Rushdie's narrator in *Shame*.

Alongside the stories of women framed in their ultimate expression of corporeality, there are the gaps and holes in history which help to delineate certain patterns of the textual fabric. The female-centred universe tends to be described as a private sphere that integrates the public milieu mainly ordered by male figures. However it is precisely the deconstruction of this dualism that is at stake in the novels dealt with, so that the specific demarcation between public/private inevitably undermines the authority of female agency, and to some extent it provides the framework for a certain objectification of women's sexuality. The fascination/obsession with the sexual and domestic power of women is also a key element in the novels, but approached in terms of female-based perspectives, along with the relevance of subverting pre-assumptions related to sexuality. In the societies depicted, sexuality is explored and exploited by power through rendering women powerless, although it seems clear that it is also through the subversion of repressive modes that women develop a certain agency within socio-cultural contexts. The female character-subjects that populate the novels dealt with embody a sort of personal writing back to the colonial and phallogocentric order. In particular, the women in *Imaginations of Sand* transgress the boundaries imposed on them by affirming their corporeality, by inscribing their stories in a limbo world between the real and the unreal that functions as a metaphor for the gaps left by history. Borrowing Spivak's formulation, those literary representations are a "textualisation of the world", a process of constructing meaning, or the "worlding of a world on a supposedly un-inscribed territory" ("Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution", 1). Although literature is for the most part fiction, the

dialogic bridge between historical facts and imagined realities addresses real issues, and in that sense it reframes the world by inscribing unscripted stories in the content of canonical history. Thus gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity are the arenas in which reformulation/subversion occurs. From a gender-based standpoint, the socio-cultural world depicted in literary texts occurs as a display of phallographic discourses from which a set of female subjectivities resists that Symbolic order. It is interesting to note that Kristeva includes an explicitly political element in the relation that she establishes between sexuality and transgression, so that it seems clear that the feminine also represents the potential for a specific transgressive force. Further, female characters participate actively in dismantling certain monolithic assumptions about socio-political issues.

Therefore, from a particular perspective in postcolonial studies, female characters permeate the narration of their truncated histories with an awareness of the existence of double forms of oppression, gendered and discriminatory, bodily and territorial, and ultimately the micro-universes created through those histories intersect with public and wider issues. While framing the stories in a magical realist vein, authors, whether male or female, expose particular histories of oppression which are usually invisible in the official accounts of history, and they unfold the negotiation of new models and strategies to inscribe women's position within their postcolonial context. Consequently, the novels examined often expose a profound socio-cultural heritage of subalternization, as well as the corollary violence and misogyny repeatedly perpetrated during colonialism (and in its aftermath). Despite the fact that political colonialism reached its end it does not necessarily mean that women's position as marginalized figures has been adjusted or altered in relation to power. Moreover, postcolonial authors tend to make room for difference, and the narratives dealt with encapsulate the profusion of entanglements that characterizes gender, not to mention the way postmodern approaches offer an oversupply of information related to memory, history and identity. Ultimately, postcolonial authors bear in mind the injustices committed by the hegemonic power of colonialism, along with persistent notion of gender and ethnic supremacy, and hence they deconstruct social fallacies by questioning the pre-established order without the disembodiment that frequently typifies socio-political discourses. Faced with multiple versions of reality, readers are left to participate actively in the process of constructing new ways of thinking and analyzing those versions of reality which lead to the contemporary and postmodern assessment that, perhaps, reality and history are nothing less than a (re)collection of multiple stories told about it.

Although separated geographically the authors that form the basis of this study share several common aspects: firstly, their colonial and neocolonial background, and then the preoccupation with marginalized voices. Their narratives form an entangled tapestry of representations that overtly demonstrate the way female subjects are erased from history, eventually manipulated and objectified

by the castrating male gaze in terms of desire and sexual exploitation. From different geo-cultural contexts, South Africa, Hawai'i and India, writers naturally present a diversified approach to feminist agendas. It is therefore the close relation of responsibility and interconnectedness that the narratives of the female characters explore, along with other subjects such as dislocation and hybridism, difference and otherness, exploitation, loss, trauma, memory, and power, with specific insight into the relationship between past and present. Such a prolific array of topics from diverse social, political and cultural backgrounds suggests that there exist similar representations of colonial and postcolonial networks, subservience to hierarchical protocols, and the imminent deconstruction of those situated agendas. Furthermore, the preoccupation with gender-based issues that overtly intersect postcolonial studies promotes the visibility of marginalized identities that have been kept away from the dominant spheres of power. Subsequently, the increasing visibility of cultural hybridism and the re-invention of postcolonial cultures constitute a crucial turning point in certain official records of the past of Eurocentric history. Accordingly, postcolonial literatures write back and dismantle the self-image of European empires in order to demystify the glorious past and its abuses. In this point, postmodernism has been decisive to the revision of history, for the erosion of pre-established assumptions of the past. In addition, the role models of women from the past are questioned and revised in a continuous and conterminous dialogue between historical facts and feminist agendas, opening room for a less male oriented perspective. This implies an entire process of opportunities to reinterpret the Symbolic, and also its subversion through the feminine relation with language that clearly represents a challenge to the ideological wholeness of subjectivity based on the model theorized by Lacan. Conversely, within phallogocentric discourses female bodies are described as possessions, but also in terms of fear and pollution-impurity. Thus Ania Loomba points out that "from the beginning of the colonial period till its end (and beyond) female bodies symbolise the conquered land" (*Colonialism/Postcolonialism*, 129), while in contrast the male bodies have been controversially re-presented according to their geographic location. For instance the "Oriental male was effeminized, portrayed as homosexual" (129) a degenerate, and fragile opponent to the white male. As for the black male, he was represented as excessively sexualized in his sexual prowess, an ultimate threat to the "civilized" white man and also to white women as is possible to infer from Brink's parody in his novella *Cape of Storms: The First Life of Adamastor*. Clearly, through different approaches the authors' interventions in the texts serve to point out the fragmentation of history and identity in their multiple representations/fetishization, as well as the universalized problem of gender oppression, using the fictional approaches and postmodern juxtapositioning to provide the frames to depict certain controversial issues.

Notions of fragmented and dispersed identities problematize critical and politicized discourses predicated on the unmasking of phallogocentric ideologies by hitherto marginalized groups and the overlapping codes through which identities are constructed, and thus it is possible to discern historical shifts in the representations of female roles in socio-political contexts. In this sense, novels orchestrate certain socio-political and historical concerns with the frameworks of feminist and postmodern theories whether through the hyperbolization of improbabilities or through the minimalist magical elements encapsulated in the details of women's stories. The intertextuality of Bakhtinian's dialogism suggests what he formulated as a "hybrid construction" permeable to historical and social tensions where one's own wor(l)d mingles with the other's wor(l)d opening an interstitial space in which dissimilar voices can be inscribed. Magical realism as a counterhegemonic tradition while it embraces the untold past, and re-imagines history, is in itself a hybrid construction that undoubtedly rejects formal unity in favour of the asymmetrical and miscegenated cultural models. Moreover, the effort to highlight the perspective of the Other in relation to the Self underscores the postmodern preoccupation with difference, and opens it up to alternative perspectives. Yet this is not merely a device to give voice to unuttered stories, or postmodern approaches to history. On the one hand it draws attention to the marginalized voices, while on the other hand it expands their voices in many directions, inventing and re-inventing them, and speaking at the same time of several spatio-temporal realities and in several voices. Therefore the palimpsestic multi-trace nature of narratives operates both within and across those cultural modes which gloss Bakhtin's concern with the dialogical correlation between self and other and the *topoi* of its infinite spiral of interpretations, pointing to the possibility of reappropriating histories, memories and identities in order to introduce new elements into official historical perspectives and to produce new sites and arenas for the articulation of gender and sexual identities. Extrapolating from Kristeva and Bakhtin, bodies and sexuality themselves are a kind of palimpsest in which social formations rely on marginocentric perspectives that explicitly exalt the blurring of gender distinctions, and the discharge from the boundaries of socially entailed sex roles. Given that the female body embodies both the objectification and commodification of sexual pleasure, and the materialization of eroticism as sites of signification, that so dismantling monologisms such as patriarchy or Puritanism become dismantled. In that sense, Ouma Kristina in *Imaginations of Sand* explores her corporeality by deploying it as a demarcation of her *self* in a patriarchal society. She anchors her polysemic body in the pleasures of sexual intercourse and childbirth, affirming her womanhood in the presumptions that have been banned from the "official decorum". Considering that certain representations of the female body are chained to a Manichean notion of uncleanness and impurity, it is relevant to note that authors like Brink or Davenport expand Bakhtin's assumption of the body as a complex

element composed of inner and outer aspects that serve to demarcate the social relations of gender, symbolically freeing women from ideological constraints. Given the conceptualization of the woman's body within phallographic discourses as fluid and unstable, Kristeva proposes a distinction between two kinds of bodies: the imaginary or abject and the symbolic body. Subsequently, it is the abject body that seems to be relevant due to the immediate demarcation between pure and impure notions that it encapsulates, allied to its ability to threaten the boundaries between civilized and uncivilized. In this context, the female characters that populate the narratives are to some extent the embodiment of this abject body, contrasting with the male body under normal conditions the female body is penetrable (like the colonized land), not to mention that it suffers alterations in terms of shape, it is also defined by its ability to give birth, or even bleeding and lactating. The abject as theorized by Kristeva, the fluidity of all bodily components as explained by Bakhtin, the importance of corporeality clarified by Grosz, and the notions of impurity and purity asserted in Mary Douglas's theories are key aspects that altogether characterise representations of women's corporeality and their signification in terms of cultural identities that are still spaces of struggle and transformation. Accordingly, it is the interconnections of those theories, the importance of female bodies as sites of protest, and the nation's official history that serve to demonstrate that women have occupied different spaces which may ultimately destabilise the male-centred space of nations.

Multitextured postcolonial discourse, Boehmer explains, "concentrates its energies on 'mixed', 'in-between' texts because they not only signify but seem to encourage and give support to cultural interaction" (*Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, 242). In effect, those discursive practices undermine monolithic representations of the world, and at the same time they generate in-between texts where alternate histories can be inscribed and ultimately validated. In doing so, postcolonial writers mingle the plausible and the bizarre so that they often turn out to be indistinguishable, mimicking fantasy and exaggeration to describe new realities. In short, magical realism and postmodernism intersect with postcolonial practices illustrating the provisional and fragmentary aspects of identities, and exploring the liminality that those practices allow by concentrating on subjectivity as a space where cultures strive to exchange certain images and ideals. Amidst the conceptual schemes borrowed from oral traditions and storytelling, certain postcolonial narratives offer insight into the harsh existence of dispossession and displacement of peoples. On the basis of conventions, cultures negotiate with the unknown and the unfamiliar, and what is known, in order to make distinctions between the self and the other. Consequently, this symbolic complex of otherness also seems to correspond to hybrid and fractured identities that "have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths, all certainties" (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 12). Paradoxically the emphasis on questions of hybridity and otherness resists feelings of

inferiority first, and then the explicit demand for utterance regenerates marginalized cultures, and encourages socio-political transformations, thus manufacturing different identities out of the incongruities and contingencies inherent in national histories. However, the embodiment of salient aspects regarding gender issues has been addressed and reinforced through the fragmentation of history, personal stories, and local struggles that directly contrast with all-encompassing representations of colonialist discourses. Even so, women are, broadly speaking, the vivid allegory of *terra nullius*, both lacking all traces of history, and always occupying the fringes, and consequently opened up to be penetrated and colonized. Individually and collectively the narratives assembled here set out to map such socially constructed categories of gender, sexuality, ethnicity when related to postcolonial cultures, and the discourses of displacement whether physical (when referring to diasporic movements) or psychological. They therefore elaborate (new) postmodern versions of identity and historical memory that seemed to have been almost obliterated. In that sense, postcolonial narratives comprise a medley of images and stories that converge not only to re-imagine and rewrite history, but to generate and to frame fundamental symbols in order to imagining the nation. The polyphony that results from this diversity of images and stories in a postcolonial discursive practice is an amplification of the dialogic quality once defined by Bakhtin as one of the major elements of novels in general. The appropriation of Western literary genres seems to be a pitfall in postcolonial writing, although the implications of that appropriation are to some extent re-invented in ironic and parodic modes that resist easy decoding expressing their own cultural complexities and subtleties. Moreover, the vexed issues surrounding magical realism problematize and engage intimately with contemporary anxieties about gender issues, private and public memory, history and cultural aspects of the postcolonial societies generate such narratives.

The complexities entailed in the analysis of *Otherness* are directly correlated with the location of female subjects within phallogocentric contexts. Toril Moi states that ultimately “women under patriarchy are oppressed because they are *women*, not because they are irredeemably other” (12). Thus it is precisely the de-objectification of female subjectivity that undermines phallogocentric (mis)conceptions of otherness. By exploring the coordinates between narratives, it is possible to gauge how cultural appropriations of the female body have been crucial to legitimize certain relations of power and inferiority, and the corollary efficacy of their deconstruction. Significantly, such approaches subvert pre-established assumptions about en-gendered corporealities as a site of contestation, while they simultaneously deny the supposed effectiveness of phallogocentric discourses. Ultimately, however, women’s stories explore the connection between oppositional realities framed in a language that seeks to conceptualize both political resistance and the inscription of silenced voices unfavorable to patriarchal conceptions of nationhood whose certainties seem to

have been shaken. In fact, the female body therefore functions as evidence of the resilience of women in several cultures who have tried to maintain a sense of continuity between past and present in spite of the diverse experiences of colonialism. Significantly, storytelling and oral traditions are evident in the structure of the narration of female (hi)stories which entwine multiple narrative lines to create a polyphonic whole, and indeed, storytelling is a common identificatory strategy used in several cultures, further indicating the way in which female bodies and voices are inscribed and encoded with core postcolonial philosophical and cultural concepts, suggesting that it parallels postmodern strategies of decentralization, as well as embodying wider and rearranged conceptions of history. By focusing primarily upon strategies such as storytelling and magical realism, it is possible to identify, in the novels and authors dealt with, common narrative approaches and ideological preoccupations that can be traced back to postcolonial cosmogonies and philosophies that have as their primary basis a preoccupation with memory, history representations and gender-specific concerns. In this way these concerns and narrative techniques serve to emphasize the fluidity and mutability of multiple representations and inscriptions of female bodies in the different cultures that have been analyzed through the novels assembled here. The politics of identity, the politics of *différance*, multiculturalism or even hybridism proliferate in narratives from a postcolonial background and, as Bhabha sustains, “it is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and the displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and the collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated” (*The Location of Culture*, 2). Accordingly, profound changes seem to have occurred in contemporary cultural conflicts in terms of the way certain cultural consensus is negotiated amongst emergent and/or marginalized subjects. Cultural transgression, hybridization, and border crossing – acts that *per se* disrupt the frontiers between genres, ideologies, cultures and genders – thereby continue to be crucial to the perusal of the narrativization of nations and ultimately help the ambivalent identification of subjects. Reeling between dislocated realities and fragmented memories, the female characters are commonly assaulted by ambivalent feelings – their desire for assimilation that contrasts with their revulsion against all kinds of discrimination based on ethnicity and gender. Similarly, these interrelated issues highlight the dialectic relation between native cultural conventions and the metamorphosed translated self. The permanent examination of situatedness within contemporary socio-cultural contexts, thereupon, forms major lines in the novels, which include, for instance, the episodic transmogrifying abilities of certain female characters that infuse the books’ persistent reflections on the issue of identity. Thus the question of identity lies at the heart of the novels dealt with as much as it lies at the heart of books’ complex conception of cultural notions based on gender-informed agendas articulated with postmodern conceptualizations of historical representations. It is, then,



through magical realism that voices are recuperated, and identities excavated out of ossified representations of history, so that novels cultivate what Bhabha has coined as the “Third Space” an ambivalent space of mediation and negotiation for the articulation of multi-layered realities of hybrid subjectivities. The frameworks of magical realism and the occasional carnivalesque tone, in addition to the deliberate intention to parody or at least subvert monolithic discourses, also vest the narratives with a counter power that refutes against the discriminatory demonization of female-Otherness.

Cultures come to be represented within processes of interaction and transgression through which meanings are generated in a *mise-en-abyme* strategy, and consequently narratives mirror the cleavages fabricated out of that, as well as a never-ending web of signifiers within the text and its sub-texts. In this hall of mirrors, authors from postcolonial contexts prove to be aware of the pitfalls entailed in historical representations, adopting postmodern frameworks to deconstruct the homogeneity embodied in colonial discursive practices. Women are represented and given agency within imaginary and engendered spaces, eventually deconstructing Spivak’s formulation on the subaltern, and proving to be more than a “second sex”. The complexities entailed in the politics of the female body as a site for contestation and subversion of pre-established phallogocentric discourses find utterance through the frameworks of postmodern and magical realistic conceptualizations of reality. Perhaps, the vacuums left in historical master narratives are ultimately filled by stories that consequently generate hybridized notions of identity. Nonetheless, authors whether male or female debate the relevance of women’s histories in the construction of a more balanced reality instead of perpetuating the silences and the discriminatory behaviour, as well as deconstructing the rooted notion of power intrinsically tied up with configurations of sexuality. Therefore, they restate that the powers attributed to women symbolized to some extent the ambiguity and ambivalence of their status which is also a correlation that therein, produces social forms. Mary Douglas explains that “granted that disorder spoils patterns, it also provides the material of pattern. Order implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used” (117), and whereby the margins of body become the margins of the social order and *vice versa*. In fact, women are situated on the fringes of a double categorization of purity and danger, and for the most part directly depicted as elements that disrupt and spoil order by reason of their sexual upheavals, transgression and the deviance of their behaviour. Obviously, those connections are intimately linked with corporeal representations and the supposed strangeness entailed in female bodies either in terms of abjection or in terms of grotesqueness which are *per se* two categories that demarcate what is ordered from what is disorder and subversion. This also bears a direct correlation with colonial power and the colonized who is acknowledged as inferior and

unclean. As the narratives demonstrate, the complexities encapsulated in representations and misrepresentations of the female body are not easily decoded or resolved. However, via a dialogic interaction between oral tradition/storytelling and postmodern devices that include a myriad viewpoints, authors dismantle and challenge colonial versions of history, and female subjects resist bodily exile and erasure from power. Accordingly, the act of inscribing and recuperating fractured and fragmented identities through storytelling *vis-à-vis* an act of history-telling functions as the legitimization of unuttered stories shattering the illusion of embodied realities. Undoubtedly, female-centred discourses find ultimate utterance in postmodern narratives because of their preoccupation with Otherness, hybrid identities, and/or memory construction as well as their imaginative ways of investigating the human condition. The micro-narratives constructed around female subjectivities are, therefore, an act of recuperation, inasmuch as the deployment of body/corporeal images generates metaphors for otherness that seem to threaten the order both internally and externally. The authors, through their narration of female subjectivities, combine the notion of abjection as a societal construct that disrupts borders, and Butler's formulation of "the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of "women" are constructed" (*Gender Trouble*, 19). Through their disruption of these intersections, women are to some extent depicted as "memory palaces" (Rushdie, *The Enchantress of Florence* 195) or the repositories of histories, and ultimately the body serves as a tool for the rearrangement of the boundaries of the social order, managed differently in all the novels dealt with. As a group of novels, the works examined nonetheless provide an intelligent exemplification of the use of magical realism, and destabilising female voices in contemporary postcolonial fiction.





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