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منکرنک : Politics of Indigenous Imagery and Referrals in Postcolonial Literatures in English

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"The drum/is dumb/until the gong-gong leads//it."[1]

"The Gong-Gong": introduction

Kon kon kon kon
kun kun kun kun
Funtumi Akore
Tweneboa Akore
Tweneboa Kodia
Kodia Tweneduru

(Brathwaite 1973, 98)

With this invocation does start Edward Kamau Brathwait'es poem, "Atumpan." The only key to it that the poem offers appears in the fourth stanza, transliterating the last four lines: "Spirit of the Cedar/Spirit of the Cedar Tree/Tweneboa Kodia" (ibid. 98). Otherwise, this poem in E/english denies access to its full import. The glossary tells us that "Atumpan" means talking drums, that the initial "kon kon kon kon/kun kun kun kun" is "imitative of the sound of the drum" (ibid. 273), that *tweneboa* is a kind of cedar, "used for making drums" (ibid. 275). Curiously enough, that "talking drum" – an hourglass-shape drum – mimics the tonal patterns of spoken language, especially languages like Yoruba (spoken in southwestern Nigeria, Benin and Togo) having three

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distinct pitch levels, and is used to transmit message, is left for the audience/reader to know. Without understanding this cultural signification of *atumpan* and other signifying practices relating to talking drum, the poem may fall short of fully effective. Brathwaite here assumes an anthropo-semiological strategy – the strategy of distancing and individuating – that postcolonial creative discourses in E/english often employ as a counter discursive means.

COLONIAL DISCOURSE, quoting Peter Hulme, is "an ensemble of linguistically-based practices unified in their common deployment in the management of colonial relationships" (quoted in Mills 1999: 106). As Edward Said and later colonial discourse theorists have argued, colonial discourse *produces* 'knowledge' (in a regime of representation) of the colonized communities (for example, the untrustworthy Arab or the docile Hindu) through apparently 'objective' statements which *are* actually produced "within a context of evaluation and denigration ... [and] sweeping generalizations" (ibid. 109). These discourses identify the colonized subjects as non-west, as 'other' – backward, dull, mysterious, primitive, savage, seditious, sensual, etc. – and thus homogenous, not individual communities but an undistinguishable mass who are denied "history and the possibility of change" (ibid. 110). We consider postcolonial creative literature as strategic dialogue with colonial discourses. What we'll do here is to locate and evaluate two literary techniques in postcolonial literature that surreptitiously attempt to counter the othering and individuate the so-called undistinguishable mass.

We have listed four literary-linguistic counter discursive means that potcolonial literature employs: these are – nature of idioms; orature[2]; alter/native discourse (music, dance, and beat); and indigenous imagery and referrals. We've somewhere else talked of the first three; here we are concentrating on the last one. We'd like to show the ways in which the postcolonial writers in English employ referrals (allusions and symbols) and images (similes and metaphors mainly) that reference indigenous elements and experiences, unfamiliar to the metropolitan readers, and unapproachable without the help of glossary, sometimes, as in the

case of "Atumpan," even with a glossary. We argue that this strategy constructs cultural DISTANCE – giving the impression like *This literary piece written in English is non-English, non-western*, and cultural SPECIFICITY as well – giving the impression that *This writing is of THAT community*, reinstating the national-historical-cultural nucleus of postcolonial cultures or diasporic continuum. On a subtler level, this strategy has the potential to subvert colonial subject-positioning, situating the other*ized* object in the position of orator/interpreter/subject that selves, knows *others*, and redirects the othering gazes.

With a view to correspond to this indigenizing strategy, this article is presented in the form of conversation in which Azizur Rahman Jewel and Tania Tasneem Hossain play roles of participants. We'll limit our discussion to creative literatures written in E/english, and when we refer to colonizer's language, we mainly refer to English. We divide our discussion into four parts: first, how the study of literature attempted to perpetuate colonial hegemony through education system; second, the politics of referentiality; third, the politics of indigenous imagery; and fourth, the case of diaspora.

"med'cinable eye"[3]: politics of (English) literary consciousness

Language has always been a favourite weapon for colonization, because it can ensure that imperialism – with all its symbolic apparatuses – may thrive and survive even after the loss of political dominance. Military power works best when taking possession of land is concerned; but once land is gained, it is important to cash in on the ISAs[4], to systematically detour the colonized subject's sense of self-dignity with a view to maintain western hegemony and to administer the 'natives,' and also to quell rebellion. As Karega, the young rebellious trade unionist in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, outlines the "history of Mr Blackman" in three sentences:

> In the beginning he had the land and the mind and the soul together. On the second day they took the body away to barter it for silver coins. On the third day, seeing that he was still fighting back, they brought

> priests and educators to bind his mind and soul so that these foreigners could more easily take his land and its produce.
>
> (Ngugi 1. 236)

Planting English in British colonies through education system has been proved to be the most effective means of injecting and circulating hegemonic ideologies and western system of thoughts and values while at the same time reducing colonized people and culture into the category of OTHER – inferior, exotic, mysterious, marginal. English literary discourse played an important role in this venture.

As it did, along with literary studies, in stereotyping the Oriental.

Exactly: education and literature. In her groundbreaking study of the institution and ideology of English studies in India under the British Raj, *Masks of Conquest* (1990), Gauri Vishwanathan rightly observes that long before English literature was institutionalized in England as an academic subject, English as the study of culture and the study of literature "appeared as a subject in the curriculum of the colonies" as early as in the 1820s (Vishwanathan 3). In the guise of quality improvement and dispersing of enlightenment, humanism, and ethics, colonial education system and the study of literature – English Literature – attempted to remould native consciousness and manufacture alterity for the benefit of imperialism. One of the common means to achieve this is mnemonic practice: referring to Richard Altick's *The English Common Reader* (1957), Vishwanathan writes: "The new subject of 'English literature' was introduced in 1871, and it consisted of memorizing of passages of poetry and testing knowledge of meaning and allusion" (ibid. 171).

The consequence is distancing the readers. This distancing is, borrowing from Bhabha, "the sign of a double articulation" (cited in Mills 125): distancing the subject from the things familiar as well as keeping the Other, the Centre, at distance. The discourses taught and memorized at schools got the school students gradually

familiar with what they never experienced – the knight and the hailstorm and the daffodils – while the objects around – the coolie and the kal-baisakhi and the crow – remained discursively *distanced*, as if they were too unscholarly and unpoetic to find access to the 'sacred' textbooks. The Caribbean Slinger Francisco, popularly known as The Mighty Sparrow, angrily squints at this cultural-academic domination in "Dan is the Man":

> According to the education you get when you small
> You'll grow up with true ambition and respect from one an all
> But in days in school they teach me like a fool
> The things they teach me I should be a block-headed mule.
> … … … … …
> Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall
> Humpty Dumpty did fall
> Goosey Goosey Gander
> Where shall I wander
> Ding dong bell … Pussy in the well
> RIKKI … TIKKI TAVI
> Rikki Tikki Tavi.
>
> (Donnell and Welsh 1996: 161)

On the other hand, the exuberant romanticizing of everything that is British and regal – from chivalry to Shakespeare to Victoria – left colonized subjects "whoring/after English gods" (*Exile* 2 in Parthasarathy 75) only to understand that the Other may be mimicked but can never be attained. In his short poem "Civilization Aha", South African Sipho Sepamla exposes the discursive politics of colonial education – the rechannelling of mythopoeic and imaginative consciousness – to maintain knowledge/power:

> i thought of eden
> the first time i ate a fig
> i thought of a whiteman
> the first time i saw a god's portrait
> i thought of a blackman
> the first time i met a satan on earth

i must be honest
it wasn't only bantu education
it was all part of what they say is western civilization

(Moore and Beier 1986: 266)

So the objectives of teaching English studies were two: saturating literary consciousness with eurocentric values, and suffocating creative potential to inertia. In "The Occasion for Speaking," George Lamming clarifies his perception of the colonial education system "as means of ideological control which suffocated any expression of [a local] consciousness" (Donnell 1996: 115). With a similar spirit, the Caribbean Roger Mais finds that the chief obstruction on the development of rich oral culture + local consciousness is colonial education: "our developing minds" stopped growing from the moment they came into contact with "the school syllabus," stuffed with Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton ... understandably, "when you stopped growing you become stagnant" ("Where the Roots Lie" in ibid. 183).

Postcolonial literatures, both during and after colonization, have launched active resistance against this threat of being stagnant, being voice/less. While the choice of language gives literature in 'mother tongue' a cutting edge, literature in English had to resolve in its own way the paradox of writing about indigenous experience in English – the language of the colonizers, the 'stepmother tongue'. Postcolonial literature in English attempts any or every of the following literary/linguistic strategies in an attempt to minimize the paradox mentioned above:

- the abrogation and appropriation of English which produces a kind of language – english, as Ashcroft *et al* designates it in *The Empire Writes Back* – that can communicate but that is still strikingly different from Standard English;
- the appropriation of narrative mode and structure; and
- the incorporation of indigenous materials and referrals: song, dance, drum, beat, speech rhythm, imagery, allusion, symbol, etc.

What we will do now is to see and show how the art and politics of nomenclature and referentiality in postcolonial literature written in E/english attempt to foreground indigenous subjectivity by de-employing the colonial literary strategy of distancing and defamiliarizing.

"Ouvri bayi pou' moi"[5]: indigenous referrals

Listen:

> Nazneen adjusted her headscarf. She was conscious of being watched. Everything she did, everything she had done since the day of her birth, was recorded. Sometimes, from the corner of her eye, she thought she saw them. Her two angels, who recorded every action and thought, good and evil, for the Day of Judgment.
>
> (Ali 2003: 210)

If the reader is not Muslim or has no exposure to the basic administering system in Islam, s/he is likely to confuse these "two angels" with their Christian counterparts: Good Angel and Bad Angel as they appear in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, or in their Indian transformation – my/Kz – as in Bankimchandra Chattapadhyaya's *Krishnakanter Will*. Because منکر نک ("Moonker-Nakker") – the two angels the extract refers to – are Islamic panopticon[6]. They are not talkers, preaching for or against God's injunctions; nor are they psychological symbols, metonymizing the Hyde/Jekyll dichotomy in human, though they correspond to good/bad binary. These two are s upernatural clerks, appointed by Allah, to keep continuous vigil of a person they are assigned with. In Islamic 'regime of truth', each human is accompanied by two angels: the one named *Moonker* keeps record of the concerned person's "good" deeds and thoughts while the one named Nakeer records the "bad" ones; at the Maidan of *Hashore*, on "the Day of Judgment", these records would be evaluated and the findings would contribute to determine the concerned person's allotment to *Behesht* (Heaven) or *Dozokh* (Hell). Very understandably, a believer Muslim is always, consciously or unconsciously, haunted ...

Haunted?

Sounds offensive? Let's rephrase: very understandably, a believer Muslim is always, consciously or unconsciously, aware of the vigilance of Moonker-Nakeer, which may leave her/him more prone towards "good" thoughts and actions; if not, at least, s/he encounters a sort of struggle, resulting in defending, or ritualistic regretting – that infinitely powerful *tauba*, stronger than similarly powerful English word *sorry* – resulting in defending or regretting what s/he considers "bad" jobs. So, without understanding, or experiencing, the panoptic aspect of the "two angels," the metropolitan reader will miss the psychological pressure – religio-cultural in nature – that Nazneen, a Bangalee-Muslim-village girl in a European-Christian-city like London, is encountering.

Reference and illusion to the indigenous and the traditional can thus foreground cultural distance and cultural specificity at once. Allusion, because of its nature of referencing literary or cultural-historical phenomenon, provides postcolonial writers with a sure means of accessing the cultural nucleus. The distancing effect is stronger when the text denies glossing the allusion. A famous example is Ngugi wa Thiong'o's refusal to gloss a song of Gikuyu in *A Grain of Wheat* (1967):

> "You know it too. I believe it is Kihika who introduced it here. I only remember the words of the chorus:
>
> 'Gikuyu na Mumbi,
> Gikuyu na Mumbi,
> Gikuyu na Mumbi,
> Nikihui ngwatiro.'
>
> It was Mumbi who now broke the solemnity. She was laughing quietly.
> "What is it?"
> "Oh, Carpenter, Carpenter. So you know why I came?"
> "I don't!" he said, puzzled.
> "But you sing to *me* and *Gikuyu* telling us *it* is burnt at the handle."
>
> (Ngugi 79)

Contextualizing of the song tacitly gives the reader an associational meaning, the one that Mumbi the beautiful village belle makes: she comes to Gikonyo's workshop with a panga (a kind of ladle) that needs a wooden handle. Actually, this illusively seditious song, made and sung at the moment when Mau Mau revolt is being brewed, voices a socio-political urgency: the handle is burnt, situation collapses, so one has to act fast;*NOW.*

A similar but less ambitious technique does Achebe employ in *Arrow of God.* For example, at one point, the narrative maintains: "...the power of *ike-agwu-ani*, great though it was, could not change a crawling millipede into an antelope nor a dumb man into an orator" (Achebe 1986: 223). But, what is "*ike-agwu-ani*"? It seems that the narrator, not unlike the one of *Brick Lane*, takes for granted that s/he is telling the story to her/his fellowpeople who are well acquainted with these allusions, so clarifying "*ike-agwu-ani*" to them would be pretentious or ridiculous. By reversing the politics of signifying and meaning-making, these postcolonial novels thus symbolically distance the metropolitan readers, casting them in the position of the outsiders, the viewers, *others.*

It seems this literary piece is saying to the metropolitan reader: THIS is written by the not-you for the not-you! The previously powerful, self-complacent subject is thus, I presume, subject to re-subjectification.

This is distancing, yes! Now, let's pick an African poem by the Zimbabwean poet Chenjerai Hove. Hove's "Lost Bird" is about the unexpected death of a long-awaited migratory bird. No one can tell for sure how it died, but it died while it was flying over "the city compressed by smog" (Maja-Pearce 206). And the year that followed experienced a long-drawn drought: lands and women get equally barren, leading to a series of death:

> That year the rain failed.
> Then the sky had its share
> of empty prayers, tasty meat for dogs.
> Later the bird's nest was empty:
> so the secretary bird roamed

the sky in uproarious song,
And women complained to their husbands,
Some nocturnal visitor
had castrated the women too,
So nobody would sing:
Ngauzani Ngauzani
Ngauzani Ngauzani.

(ibid. 207)

This dirge demands handsome acquaintance with the significance of migratory birds in the lives of the Shona[7] community: the migratory bird is a symbol of renewal and regeneration in the Shona culture as they are harbingers of the rainy season; so when the children find these birds "going round and round in the sky, they sing songs of joy – "Ngauzani Ngauzani" – as they imitate the circular flights of the birds" (Footnotes in ibid. 208). Fusing the worlds of human, animal and nature, this is reenactment of the intertwined, circular nature of the lives of human, animal and season. The "secretary bird," on the contrary, stands for evil omen, their roaming the sky and "roaring like a bull" forebode a series of death.

In some cases, the major symbolic pattern is adapted from indigenous experience, and the references which are provided are just more than sketchy. So a reader of Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories* may fail to appreciate its satire of the policy and politics of suppression directed against 'speaking' until s/he moves to the glossary to find that the name "Alifbay," the imaginary place in which the story takes place, is derived from a Hindustani word for 'alphabet' (Rushdie 1991: 217).

Glossing, however, not always helps. Wole Soyinka's plays, for example, are so steeped in Yoruban history, mythopoesis and cosmology that understanding full import of his plays demands a good command over Yoruban values and imagination. The Road, *for example, is based on the elaborate symbolic pattern of Agemo: Soyinka, at the beginning of the play, provides a brief explanation of this*

cult and inserts a poem, "Alagemo" to orient the audience/reader to Yoruba culture and cosmology. All these, however, appear inadequate to get into the significance of Agemo and Ogun without which the play remains unapproachable.

From one point of view, this is inversion of the subject-position. Consider: do Shelley and Yeats provide us any glossary of Greek or Celtic mythologies which their plays and poems develop on? No. Now, as we need to browse numerous references to get access to *Prometheus Unbound* or Yeats' poems of the 'Celtic Twilight,' we need to do the same to enter Soyinka's world of 'twilight zone.'

Well, *The Road*: this play, written during the momentous post-independent period of Nigeria, deals with the "movement of transition" (Soyinka 1986: 149) operating at different levels of experience and consciousness – psychological, cultural, religious, spiritual, linguistic, political, and postcolonial. Let us first read the set of instructions that the playwright provides for the producers with a view to assist to grasp the art and import of DANCE that is used in the play as a symbol of transition, the twilight zone:

> The dance ... is used in the play as a visual suspension of death – in much the same way as Murano, the mute, is a dramatic embodiment of this suspension. He functions as an arrest of time, or death, since it was in his 'agemo' phase that the lorry knocked him down. Agemo, the mere phase, includes the passage of transition from the human to the divine essence (as in the festival of Ogun in this play), as much as the part psychic, part intellectual grope of Professor towards the essence of death.
>
> (ibid.)

The play develops around Professor's quest for Word, which has a plethora of associations[8], but the 'preferred meaning' is knowledge-of-the-meaning-of-existence. According to Professor, who is half-intellectual half-quack, the 'word' can be found at the moment of transition from life to death. This prompts him to eccentricity: he stays overnight at church graveyard; he rushes to

places of fatal road accidents so that he can commune and communicate with the fleeting "broken souls" of people who died (ibid. 159); he keeps Murano, the palm-wine tapper, as his servant, because the latter was knocked down in his Agemo phase, "a religious cult of flesh dissolution" (ibid. 149). What the play denies to gloss is the practice and significance of the *egugun* masquerade. Ogun, the god of steel and forge, is one of the most powerful and popular Yoruba gods. A creative and destructive force at once, this enigmatic god is also revered as the god of road. He is the protector of road and the road-runners – like the symbolic spider in the play, spinning its web and waiting for insect – whose blood thirstiness[9] could only be satiated by ritual sacrifices: killing of dogs on road. Hence the Drivers' festival is dedicated to Ogun (ibid.). In this festival, a select person wears an elaborate *egungun* mask, representing Ogun, and dances accompanied by the rhythm of agemo. Gradually, the rhythm gathers pace and the dance becomes wild, spasmic and breathless; it is through this frenzied dance that the *egungun* gets possessed, crosses the threshold of life-and-death (the "agemo" phase)[10], and embodies *Òrò*, the incomprehensible spirit, the "Not-to-be" in the preface poem "Alagemo." Murano was the *egungun* during the last Drivers' festival and he was knocked down by a lorry in his 'agemo' phase: so he is neither dead nor alive; dumb and dull, he is "a suspension of death," arrested and fixed at the precise transitional moment in which death and life co-exist. Now, if Professor can make Murano talk or re-enter the 'agemo' phase, "the revelation will stand naked" "At the end of the drama, Professor manages to do so only at the cost of his own life: "death's revelation must be total, or not at all" (ibid. 226), and it cannot be communicated.

That is, knowing Ogun and egungun *is imperative to follow the play. Throughout the play, Soyinka employs a plethora of rituals and allusions, and names too, both factual and fictitious.*

This we may call the politics of **nomenclature**, abundantly used in postcolonial literatures, which may qualify the reader's entry into the essential meaning of the discourse. For example, the use of

Bangla names and family addresses in Amitav Ghosh's *Shadow Lines*, or more pervasively in Amit Chaudhuri's *A Strange and Sublime Address*: "All in all, the Bengali family is a tangled web, an echoing cave, of names and appellations, too complicated to explain individually" (Chaudhuri xi). On the other hand, Shiv K Kumar's highly-allusive poem "Kali" (in Dharwadker and Ramanujan 79) and Rajagopal Parthasarathy's "Speaking of Places" are full of mythical figures and geographical locations. The latter poem incorporates names of a number of places, for example, Kailasha or Kashi, and mythical and legendary figures: Ranganatha, Shankara, Shiva and Parvathi. To get through this poem of places one needs to know that Parvati and Shiva, the *yoni* and the *lingam*, are the Mother and Father of the World. Only then may the final stanza of the poem – a rhetorical question investing the landscape of India with the beauty and richness of poetry – may make sense:

> What is it about the earth
> of India that consents
> to be shaped like a poem?
>
> (ibid. 144)

"like a calabash": indigenous figures and imagery

Re-naming *is* one of imperialism's oft-opted and much successful means of erasing local referntiality. Colonialism, being a "metaphoric and cartographic" venture at once, (Boehmer 1995: 17), import*ED* European/non-native codes and taxonomy and impos*ED* them on "peoples, cultures, and topographies that were entirely un-European" (ibid.). Added to this, English as an academic discipline imbue*D* the colonized people's consciousness with the linguistics and imagery system of English. While political and anti-colonial moves administratively attended this politics of nomenclature and referentiality, postcolonial literatures have attempted to re/store and create indigenous codes and images to (re)construct shattered sense of identity. The exigency of such symbolic resistance is voiced by Karega in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*: "We wanted to be taught African literature, African history,

for we wanted to know ourselves better. Why should ourselves be reflected in white snows, spring flowers fluttering by on icy lakes?" (Ngugi 170).

With a view to re-constitute the (sense of) place, feeling of be/longing, and thus to distance indigenous experiences from that of the Europeans to individuate the former, postcolonial writers have appropriated English and collected their images and figurative languages from their own cultures instead of borrowing from Wordsworth or Milton, the English textbooks the schools are flooded with. So the Nigerian Gabriel Okara's poem "The Snowflakes Sail Gently Down," a record of his feelings on first watching snowfall during his study in the USA, incorporates non-Western expressions to describe an American scene:

> Then I awoke. I awoke
> To the silently falling snow
> And bent-backed elms bowing and
> Swaying to the winter wind like
> White-robed Moslems salaaming at evening
> Prayer ...
>
> (Jones 1986: 52)

What's more: the poet in his dream dreams "not of ... elms" but of "black birds ... hatching on oil palms bearing suns/for fruits" (ibid. 51). Curiously reversing the roles that the colonized subjects had to assume in reading European texts, the poet here takes the position of interpreter, describing something western – the elms swaying by wind – in terms of something 'alien,' non-western – "Moslems salaaming." It is Orientlaism subverted, positively though.

I found that postcolonial poetry, especially African, Caribbean and Aboriginal, is full of living nature imagery – trees, animals, birds – and things like this which are 'individuatingly' indigenous.

Because African, Caribbean and Aboriginal poetry, to a great extent, is orature based. Listen, for example, to some lines from the

Australian Manoowa and notice the images:

The sisters beach the bark canoe,
unload the rannga things.
They thrust one in the earth. From there
The first goanna comes.
They've gone island. Their digging sticks
make scared springs.
They leave behind them rannga forms
For all living things.

(Narsimhaiah 109)

Pic. 3 Calabash, or bottle guard, has been cultivated from time immemorial for its multi-purpose use.

Now, one of the chief aspects of oral literature is that it is telluric, it is close to the human world, it is close to the soil, and the more close it is to the soil, the more can it communicate with the audience. This might be a reason why indigenous images – animals, birds, trees, crops, plants, fruits – frequent postcolonial literature.

To take African poetry, any reader will quickly be able to notice that the poets insistently make references to animal world: ox, oxen, bulls, lions, leopards, tigers, snakes (e.g. "red snakes" in Okogbule Wonodi's "Planting" in Moore and Beier 204), and birds (e.g. "With thunder's sword/We borrow the restless throat of *adoko*" in Niyi Osundare's *Moonsongs III* in Maja-Pearce 12) to name a few. The images of tree, plants, and crops are virtually numerous: "On the road/the line of Bailundo porters/groaning under their loads of crueira [maize flour]" (from Augustinho Neto's "African poem" in Moore and Beier 28) or "But will a fluist never stop to wipe his nose? / Two arms can never alone encircle a giant iroko" (from Okigbo's "Lament of the Masks" in Bushrui and Maxwell xv). The effect is to construct territorial, and hence cultural and experiential, distances, and to foreground local specificity. African experiences, unlike the "ice-block" western perceptions, are closely related to the elements of natural world – "the fire/of the eye of the sky, the fire/of the earth, the fire of the air,/the fire of the seas and the/rivers" (from Okara's "You Laughed and Laughed and Laughed" in Jones 1986: 78) – and so could be most effectively represented by nature imagery.

Similar strategy is evident in the employment and development of figurative languages, like simile and metaphor. To illustrate, the Madagascarian poet Flavien Ranavio in his delightful love poem "Song of a Common Lover" solicits his "dear" how she should love him in a series of similes: first in the negative terms – the don'ts: "Don't love me, my dear./like your shadow/for shadows fade at evening/and I want to keep you/right up to cockcrow"; the later half of the poem is assertive and cajoling at once with a plenty of "Love me like"-s. The poet/lover ends his song with a tone of complacent finality and a change of style through an image of calabash:

> [Love me]
> like a calabash:
> intact, for drawing water;
> in pieces, bridges for my guitar.
>
> (Moore and Beier 1986: 134)

Appreciation of the wit and effectiveness of this image demands knowledge of calabash and the creative transformation this fruit may go through in the hands of African craftspeople: fruits ... pots ... bowls ... drums ... and bridges for guitar, to name a few.

This is our bvwi‡Kj then! What about writing a love poem with coconut imagery?

Just do it! Well, let's wrap up by quoting from the Ugandan poet Okot p'Bitek's *The Song of Lawino*. See how the similes in this poem are drawn extensively and almost entirely from indigenous nature objects:

> The papers on my husband's desk
> Coil threateningly
> Like the giant forest climbers
> Like the kituba tree
> That squeezes other three to death;
> Some stand up,
> Others lie on their backs,

They are inter-locked
Like the legs of youths
At the orak dance,
Like the legs of the planks
Of the goggo fence, ...
(Moore and Beier 1986: 283-84)

I think an important contribution of postcolonial literature to the field of knowledge is subversion of white/black binary.

Surely. Take Leopold Sedar Senghor. He was one of the founders of the Negritúde school which, though later being strongly criticized by some African critics including Soyinka, stormed the world into recognition of the power of Black, of the existence and authenticity of African literature. Senghor in a number of his poems reverses the "black=bad" matheme[11] and presents black as beautiful, powerful, glamorous, good.

I will pronounce your name, Naett, I will declaim you, Naett!
... ...
Naett, that is the dry tornado, the hard clap of lightning
Naett, coin of gold, shining coal, you my night, my sun!
(Senanu and Vincent 28)

The black girl, Naett, is like night, "shining coal," natural, precious, gorgeous, and enchanting, which is no less regal than the sun, the coin of gold. This subversion of traditional referentiality gives the poem its spirited poignancy.

Equally poignant is Walcott's proclamation in *The Fortunate Traveller* that "The heart of darkness is not Africa./The heart of darkness is the core of fire/in the white centre of the holocaust" (cited in Wyke 221). In another poem, "Old New England," Walcott inverts the "usual stereotypic symbolism" (Wyke 1995: 215) of black and white:

The hillside is still wounded by the spire
Of the white meetinghouse, the Indian trail
Trickles down it like the brown blood of the whale

In rowanberries bubbling like the spoor
On logs burnt black as Bibles by hellfire.
(cited in ibid. 214)

While 'white' – usually associated with light and goodness – is chillingly identified with "violence and destructive victimization," black, along with brown, are colours identified with "objects that have been defiled or damaged or destroyed" (ibid. 213).

The act of Monkeying: the case of Creole Continuum

Derek Walcott belongs to the Creole continuum, which forms a rich section of what we may call diasporic continuum. **Diaspora** is purposive or forced displacement of people, "whether as the result of war, oppression, poverty, enslavement or the search for better economic and social opportunities, with the inevitable opening of their culture to new influences and pressures" (Gilroy 1997: 304). We here isolate the Caribbean Brathwaite and Walcott as both are the products of 'black diaspora' that took place through the Middle Passage. We intend to note that symbolism and imagery in Caribbean literature in particular, and in diasporic literature in English in general, are essentially, and proudly, syncretic in nature. In fact, the cultural identity of the Caribbean is inextricably hybrid. Stuart Hall in "Cultural identity and diaspora" shows how Caribbean cultural identities are traversed by at least three 'presences', borrowing Cesaire and Senghor's metaphor: *Présence Africaine*, "the site of the repressed," (Hall 1997: 55) which, operating through memory and residual tradition, is present "everywhere," in languages, taxonomies, arts, rituals, religious beliefs; the second one is *Présence Européenne*, the site of "exclusion, imposition and expropriation" (ibid. 56) in which the 'otherness' – a product of ambivalence of European desire – is imposed and fixed; and the third *Présence Americaine*, a sliding term, refers to "ground, place, territory," (ibid. 57) the meeting point of people of different cultures none of whom originally belonged the place: this is then "the beginning of ... hybridity and difference" (ibid.). The chief task of the Caribbean poets, musicians and artists, as voiced by both Brathwaite and Waloctt, is

to contribute to re/positioning and re/constructing Caribbean cultural identities.

Brathwaite's poetry, especially the New World trilogy *The Arrivants*, displays a curious and enriching transcultural mixture: images and symbols are simultaneously African, Afro-American and Caribbean; while there is nostalgia for the Africa that is lost (e.g. "Bosompra"), there is ambivalent reverence for the West Indies that is present (e.g. "Homecoming"); while African cultural and aesthetic elements are effectively tapped (e.g. "Atumpan"), Caribbean and Afro-American forms of art and experience are freely incorporated (e.g. "Folkways"). Listen how the poem "Negus" ends:

> It is not
> it is not
> it is not enough
> to be pause, to be hole
> to be void, to be silent
> to be semicolon, to be semicolony;
> fling me the stone
> that will confound the void
> find me the rage
> and I will raze the colony
> fill me with words
> and I will blind your God.
> *Att*
> *Att*
> *Attibon*
> *Attibon Legba*
> *Attibon Legba*
> *Ouvri bayi pou' moi*
> *Ouvri bayi pou' moi . . .*
>
> (Brathwaite 1973: 224)

This Rasta[12]-oriented angry poem combines images and languages of Europe, Africa and the West Indies. While "*Ouvri bayi pou' moi*" (standing for "Open the door for me") is an example of French-based Caribbean patois, the image of *Attibon Legba* is

syncretic: Legba is "the Dahomean/Haitian god of the gateway" the invocation to whom "marks an important moment in *vodoun* worship" (Glossary in ibid. 273) This transcultural mixture, in Paul Gilroy's words, "alerts us not only to the snycretic complexities of language, culture and everyday modern life in the areas where racial slavery was practiced, but to the *purity-defying metamorphoses of individual identity*" (Gilroy 1997: 323; italics added). Because identity is always protean.

Walcott's historic and imaginative consciousness, however, is more cosmopolitan and assimilative. To Walcott, the New World poet's task is two-fold: the first is to record, authentically and creatively, the Caribbeanscape, as he and his painter-friend St. Omer "drunkenly" swear "that [they] would never leave the island/until [they] had put down, in paint, in words,/as palmists learn the network of a hand," the differentiating nuances of the experience and landscape of the islands (in *Another Life*, Chapter 8, Part ii in Walcott 52). Equally important task is to positioning the Caribbean identity by re/writing the history of victory and conquest "by inhabiting 'the timeless habitable moment' which acknowledges history but 'neither explains nor forgives it'" (Brown 100). Here jumps the **monkey** as archetypal symbol. On the one hand, it suggests mimicking, that quality of tormenting ambivalence that Bhabha dubs 'mimicry.' On the other hand, it refers to a quest, journeying "back from man to ape," and every artist-actor "must make this journey to articulate his origins" ("What the Twiiight Says," cited in Wyke 1995: 218). The New World poets are thus both Crusoe and Adam, trying to "afford a vision of reconciliation and reconstruction" (Samad 1995: 228).

'Divided to the vein,'[13] Walcott's personas and poems enact this "tormented ambivalence" (Wyke 1995: 209). A "schizoid"[14] pattern of ambivalence and sliding between binaries inform his symbols and imagery network that integrate "Caribbean, Afro-American and European realities" (ibid. 210); there is 'masochistic recollection,' there is angry denunciation of the whites, there is reverential recognition of the positive aspects of European culture that came with colonialism, there is a redemptive vision of history.

We'll, however, wrap up by citing a curious pattern of image from *Omeros*. This sprawling epic, structured after Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, tells stories of everyday lives of some Caribbean commoners. As Sidney Burris argues in "An Empire of Poetry," Walcott here revises the 'mythic method':

> Instead of advocating the contemporaneity of mythic structures, thereby establishing the linear clarities of a tradition, Walcott gradually reveals the failure of such structures to represent adequately the multifarious tensions of his own culture, thereby establishing its sovereign integrity.
>
> (Burris 1995:262)

Walcott thus both attacks the foundation of linear history and suggests the individuality, the uniqueness of Caribbean situation and identity:

Paanch. Let's first listen to the extract, referring to Helen of *Omeros*:

> ... Names are not oars
> that have to be laid side by side, nor are legends;
> slowly the foaming clouds have forgotten ours.
> You were never in Troy, and, between two Helens,
> yours is here and alive; their classical features
> were turned into silhouettes from the lightning bolt
> of a glance. These Helens are different creatures,
> one marble, one ebony. One unknots a belt
> of yellow cotton slowly from her shelving waist,
> one a cord of purple wool, the other one takes
> a bracelet of white cowries from a narrow wrist;
> one lies in a room with olive-eyes mosaics,
> another in a beach shack with its straw mattress. ...
>
> (cited in Burris 1995: 262)

So: this network of imagery counters the linearity of western history, attests the uniqueness of Caribbean situation and experience, integrates indigenous cultural features, foregrounds 'tormented ambivalence,' and, more importantly, suggests a step towards syncretic cultural identity acknowledging but not

hegemonizing any factors involved: the Helen in *Omeros* is Caribbean, of ebony.

"the syllables of trees": countering othering/counter-othering

So this is what we may call the positive politics of indigenous referrals in ...

... sorry if I interrupt, but can't we specify more clearly why we call this politics 'positive'?

It's positive, because, unlike Orientalism, it tries to 'know' and express one's *own* self, because it situates 'knowledge' at the experience of being, because it resists symbolic violence with a non-violent symbolism, because instead of attempting to belittle others, it shows the subject's otherness, uniqueness. It's political, because it has the potential to reverse the subject/object positioning, placing the previous subject of interpretation, the knower, the metropolitan gazer, into a position where it has to understand the world of the previous object of interpretation, the known, the gazed-at, through images, referrals, and interpretations supplied by the later. This indigenizing strategy thus subtly counters colonialism's othering process while at the same time launches a counter-othering.

We must, however, be alert to the danger that overemphasizing of orature and indigenous referrals may be fetishistic. These are agencies – agencies – that operate on the levels of symbolic and mythopoeic, and the way they invert colonial discursive politics is symbolic and discursive. This is, what we have said earlier, Orientalism reversed ...

May we dub it 'Occidentalism'?

Not necessarily: it is counter-othering. It is both tactical in/version of orientalized otherness and confident assertion of cultural identity – different and individual. It stabilizes and gives weight to the positions of *enunciation*, "the positions from which we speak or write" (Hall 1997: 51). This enunciation takes place not only in the site of discourse, but also in discursive regime.

The postcolonial subject is thus enunciated, assuming, what Brathwaite demands in "Negus," the "words to shape my name/to

the syllables of trees."
The door – *bayi* – is open!

Endnotes

[1] "God is dumb/until the drum/speaks.//The drum/is dumb/until the gong-gong leads//it." (From "The Gong-Gong" of "The Making of the Drum" in Brathwaite 97).

[2] A politically correct alternative term for orality in which orality is considered to be equally aesthetically powerful as written discourse is.

[3] From a long quote from Shakespeare made by Chui, a student rebel turned comprador administrator, in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood*. Chui uses this quotation before a tumultuous group of students demanding Africanism in their school. By referring to the "med'cinable eye" of Sun that makes the planetary system ordered and without any discord, the quote argues that it is only by maintaining "degree," order, tradition, education – in this case, all colonial/English – that everything can have its "authentic place" (Ngugi 172).

[4] Ideological State Apparatus, a term coined by Louis Althusser, designating the means – church, media, education, etc. – through which the state or hegemonic group of the society produce, circulate and perpetuate ideology for its own benefit.

[5] From Brathwaite's "Negus"; 'bayi' means barrier or door (Brathwaite 1973: 272-73); for further reference, go to the fourth part of this discourse.

[6] Michel Foucault's concept of 'panopticon' as disciplinary, monitoring power.

[7] Allusion is "a passing reference, without explicit identification, to a literary or historical person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage" (Abrams 9).

[8] Shona is an ethno-linguistic group of southeastern Africa, now living mainly in Zimbabwe and different parts of Zambia and Mozambique. Among a number of Shona empires that emerged after 1000 AD, the empire based on "Great Zimbabwe," from the 12th to the 15th century, is considered to be the greatest.

[9] The 'Word' may stand for the following: hegemonic power; power to control the supernatural forces; meaning of existence; 'Ogun,' the god of road; *juju*, the power to exorcise spirits; the knowledge of future (as "Alagemo" suggests) which only the God possesses.

[10] Road accidents were regular phenomena in the post-independence Kenya in response to which Soyinka wrote this play.

[11] Unlike western concept of linear time (past → present → future), African concept of time is parallel:

past ↑ present ↑ future: so moving through time is possible.

[12] A schema, coined by Lacan, which is "equivalent to 'mathematical sign'" is used in, for example, linguistic and psychoanalytic studies (Macey 245).

[13] Rastafarianism is the name of a millenarian, peace-advocating religio-cultural movement that originated in Jamaica in the 1930s. The name combines "Ras," meaning "Lord" in Amharic language, and Tafari Makonnen who was crowned emperor of Ethiopia in 1930. "Negus" is a term used in the past for the king or emperor of Ethiopia.

[14] "I who am poisoned with the blood of both/Where shall I turn divided to the vein?" ("A Far Cry from Africa," cited in Samad 229).

[15] "In that simple schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poverty, the outward life of action and dialect" ("What the Twilight Says," cited in Burris 263).

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