

**POSTCOLONIAL ECOCRITICISM AND THE COMPARISON OF
SOUTHEAST ASIAN AND CARIBBEAN LITERATURES**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis consists of two parts. In part one, I argue that diverse works – hailing from the otherwise disparate archipelagic regions of the Caribbean and Southeast Asia – can be placed into productive relation. To perform this work, I use a methodological lens developed and derived from two very different sources of inspiration. First, I draw upon seminal and contemporary work in the burgeoning discipline of “postcolonial ecocriticism.” The second source of inspiration is classical work in comparative anatomy and developmental vertebrate biology, more specifically, the model of differentiation presented by the concept of “analogous structures.” I spend considerable space in part one of this thesis developing and attuning this specific comparative methodology to Caribbean and Southeast Asian particularities. In Chapter Three, I place the two regions under the rubric of “analogous structures” and demonstrate how the two regions began to be thought of together historically, through the *colonial imaginary*, and on to the *postcolonial imaginary*. I build on this historical and literary scholarship in an effort to justify and ground subsequent comparisons. Part one concludes with a survey of the “comparative gesture” in recent works of postcolonial ecocriticism and a claim, namely: as a theoretical method, postcolonial ecocriticism can recuperate the work of analogy in literary comparison.

In part two, three chapters of analysis are presented as case studies for the specific comparative approach developed and advocated in this thesis. In Chapter Four, I consider Ishak Haji Muhammad’s *Putera Gunung Tahan* (1937) alongside Alejo Carpentier’s *El Reino de Este Mundo* (1943) so that each might comment on the other’s magical representation of a specific colonial epistemological struggle. In Chapter Five I juxtapose Lloyd Fernando’s *Scorpion Orchid* (1976), Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), and Zee Edgell’s *Beka Lamb* (1982) to complicate the critical reduction of the authors’ fictional narratives to the logic of national social prescription.

This chapter reveals how the textual figure of the female is problematically used in the narratives to resolve issues of socio-racial national integration through analogical recourse to nature and land. Finally, in Chapter Six, I look at two famous works of Caribbean and Southeast Asian provenance respectively, Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887) to show how the differences in status held by both work and author in their respective regions is belied by the comparatively similar literary configurations they each display.

My conclusion synthesises the findings in a qualified defence of the work of analogy in postcolonial literary comparison against claims of ahistoricisation. I conclude with the claim that ecocritical perspectives in postcolonial literary analysis sustain the politically-useful work of mimetic reading while providing a suitably universal theoretical category that yet protects the works against over-contextualisation and reductionist forms of allegorical reading.

ABSTRAK

Tesis ini terdiri daripada dua bahagian. Dalam bahagian satu, saya mempertahankan bahawa ilmu sastera dari Caribbean dan Asia Tenggara, walaupun kedua-dua lokasi adalah jauh, boleh membawa faedah apabila digabungkan untuk perbandingan atau pembacaan secara selari. Untuk membuat kajian ini, saya telah menggunakan kaedah metodologi yang datang dari dua sumber inspirasi yang berlainan.

Pertama, saya menggunakan karya sastera yang kontemporari dan penting dari disiplin yang semakin berkembang – “postcolonial ecocriticism”. Sumber inspirasi yang kedua adalah dari karya klasik dalam biologi, iaitu perbandingan anatomi dan perkembangan vertebrata. Untuk menjadi lebih khusus, model perbandingan dari konsep “struktur analogi” digunakan. Saya menyumbangkan sebahagian daripada jujuk satu untuk memperkembangkan dan memperbaiki metodologi perbandingan ciri-ciri khas Caribbean dan Asia Tenggara.

Dalam bab kedua, saya meletakkan kedua-dua lokasi itu di bawah rubric “struktur analogi” dan menunjukkan bahawa, pada asalnya, kedua-dua lokasi difikirkan bersebelahan melalui *imaginasi kolonial* dan seterusnya kepada *imaginasi pascakolonial*. Saya menggunakan kajian sejarah dan sastera sebagai asas untuk dikembangkan, dengan harapan ini akan mengesahkan perbandingan masa hadapan. Bahagian satu menyimpulkan dengan kaji selidik “perbandingan isyarat” dalam karya baru dalam “postcolonial ecocriticism” dan terutamanya, ia boleh digunakan sebagai cara teori. “Postcolonial ecocriticism” boleh mengembalikan semula kaedah analogi dalam perbandingan sastera.

Dalam bahagian dua, tiga bab yang beranalisis dibentangkan sebagai kajian khusus untuk cara perbandingan dan diperjuangkan oleh tesis ini. Bab tiga, buku *Putera Gunung Tahan* oleh Ishak Haji Muhammad (1937) dan buku *El Reino de Esta Mundo*

oleh Alejo Carpentier (1943) digunakan supaya kedua-dua buku boleh menonjolkan perwakilan sama sekali sebagai negara yang dijajah dan isu-isu penjajahan asing.

Dalam bab empat, saya bandingkan buku *Scorpion Orchid* oleh Lloyd Fernando (1976), buku *Palace of the Peacock* oleh Wilson Harris (1960) dan buku *Beka Lamb* oleh Zee Edgell (1982) untuk memahami kisah fiksi penulis, bersebelahan pemikiran sosial-nasional. Bab ini menunjukkan imej wanita dalam kisah-kisah tersebut, sebagai wakil yang menyelesaikan masalah dan intergrasi sosio-bangsa negara. Ini dibandingkan seperti alam sekitar kepada bumi.

Dalam bab lima, yang terakhir, saya mengkaji dua karya Caribbean dan Asia Tenggara yang terkenal, iaitu buku berjudul *Wide Sargasso Sea* oleh Jean Rhys (1966) dan *Noli Me Tangere* oleh Jose Rizal (1887) untuk menunjukkan perbezaan kedudukan taraf penulis dan karya masing-masing di negara asal mereka. Perbezaan dan perbandingan itu juga boleh dikaji dari segi hubungan watak-watak dengan isu-isu negara tersebut.

Kesimpulan saya mengabungkan maklumat dari membentangan analogi dalam perbandingan karya pascakolonial dengan “ahistoricisation”. Saya menyimpulkan bahawa perspektif “ecocritical” dalam analisis karya pascakolonial boleh membawa faedah kepada cara membaca dan melindungi karya ini dibaca secara berlebihan atau di kurangkan sebagai pembacaan alegori.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was written during a most tumultuous time for me. Thus, I will always find strange the suggestion that doing a PhD means giving up several years of one's life for the project; so much of *life* attended its production and is bound up with it. During the writing of this thesis I moved clear across the planet, married my travel companion, and fathered two children. But I also experienced stresses of the negative sort. I lost several family members during this time-period, the last of my grandparents, and most painfully and much too early, my own father.

That my thesis is completed at all I owe to the fact of many fortuitous events, for which I am thankful, and wonderful persons in my life, for whom I count myself blessed. Family in tropical East and West supported me in fundamental ways, faculty and fellow scholars at the University of Malaya lent me their ears in both official and familiar capacities, family, friends, acquaintances, and countless others supported me in conscious ways or else unbeknownst. To all of you, *terima kasih* and *Jah bless*. Though I have been the privileged recipient of tremendous support, the contents and all shortcomings of this thesis are my own responsibility.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ABSTRAK	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
— PART ONE —	2
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	3
1.1 Rationale	3
1.2 Chapter Outline	13
1.3 Candidates for Comparison	16
CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE – SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE CRITICAL FRAME	43
2.1 Comparative Literature and the Link between Nation and Text	44
2.2 World Literature and other Alternatives to the National Category	57
2.3 The Comparative Gesture in Postcolonial Ecocriticism	69
2.4 Ecocritical Models for Postcolonial Literary Comparison	78
2.5 Approaching the Caribbean <i>and</i> Southeast Asia	95
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY – ANALOGOUS STRUCTURES: LITERARY ISOMORPHISM AND THE MALAYAN AND CARIBBEAN ARCHIPELAGOS	100
3.1 The Colonial Imaginary	103
3.2 The Postcolonial Literary	117
3.3 Postcolonial Ecocriticism	120
— PART TWO —	129
CHAPTER 4: NATIVE MAGIC – ALEJO CARPENTIER’S <i>EL REINO DE ESTE MUNDO</i> (1949) AND ISHAK HAJI MUHAMMAD’S <i>PUTERA GUNUNG TAHAN</i> (1938)	130
4.1 Introduction: Why Compare?	130
4.2 Magical Realism and Ishak Haji Muhammad’s <i>Putera Gunung Tahan</i>	144

4.3	Alternative Epistemologies and <i>El Reino de Este Mundo</i>	165
4.4	Native Magic: Power and Indigeneity	174
4.5	Crucial use of the Native	183
CHAPTER 5: INDIGENOUS PRESCRIPTION IN LLOYD FERNANDO'S <i>SCORPION ORCHID</i> (1976), WILSON HARRIS'S <i>PALACE OF THE PEACOCK</i> (1960), AND ZEE EDGELL'S <i>BEKA LAMB</i> (1982)		188
5.1	Her National Function? The Object of Desire in Allegories of Nation	189
5.2	The Call for National Representation	196
5.3	Wilson Harris's <i>Palace of the Peacock</i> and the Hinterland	200
5.4	Lloyd Fernando's <i>Scorpion Orchid</i> and the Urban Environment	216
5.5	Zee Edgell's <i>Beka Lamb</i> and the City-swamp	221
CHAPTER 6: CREOLE NATIVISATION IN JOSÉ RIZAL'S <i>NOLI ME TANGERE</i> (1887) AND JEAN RHY'S <i>WIDE SARGASSO SEA</i> (1966)		231
6.1	On Hybridity	233
6.2	Problems of Placement	240
6.3	Representation in Rizal and Rhys	251
6.4	Creoles and the Discourse of Tropical Degeneracy	265
6.5	Critical To/Eponymy	286
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION		297
WORKS CITED		304

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

There exists a historical resemblance between the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia that extends to the modern literary practice of these regions' respective writers. By virtue of this resemblance, the literary performances extant in the vast corpora of texts of the Caribbean and Southeast Asia beg comparison despite mutual separation by geography (indeed, theoretically, geographical distance is frequently irrelevant when examining the flow of ideas and literary influences). In institutionalised academic settings, however, the two areas are rarely considered together,¹ and furthermore, where a comparative literary dimension is suggested, it normally does not occur under any but a postcolonial framework (itself effectively evolving out of, or superseding, the category of Commonwealth Literature).² Under such a framework, I want to argue, comparative concerns are *necessarily*, or by definition, subsumed under the work of establishing or testing the integrity of the universalising theory of postcolonialism as a framework rather than testing and juxtaposing potential points of relation and mutual concern.

A comparative engagement of the nature proposed in this thesis must be done outside a conventional postcolonial framework. It cannot constantly refer to the metropole for foundation and scaffold, dividing and annexing texts according to colonial experience and/or linguistic medium. Neither can the project of comparison be taken lightly. Justification for juxtaposition and comparison must be provided to make any comparison worthwhile. Without such justification, the work of comparison risks bringing together diverse objects to make banal observations at the cost of complexity.

¹ And this neglect is not limited to the literary. For example Murray, Boellstorf, and Robinson declare that “[w]hile the parallelism of ‘East Indies/West Indies’ might seem self-evident as one mode for organising knowledge, it has been almost entirely absent throughout the history of anthropology. Even in The Netherlands, which had colonies in both the East and West Indies and is a centre for scholarship for both regions, we and our colleagues have been unable to find any scholarly works that examine both the East Indies and West Indies” (219).

² Tim Watson argues that the true roots of Commonwealth Literature as an academic or institutionalised field might be said to have emerged in the 1950s in the US, although a conference at Leeds and the publication of the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* in 1964 is usually taken as the signal moment for its emergence (Watson 54-5).

In this thesis I will argue that works of the two regions offer points of connection and resemblances that require them to be considered in the same context, not simply the flattening context of the postcolonial (which exerts a kind of hegemony that precludes the asking of different sorts of questions) but also in the context of humanity's relationship with the non-human world.

Undoubtedly, a comprehensive assessment of the literary output of either the Caribbean or Southeast Asia – not to mention both – would take historians, scholars, and encyclopædists entire lifetimes to record. Comparing the literary output of both these regions, or attempting to offer a comprehensive treatment of Southeast Asian and Caribbean resemblances, is obviously beyond the scope of my project, regardless of how useful that type of scholarship might be.

Instead, this thesis labours to provide a theoretical foundation for subsequent forays into the archipelagic literary comparison of these regions. It does this by investigating the possibility of literary comparison between the regions, and applying this test to literary candidates for comparison (that is, literary works of the two regions that are candidates regardless of intention, or, by virtue of their value/position within literary history). This project, then, does not simply and arbitrarily take texts from the Caribbean and Southeast Asia for comparison; neither does it engage in the spurious task of identifying “representative” works. Instead, works are selected, in part, for the impact they demonstrate outside of their respective national contexts and the strategy of indigenisation they display. In this way, this thesis shrugs off the strict national framework and complicates the ensuing tendency to define a “national” literature. This last tendency is one that takes works to be mere epi-phenomena of the nation and, as I

will later show, it is a tendency that emerges from a Eurocentric legacy and therefore an ironic one for postcolonial practice.³

I explore the candidacy of specific texts drawn from Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, and determine how they display an archipelagicity that somehow presents an organic link to their region as a geographical entity and the implications this might have on the project of representation and comparison. The danger I avoid here is in simply taking a text from the Caribbean and then another from Southeast Asia that will, for the most part, be a random selection, to say: “let’s compare these two; let’s make these representative.” Of course, throughout this thesis I do examine, and suggest, all sorts of comparisons between the regions, but I do so, always with a scepticism that demands justification for these comparisons.

The grand, or overarching objective to this thesis might be summarised as a justification for archipelagic literary comparison between Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. And it is through the theoretical and methodological prism of postcolonial ecocriticism that I narrow down my grand objective. In particular, I work to reveal what I will call *the trope of indigeneity* in selected works from both regions and use the writers’ works to interrogate theoretical articulations of literary regionalism (of both Caribbean and Southeast Asia). In this way, I do not simply deploy theory, but instead employ a meta-critical approach that critiques regional and postcolonial theory using works of literature.⁴ Tracking the trope of indigeneity within specific significant literary works appearing around the particular time of independence facilitates the larger project of comparison.

The research then aims to provide several interrelated contributions. Cultural and political contributions lie in contributing to discourses, however modestly, that

³ Wai Chee Dimock argues against identifying texts by nation. In her article, “Deep Time: American Literature and World History” Dimock reveals the gross assumption of turning “a territorial unit [...] into a mode of literary causality” (755).

⁴ In *Criticism in the Wilderness*, Geoffrey Hartman punctures theory’s inflated sense of place within academia; he writes, “[t]heory itself is just another text; it does not enjoy a privileged status” (242).

reveal how postcolonial societies can help each other attain that fraught, contested condition known as modernity. Thus, this thesis shares the impossibly ambitious and utopian desire of other work in the field that seeks “to make exploitation and discrimination of all kinds, both human and nonhuman, visible in the world” and work towards their obsolescence (Huggan and Tiffin 16). Academic and theoretical contributions lie in examining concrete, historical – but also ideological and imaginary – connections between Southeast Asia and the Caribbean. As well, this thesis seeks to unearth and honestly analyse epistemologies and attitudes towards nature and belonging that have become discredited in the face of colonial and neo-colonial onslaught but also, importantly, those discredited in the anti- and post-colonial counter. Even more specifically, this project will add to the rapidly growing discussion in recent academic debate that attempts to marry ecocriticism to postcolonialism and point out instances where postcolonial theory may be wilfully blind to certain features of literary texts.⁵

Before moving into the thesis proper, it is necessary to consider these two general sites for contribution. This thesis appears at a time when many problems and ironies are readily apparent in both postcolonial and ecocritical study. Far from discouraging scholars though, these problems should be seen as challenges toward attaining better, more informed scholarship attuned to ever-greater complexities.

The problem of a predominance of North Atlantic scholarship prefaces and partly engenders this thesis. Despite the fact of a remarkable transnational or “international turn” in ecocriticism of the last decade, and in comparative literature in the last two decades, a North Atlantic or Euro-American focus and impetus in both contemporary ecocriticism and postcolonial studies still seems to control and shape the

⁵ See George Handley’s witty comment on “the most recent confluences of interest between postcolonialism and ecocriticism,” which appears in his essay “Toward an Environmental Phenomenology of Diaspora.” Handley describes these “two fields whose seeming need for a long-term relationship of trust has been undermined by what feels like their rigorous demands for pre-nups” (650).

discourse in troubling ways.⁶ As Rey Chow has perceptively noted, Dipesh Chakrabarty's project of "provincializing Europe" is still a glimmer at this stage (Chow "Old/New Question" 296).⁷

Part of this thesis will argue that it is not enough to simply internationalise when the project of internationalisation itself is designed within limits established by the "North Atlantic."⁸ The argument in basic is that the works of literary regions outside "the West" merely serve the careers of the Western literary scholars themselves who devote themselves to that literature. Aijaz Ahmad has devoted considerable attention to articulating the irony inherent to this state of affairs; in *In Theory*, he insists that "[i]t is in the metropolitan country, in any case, that a literary text is first designated a Third World Text, levelled into an archive of other such texts, and then globally redistributed with that aura attached to it" (45). But more interestingly for this project, Ahmad goes on to reveal the irony of comparison of third-world texts under the first world regime.

At the level of this greatly expanded archive of books produced in the ex-colonial countries but written in or translated into Western languages, a direct dialogue between, let us say, a Haitian and an Indian novelist could really take place, and something called "Third World Literature," with its own generic classifications and categorizations, could ensue from that archival nearness; the irony of that operation would undoubtedly be that a Third World Literature would arise on the basis of Western *languages*, while Third-Worldist ideology is manifestly opposed to the cultural dominance of Western *countries* (80).

Ahmad here clearly articulates a danger and irony that this thesis seeks to avoid.

This is not to downplay the real presence of work currently produced outside the West,

⁶ In a 2013 article in *PMLA*, "Globality, Difference, and the International Turn in Ecocriticism," Ursula Heise explains how the rise of postcolonial theory spurred internationalisation of comparative literature beyond the historically limited Western European focus, just as postcolonial ecocriticism, with inspiration from sociological studies, has spurred scholarly undertakings with much wider geographical and linguistic range.

⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁸ "The North," or "Global North" is here taken, as many now do, as a term of convenience not so much to describe those so-called developed countries of the world characterised by their industrial or post-industrial societies but rather an ideological position. Thus "North" and "West" relate to ideological rather than a strictly geographical position. A geographical term, frequently employed in postcolonial scholarship to which it is only tangentially or partially related, "The South" or "Global South" also does not have an apprehensible object or referent in "postcolonial" societies or the sum total of formerly colonised states. Instead the term functions to reveal or call attention to the disparity in wealth and character of world states, cultures, and peoples and operates in the same way, as an ideological position location from which a subject claims to speak.

nor the work of truly transnational scholarship that can both foreground issues of global significance present in the global south and utilise agents from the global south to present them. However, although the appearance of transnational works of ecocriticism attuned to the global south – such as Slovic, Swarnalatha, and Sarveswaran’s edited collections *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development* (2014), *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (2015), and the like – indicate something of the globalised landscape of ecocritical work, the centre-periphery dynamic has not been thoroughly shaken off. In ecocriticism, the preeminent academic professional organisation, *The Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment*, is a United States’-based association that now has autonomous affiliates around the world and whose journal *ISLE* contains works of literature, reviews and academic essays that span cultures and nations. But as Ursula Heise points out in a recent report on the “state of the discipline” of comparative literature, the greatest single source of impetus to internationalise ecocriticism as an institutional discipline is probably embodied in the efforts of an Americanist ecocritic.⁹ Moreover, the names of those autonomous instances that have emerged in other countries, and which maintain a loose affiliation with ASLE are often graced with a national qualifier to differentiate and specify them.¹⁰ In comparative literature, especially of decades past, a similar process unfolds as the novel is internationalised according to nation. This process assumes literary output is classifiable by nation-state, and that literary taxonomists can simply insert each country’s works into a grid. This rubric is open to postcolonial criticisms, given that the grid into which works are inserted is predefined according to European antecedents. Chapter Two of this thesis

⁹ Ursula Heise singles out Scott Slovic, *ISLE*’s editor, as that indefatigable ecocritical internationalist in “Comparative Literature and the Environmental Humanities” *ACLA Report on the State of the Discipline 2014-2015*, 9 March 2014. Web. 21 Feb 2015 <http://stateofthediscipline.acla.org/entry/comparative-literature-and-environmental-humanities>.

¹⁰ Buell, Heise, and Thornber reveal how “The Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE, established in 1992) (<http://www.asle.org>) has become a worldwide movement with chapters throughout Europe, East and South Asia, and Australia-New Zealand, though scholars from the Anglophone world, especially the United States and the United Kingdom, still predominate” (418).

investigates these claims, offers some counter claims, and introduces the comparative method of this thesis more properly.

Irony and contradiction seem ever-present in postcolonial practice, sometimes in damaging ways. What strikes me as particularly defeating for a student using postcolonialism and ecocriticism as methodologies for literary study – especially in a university outside “the West” and the “North Atlantic” – are issues of audience and relevance. Summaries, analyses, and accounts of these fields when couched in postcolonial and transnational ecocritical terminology appear almost invariably as instances of interventionist scholarship with a focus on changing “the West.” This is an honourable project to be sure, but one that, by its very nature must take Western criticism as its ultimate subject of inquiry, despite – or especially when – the raw material of its production is derived from the third world.¹¹ I call this defeating because this situation renders postcolonial studies ironic.¹²

Much scholarship from the former colonial metropolises dictates the field of postcolonial studies. And, when it comes to postcolonial studies, critics and theorists too often consider the former colonies from a metropolitan perspective. Even in their resistance to Western frames of thinking, they necessarily take the metropole as subject of inquiry. This is something that happens all too often in postcolonial studies, from critiques of the location of postcolonial practice (perceived as being based in the former colonial metropolises and in large first world cities that thrive on the kinds of unequal global flows that perpetuate the kind of third world economic disadvantage postcolonialism itself critiques)¹³ to what amounts to almost *ad hominem* intimations of

¹¹ In “Actually Existing Postcolonialisms,” Anthony King argues that “much of the early development of that particular discourse developed in association with a postcolonial diasporic community of scholars and for various reasons, was primarily directed to an audience in the one-time metropolitan society, rather than the postcolonial society itself” (178).

¹² Many academics have commented on this theme. Notable commentators include Barbara Christian, who blasts “deconstructionists” for “reifying” the canon they critique, and Graham Huggan, who – in his introduction to *The Postcolonial Exotic* – also analyses perceptively the tendency to commoditise exoticism, with postcolonialism performing the role of the ironic peddler of these wares.

¹³ This situation is wittily encapsulated in the following comment by Slavoj Žižek: “If one accuses a big corporation of particular financial crimes, one exposes oneself to risks that can go up to murder attempts; if one asks the same corporation to finance a

hypocrisy in personal critiques of major postcolonial academics, especially those based in the first world.¹⁴

I avoid this irony with this thesis by taking the West out of the dock and simply using its testimony as evidence, considering its hegemonic role ideological, and referring to the effects of its pervasive influence as context.¹⁵ The focus of this thesis is on points of comparison that surround the performative strategy of indigenisation between literary works of the regional entities of the Caribbean and Southeast Asia. Where the West does impinge on this focus (and I of course admit that it does so pervasively) this is understood as part of the composite, constitutive context, rather than, front and centre, the object of critique.

There can be no doubt that the world is in the midst of ecological crisis. The irrefutable evidence includes: anthropogenic global warming creating far-reaching and devastating consequences for the planet, the loss of species proceeding at a devastating rate, and humankind's seemingly inevitable penchant for exploiting its technological capability with increasing facility toward the marginalisation of wild spaces by topographic alteration. Many critics have pointed out how the rise to dominance of the rationalistic scientific positivism of modernity has fanned the flame of human hubris and exacerbated humankind's unjustified tendency to read nature as a resource existing solely for his pleasure. Indeed, the latest literary and cultural trends have contributed to a risen awareness among the general populace of eco-apocalypse. Still, and perhaps more troubling however, is that this so-called awareness often amounts, as Timothy

research project about the link between global capitalism and the emergence of the hybrid postcolonial identities, one stands a good chance of getting hundreds of thousands of dollars" (Žižek 60).

¹⁴ Theorists such as Homi Bhabha, probably as a result of fame and prolix writing style, regularly occasion ridicule. For example, at a talk at the University of Malaya in 2010, Harish Trivedi cited the academic's owning several houses around the US and on an island in the Caribbean as a kind of intimation of this sort of postcolonial hypocrisy. More astutely, Anthony King defends the idea that *where* an intellectual produces work matters for the work he/she produces; he contrasts this position to Robert Young, who views geographical location to be of less importance than epistemological, political, and cultural location, and a consideration of less importance than analysing the actual target of discourse (King 170).

¹⁵ Neil Lazarus's helpful introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies* makes a distinction in postcolonial practice between those who take Eurocentrism as ideology, and those who consider it part of the age's episteme. The latter, he argues, make Eurocentrism something that cannot be critiqued because it pervades the very questions one asks. I agree with Lazarus that this is unnecessarily defeatist. Taking Eurocentrism as ideology does not make it any less of a pervasive, insidious force, and it does allow scholars to attempt to identify and critique it.

Morton has claimed, to nothing more than a vague sentiment that something apparently precious called “the environment” exists somewhere “out there.”¹⁶ This, of course, leads to inaction and continued impuissance as the crisis deepens.

Alongside the work of contemporary science, one corrective for this problem lies in breaking the spell of ignorance via dissemination of historical scholarship. In the postcolonial world, an attempt at rescuing indigenous epistemologies lost with uncritical adoption of Euro-American models of development and critical framing still needs to be carried out. As Peter Hulme writes in *Colonial Encounters*, “The gesture of “discovery” is at the same time a ruse of concealment” and it is colonial discourse which produced regions of the world for Europeans by influencing the methodology, analysis and horizon of expectation through a hegemonic meta-narrative filtered through the “discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir and so on” (2). Can these nations really return to indigenous articulations and writings for wisdom and a local ethic in the face of these crises? What forms do the literary performances take, when they refer to their regional or archipelagic identity? In what ways might aesthetic appeals to indigeneity within the varied national cultures of both regions’ societies be problematic? And what insights and solutions do they provide one another?

This thesis appears at a time when greater and greater resources are available to foster South-South comparisons of the type I am attempting. Despite this, many have documented how “the West” still holds reign in terms of ideal-types of the horizon. The cultural hegemony countries like the United States command still holds in many places despite indications to the contrary. And it is universalising hegemonic forces that create conditions of sameness the world over.

¹⁶ As his title suggests, in *Ecology Without Nature*, Morton argues that the term “nature,” or “the environment” itself must be abandoned for a truer ecological practice. He offers a feminist analogy to explain this: “putting something called Nature on a pedestal and admiring it from afar does for the environment what patriarchy does for the figure of Woman. It is a paradoxical act of sadistic admiration” (5).

The major critique that might be levelled against this thesis is that with any attempt at bringing together disparate, varied texts of such regions under universalising guises like “the postcolonial” (notwithstanding – or, all the more, because of – its marriage to ecocriticism) comes the risk of losing their special complexities and differences. Rendered in general terms, the charge goes like this: the universal category, for it to be properly universal, must erase difference in order to exist. Such is the argument Slavoj Žižek, Ernesto Laclau and Judith Butler present in a published exchange. For these theorists, a foundationalist universality is schizophrenic; it is afraid of that which it does not encompass so that even as it claims to be universal so it must erase difference to maintain that universality.¹⁷ Use of the term “postcolonial,” just as the even larger category of “the environment,” being universal in this instance, churns up difference, homogenizing the specificities and spices of regions. By amalgamating them all into a soup of sameness, even vastly disparate and distant regions such as the Caribbean and Southeast Asia are comprehended under the same category. In this way, the two regions are subsumed by categories that are articulated from a specific social and cultural location with aspirations toward universality with all the attendant risks and occlusions this entails. To paraphrase the work of Silvio Torres-Saillant on Caribbean socio-historical and intellectual particularities, the combining of disparate regions under the postcolonial label is a recent invention that serves to unite and bring together varied texts at the cost of complexity.

At its most universal and reductive, postcolonialism apprehends the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia as equivalent signs of difference; as sites of resistance for the West. This difference, understood as lack, has strategic value for Western theory which will often invoke these regions (harnessing the powerful perceptions surrounding them) for specific ideological ends. In so doing, postcolonialism operates at the

¹⁷ This idea, which I have paraphrased, is argued, repeated, and tweaked throughout Žižek, Laclau and Butler’s collaborative work, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*.

totalitarian level: it destroys difference by converting it into the same; and it renders whole communities flat, reading them as “just another sign of difference” or another instance of lack which must be supplemented by an excess of theory.¹⁸ The Caribbean and Southeast Asia then become, and produce, new products; they become intellectual commodities for increasing the knowledge and consequently the power of “the West” especially. I address this problem in the thesis in my discussion on methodology. In particular, I make the claim in this thesis that there are ways to approach the literary work of both regions as analogous that still allow for the specificities of both to emerge, despite the colonial origins of analogy and literary comparison.

* * *

1.2 Chapter Outline

Maritime Southeast Asia, especially the “Malay Archipelago,” and the Caribbean (both “continental” and “island”), are two geographical regions that have been historically and imaginatively comprehended (etymologically, “grasped together”) in the colonial imaginary but whose contemporary connections are today generally neglected.¹⁹ It is my contention in this thesis that works as diverse as José Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* and Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock*, or Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s *Bumi Manusia* and Alejo Carpentier’s *El Reino de este Mundo*, or Ishak Haji Muhammad’s *Putera Gunung Ledang* and Zee Edgell’s *Beka Lamb* might be placed into productive relation. More than this, these writers of fiction might interrogate contemporary theory that seeks to analyse the individual works by situating them in the

¹⁸ Here I borrow Elleke Boehmer’s phraseology, though not her specific argument. In her introduction to *Stories of Women*, Elleke Boehmer offers a critique of Homi Bhabha’s work; as she characterizes it, Bhabha considers gender “effectively merely just another sign of difference” (8). In this thesis I extrapolate this comment to suggest that postcolonial theory as a whole has this tendency to make equi-valent different forms of resistance. The subsequent phrase, “lack ... which demands an excess of theory” is informed by Rey Chow’s work in *Ethics after Idealism*.

¹⁹ While this thesis draws especially on the geographical and theoretical resonance of what is variously apprehended as “the Malay Archipelago”, or the “East Indies”, it also acknowledges the “continental” element, that is, the Southeast Asian peninsula. Thus, while not exactly synonymous, the terms overlap as set and subset. Throughout the thesis I will refer to the archipelagic region in more neutral, less quaintly colonial terms, as “Maritime Southeast Asia” (my thanks to Philip Holden for this useful suggestion). Similarly, while the Caribbean is generally apprehended as an archipelagic entity alone, the coastal and continental elements of South and Central American nations is also a recognisable part. The economic and political entities, ASEAN and CARICOM, acknowledge these elements.

restrictive constructs of national context or global theories of resistance to Western epistemologies.²⁰ Juxtaposing and comparing these works reveals relations between them that highlight specific areas where postcolonial theory and national context – which provide the predominately employed methodology for analysing literature of the archipelagos in question – might wilfully misread texts according to bias derived from their own immanent logic (in the case of postcolonialism) or a prescriptive national function suggested (un)intentionally by the authors and/or critics themselves (in the case of national context). While many strands for comparison are suggested in this thesis, it is coupling this relationality with regard to the writers’ strategies of indigenisation within the two regions that constitutes the main focus.

In Part One of this thesis, I spend considerable space theorising and developing the specific comparative methodology attuned to Caribbean and Southeast Asian particularities that I derive from Brathwaite’s concept of tidalectics – via Elizabeth DeLoughrey – but also from the model of comparative differentiation presented by the concept of “analogous structures” within comparative anatomy in the biological sciences. In Chapters One and Two, I use this methodological and theoretical perspective to explore extensively three particular pairs of literary comparisons as case studies for the specific comparative approach advocated in this thesis. In Chapter Four, I consider Ishak Haji Muhammad’s *Putera Gunung Tahan* (1937) alongside Alejo Carpentier’s *El Reino de Este Mundo* (1943) so that each might comment on the other’s magical representation of a specific colonial epistemological struggle. To this end, in Chapter Four I engage with theory of postcolonial satire, the discursive (and extra-discursive) reality of nature, and magical realism (or what Carpentier calls *lo real*

²⁰ The desire to situate them in a national context partially results from the proximity of the selected writers to their nation’s independence or nationalist movements. The desire to situate them in a counter-Western paradigm partially emerges as a result of the dominance of postcolonial theory as a mode of reading non-western literatures.

maravilloso), situating both novels within their national and regional contexts while simultaneously insisting on their relationality.

In Chapter Five I juxtapose Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* (1976) with Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (1960) and complicate critical reduction of both authors' fictional narratives to the logic of national social prescription by revealing how the textual figure of the female in the narratives disrupts such attempts to resolve the problem of historical socio-racial national integration. To this end I highlight critical responses to Belizean author Zee Edgell's work *Beka Lamb* (1982) in an attempt to offer productive counterpoint to this tendency.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I look at two famous works of Caribbean and Southeast Asian provenance, respectively: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and José Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* (1887). In the resulting comparison, I show how despite both authors' sharing many themes and conclusions regarding the power and efficacy (or lack thereof) of the *creole* in the unique societies of which they write, both writers and works enjoy quite different statuses. That is, the status held by both work and author in their respective regions as evidenced by the difference in their respective receptions is belied by the comparatively similar literary configurations they each display.

My conclusion synthesises the findings in a qualified defence of the work of analogy in postcolonial literary comparison against claims of ahistoricisation. I conclude with the claim that ecocritical perspectives in postcolonial literary analysis sustain the politically-necessary work of mimetic reading while providing a suitably universal theoretical category that yet protects the works against over-contextualisation and reductivist forms of allegorical reading.

* * *

1.3 Candidates for Comparison

While culturally and geographically distinct, Southeast Asia and the Caribbean share much more than the banal fact of archipelagicity. However, their geographical and cultural distance often seems to preclude any justification for their explicit comparison (beyond comparison for its own sake). I offer justification for this comparative project, first, by providing some overview and literature review of contemporary theory problematising comparison in general within postcolonial and ecocritical theory; and second, I go on to provide a selective overview of *historical* comparisons and comprehension of the two archipelagos – by analysing primary colonial documents, especially from the Elizabethan “Age of Exploration” – to demonstrate how the two regions were thought about analogously in the colonial era. With this historical grounding and theoretical problematisation, I then make the claim that colonialism provided a *convergence* both ideologically and materially with respect to these two particular regions. That is, the regions began to be thought of in the same context, but also, and partially as a result of this *comprehension*, they began to be actively and physically ordered and altered so that physical changes in both environments rendered them more and more similar to one another. This process seems to have peaked and then declined in the Eighteenth Century as progress in geographical and scientific knowledge began to reveal more and more differences and eliminate the ignorance that allowed two vastly different geographical regions to be thought about in the same light. Paralleling this development is a particular usage of the term “Indies” which, although now obsolete, once referred to both regions simultaneously in an allusive manner. This *comprehensive*, or *apprehensive*, historical and theoretical grounding thus demands that the cultural products of the two regions be placed into productive relation and forms the introductory portion of this thesis.

Revealing the colonial roots of comparativism may complicate and problematize contemporary scholarship that builds on its legacies. One concern is that comparativism fosters a universalising approach, and this sits uncomfortably with postcolonial theorists who realise analogies between comparative methods and the “geographically encompassing intellectual projects from the colonial era” (Robinson 126). As Gayatri Spivak reminds in “Rethinking Comparativism,” recalling past comparativist projects, “in today’s divided world, to discover varieties of sameness is to give in too easily to the false promises of a level playing field” (611). The first part of the next section focuses on the colonial roots of comparison and highlights some suspicions and responses postcolonial theorists make toward the project. After discussing the particular comparison explored in this thesis, I survey recent works in postcolonial ecocriticism for instances of the “comparative gesture” and methodological attitudes towards it within this recent specialisation of postcolonial and ecocritical literary theory.

1.3.1 Is Comparison Colonial? Justifying juxtapositions

In his essay, *Beyond the Straits: Postcolonial Allegories of the Globe*, Peter Hulme highlights the productive friction that results from interactions between postcolonial studies and discourses of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. Hulme’s article is developed from a paper he gave at a conference on new directions in postcolonial studies.²¹ On the one hand, Hulme believes that expanding the scope of postcolonial studies to include increasingly diverse time periods and places is undoubtedly beneficial for the field. He points out how rigid definitions and accounts of the field that “narrow its range to the work of a handful of theorists and a handful of novelists” is impoverishing (42). But, Hulme also finds many reasons to be suspicious of the conjunction between postcolonialism and global thinking. He writes, “[o]n one level, globality – even in a restricted sense of the term – is clearly directed at the

²¹ The conference, held in April 2002 at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA, was titled “Postcolonial Studies and Beyond”: <http://criticism.english.illinois.edu/archives/miscellanea/poco/overview.htm>.

attainment of military and commercial power” (47).²² Hulme illustrates his suspicion well with an analogy: “In the tradition of Baconian rationality,” he writes, “Magellan’s voyage across open seas and around the world offers an allegory of universal knowledge divorced from the local exploration of coastal waters” (47). Therefore he asks: “Why do versions of this allegory survive in the face of postcolonial studies’ fundamental commitment to ideas of the local and the marginal?” (47).

There are two key assumptions here to be explored in this thesis. The first assumption is found in Hulme’s claim that “universal knowledge [is necessarily] divorced from the local” (47). The second relates to the perception that postcolonial studies champions the *local* and the *specific*.²³

1.3.2 Postcolonial Studies Champions the Local and Specific

The latter perception is a well-founded assumption; much of – especially early – postcolonial writing worked to counter colonialist strategies of “silencing the native” and “discrediting the native past” (Lazarus, “Postcolonial Studies” 7). Countering these colonial strategies required anticolonial responses or methods including the writing, or speaking, *back* to the empire, and unearthing, rehearsing, and re-validating, erased native history.²⁴ Hulme alludes to these historical anticolonial strategies of validating the specificity of native cultures and histories in the face of colonial practice that entailed the levelling and dismissal of “other” cultures.

But the discipline or field of postcolonial studies, if it is a coherent one, must possess an inherent or immanent logic. Determining the parameters and coordinates of the field is as much a *prescriptive* as it is a *descriptive* activity; that is, theorists of

²² Or, as Neil Lazarus puts it in “Postcolonial Studies after the Invasion of Iraq,” what is understood as “‘globalisation’ was never the deterritorialised and geo-politically anonymous creature that neo-liberal ideology projected it as being. On the contrary, it was from the outset a political project, a consciously framed strategy designed to restructure social relations world-wide in the interests of capital” (11).

²³ Peter Hulme, being an expert in postcolonial theory, obviously uses these two claims with the full extent of his prior scholarship backing him up. Therefore, one might argue against my categorising his claims as mere “assumptions.” My point in doing so is to re-problematise the claims within postcolonial theory. The logic of my thesis here demands a step back in terms of scale and framing.

²⁴ Hence the playful title of Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin’s influential work for postcolonialist practice *The Empire Writes Back*.

postcolonial studies identify instances of specific observable social phenomena they label “postcolonial”; but, they also speculate and conjure up theories in order to taxonomise as yet unrealised, or, potentially-occurring phenomena. “Hybridity,” as a term, for example, becomes co-opted within postcolonial studies to signify an observable condition or phenomenon but it is employed with very different connotative resonances to that of, say, racist colonialist pseudo-science. Derek Walcott summarises the distinction between the two perspectives of hybridity nicely in the prose-poetry of his Nobel acceptance speech, later published as *Fragments of Epic Memory*. First he considers the perspective of the coloniser, and those who have adopted this view of hybridity-as-impurity:

These purists look on such ceremonies as grammarians look at a dialect, as cities look on provinces and empires on their colonies. Memory that yearns to join the centre, a limb remembering the body from which it has been severed [...] In other words, the way that the Caribbean is still looked at, illegitimate, rootless, mongrelized. “No people there”, to quote Froude, “in the true sense of the word”. No people. Fragments and echoes of real people, unoriginal and broken [...] like a dialect, a branch of its original language, an abridgement of it (5-6)

Then, Walcott offers an alternative perspective, representing those who take the mixture to be a unique expression of culture in itself:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. (8-9)

In this case postcolonialism strategically re-interprets and re-inscribes already observed phenomena to bounce or detour colonial discourse.

The term *négritude* exemplifies the other case; here, *négritude* functions as much as a prescriptive term as it does a descriptive one. It is prescriptive in that Leopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Wifredo Lam all conceived of the term as a solidarity, a political project which one might artistically join or to which one might contribute.²⁵ This is where postcolonial specificities become extrapolated into the general and thence on to the universal. Looking more closely at the methods of anticolonial posturing reveals similar practices – especially within postcolonial literary studies – on the level of performance. That postcolonial studies can champion and validate the local while engaging in a universalising rhetoric is therefore not mysterious. This transformation occurs on the level of theory, and it is a response to the universalising force of colonialism. And thus, the shared shape of anti-colonial responses in postcolonial theory results from what it opposes.²⁶

The frequent subtext to much of Eurocentric colonialist writing was that all other cultures were somehow inferior to European civilisations in oddly similar ways. This is the point Aimé Césaire makes when he rails against the pseudo-humanist writings of racist French intellectuals in his *Discours sur le colonialisme*. Césaire reveals how heretofore renowned figures of European civilisation could espouse universalist humanist rhetoric while harbouring racist ideology with startling hypocrisy. Many of these colonial-era European thinkers had an ideological and material investment for portraying non-European races as naturally inferior.²⁷ But what is important here for this thesis is that these peoples were portrayed as naturally inferior

²⁵ Césaire and Senghor theorised this term and movement, Césaire became its first poet, Lam its first painter. Of the three figures, Lam's association with the term is least known, see Robert Linsley "Wifredo Lam: Painter of Negritude" *Race-ing Art History: Critical Readings in Race and Art History* edited by Kymberly N. Pinder (Abingdon: Routledge), 2002.

²⁶ Charlotte Epstein locates the origins of this institutionalised understanding of the work of postcolonialism in Sartre. "The category of thought that best captures what the postcolonial has to offer is that of experience," writes Epstein, and the (philosophical) roots of this idea are present in Sartre's phenomenology, "which puts forward embodied consciousness, as opposed to abstract reason, as a starting point for knowing the world" (296).

²⁷ A point Edward Said reiterates in his study *Orientalism* (1978).

for the same reasons: i.e., they were represented as degenerate, brutish, uncivilised, and lazy.²⁸ Aimé Césaire's incendiary text, *Discourse on Colonialism* (1972), first published as *Discours sur le colonialisme* in 1950 famously reveals this. Césaire summons up representative snippets of racist discourse from diverse Francophone luminaries of the time, and, with satire, sarcasm, and not a small dose of anger, he ridicules and refutes each one. Césaire cites examples "purposely taken from very different disciplines" (11). Instructive in this instance is Césaire's contemptuous summary of Gourou's *Les Pays tropicaux*:

[...] amid certain correct observations, there is expressed the fundamental thesis, biased and unacceptable, that there has never been a great tropical civilization, that great civilizations have existed only in temperate climates, that in every tropical country the germ of civilization comes, and can only come, from some other place outside the tropics, and that if the tropical countries are not under the biological curse of the racists, there at least hangs over them, with the same consequences, a no less effective geographical curse. (11)

Césaire reveals the hypocritical and racist bases to colonialist ideology, which was not simply unable to admit non-European civilisation, but actually refused it at the ontological level. To this end, rational investigation and refutation of colonialist claims were not possible. This is because, as Albert Memmi points out in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), colonialist interpolations of the colonised were institutionalised:

In fact, the accusation has nothing to do with an objective notation, therefore subject to possible changes, but of an institution. By his accusation the colonizer establishes the colonized as being lazy. He decides that laziness is constitutional in the very nature of the colonized. (81)

As Memmi explains, it did not matter therefore if these insults were agglutinated to the point of being wildly contradictory:

²⁸ Indeed, theories for the universality of such degeneracy among non-European peoples were forwarded by racist European writers attempting to formulate their prejudices in scientific terms. Césaire skewers one such Gourou for his book *Les Pays Tropicaux* in which Gourou claims that the very environment produced the degeneracy he finds everywhere in the tropics (*Discours* 11).

It is significant that this portrait requires nothing else. It is difficult, for instance, to reconcile most of these features and then to proceed to synthesize them objectively. One can hardly see how the colonized can be simultaneously inferior and wicked, lazy and backward.

What is more, the traits ascribed to the colonized are incompatible with one another, though this does not bother his prosecutor. (82-83)

And this is the reason why very different figures in the postcolonial canon – Albert Memmi in Tunisia, Syed Hussein Alatas in Malaysia, and also Edward Said in the United States, to name a few key theorists – could talk about shared colonial myths (such as the myth of the lazy native), discriminatory motifs, and racist tropes that recurred throughout colonial representations of very different colonised societies.

It is also for this reason that Albert Memmi could talk about the specificity of his Tunisian colonial experience confident that, *at the same time*, he was talking about the specificities of other colonial situations. Memmi says in the preface to his book *The Colonizer and the Colonized*,

Thus, I undertook this inventory of conditions of colonized people mainly in order to understand myself and to identify my place in the society of other men. It was my readers – not all of them Tunisian – who later convinced me that this portrait was equally theirs. [...] As I discovered that all colonized people have much in common, I was led to the conclusion that all the oppressed are alike in some ways. (ix)

Similarly, Syed Hussein Alatas could talk about *The Myth of the Lazy Native*, as a shared strategy of colonial representations of different peoples of Southeast Asia and the “Malay Archipelago”: Javanese, Filipinos, and Malays, in his case. And Edward Said famously implicated the whole of Orientalist discourse as a strategy to consolidate control, material and otherwise, over the Eastern Other despite its cultural diversity and distinct manifestations.

The anti-colonial figures cited above, and their works, are seminal for postcolonial studies; together they reveal how, from its inception, postcolonialism

championed the local and the specific in the face of a universalising, and global force of colonial power. They also offer justification for a theory (later it would be called postcolonialism) to function as a meta-narrative discourse. But what I want to emphasise here, is how this universalist theory uses the rhetoric of specificity, locality, nationality as a mode of operation. As Fanon powerfully declares in *The Wretched of the Earth*, “[c]olonialism’s condemnation is continental in scale” (150) and it works “by a kind of perverted logic” to distort, disfigure, and destroy pre-colonial history (149). The solution, for Fanon, is not only to “[delve] into the past of a people” but also to “construct the future and to prepare the ground” of the “national culture” (168). In other words, Fanon prescribes the vigorous and distinct *specificity* of a national culture to counteract the perverse *generic* or *global* forces and effects of colonialism.

This important intellectual ancestry has implications for any project of postcolonial *comparison*, which must, it would appear, rehearse the patterns of colonial domination in order to trace resistances between postcolonial regions. In order to compare the output and response of different postcolonies, a conventional methodology would be to trace the trajectory of the colonial powers that dominated them, thereby reinstating colonial patterns of comparison, or, positioning these entities upon a colonial framework that some have shown to be procrustean (Hoving 9).²⁹

In many cases of postcolonial comparison, therefore, both in Southeast Asia and the Caribbean, *language* provides the frame, justification, or impulse to offer comparison in the first place.³⁰ Whole countries and their literatures are grouped for comparison under this rubric according to the respective European language that governed them. Thus, there are several *Caribbeans* in postcolonial analyses:

²⁹ Isabel Hoving makes this claim with regard to Caribbean women’s writing but other theorists of literatures that are subsumed under the post-structural, postcolonial or other form of theory protest this as well, notable or influential (anti-theory) theorists include Barbara Christian, especially her “The Race for Theory” (1996), and Evelyn O’Callaghan, especially her *Woman Version* (1993).

³⁰ In fact, a common assumption of comparative projects is that they are comparing literature of different national languages. Rey Chow analyses this assumption in her essay on Comparative Literature, “The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies: A Post-European Perspective.”

Anglophone, Hispanophone, Francophone, Lusophone, and so on. While in Southeast Asia, provision is normally made to consider the unique colonial history of each nation-state according to the colonial power that most dominated it (and this includes even Thailand which, although not officially colonised, still had to respond to the fact of the colonial presence both traveling through it and demarcating borders outside it).³¹ When a Southeast Asianist approach is taken (Area Studies), Indochina is most often associated with France, the Federated Malay states with Britain, the Dutch East Indies with the Netherlands, and so on. Notwithstanding this, throughout the years, several attempts have been made to figure the area in regional terms, or to consider the inadequacies of doing so – such attempts have been issued from diverse fields, including poets, literary theorists, political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists, among others.³² Writing in the wake of the Asian financial crisis, Acharya and Rajah argue that given its cultural diversity, and the political and environmental change that characterises the region, “the notion of Southeast Asia as a cultural or geographic entity is manifestly overstated” (3). Because of its dynamic and changing nature and the multiplicity of its constituent cultures, they argue, past attempts to essentialise a unified Southeast Asian identity from physical or cultural empirically-measurable units were doomed from the outset. To be fair, such attempts were debated from the start (1). But what Acharya and Rajah deem less contestable are rubrics that understand Southeast Asia along Benedict Anderson’s terms, that is as an “imagined construct” (3). This

³¹ Thomas Suárez, in *Early Mapping of Southeast Asia*, notes how Southeast Asian nations abandoned classical (native) concepts of political space such as the “‘mandala psychology’ in which power and sovereignty radiated out from the center of a kingdom” (263) with the profound influence of Europe on their internal affairs (20). In the case of Thailand, the Siamese King Mongkut (1851-68) commissioned a survey of borders in response to French exploratory surveys along the Mekong because he understood “the political implications of such a mapping” (263).

³² This thesis draws on conceptualisations provided by scholars and thinkers in several of these fields. The social and political scientists Amitav Acharya, and Ananda Rajah, distrust easy gestures to the region, preferring to refer to an “imagined construct” (3). Literary theorists have taken up contrary positions on this issue. In “Postcoloniality in Southeast Asia?” Shirley Lim is also suspicious of references to a static or unified regional identity, given the tendency to erase subcultures or subaltern identities, she gestures to the variety of women’s experience in the various countries in the region to illustrate how normative national identities often mask or occlude others (5). Muhammad Haji Salleh, on the other hand, in seeking to identify an indigenous literary aesthetic for the region in *Romance and Laughter in the Archipelago*, latches on to the *pantun* as a kind of cultural unit or denominator by which a normative aesthetic sense might be understood. In yet another application, Chua Beng Huat wields Southeast Asia as a kind of strategic essentialism in that, insofar as references to cultures and experiences within Southeast Asia are absent from much postcolonial analyses, calling attention to these under a heuristic term is a useful strategy. Benedict Anderson’s work in general meanwhile has tended to privilege the national category while simultaneously referring to complex contextualisations that complicate easy understandings of it and viewing with suspicion attempts to compare entities.

notion of the region as imaginary construct also facilitates the literary exploration I embark on in this study. While I use the political and geo-specific terminology of “Southeast Asia” in this thesis, I do not attempt to offer any comprehensive representation of the region nor do I problematise the terminology much beyond the earlier geo-politically related nomenclature of “East Indies.” As David Lim writes—in an introduction to an anthology on Southeast Asian film studies that situates such cultural criticism in regional terms—the term Southeast Asia denotes a geopolitical region “whose internationally recognized coherence has largely been the outcome of Western imperatives during the cold war and ASEAN efforts initiated by political elites to guide the conduct of inter-state relations” (1). There is thus a standard heuristic understanding of the region in the political and social sciences that roughly breaks down according to nation-state. But referring to the region’s “literature” with any suggestion of accuracy in representation is problematic because such representations of languages, peoples, environments, genders, races, and classes can never approach an egalitarian approximation. As is obvious, I do not attempt such a comprehensive representation. Beyond the representations I explore in this thesis, I offer mere suggestions. What the initial chapters of this thesis instead focus on and problematise is *approach*.

In terms of approach, a crucial difference between the two regions, for the concerns of this thesis, lies in the indigenous element. Due to the fact that indigenous peoples of Southeast Asia and the “Malay Archipelago” were not entirely eradicated in name, writers of these nations had recourse to employing the trope of the indigenous toward an anti-colonial agenda by co-opting and legitimising its specific difference. In the Caribbean, co-opting the rhetorical power of indigeneity seems less contentious in the island Caribbean (though in later chapters I will add my voice to others to show that this is still very much a contestable strategy) than in the continental Caribbean. It is here, that the writers of both regions can contribute to the theory of each others’

archipelagoes. When superimposed, the two regions' discourses of nature, indigeneity, and national culture become blurry, but important points of incongruence are highlighted with productive implications for regional cultural policy and imaginative or literary significance. It is my argument in this thesis that ecocriticism provides a useful perspective to consider these points of instructive incongruence. As Srinivas Aravamudan argues,

[i]n fact, an understanding of false, inaccurate or confusing comparisons between East and West Indies could paradoxically reveal more about the stakes behind such comparisons than so-called true, accurate or clarifying analyses that often get bogged down in the details of positivist knowledge within the multidisciplinary epistemology of area studies. (292)

In other words, inaccuracies and misnomers frequently function as extremely accurate flags to sites of inquiry that yield great theoretical dividends.

Insisting on privileging the local and specific may be a rhetorical strategy for postcolonialism, but such emphasis is at the root of much potential irreconcilability between postcolonialism and ecocriticism. The potential incompatibility of postcolonialism with ecocriticism has been the subject of several studies already.³³ In reviewing work in ecocriticism from the 1990s, William Slaymaker summarises the ecocritical position vis-à-vis the national category nicely in his *PMLA* essay "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses," which opens with a survey of work in literature and the environment. In summarising Karl Kroeber's book on the Romantic tradition *Ecological Literary Criticism*, Slaymaker writes, "[Kroeber] argues that ecological criticism is a global activity that eschews the narrowly nationalistic, ethnic, or ideological agenda" (199).

³³ For treatments of the potential incompatibility between postcolonialism and ecocriticism, see especially Slaymaker's 2001 essay "Ecoing the Other(s): The Call of Global Green and Black African Responses," Nixon's 2005 essay "Environmentalism and Postcolonialism," Handley's 2009 article "Toward an Environmental Phenomenology of Diaspora," and Vital's 2008 article "Toward an African Ecocriticism: Postcolonialism, Ecology, and Life and Times of Michael K." None of these theorists suggest jumping headlong into a merger but temper the mutually-beneficial influences the disciplines might have with potentially damaging associations and baggage that might come with it.

While the intellectual luminaries of postcolonialism all advocated a celebration and return to the specific, local, and native as an anti-colonial strategy (if only as a step towards validating the national culture), ecocriticism has transcended these appeals to national sovereignty, and yielded to a larger, greater, more universal logic: the logic of the planetary imperative, or of the order of nature. Hence, difficulties and suspicions arise within and between postcolonial studies and ecocriticism.

Rob Nixon – in an influential essay “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” that, for many, opens this debate – tackles the subject directly, outlining what appear to be diametrically opposed positions within each field that, he explains, seem to be born of indifference or mistrust. Nixon first describes how both fields have shown little interest in the other’s project; he argues that the broad silence they show toward each other’s project only demonstrates how dialogue between the two has been long overdue. This situation was exacerbated, Nixon explains, as literary environmentalism was fast “developing de facto as an off-shoot of American studies” (234). And postcolonial studies for its part, came to regard environmentalism and ecocriticism as elitist, Western (Euro-American) and generally, with much suspicion. In his essay, published in 2005, Nixon outlines “four main schisms between the dominant concerns of postcolonialists and ecocritics” that engender these mutually constitutive silences (235). Since then, dialogue has been initiated in the form of a score of notable books specifically tackling the subject, and a flurry of academic papers that specifically address the postcolonial and the ecocritical subject (just as Nixon’s).³⁴

The four schisms Nixon identifies are worth noting here. First, Nixon points out how postcolonialists foreground hybridity and cross-cultivation, while ecocritics

³⁴ Notable Books include Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010); Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt’s *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (2010); Pablo Mukherjee’s *Postcolonial Environments* (2010); Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley’s edited collection *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2013) as well as their earlier *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (2007); Laura Wright’s *Wilderness into Civilised Shapes* (2006); Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s *Routes and Roots* (2007); Richard Grove’s *Green Imperialism* (1995); Huggan and Tiffin’s edited special issue in *Interventions* on “Green Postcolonialism,” and of course Rob Nixon’s own widely cited work on the subject: his essay “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” in *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond* as well as his book *Slow Violence* (2013). These books are briefly treated in Chapter Two for the manner of comparison they espouse.

generally employ discourses of purity, virginity, and the “preservation of the uncorrupted” (234). Second, while postcolonialists are concerned about issues of displacement, ecocritics concern themselves with the literature of place. Third, postcolonialists value cosmopolitanism and the transnational, while ecocritics work within the national framework. Lastly, while postcolonialists work at excavating marginalised history, Nixon points out how ecocritics often repress history, attach significance to solitary communion, and value open space generated after erasure.

Rehearsing the apparent antagonism between “anthropocentric” postcolonialism and “Eurocentric” ecocriticism has become a standard opener to books and essays in the field of postcolonial ecocriticism, even if they ultimately contest the opposition (as they inevitably but rightfully, do).³⁵ In an eponymous book on postcolonial ecocriticism, Huggan and Tiffin feel Nixon’s “subtle discriminations [...] may not hold up to closer scrutiny” (3). The authors warn against using falsely simplistic caricatures of the fields in question and tell of environmental literature’s long concern with “cultural difference” and postcolonial criticism’s “long history of ecological concern” (3).

The points of contention of the sort Nixon first brings up are significant for tracing the history of the field known as postcolonial ecocriticism, or at least, in tracing its future trajectory. What is of concern for this thesis, however, is not so much to “outline a broader, more complex genealogy of ecocriticism” as DeLoughrey and Handley do in their recent edited collection (9). That collection attempts to offer alternatives or corrective supplements to “the recent scholarship theorizing the development of ecocriticism and environmentalism [that] has positioned Europe and the United States as the epistemological centers” (8). While such scholarship is necessary and rewarding (and a rich resource for a project such as this which has been greatly

³⁵ In their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, Huggan and Tiffin write that “large-scale distinctions based on the initially attractive view that postcolonial studies and eco/environmental studies offer mutual correctives to each other turn out on closer inspection to be perilous” (3). DeLoughrey and Handley open their book on *Postcolonial Ecologies* by “draw[ing] from earlier works in postcolonial literature to suggest that the global south has contributed to an ecological imaginary and discourse of activism and sovereignty that is not derivative of the Euro-American environmentalism of the 1960s and ‘70s” (8).

inspired from this work), I want to move away from the work of insisting on the importance of such literature and scholarship for the West; instead, I want to focus on the relevance of ecocriticism in the postcolonial Global South for *other nations and cultures of the Global South*. As stated in the preface to this work, this thesis attempts to perform a postcolonial manoeuvre without focusing solely on how the nations and cultures of the Global South may be resisting Western forms of understanding. Rather, taking its testimony as evidence, considering its hegemonic role ideological, and referring to the effects of its pervasive influence as context, I hope to show that the West does not have to constantly be the object of critique within postcolonial ecocriticism. By focusing on literary points of comparison between the regional entities of the Caribbean and Southeast Asia I hope to dethrone (or de-dock) the West as object of interrogation (and therefore ultimate subject of study) and cease the persistent and ironic re-reification of the West in postcolonial study. Using the same metaphor, this thesis hopes to occasion a cross-examination or cross-interrogation, via the comparativist method, of two postcolonial regional literary entities.

The particular topic of examination in this case revolves around depictions of nature, the environment, but specifically concerns literary strategies of postcolonial indigenisation. Hence, Rob Nixon's last point forms a special point of significance for this thesis (on postcolonial excavations of history versus ecocritical repressions and erasure). As Nixon reveals, "there is a durable tradition within American natural history writing of erasing the history of colonised peoples through the myth of empty lands" (235). As I will show later, this tactic of erasing peoples and histories via the trope of indigeneity is seen in writing from both archipelagoes under investigation here as well. As such, I agree with Huggan and Tiffin's assessment of the overly simplistic opposition generated by commentary on the two fields' conjunction; I also agree with DeLoughrey and Handley's claim in the Introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies* that

many early and seminal postcolonial works have foregrounded ecological concerns from the start. And I critique the easy opposition between the two fields in this last point by Nixon, by demonstrating (in later Chapters) how these repressions and excavations are often performed simultaneously in postcolonial literature as a strategy for indigenisation.

One pattern that becomes apparent with a brief review of postcolonial ecocriticism is how subtly influential Richard Grove's book *Green Imperialism* has been for the field. So many "postcolonial ecocritics" seem to take his points as premises for their own work.³⁶ This may be, as Beth Fowkes Tobin argues, that "the role of agriculture is under-theorised in the study of colonial expansion" (10) and the few writers who do take these concerns seriously are duly cited. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, George Handley, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, Graham Huggan, Helen Tiffin, Mimi Sheller, and others offer quotations from Grove's work to back up claims of the centrality of the colonial experience to modern symbolic appropriations of the environment. In general, where they differ is in their emphases. While Grove labours to prove this centrality, postcolonial ecocritics take this and insist on the importance of environmental concerns from the earliest "postcolonial" documents, most often contrasting indigenous concerns with colonial ones. The complication that Grove introduces (and which is rarely dealt with by postcolonial ecocritics) is how much colonial attitudes to the environment were shaped by the colonial experience – including, crucially, influence from local, native wisdom of flora and fauna – so that, so-called Western thought, is consequently polluted and contaminated with myriad so-called indigenous or "non-western" epistemologies and the so-often unacknowledged

³⁶ Beth Fowkes Tobin cites "recent work in the history of science [...] as] exceptions to the lack of interest among imperial historians in colonial agricultural practices" (206). Her bibliography to this end features Richard Drayton's *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the "Improvement" of the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 2000; and, Richard Grove's *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens, and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge University Press), 1995. She also cites Lucille Brockway's *Science and Colonial Expansion: The Role of the British Botanic Gardens* (New York: Academic Press), 1979, describing it as pioneering.

contributions of non-western ways of knowing. In addition, the tropics indeed provided massive laboratories for documenting the environmental destruction that was so often a corollary to damagingly exploitative colonial systems for wealth extraction.

What this means, for me, is that a facile rejection of all things “Western” will be a misguided task although we must constantly remember much indigenous knowledge was lost and unfairly and horribly appropriated. One of the tasks, then, is to liberate that knowledge, via critical appraisal, and disseminate it, showing how so much depends on the encounter with the new and does not originate exclusively from some magical, Northern, metropolitan environment. By keeping this in mind I hope not to dichotomise entities within the colonial world in a facile way. I thereby maintain an appropriate level of complexity when considering archipelagic literatures of very diverse regions.

1.3.3 Universal Knowledge is Divorced from the Local

“Universal knowledge [is necessarily] divorced from the local ...” (47), says Peter Hulme in his useful essay on postcolonial futures; contemporary scholarship attempts to address this apparent incommensurability by incorporating theories of globalisation and cosmopolitanism into postcolonial studies, but this claim is another well-founded assumption; it has much to do with postcolonial practice. Critics of postcolonial practice have pointed to a troubling tendency within the field to analyse historically specific cultural formations and then extrapolate the results into the realm of general theory as if the analysis could really hold in completely alien contexts.

Jean Franco articulates this problem for Latin American literature; he finds that Latin American literature is too often analysed as if it can only belong to one of two paradigms: either it is read, à la Frederic Jameson, as national allegory or – for those that do not satisfy this category – the postmodern. For Franco, this is a problem because it conceals the fact that these categories are themselves derived from other literary works themselves specific to a distinct context. As such, Franco intimates that such

analysis cannot simply be extended to all other novels of that nation, let alone region.

For Franco,

[...] extrapolation reduces the complexity of intertextual allusions and deprives texts of their own historical relations to prior texts. It implies a view of Latin American literature either in opposition to the metropolis or as part of the metropolis's postmodern repertoire [...] yet novels] defy facile recuperation as national allegory or as the postmodern, [and] demand readings informed by cultural and political history. (135-36)

The word *extrapolation* that Franco uses is particularly resonant here for this thesis on comparison, because it points to the great danger that lies in comparing entities via a universalist paradigm: instances of specific significance may turn out to be in fact singular occurrences and therefore falsely extrapolatory.

Franco offers a cogent critique of both Frederic Jameson's "third-world novel-as-national-allegory" as well as Benedict Anderson's "imagined communities"; he shows how these large understandings of the relationship of the novel to nation inadequately classify and group *Latin American* literature's complexity; at the same time, he implicitly offers another large category - that of region: Latin America. Franco's warning is useful for this thesis which traffics in comparison, and the term *extrapolation* he uses is quite relevant for this thesis; however, it is striking that Franco decries general categorisations and can yet refer to the literature he describes as *Latin American*. That is, Franco does not reveal that the regional category itself might be a problematic descriptor. Instead, he implies that the diverse works that somehow fall under the category *Latin American* are well served by that descriptor. This, however, is not very clearly the case for any region of the world as Jahan Ramazani's work on transnational poetics so clearly articulates.³⁷

³⁷ See Ramazani's "A Transnational Poetics" in *American Literary History* 18(2) 2006: 332-359; see also his *The Hybrid Muse* (2001) for useful complications of the use of the national descriptor.

Work in transnational scholarship in the last two decades has renewed interest in literary works that travel and signify differently in various places around the world. Under these conceptions, what really counts as national literature? What does it now mean to invoke the nation when talking about literature? These questions are dealt with more fully in Chapter Two; it should suffice to say at this point that this thesis is interested in such questions insofar as the writers themselves, or those receiving the works, have explicit or implicit strategies for performing or invoking the nation or region as a whole.

One way of dealing with this inherent extrapolation is to focus on common subjectivities within the literature and draw strategic analogies or solidarities between discrete entities from different regions. In her work in postcolonial feminist theory and the nation, *Stories of Women*, Elleke Boehmer also warns against *extrapolation*. She offers a useful articulation of relationality that, while specifically applied to feminist theory, is of great value to this discussion. For Boehmer, simply “interpreting the world in terms of the self, forgetting that cultures are fields of interrelationship that exist in dialogue” is the methodological risk that comes with “assertion[s] of locale and particularity” that are “often proffered as a countervailing force to globalising tendencies” (13). This is why Boehmer recommends instead a “qualified, relational” strategy; which, in her view, allows both “respect for the specificity of historical differences” and allows “a relational, global process” to unfold that permits “inter-subjective exchange and cross-category comparatism” (13).

The “relational approach” Boehmer identifies allows [women] *both* to proclaim the specificity of their particular historical experience, *yet also* to affirm common interests and political transformations across cultural and national borders, as they act from a commitment to social justice for those constructed “woman” (13). Boehmer’s work specifically describes the particularities and solidarities offered through the

category of gender, which she shows, has been generally neglected or dismissed within postcolonial theory as if subordinate to categories of nation or class.³⁸ Boehmer demonstrates not only that this should not be so, but that gender is just as crucial for the emancipatory projects of nation-states as any other category, and in fact, should not be separated as if distinct from them. In a similar way, then, the relational manner of viewing might be applied to national or regional literatures – acknowledging their distinct and discrete performances, while revealing shared performative strategies and solidarities across the seas.

It is easy to trace the provenance of Boehmer's theory. Her use of relational modes of interpreting texts and insistence on mediating the particular with the universal, reveal the unmistakable imprint of Édouard Glissant to whom she is apparently intellectually indebted. Glissant's theories are incredibly influential within the field of postcolonial studies, and, postcolonial ecocriticism, and yet he is often not explicitly invoked. My understanding of Glissant is necessarily mediated through translation and also greatly influenced by the reading of Glissant that Peter Hallward offers in his book, *Absolutely Postcolonial*. Édouard Glissant's theories also impinge on this thesis through the work of Elizabeth DeLoughrey, whose methodological approach is excitingly germane to my own.³⁹

Glissant's articulations of a "poetics of relation" (*Poetics*) and his insistence on the "tout monde" or "whole world" as a universal category while at the same time invoking Caribbean "opacity," are some of the methodological nuances explored in this thesis. Glissant's usefulness for postcolonial ecocriticism in particular (as separate from

³⁸ In *Stories of Women*, paraphrasing Homi Bhabha's essay "DessmiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," Elleke Boehmer criticises those who claim, following Bhabha, that "the homogenising 'pedagogies' of the prescriptive national 'master-discourse' are ceaselessly fractured by the performative interventions of those on its margins" (8). Boehmer is quick to point out that this articulation universalises the marginal as simply multiple signs of "difference" (8).

³⁹ Particularly germane is DeLoughrey's *Roots and Routes: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*. While this text has been most useful in terms of articulating a workable methodology for investigating the texts of archipelagos under examination here, I argue later that this work nevertheless does not provide much of a historical justification for comparison that my thesis labours to provide, and comes across, despite its cogent, well-informed analyses, as somewhat arbitrary in establishing its grounds for comparison.

postcolonialism or ecocriticism respectfully) is notable. This is because Glissant takes on concepts and terminology of “Totality,” the “concrete Unity of the earth,” and even “Planetary Thought” which have especial resonance to this field (Hallward 71). While some of Glissant’s most influential critics – such as J. Michael Dash and Celia Britton – have laboured to demonstrate Glissant’s affinity with postcolonial theory, it has been compellingly argued that Glissant’s work – especially his later work – may, in fact, be broadly opposed to the current postcolonial consensus advocating increasingly greater specificity in postcolonial scholarship (Hallward). That is, Glissant provides a useful corrective to postcolonial theory in this regard.

Peter Hallward, in a cuttingly insightful yet somewhat underappreciated book, *Absolutely postcolonial: writing between the singular and the Specific*, reveals “the very real dangers of *over*-contextualisation” and offers some discussion of why this is so underappreciated by critics (39). Hallward clearly spells out two real problems with over-contextualisation and specification: he declares that “it should be obvious that mere insistence on particularity (on the thisness of things) cannot resolve any *theoretical* question whatsoever” (39). But he also reveals the link between the nearly unqualified affirmations of locality and specificity and, “exuberantly nativist essentialism” (36-37). Hallward argues that there is only a small step to jump between celebrations of cultural specificity or “bland contextual respect,” and literary judgement based on cultural authenticity – a form of literary assessment that postcolonial criticism incessantly disavows (37). In Réda Bensmaïa’s phraseology:

What has long struck me was the nonchalance with which the work of these writers was analyzed. Whenever these novels were studied, they were almost invariably reduced to anthropological or cultural case studies. Their literariness was rarely taken seriously. And once they were finally integrated into the deconstructed canon of world literature, they were made to serve as tools for political or ideological agendas. This kind of reading resulted more often than not in their being reduced to mere signifiers of other signifiers, with a total disregard

for what makes them literary works in and of themselves.
(6)

This tendency has been noted by, among others, Rey Chow – who quotes Bensmaïa – and takes the Eurocentrism inherent to the comparative method to task in her essay “The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies: A Post-European Perspective.” For Chow, dividing the literature into discrete entities by nation or language is to subscribe, however unconsciously, to the European “grid-of-intelligibility” she labels, “Europe and its Others” (294). For Chow, this demonstrates the “politics of comparison,” in which literature is defined in the manner it is “understood in Europe, and historical variations are often conceived of in terms of other cultures’ welcome entries into or becoming synthesized with the European tradition” (294). In other words, Europe forms the grid-of-reference to which other literatures are added “in a subsequent and subordinate fashion” (294).

Moreover, sadly lost in scholarship crudely advocating increasing specificity is the grander view portrayed in Glissant’s notion of the *tout monde*, or the *whole world*. That universal knowledge is divorced from the local and specific then is an assumption that several theorists have set out to challenge; this thesis attempts to capture something of that grander view, with regard to Caribbean and Southeast Asian archipelagic literary texts. Glissant’s insistence on the “opacity” of the specific culture of the Caribbean is considered together with its mode of relation to other regions, texts, cultures. Coupling this relationality with regard to the strategies of indigenisation within the two regions highlights specific areas where postcolonial theory alone might wilfully misread texts according to bias derived from its own immanent logic. I invoke Glissant’s nuanced reading of opacity and the poetics of relation in Chapter Three to open the discussion of colonial versus postcolonial methods of comparison.

A recent book on postcolonial diasporas makes the claim that “[i]t is notable that in exploring the legacy of empire, postcolonial research has tended to focus on

individual nations rather than on investigating comparative links between empires.” (Keown *et al.*, 1). While alternative models and methodologies, including that of diaspora, exist for engaging different imaginary structures within the logic of comparison,⁴⁰ postcolonial theory still appears to be the dominant methodological perspective for viewing the archipelagic regions in question. And even when postcolonialism is not explicitly invoked or adopted, it is remarkable how studies of the literature in of both archipelagic regions overwhelmingly privilege readings of *resistance* these works show.

Lawrence Buell’s theorisations of environmental literature reveal how biological metaphors and concepts are increasingly being employed to explain certain literary phenomena. William Slaymaker’s useful summary of Buell’s work reveals how, more and more, scientific or other ostensibly non-literary aspects of environmentalism are considered applicable to understanding and interpreting literature. These candidate vantage points have informed this thesis, but the postcolonial injection into ecocriticism demands that one ask what is at stake and from what location one speaks in representations of nature and the resultant effects of these representations on human and non-human populations.

The sort of grand geopolitical theorising is precisely the purview of Pheng Cheah’s critical elaborations. Cheah outlines the motives of comparison in his introductory essay to a special issue of *Diacritics* addressing the influential work of Benedict Anderson. Cheah describes the “ground of comparison” as *both* comparison’s objective basis *and* its motivation (3). According to Cheah, after the postcolonial critique, the old understanding of comparison has changed. It used to be that comparatists started with their own material or empirical situation (invariably Europe

⁴⁰ Notable methodologies include: Wai Chee Dimock’s appropriations of the scientific theory of “stochastic resonance,” and also “deep time”; “network theory,” See Jeremy Boissevian for a “reappraisal”; Deleuze and Guattari’s influential image of the rhizome (which many subsequent theorists adopt, including Édouard Glissant, Paul Gilroy, and Elizabeth DeLoughrey, themselves influential for their own derivative models), Margaret McFadden’s “telegraph cable,” and Harold Bloom’s “theory of influence,” among others.

was doing the comparing here) and *other* cultures provided an opportunity of confirming or disconfirming Western perceptions of their own culture (and as Said perhaps most famously has shown these perceptions were invariably calculated to demonstrate the cultural superiority of the comparing nation or culture). In this way, Cheah categorises past comparative models as “undeniably Eurocentric” because the “starting point of comparison [was] always from Europe or the North Atlantic” and comparison had the effect of “affirm[ing] a certain idea of Europe as a world historical model” – that is, it was teleological, with Europe as Telos (3). With this understanding in place, Cheah then asks if it is possible to “re-envision” the grounds of comparison without “presupposed geographical or cultural areas that are a priori distinct and to be compared” (4). This is where Cheah’s analysis intersects with this thesis. Cheah questions the role postcolonial studies has played in this critique of comparison:

This has also been a fundamental problem of the comparative study of culture in general and postcolonial studies in particular which have also called for the decentering of Europe. If attempts at rectifying the problem in those fields have thus far not succeeded, it may be because their theoretical articulations and attempted resolutions of the problem have focused on critiques of Eurocentrism and pronouncements about hybrid conditions and postcolonial counter modernities, when what is needed is work of genuine comparative reach; detailed and empirically grounded research on particular regions outside the North Atlantic; and a theoretically sophisticated understanding of the complexity of material culture and social-scientific evidence. (17)

It may be significant to note that this essay of Cheah’s is published in 1999. And while I feel Cheah’s prescription here is broadly affirmative of the motivations of my project, many years have passed since that time. However, I fear the grand shift in perspective, even within postcolonial studies which champions such moves, can not be said to have taken root. Indeed, Cheah’s own position regarding the work of critical

theory, and postcolonial studies in particular – articulated some twelve years later – remains largely unchanged:

Despite its self-proclaimed radicality, the tacit frame of reference of critical theory regardless of how it is defined remains firmly in the North Atlantic. For at least two decades, it has been the task of postcolonial theory, loosely termed, to remind critical theory of its Eurocentric limits and to point to different forms of theorization that may arise in colonial and postcolonial space. Postcolonial theory then can be considered as the creolization of theory insofar as it seeks, broadly speaking, to examine how philosophical ideals and critical concepts are transformed when they are activated in spaces with social and political histories that are different from the North Atlantic. The question, however, is whether or not postcolonial theory itself is attentive enough to the ever-changing present [...] (“Crises” 83)

What Cheah calls the “creolization of theory” is the ostensible work of postcolonial studies: the shifting of the frame of reference from the Eurocentric North Atlantic. As the ellipsis indicates (not part of the original) the institution of this shift remains an as-yet-unrealised possibility.

After “witnessing” the attack on the US twin towers in September of 2001 and the subsequent US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, Neil Lazarus asks whether these events signalled a net-failure on the part of postcolonialism and academia in general to affect world policy at all (“After the Invasion”). He castigates methods in postcolonial studies that fail to address the very real processes of imperialism on the ground, instead concerning themselves with largely obfuscatory concepts that take the focus off of material concerns:

Despite the fact that what they think and write about in their professional capacities is the relationship between peoples, communities and cultures situated at different and differentially structured points in the modern world system, scholars in postcolonial studies have consistently failed to recognise the unremitting actuality and indeed the intensification of imperialist social relations in the times and spaces of the postcolonial world. (16)

This is a legitimate charge. The problem is echoed implicitly in Rey Chow's sentiment that Dipesh Chakrabarty's project of "provincializing Europe" is still a glimmer at this stage (296).⁴¹ And thus, while comparative projects are offered that are ostensibly representative of the Global South – some that are, I reiterate, incredibly germane to my project (such as DeLoughrey's work on Caribbean and Pacific Island archipelagoes to which I will return in subsequent chapters, or Lionnet and Shih's theoretical project and editorial work on "minor transnationalism") – these projects are still conceived of as asserting methodologies in contradistinction to that of a hegemonic West or as if they merely exist to provide an alternative to a Western-derived episteme.⁴² As such, even in their opposition to the West they necessarily position it as ultimate object of inquiry.⁴³ In contrast to these types of projects, this thesis places in comparison archipelagic entities within the Global South without privileging colonial mediation. This is why I inhabit here a specifically comparative methodology and refuse to treat the literary works as exemplary *resistances*.

The implication of this politics of comparison for Hulme's premise is that, while the universal category is in actuality a particular one that does not rise organically from the products it purportedly describes, simply taking the national as an instance of local focus does not actually surpass "the straits of Eurocentric thinking" to which postcolonial studies is so opposed (42). This also complicates our understanding of the insights of the seminal postcolonial thinkers outlined in the previous section. The national "solution" provided by Fanon, is not so easily attainable, as the idea of the "native" becomes a contestable term in many postcolonial societies, especially when

⁴¹ See Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton UP), 2000.

⁴² For example, DeLoughrey coopts Brathwaite's "theory" of tidalectics in contradistinction to the Hegelian dialectic, but offers no real engagement with Hegel; instead the simple fact of *opposition* or *resistance* to the Western model suffices to warrant adoption. As such, the term ends up remaining amorphous – no doubt also evocative and suggestive – but in the end, perhaps not having any remarkable material consequences for lived postcolonial experience. See my discussion of *Roots and Routes* in the next two chapters.

⁴³ See Barbara Christian's essay "The Race for Theory" for a trenchant critique of this tendency to ironically "re-reify" the canonical dead white male authors in the attempt at deconstructing the Western canon.

neocolonialism becomes an issue – that process whereby colonial processes and structures are extended beyond independence into the preserve of native elites.

In Hulme's case, he cites three laudable examples of potential "postcolonial globality" (53). Hulme's desire is for "some version of a global perspective" that does not "[betray] its local commitments" (54) but, he cautions, these instances may be fleeting. The problem that Hulme identifies then, is that focusing on the specific and local has always been the perceived strength of postcolonialism; therefore analyses that attempt to describe large swaths of territory or history or culture, would seem to forgo that advantage. And yet some form of global thinking that maintains postcolonial commitments is desired – especially in this day and age when the consequences of humankind's actions and lifestyles in the world seem ever more *shared*. And while this cosmopolitan version of postcolonialism may be desired, there are legitimate reasons to be suspicious of such a formation. As political scientist Charlotte Epstein writes, "the challenge becomes how to mobilize the particular and the local, in their infinite richness, as sites for deploying a form of theorizing that, by way of this grounding, seeks to avert the pitfalls of a universalization that was a key historical driver of colonization in the first place" (298).

Among the stronger reasons postcolonialism might be suspicious of comparison is for the embarrassing fact of comparison's colonial genealogy. This thesis attempts to explain how this anti-specific, pro-comparative strain is mandated by the historical conditions of both the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia. It makes the claim that, to understand the specificity of the regions in question, a comparative dimension must be included in the investigation. And rather than champion the exceptionalism or singularity of the situations of concern, a generalised comparative project is necessary to approach the regions whereby points of incongruence indicate sites of useful or overlooked knowledge about the literatures and societies in question.

* * *

In the following two chapters, I first explore models for comparison of the two regions in question, before then exploring the particular *colonial* imaginary that succeeded in bringing the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia – two very different parts of the world – together within the same intellectual frame. I will then demonstrate how exploring this connection complicates contemporary attempts at postcolonial comparative projects.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE – SOUTHEAST ASIA AND THE CARIBBEAN IN THE CRITICAL FRAME

National literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach.

– Eckermann, *Conversations with Goethe* (204)

National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension.

– Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (247)

Before approaching a more explicit comparison of actual texts from the two specific regional categories, Maritime Southeast Asia (colonially apprehended as the “Malay Archipelago”) and the Caribbean, about which this thesis is concerned, I will introduce some problems of literary comparison in general. This is also to address the initial question as to why consider comparison in regional terms at all.

The first section of this chapter presents some complications and recent debates over the legitimacy of using the national category to describe literature, and examines proposals for alternative comparative projects. It investigates the validity of Goethe’s remark in the epigraph as recorded by Eckermann on the unmeaningness of the national category for literature. The next two sections present arguments against using overarching explanatory frameworks in general. The penultimate section responds to these complaints and demonstrates ways some frameworks can be useful when used in particular ways. The last section of this chapter presents the specific theoretical or methodological perspective utilised in this thesis (postcolonial ecocriticism) alongside some justifications for making the specific regional comparison pursued in the thesis as a whole.

As I reiterate throughout this thesis, conventional or popular theoretical frameworks today simply ignore a specific comparison of the literary products of the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia. Or worse, they may consider this comparison an inappropriate object of study. It is part of the task and challenge of this thesis to prove that this comparison is not inappropriate but, in fact, valid and useful.

Recurring in arguments today within the discipline of postcolonial studies is a simple call for greater and greater specificity. A standard conclusion when discussing theories is to declare that they result only in problematic constructions and no neat category exists for conceiving these regions together. I want to argue instead for the benefit of a general comparison, even to the point of considering analogy, especially when it concerns a comparison of the literary products of the Caribbean and Southeast Asian archipelagoes.

But first, how are we to think about literature of the Southeast Asian and the Caribbean Archipelagoes, without inventing the category for this purpose? Would the texts of these two regions simply consist of the sum total of literature emerging from the nations of which they are composed? If we take this premise, difficulties immediately arise. For example, would this include texts by writers who identify with these regions but who live and write for audiences outside them? Just what purpose does describing a text as “Indonesian” or “Jamaican” really serve?

2.1 Comparative Literature and the Link between Nation and Text

In literary studies of recent decades a renewed critique of ostensibly *given* cultural and geographical borders has emerged.⁴⁴ According to this critique, the unproblematic invocation of notions of national or regional difference that once sufficed when comparing geographically and culturally distinct literatures is revealed as the gross assumption upon which such comparison rests.⁴⁵ Consider how historically, denotatively, and practically, the mysterious term *literature* – especially when coupled with a national or regional qualifier (Caribbean literature, Southeast Asian fiction, Malaysian Literature in English, Singaporean Poetry, *etc.*) – is apparently meant to offer

⁴⁴ See for example, Wai Chee Dimock’s use of the concept of “Deep Time,” Peter Hulme’s discussion of “Allegories of the Globe,” or Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* all of which attempt to theorise alternative frames to the nation for thinking about literature and culture.

⁴⁵ Some scholars are incredulous about the novelty of this idea (Kadir). After all, Wellek and Warren had already remarked, in 1949, on “the obvious falsity of idea of a self-enclosed national literature” (49). That this critique is suddenly in vogue again, especially in the US, may comment more on Western literary assumptions than anything else.

a representation of specific geographical entities. So often is such phraseology employed that its absurdity is obscured. Wai Chee Dimock has pointed out, in “Deep Time” how the assumption in this usage is so often unacknowledged that, almost by default, literature becomes “an effect, an epiphenomenon” of the nation, “territorially predicated and territorially describable” (755).

While indeed concealing a great deal of assumption, the apparently tacit acceptance of national representation in terminology linking region and nation with literature may not be as new or shocking as Dimock seems to imply. One merely has to consider the etymology of the word “literature.” As Susan Bassnett and others have documented, literature, *in its current denotative sense* arose with the genesis of the modern European nation-state in the 19th Century.⁴⁶ Early theorists and practitioners of what was to become the field of comparative literature, including famously, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, all would have been using the word “literature” in the historical context of proximity to the new national formations in Europe.

Hutcheson Posnett, a nineteenth-century Irish academician, distinguishes Græco-Roman definitions of literature with his own nineteenth-century meanings in his book *Comparative Literature*, saying: “they [Greeks and Romans] did not intend to convey the idea of a body of writings representing the life of a given people” and did not need “a word to express the general body of their writings as representing a *national* development” (6). Demonstrating Græco-Roman ideas of literature by negation, that is, by what they were not, Posnett gives an indication of what literature actually meant in *his* historical moment: national expression.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ See Hutcheson Posnett, *Comparative Literature* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench), 1886; Susan Bassnett, *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (London: Blackwell), 1993; or Tzvetan Todorov. In “The Notion of Literature” – an article first published in *New Literary History* in 1973 – Todorov writes that, “[i]n the European languages the word literature, in its present usage, is quite recent: it barely dates back to the nineteenth century” (1).

⁴⁷ Posnett, incidentally was among the first to use the term “comparative literature” in the English Language. See Susan Bassnett’s chapter, “How Comparative Literature Came into Being” for a brief genealogy of the term in Western Europe. Wellek and Warren, in their *Theory of Literature* claim it is Matthew Arnold, translating Ampère’s use of “*historie comparative*,” who first used the term in English (46).

Indeed, many scholars, drawing on Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*, aim to resuscitate an international or transnational dimension in their studies – from Edward Said to Frederic Jameson to Rey Chow – or to employ a large, theoretical framework as a universal set within which the Literatures in question can be drawn together, the dimensions of their intersection explored.⁴⁸ While critiques of Posnett's type of comparative project have arisen much earlier than scholars like Dimock might seem to imply,⁴⁹ there is something new in the returned awareness of the artificiality of the link between literature and state. More than just a neo-liberal (or neo-Goethean) push among North American academicians to theorise the notion of "World Literature" (a remarkable endeavour with suspiciously imperialistic overtones today) the mere possibility of bringing diverse regions into dialogue offers a curious but compelling project that implies the existence of a larger binding unity – a new and contemporary desire for unity.

But was this really Goethe's idea? Goethe, we must first recall, advocated a new kind of literary relation that privileged translators as agents for exchanging works of national traditions. Goethe's quote, taken from Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe in the Last Years of his Life*, used as an epigraph above, indicates his progressive vision of a new literary world order: "national literature is now a rather unmeaning term; the epoch of world literature is at hand, and everyone must strive to hasten its approach" (204). For Goethe, *Weltliteratur* meant "international literature," in which each nation had autonomous traditions which were then translated and shared, providing inspiration for each one's national literature. This meaning may still be alluded to in contemporary usage but it does not describe current literary practice or spread. Goethe predicted

⁴⁸ For example, in his foreword to Retamar's *Caliban and other Essays*, Jameson writes, "in any case, the new global system demands some new conception of 'comparative literature,' or of 'world literature,' as Goethe called it: a need sometimes obscured or blotted out by cultural – including a specifically *theoretical* – imperialism, in which a common canon of Western modernist and theoretical texts seem slowly to cover the world. Goethe's original concept of 'world literature' had nothing to do with eternal invariants and timeless forms, but very specifically with literary and cultural journals read across national boundaries and with the emergence of critical networks by which the intellectuals of one country inform themselves about the specific intellectual problems of another" (xi).

⁴⁹ See Djelal Kadir or Harish Trivedi for arguments against the suggestion of novelty by Dimock.

fulsome networks of translation and exchange. The type of East and West Indies comparison I am attempting here however might be stretching Goethe's geographies to the extreme (especially as it suggests a network outside of Europe). Goethe's conception is idealistic, and it is not immune to critique even in geographically and politically updated versions.

In her essay on translation and the new world literature, for example, Rebecca Walkowitz summarises the arguments against world literature in the neo-Goethean sense. "It is often assumed that texts are being translated into English and that the process of translation leads to cultural as well as political homogenisation" (216). Walkowitz summarises the argument of scholars like Gayatri Spivak, and Emily Apter, whose anti-translation logic runs like this: because readers need to learn fewer languages, and translations avoid vernacular particularities and cultural-linguistic references, *cultural* homogenisation results (216). She uses Brennan's work on "the cuts of language" to present the concomitant argument that *political* homogenisation results from the market of World Literature's eliminating distinctions between works and determining what stories can be shared (216). Walkowitz acknowledges the power of this tendency to convert works of disparate regions to a singular vision of one imperialistic, universalising over-determining agent. She examines scholars like Franco Morretti and David Damrosch who critique phenomenology (the performance of the book) over ontology (how the book was written); but for Walkowitz – alluding to the old axiom from developmental biology – "ontology recapitulates phenomenology" (218). In other words, the power of this new world literary economy is such that the authors are complicit in production of "transnational fiction," or what Walkowitz labels

“comparison literature” – “fiction for which global comparison is a formal as well as a thematic preoccupation” (218).⁵⁰

The authors considered in this thesis might satisfy this condition in their own ways: José Rizal invokes an explicit call to comparison in the preface of his novel between the Philippines and Europe; Jean Rhys reveals a dying world and subjectivity that highlights fundamental ethnic differences between Old and New worlds; Alejo Carpentier conjures forth an alternative reality to that of positivistic twentieth Century white Europe; Ishak Haji Muhammad contrasts Malays with the British but also the urban with the country-dwellers; and both Wilson Harris and Lloyd Fernando sublimate diverse elements to appeal to a utopian alternative for the future with regional implications.

The practice of this sort of contemporary literature then already explicitly flouts simple boundaries by nation, and presents many complications for the idea of national literature. Of course, not all contemporary literature can be classified as such, and there are many writers who consciously write for a national audience; there are even, very commonly, writers who address a local subset of readers within that national framework to the exclusion of others of the same nationality. In these cases, the author might be said to be actually creating the conditions for a national literature. But a hypothetical example of this sort, far from cementing or proving the existence of a discrete and isolable entity called national literature, merely highlights its profound contingency. If we can admit this example, we must then accept that one can *choose* to write “national literature” depending on one’s implied reader or the constitution of one’s actual readership, independent of authorial intention. Indeed, developments in reader response

⁵⁰ Evidence justifying the classification of this new type of literature is provided by the new international authors who actually write for an international audience. As an example, consider, Kazuo Ishiguro, who has revealed in interviews that, due to correspondence with a reading group in Norway, he now also has a Norwegian audience in mind (among others) when he writes, so that he subconsciously, or sometimes quite consciously, writes in ways that might be more intelligible for that group in addition to his British, American and other readers.

theory and intentionalism in the philosophy of literature have better articulated the idea that it is possible for an author writing to a very specific group or audience within her own country to compose a work that performs or communicates something other than what was explicitly or consciously intended. In this sense, the work of one national author might have a profound influence on the national literature of another author of completely different nationality. To consider this is also to privilege phenomenology over ontology. And indeed the tendency to interpellate and appeal to members of a national community is manifestly characteristic of the work of postcolonial writers, of the sort considered in this thesis, especially. Despite this, postcolonial nation-states have a hand in influencing or even dictating what constitutes “national literature,” often minimally distinguished by language, to the point of relegating work in non-authorised languages to the marginalised or subordinate category of “sectional literatures” or its equivalent.

Rey Chow is invoked in the introduction to this thesis because of her crucial work on literary comparison. To quickly reiterate her claims, the tendency to belatedly apply a national descriptor onto the word novel so that we look for the “Brazilian novel” or the “Malaysian novel” or the “West Indian” novel is to import a framework based on a European form that developed out of the specific socio-historical conditions of Europe. Wellek and Warren’s famous attempt to theorise Literature was issued alongside the claim that, “it is important to think of literature as a totality” and that “Western Literature forms a whole...” (“Old/New” 49). Rey Chow calls this formulation “Europe and Its Others”; by this she means that Europe became a Grid-of-Reference to which others (by nation, or country, as this is the preferred unit) are added in subsequent and subordinate fashion (294). What Chow locates here is the politics of comparison. As an illustration she observes that the novel, when outside Europe, is invoked with a national or ethnic qualifier. And therefore she concludes that, not only is

the paradigm, “Europe & its Others” fully in play but the project of “provincializing Europe” (in Dipesh Chakrabarty’s eponymous study) is still far off on the horizon. Moreover, agreeing with Réda Bensmaïa, who deplores the tendency to treat non-Western literatures as anthropological case studies over strict works of literature, Chow critiques the way imaginative literature finally ends up being employed along predetermined political and ideological ends. In this framework, the literariness of non-Western literatures is readily overlooked.

The fact of appropriating an imported model does not mean that the national context is flouted as a descriptive category however. Neither does this mean that nothing new can come of these “cultural appropriations”; in fact, many things have so emerged, so that – as Jahan Ramazani declares in *The Hybrid Muse* – judging from prize winners and the new literary landscape, “much of the most vital writing in English has come from Britain’s former colonies in the so-called Third World” (1). What this does indicate however is that it is a prescriptive and ideological move to carve out national territory within such a transnational and global phenomenon as literary production.

Other complications for the project of describing national literatures include authors with multiple national allegiances, and authors whose ideas and styles circulate far beyond their country-of-birth. One has to think only of writers such as Henry James to realise how international (in this case transatlantic) many authors can really be. In this particular example, defining James’s work simply as “[US] American” would not usefully or fairly represent his work. Such realities have encouraged scholars to look back even further – before the contemporary era of instantaneous global communication – at literature that has been too easily categorised and described as national. This literature is interrogated afresh without employing explicit national bias. What results is that many scholars and critics find these national categories inadequate.

If even avowedly national authors of the Western canon are now seen in a broader perspective, how much more are many postcolonial authors disserved by the national tag? In *The Hybrid Muse*, Jahan Ramazani points out how “criticism and anthologies tend to focus on a national or regional group of writers, such as West Indian poets, African poets, Indian poets” and subsequently a “poet like A. K. Ramanujan is almost always read as “Indian,” Louise Bennett as “Jamaican” or “West Indian,” Okot p’Bitek as “African,” “East African,” or “Ugandan” (4-5). For Ramazani, these contexts are “indispensable, but they are not exhaustive” (5). For many postcolonial writers especially, hybridity is a key feature of their work and performance and this is often ignored when making recourse to national descriptors.

What does this mean for the Caribbean and Southeast Asian writers examined in this thesis? It means that always already, or by default, as it were, any novel that subscribes to this genre is not a pure cultural creation of the nation but partakes in conventions of genre and other conditions developed in other nations and which may be specific to those regions. It means that to persist in labelling Ishak Haji Muhammad’s novella “Malaysian” or “Malayan,” or even “Southeast Asian” is *partially* to employ a term of convenience.

The real problem with using national descriptors is that they encourage that tendency to ignore outside influences. In the process of mythologisation, nationalism eagerly repackages outside influences so that they appear to be endogenous. As A. D. Harvey writes in *Literature into History*, “[i]f our ultimate object is the understanding of a national artistic tradition in the context of a nation’s social history, we will need to be very sensitive to the extent, and also the limits, of foreign influences” (5). Harvey’s quote gives some indication of the dangers of tracing national influences on a writer’s work. It is possible to locate apparently national sources to the work that can extend

further beyond the nation, so the original source is proved to be elusive but definitely greater and therefore, outside, the nation.

Some writers and theorists persist in defending their identification with the nation in ideological ways (as opposed to strictly-descriptive ways). However, if not done with nuance, this position risks being taken as somewhat out-of-date, or worse irrelevant. This can be illustrated in an article, “Postcoloniality in Southeast Asia?” in which Shirley Lim comments on Muhammad Haji Salleh’s aesthetic politics. Shirley Lim writes:

Muhammad’s [...] nationalist postcolonial critique assumes [...] that the division [between the coloniser and the colonised] is psychologically transparent and containable in the universally understood paradigm of good nationalist and bad colonialist. The contemporary economic and social disturbances in post-Independence Algeria and the Caribbean states, however, demonstrate the inadequacy of such assumptions. We, even those of us who are not historians, who may be poets and fictionists, are no longer able to believe in a pure, innocent, undivided pre-colonial Eden; nor do we now enjoy, even under the most paternalistic of nationalist regimes, an undivided liberated consciousness. The mythifications of such pre-contact identities generated by nationalist authors like Muhammad possess little resonance and credibility among today’s skeptical globalized citizenry.
(3)

Lim’s gloss reveals several important assumptions in contemporary scholarship. First, that binary oppositions have long been discredited; interestingly, Lim invokes the experience of the Caribbean (and Algeria) to inform her critique of Muhammad’s Southeast Asian critical practice. Second, the new nation-state is as much involved in prescriptive representations of its people as the colonial regime was. Third, and most important for my argument here, the nation is not held up to be the sacrosanct ideal toward which the writer works. Salleh’s “mythifications,” as Lim calls them, work to legitimise the national teleologies of the nation-state and put art explicitly at the service of nation. For Salleh, this may be justification enough for a national laureate’s art. For

Lim, representing “today’s globalised skeptical citizenry,” it should never be assumed that the goals of writers and the work they produce naturally coincide with those officially articulated by the governmental opinions and policies of their nation.

Despite the wealth of anti-nationalist sentiment spewing from the halls of academe and the desires to adopt transnational, transatlantic, global, transpacific, circum-atlantic, postnational, postmodern, rhizomorphic methodologies for considering culture and literary production, the nation is still the favoured descriptor for discussing works of literature, especially in institutional or pedagogical contexts such as the course in World Literature. In “The National Longing for Form,” Timothy Brennan dates the resurgence of national description to World War Two, but critically adds how, “in a conveniently European lapse of memory, studies of nationalism have not only increased; they have for the most part condemned the thing they studied” (57). In ecocriticism, which by definition is suspicious of the artificiality of national borders, single-country approaches are still common (Buell “Ecoglobalist Affects” 228). Lawrence Buell offers some discussion as to why the nation remains a popular unit in ecocritical studies, and among other reasons, argues that the nation is just too heuristically convenient and institutionally entrenched a category to be easily dismissed (228).

Jahan Ramazani draws upon Etienne Balibar’s nominal distinctions between “*ethnos*, (the ‘people’ as an imagined community of membership and filiation) and *dêmos*, (the ‘people’ as collective subject of representation, decision making, and rights”) to articulate the complexity of the decision to use national labels in “Transnational Poetics”:

Because these national labels are made to serve disciplinary, ideological, and pedagogical functions, they often blur the distinction [between *ethnos* and *dêmos* ...] While literature, as Benedict Anderson shows in his book of the same name, helps fashion “imagined community,” or *ethnos*, poets, novelists, playwrights, and readers also

confound the boundaries of national and regional community, forging alliances of style and sensibility across vast distances of geography, history, and culture. (333)

The use of the national descriptor is a situation described by Thomas Bender who identifies it as part of an older literary perspective. In his *The Boundaries and Constituencies of History*, Bender writes, “the scholarly naturalisation of the nation as the exclusive form of significant human solidarity has obscured the multi-scaled experience of history that is clearer to us today” (271). In “Transnational Poetics” Jahan Ramazani critically reassesses this sentiment emphasising how this tendency to instate national alignments has not at all disappeared. Ramazani draws on his own surveys of recent anthologies to claim that it is “as if literary critics have been elegiacally recathecting the national at a time when the globalizing processes of a century ago have multiplied and accelerated” (334).

Because Southeast Asian archipelagic nations are institutionally divided and annexed by language domains that emerged from independent colonial traditions, on the official or national level, their literatures would seem to form from roughly autonomous national traditions in the postcolonial era. Because of the existence of these official national languages – Malaysia has a “national” language in Bahasa Malaysia; Tagalog is the politically dominant local language in the Philippines; Bahasa Indonesia, while related to Malaysia’s, has its own unique and august trajectory that was “modernised” much earlier, etc. – it would at first appear that their literatures would be relatively autonomous. But attempts to isolate and conclusively identify an endogenous literature (one coming from within) in any one country would be complicated by the shared regional experiences (in war for example, and the Japanese occupation) and the fact that each nations’ national literatures would be born from diverse and often syncretistic pre-colonial cultures in conjunction with anti-colonial and postcolonial literary developments that arise from coerced engagement with the imperial West.

Despite these complicating factors, as in many postcolonial cultures, a purposive attempt to found and identify a national tradition becomes part of the decolonising process. Often this national tradition is premised on a problematic conflation of *ethnos* and *dêmos* that can in the process subsume, sectional literatures and languages and occlude politically marginalised indigenous traditions justified by appeals to the nation and national rhetoric. All the writers considered in the later chapters of analysis in this thesis provide complex attempts to deal with these problems of representation in their works.

As an example of the tendency to locate national logic to literary tradition in the Southeast Asian context, consider twentieth century studies of literature in the region. Sahlan Mohd Saman's 1984 comparative study of Malaysian and the Philippines war novels engages with a specific conflation of both *dêmos* and *ethnos*. He is interested in discussing "the unconscious creative ability of the author – not of the individual writer or character, but of the race or culture" (113). Sahlan seeks to isolate "the ideas and perceptions" using the "yardstick of a Malayan race" (114).

Sahlan seeks to identify a creative racial or ethnic genius despite noting how, during the first few decades of local novel-writing in Malaysia and its neighbouring countries, "more similarities are to be found than differences" (112).⁵¹ The critic imports a postcolonial rubric of national difference to make sense of ostensibly ethnic literary products. The main point of comparison for Sahlan is the authors' shared "Second World War experiences," which would seem to resist national distinctions by instituting instead the theme and social experience of war, but is overridden by an institutional, and perhaps patriotic, ideology of nation (113).

⁵¹ These similarities include figuring a spatial, temporal, and moral divide between rural and city folk: "novelists usually took their rural settings from their peace-loving societies, and they considered towns like Manila, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore as polluted with dehumanizing factors" (Sahlan 112).

Ali A Wahab's study on the rise of the novel in Malaysia and Indonesia is notable in its comparison of the genesis of the novel in the "Malay Archipelago" (in specifically, Malaysia and Indonesia). Ali concludes that this tradition derives from a synthesis of *penglipur lara* tales, traditional *hikayat*, and western realistic novels. These essential components mixed to form a resultant "modern Malay prose style" (262).

Of interest in Ali's study is his use of the archipelago as a critical category, and his attempt to compare processes between and inside peninsular Malaysia and the archipelagic Indies. This is something that would later be attempted (by Muhammad Haji Salleh) in *nusanterism* or a coherent set of critical practices archipelagic in origin. The shared processes that led to the modern novel are said to be, in general, an indigenous tradition of storytelling (*penglipur lara*) and letters and romances from the Arabic tradition (*Hikayat*) that changed and further developed after contact with Europeans and the West.

As regards the Caribbean region, it is more problematic to simply assert that the postcolonial novel arose out of a confluence of indigenous and Western notions of literature. For one, more powerful than the history of syncretism in the region, especially for the island states of the Caribbean (in contrast to the continental Caribbean nations) is a persistent discourse of indigenous erasure. The discourse of indigenous erasure originates with colonial and conquistador incursions into Caribbean territory.⁵²

But in true neocolonial fashion, this discourse has transmogrified in the postcolonial period both academically – in Caribbean scholars' repeated inaccurate reference to the utter "extermination" or utter "annihilation" of indigenous peoples (Forte) – and also

⁵² The horrors of this incursion are perhaps most famously recounted by Bartolomé de las Casas in his *The Devastation of the Indies* a work that apparently originated after a moral challenge de las Casas experienced in a sermon by Fray Montesinos.

politically – in Creole usurpations of indigeneity under a philosophical logic of nationalism (Jackson).⁵³

This myth or discourse of indigenous erasure notwithstanding, Édouard Glissant's description in *Caribbean Discourse* of the “irruption into modernity” that characterises the Caribbean experience still holds as regards the literary history of the region (146). The European form was in many ways much more of an imported genre for many Caribbean writers, even if a “hybrid muse” was employed to a greater or lesser degree among its novelists and poets (Ramazani). The Afro-Caribbean experience outlined by Lamming is an early assessment of this feature. George Lamming critically observes in *Pleasures of Exile*, how “[t]he West Indian education was imported in much the same way that flour and butter are imported from Canada” (27).

It is not my intention to examine in great detail a comparative genesis of literary genres between both archipelagic and continental territories of Southeast Asia and Caribbean. But it is useful to offer at a minimum a cursory outline of each regions' concerns with regard to what might be apprehended as their indigenous literary traditions. In this thesis though, I want to register a scepticism of the use of the national descriptor by simultaneously invoking aspects of their production and interpretation identifiable within the national borders but also larger trans-national processes that require regional conceptions. By so doing, I hope to suggest a cognisance of the nation and its pervasive influence without limiting interpretation and significance to its borders alone. Given that the works I have selected in this thesis appear so close to the time of national independence, the influence of the national imaginary on these authors and works and readers and interpreters of them is not insignificant.

2.2 World Literature and other Alternatives to the National Category

⁵³ For a discussion of the continuation of indigenous erasure discourse from colonial through to (academic) postcolonial periods, see Maximilian Forte's essay “The Historical Trope of Anti-Indigeneity” (2005); For a study of the postcolonial Creole subject's recourse to philosophical discourses of labour in processes of nativisation, see Shona Jackson's *Creole Indigeneity* (2012).

Because too many problems exist with the conventional nation-based descriptions of literature to adopt it simply and unproblematically, we cannot simply take national expression as the primary, or indeed an objective of literature at all. The extreme alternative – that of a single “world literature,” also presents its difficulties.

As late as 2008 David Damrosch described the “waning of the hegemony of the national paradigm and the opening out of a burgeoning global perspective” that he finds auspicious for contemplating “the project of a history of world literature” (482).⁵⁴ It is extremely tempting to simply drop all of the historical, definitional problems and start with a simple and universal definition of literature, which all nations and sub-national groups participate in whether knowingly or not. But many scholars are keen on identifying differences and complications that oppose such ahistoricisations and that render the levelling effect of a single universal world literature problematic.

In a recent special issue of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, for instance, some members of the Warwick collective on World Literature organised a collection of essays on the topic of postcolonial engagements with World Literature. These scholars have identified a “failure” in the world literature paradigm insofar as comparative and postcolonial literary criticism has only belatedly begun to address world changes brought on by the dominance of capitalism (Graham et al. 465). Graham, Niblett, and Deckard forward the observation that literary studies has, for the most part, seemed to accept the language of “globalization” when engaging with these changes to the world-system and have failed to link economic and humanist critiques of the same with their own scholarship (465).

Rob Nixon has been quite forthright on the potential and evident failings of the expansion of scope promised in theories of “globalisation”:

⁵⁴ See also Wai Chee Dimock and Lawrence Buell’s edited collection *Shades of the Planet* (2007) for theorists heralding this change.

[...] I am leery of the widespread assumption that everything postcolonial studies has enabled can always be assimilated, without loss, to the more ambitious, more contemporary-sounding global studies. The notion of the straight swap—midsized postcolonial for supersized global—is too often accompanied by a blunting of the adversarial edge, the oppositional incisiveness, that has distinguished postcolonial work at its most forceful. (38)

For Nixon, “the categorical turn, in literary studies, to world literature” follows a similar tendency in the capitalist world-system, and so “often ends up deflecting attention away from the anti-imperial concerns that a materialist postcolonial studies foregrounded” (38). Nixon is thus cautious about sacrificing too much of the political dimension of literary critique in order to expand its geographical horizons according to capitalist world trends, or in Nixon’s words, “that neoliberal violence [is] not hastily euphemised as ‘global flows’” (38). Citing – with qualified approval – Wendell Berry’s caution on adopting the language and perspective of “planetary scale” to describe and address problems that are “actually private and small” (Berry 198), Nixon articulates the crucial challenge of “imaginatively and strategically render[ing] visible vast force fields of interconnectedness against the attenuating effects of temporal and geographical distance” (38).⁵⁵ For Nixon, ignoring larger scales is an “evasive” manoeuvre, and yet, there is a risk, when adopting the large scale, of losing political bite.

As I see it, there are two aspects of my project that contribute and intervene in this scholarship and theory that seeks to problematise the large analytical categories of national- and world-literary comparison. The first is of course, the model for comparison that I invoke and develop in Chapter Three, which I am identifying under the term “analogous structures,” that considers literature of the two regions in tandem. The second aspect of this project that appears salubrious, is the strategy of reading these literatures in tandem, that is, pairing and superimposing literatures to reveal sites of

⁵⁵ This is not to suggest Nixon decries attempts to extend geographical reach when properly situated. In his blurb praising the recent collection on *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development* Nixon praises “[t]he book’s geographical reach” as “unusual and impressive.”

productive incongruence and constructive interference. This latter analytical work appears in part two of this thesis.

My method in this thesis is to adopt a South-South focused, postcolonially- and ecocritically- inflected mode of comparison. The benefit of this approach is to move focus from privileged sites of Anglophone empire - which marginalizes the literatures that emerged under and in the wake of colonialism by other European empires. The other benefit is to combat the geographical and linguistic balkanisation of postcolonial studies by narrowing selection of works to linguistic domains.

Thus, in this study I purposely foreground the continental Caribbean of Wilson Harris, Zee Edgell, and also Alejo Carpentier, who – though Cuban and writing about Haiti in *El Reino de Este Mundo* – is conversant with a larger continental Hispanophone and Latin American literary and intellectual tradition, not to mention his intellectual and critical relationship with Europe (especially its Surrealist tradition). Jean Rhys, while writing of the island Caribbean, is arguably more ambiguously located in the Caribbean tradition and she also figures in Francophone and Anglophone metropolitan traditions.

While the works I consider by these Caribbean authors are admittedly already rather canonical works in postcolonial literary criticism, my study does acquire some novelty in examining these fairly canonical works with an ecocritical eye. My purpose in examining some major Caribbean texts is also partially an experiment to determine how well they stand up next to works less well-known (outside Southeast Asia). Thus, in addition to these (mostly Caribbean) canonical texts, I've included some arguably less canonical ones from Southeast Asia, that may not be as familiar to postcolonial literary studies (however unfairly and embarrassingly). Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, is the obvious misfit here. Despite being famous, however, were it not for a handful of prominent academic critics – most notably Benedict Anderson – the text would not be as well known as it is today outside the Philippines.

This sort of comparison is assisted by translations, which are, of course, an essential aspect of world literary comparison (from its earliest Goethean iterations) – and not just a supplement or corrective to language deficiencies. And thus, I advocate a new comparative methodology attentive to inequality of representation in the world literary and academic economy. In so doing, I have tried to move away from notions of the “west versus the rest” that have dominated postcolonial and ecocritical studies in particular. My methodology enables later efforts to take in texts from the archipelagoes with a wider and deeper reaching net.

One of the benefits of postcolonial ecocriticism, for which I partly use it here, is its implicit transnationalism. Gilroy writes in “A New Cosmopolitanism” of a *planetary consciousness* that works as a “critical orientation and oppositional mood,” and what triggers this orientation, for Gilroy is a “comprehension of the simple fact that environmental and medical crises do not stop at national boundaries, and by a feeling that the sustainability of our species is itself now in question” (290). At a time of ecological crisis, then, calls for postcolonial specificity of national context seem irrelevant or worse, irresponsible.

In this sense, postcolonial ecocriticism seems most corrective. Some scholars have already lamented the lack of transnationalist dimensions within postcolonial studies (Boehmer and Moore-Gilbert). But even in postcolonial ecocriticism a centre-periphery dynamic can diminish its vitality for contemporary scholarship. Pioneering work in transnational postcolonialism includes Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic* (1993), Robert Young’s *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (2003), and also Neil Lazarus’s work in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011) that (re)insists on a Marxist (and internationalist) materialism to postcolonial studies.

Several new methodologies for comparing literatures have surfaced in recent decades that render the idea of national difference explicitly problematic or else attempt

to characterise it as obsolete. While most trace their genealogy from Goethe's *Weltliteratur*, many such theories are wholly new creations or wholly new appropriations or interpretations of metaphors from other sciences.⁵⁶ The diversity of theories reveals something of the history of this scholarly fielding of alternative frameworks for explaining literature and literary movement across vast spaces. It is such theory that generates alternative methodological paradigms and forms the basis to contemporary academic developments such as transatlantic, transpacific studies, (and other trans-/circum-/inter- literary studies).

Many such theories have a common ancestor in the Deleuze and Guattari's celebrated concept of the rhizome (another biological appropriation). Paul Gilroy's seminal "Black Atlantic" as described in his book of the same name, is indebted to the idea of rhizomorphism. In his book, sociologist Paul Gilroy opposes "nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches" by adopting the Atlantic as a "single, complex unit of analysis"; he uses it "to produce an explicitly transnational and intercultural perspective" (15). Adopting the Atlantic as a conceptual space, Gilroy wishes to debunk "the romantic conceptions of "race," "people," and "nation" (34). Gilroy achieves this "rhizomorphic" approach reading from an Atlantic immune to national and ethnic boundaries even as it recognises them. Similar transatlantic perspectives grant a denaturalized, interstitial "third space" where the "contingencies and contours of local circumstance" are constantly re-conflated with "a transnational, 'migrant' knowledge" (Bhabha 214). As Deleuze and Guattari elaborate in *A Thousand Plateaux*, "Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organised, attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialisation down which it

⁵⁶ Influential methodologies and figurations include Wai Chee Dimock's *theory of stochastic resonance* (which she appropriates from the science of Physics). In this thesis I also implicitly advocate the use of biological metaphors as a way to explain literary movement and development because of their robust complexity and concrete examples. While I caution against taking these metaphors to extreme degrees, their usefulness should not be downplayed. For instance, Deleuze and Guattari have exploited biological metaphors to great influence and resonance in their work.

constantly flees” (228). Taking hint from these scholars, contemporary critics navigate putatively static fictions with a craft conscious of movement, flux and flow. Homi Bhabha, in *The Location of Culture*, seeks a “global analysis of culture” and one which emphasizes the “transnational attenuation of local space” (216). For these theorists then, not only is national or ethnic absolutism a limiting perspective but it is also a false one.

On the other hand, with too forceful an insistence on the post-national, models can overlook realities of disproportionate privilege across the economic divide. Some post-national imaginings are guilty of promoting a cosmopolitan detachment from national realities that is belied by the privileges bestowed them by virtue of capitalist hegemony that favours certain peoples and geographies over others. As Sharae Deckard rightfully insists in her editorial to *Green Letters*, we must “recognize the role that nation-states continue to play in the world-ecology, whether as buffers to the worst predations of global capitalism, or conversely, as compradors to multinational corporations and accomplices to the imposition of neoliberal policies of deregulation and privatization” (8).

A more explicit instance of transnational methods is found in Ursula Heise’s concept of eco-cosmopolitanism. In *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet* Heise argues for an *eco-cosmopolitanism*, an environmental world citizenship that acknowledges global impact and connectedness despite articulations of localism and place. Although Heise’s critique is specifically directed at North American environmental rhetoric of localism, her insistence on tempering the cultivation of a “sense of place” with a “sense of planet” provides a useful dynamic model of scalar simultaneity, a local-global interpenetration in place applicable in other contexts. The challenge, for Heise, is to demonstrate ecological and political awareness advocating on behalf of the more-than-human world from a connectedness rooted in larger, transnational, and global contexts, because the emphasis – at least in US environmentalist circles – has heretofore been on privileging

cultivated attachment to local, and immediate vicinities alone. “Rather than focusing on the recuperation of a sense of place,” she argues, “environmentalism needs to foster an understanding of how a wide variety of both natural and cultural places and processes are connected and shape each other around the world, and how human impact affects and changes this connectedness” (21).

Despite these global connections and processes that no doubt impinge upon the realities of the regions in question, so that the Caribbean and Southeast Asian archipelagoes are not shielded from the processes outside these regions, I want to yet acknowledge how responses to both local and global, internal and external may be compared between regions in ways that may offer productive insight. It may be useful to draw upon Patrick Murphy, in *Ecocritical Explorations*, who argues for localism “in orientation” (1) – that is, despite the motivations, and regardless of their volitionality, such actions nevertheless manifest themselves at the level of the local and particular even when presenting ramifications potentially global in scale. As he argues, “unique events [...] do not occur in isolation from other unique events but in solidarity with them through mutual participation in human culture and in the material world” (34). Murphy highlights the example of intentional communities (for example, the Indigenous Environmental Network) whereby “fundamental commonalities and threats” link geographically and otherwise disparate groups because of the shared resemblance of their “inhabitory practices” (38). The shared environmental constraints faced by the tropical archipelagic regions in question, then offer an implicit resemblance that might render cultural responses and formulations instructive for the other. In opening up the regions to a global logic that interprets cultural products as exemplary resistances to imperial forces or the work of global capital has the ironic tendency to flatten these products, or else, provides a falsely unified subjectivity that might be parodied by the very imperial forces postcolonial theory works against.

Just consider more thoroughly the dialectical underside to the type of cultivated disloyalty and national estrangement espoused by post-nationalists, such as Paul Gilroy. The history of neoliberalism has provided numerous examples of global entities that waltz in perverse parody to the tune of solidarity with the global South. And the cultivation of cosmopolitan disloyalty is moreover a common tactic used by multinational businesses and businessmen who relocate operations to Third World regions exploiting lax tax codes, cheap labour forces, and otherwise avoid closer scrutiny of their business practices. In *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin critique this set of circumstances through Arundathi Roy's analysis of the "neocolonialist iron triangle – politicians, bureaucrats and corporations, often with international Aid backing – which has exploited the progressivist ideologies of Third World economic development for its own immediate purposes" (49). Structural Adjustments, like those advocated by the World Bank and the IMF that appear as favourable loans for impoverished countries, come with the condition of adopting neoliberal practices. They have been largely a failure for the poor, resulting in technological dependency and leaving peoples bereft of many social services. They often open third-world countries up allowing international extractive industries access to destroy natural capital such as rainforests, for short-term profit (Carrigan 275).⁵⁷

As Peter Hallward surmises in his book *Absolutely Postcolonial*, "post-national institutions on a global or continental scale are concerned with little more than the administration of the one thing that can be 'managed' at such a level of generalisation – international finance" (132). To the extent that they disrupt "self-reproducing peasant economies" and erode national sovereignty when- and where-ever this challenges "free

⁵⁷ Deforestation can be viewed as a market inefficiency in that deforestation is incorrectly priced; what is viewed as short-term monetary gain is in fact a net loss in the long term. While in many countries GDP and carbon emission are looked upon as positive co-relatives – increase in activity (emitting more carbon) produces more income – in the case of Malaysia, to give one prominent example, deforestation has grossly distorted the picture – the carbon Malaysia emits is disproportionate to the GDP it produces.

trade,” global political institutions, such as the World Bank, or the WTO pose a threat to the solidarity of the Global South (Scruton 23).

Despite the laudable project of maintaining solidarity over planetary concerns, multinational companies with a record of atrocity in third-world regions too easily undermine and parody the type of post-national, postcolonial cosmopolitanism advocated by theorists like Gilroy. While the very scale of ecological threat persuades many theorists to formulate and align themselves with larger or transecting alternatives to the nation state, it is difficult to deny that the nation-state is currently best situated to protect the interests of populations in the Global South from predatory cosmopolitanisms pretending to operate in their favour.

Scholars of social phenomena like literary flows and theoretical categories like cosmopolitanism, before over-enthusiastically subscribing to post-national frameworks, ought to heed the many recent calls to reconsider the utility of the national category. Like cosmopolitanism itself, the nation-state needs recuperation. As John Barry and Robyn Eckersley write in *The State and the Global Ecological Crisis*, their project to “reinstate the state” as an entity that would facilitate positive environmental change, “it would be a great pity if environmental activists and NGOs were to turn their backs on what still remains the primary and most pervasive form of political governance in the world today” (x-xii). Or, as Peter Hallward writes in *Absolutely Postcolonial*, consider how the nation forms an “essential intermediary between local concerns and universal aspirations” (129). Indeed, even global organisations that have a stake in formulating international regulatory law are “dependent on nation-states for their legitimacy and motivating power” and, as Roger Scruton has argued, “it is a fantasy to think that any form of governance could be produced that would not overtly or covertly rely, in the end, on the territorial jurisdictions that those states have established” (308). Considering these realities, why flee from the national category in order to articulate strategic

alliances among literary subjectivities from the margin? The nation-state, despite clearly possessing potential for abuse, would seem to be a more appropriate entity to protect local issues than the postnationalist alternatives.

Following these assertions, it may indeed be wise to consider forces inside and subject to the nation, at the particular local cultures and customs – rather than those beyond and outside it – to find grounds for solidarity between different regions that manifest themselves despite the particularity of their local expressions. Patrick Murphy points out a similar observation with regard to novelistic exemplifications of the “subsistence perspective” he highlights in his essay “The ecofeminist subsistence perspective revisited in an age of land grabs and its representations in contemporary literature.” Murphy finds the “significant commonalities among them” remarkable given they “come from a variety of national literatures, with distinct styles and settings” (207). The apparently singular nature of local expression may yet bear resemblance to that of another. To reiterate with an appropriation from Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, “[o]ne finds isomorphisms [...] that ignore the extreme diversity of the objects under consideration” (xi).

Postcolonial ecocriticism then usefully tempers an embrace of wholesale anti-territorialisation. Introducing *Transatlantic Insurrections*, his interrogation of American and British literary difference, Paul Giles indicates that “to point out the arbitrary way in which national literary traditions have been defined...is not necessarily to invalidate the usefulness or pertinence of such distinctions” (6).

Giles’s critical strategy is an attempt to maintain para-focality; tackling a text, he switches objective lenses, zooming in and out, to reveal valuable insight between the material cultures of artists and writers. Gilroy’s valiant attempts to wipe away the myths of national and ethnic rooting through an exploration of the routes these notions travel, may not be enough to debunk what he calls “their tragic popularity” (7). Looking

beyond the local yet necessitates an acknowledgement of the force of the local. As Jahan Ramazani avows in his essay on modernist poets, *A Transnational Poetics*, the project of contemporary comparative criticism should set out “not to deny the force of nationalist discourse but to become aware of and excavate with a degree of irony and without the ideological investment of blind nationalism” (334). These new perspectives then seek to negotiate a specifically translocal paradigm of cultural exchange considering the realities and power of local, ethnic or nationalist discourse.

Wai Chee Dimock, scholar and critic of American Studies, carries this idea further in her contribution to the anthology *Shades of the Planet*: “the dynamics between the global and the local play out in such a way as to make the genetic ground itself a “nested” formation, for the local here is not purely indigenous, but a “cradling” of the global within one particular site: a sequence of diffusion, osmosis, and readaptation” (277). Her position does not combat the local with a wider, global perspective instead it recognizes a complicated superimposition of global and local discourses in any location. The indigenous impetus for creation, its “genetic ground” is induced through global interaction.

Sharae Deckard has marked the work of Franco Moretti (and Pascal Casanova) as germane to the concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism in her editorial essay on “Reading the World-Ecology” in *Green Letters* (2012). She cites Moretti’s definition of world literature as implicitly validating postcolonial ecocriticism’s attempt to admit new works for analysis and comparison because it dismisses Eurocentric figurations of world literature as “a canon of masterworks” but also rejects (David Damrosch’s suggested) view of world literature as a “mode of reading” in favour of an understanding of literature’s complicity with capitalist systems of production. As such, Moretti’s conception redeploys contentious terms such as “peripheral” – not as a value judgment – but in order to describe the disproportionality of attention and production across

geographical and economic spaces. As Deckard's discussion reveals, what is valuable about such a manner of conceptualisation is the potential for comparison it instates. Moreover, as Deckard argues, the type of comparison it does allow is "not only between postcolonies, but between peripheries and semi-peripheries of the world-system" (8). But as Shu Mei-shih has pointed out, Moretti's conception is Eurocentric insofar as the novel is taken to have spread from Europe as a product originating there and moving outward and enlarging with a European core or frame. Cassanova meanwhile posits Paris as literary capital. And Damrosch privileges translations outside country of origin, which ignores the politics of translation and the inability of minor literatures, and ignored regions from being represented under this conception. The type of comparison that must be sought does not subscribe to nationalist teleologies, nor assume international equivalencies between nations in a radically uneven and disproportionate world.

2.3 The Comparative Gesture in Postcolonial Ecocriticism

No discipline or scholarly method is better suited to help ecocriticism overcome these linguistic and geographic lapses than comparative literary inquiry.
– Rebecca Gould (88)

Gould's prescription for ecocriticism is to inject a comparative dimension to ecocritical practice. A more target-specific treatment would be to inject postcolonial comparison; that is, to perform ecocritical work by and of the Global South. The type of comparison needed is postcolonial in the sense that it would be sensitive to the ironies of comparing and categorising large regions and peoples, which, as Jennifer Robinson has demonstrated, bears marks of colonial history.

Robinson articulates the general desire, after postcolonial critiques of "geographical and other forms of social science knowledge," to navigate between "excessive parochialism or false universalisms," but her particular desire is to figure a type of geographical urbanism sensitive to postcolonial realities (125). She analyses the "ubiquitous comparative gesture" that inevitably occurs – without a thought to

necessary caveats or problematisation – in theoretical statements where certain general statements represent a whole world of different specific situations. This gesture then implies that these situations can in fact be characterised according to the terminology and characteristics of the *one*. Her investigation is germane to this study of comparison between the Caribbean and the Southeast Asian Archipelagoes because she is interested in formal comparative analysis that might aid the internationalisation of theoretical claims. However, as mentioned in the Introduction, by turning to comparativism as a postcolonial method, Robinson engages with the problem of its colonial baggage – its “profoundly colonial inheritance” (126).

Colonial history is replete with examples of comparative connections between colonial entities and colonial formations. Many colonial regions of the world served as template for others, and different colonial powers cast their eye, whether respectfully, enviously, jealously, or competitively on the colonial possessions of others. Discourses like the “black legend” that vilified Spanish imperial tactics (and suggested British or Dutch imperialisms were therefore more benign) demonstrate the potential utility comparative discourses presented to those colonial powers who could leverage it to their advantage. This history of imperial comparison eventually became the discipline of “comparative colonial administration” utilised by Southeast Asian colonial powers (Aravamudan 293).

Srinivas Aravamudan highlights the importance of comparative imperialisms for early colonial powers vying for territory and efficient means of governing territories. Many colonial territories served as templates, or exempla for other colonial powers. And often territories changed hands with little structural changes, partially because the underlying logic for colonial models were well understood having been explicitly studied for these purposes.

Examples of these types of situations abound. The Dutch East Indies, a “prolific Frisian cash cow” for the Netherlands served as a model to other colonising nations anxious to reap similar riches from the territories they came to control (Boehmer and Gouda 40). In reconsidering their colonial policies the French had often looked at the Dutch Indies as a source of inspiration and French missions repeatedly visited the Dutch colony for the purpose of studying it (Gouda 61). Groups of islands often served as a template for others. One of the points Elizabeth DeLoughrey makes in *Routes and Roots* is that the colonial experiment in the Caribbean was used as a template for extracting profit and ruling the Pacific Islands (9). Christopher Columbus brought sugar cane to the Caribbean from the Canary Islands off the Iberian Peninsula, prefiguring the vast plantations that would come to define the region and determine the islands’ future exploitations (DeLoughrey 9).

Jennifer Robinson demonstrates how “some aspects of formal comparative methods can be traced to ambitious and geographically encompassing intellectual projects from the colonial era, when the interest and capacity to bring different parts of the world together within the same intellectual frame advanced significantly” (126). As discussed in the previous section (*Is Comparison Colonial?*), it is this “capacity to bring ... the world together” that gives rise to the shared colonial inheritance of former colonies, be it in terms of language, racial demographics, administrative structure, or economy. In other words, colonialism facilitated the meeting and exchange of very different and diverse cultures. Unfortunately, that great meeting almost always occurred on an uneven playing field. Césaire’s rhetorical complaint is instructive here:

But then I ask the following question: has colonization really placed civilizations in contact? Or, if you prefer, of all the ways of establishing contact, was it the best?

I answer no.

And I say that between colonization and civilization there is an infinite distance. (34)

The power dynamic between these groups was always disproportionate and in a way that almost always favoured the coloniser.

The bizarrely ironic postcolonial theoretical legacy borne of this situation is the tendency to strategically submerge differences between postcolonial entities in the name of anti-colonial struggle for the purpose of asserting unique identities. It might be regarded a form of Spivakian strategic essentialism on the part of the theoretician to collectivise the struggle against colonial legitimations, and compare colonial oppressions. And, it may be true that many postcolonial analyses that engage in comparison do so without providing the necessary problematisation. However, it is not accurate to claim, as Robinson does, that comparativism as a postcolonial method has “not [been] explored in any detail” (126). In fact, there are several critiques of comparison by scholars with postcolonial credentials. Several such theorists are cited in the introduction to this thesis, including, notably, Elleke Boehmer; Pheng Cheah – specifically his essay in *diacritics*; and Rey Chow, who explores the taxonomic gaze implicit to comparison (though her initial point of departure is the attractiveness of the idea of “World Literature” from Goethe’s formulation onwards). Srinivas Aravamudan also adds pertinent insights in an essay on Caribbean and Southeast Asian comparison that usefully charts problematic early attempts at apprehending the regions within the same theoretical frame. Aravamudan reinforces the idea that any comparison of two regions must critically frame the theoretical models used to “organise the entirety of the apprehension (or frequently misapprehension)” (292). The type of comparison I attempt in this thesis works to move beyond the colonial intermediary by drawing the disparate regions into relation more directly to suggest the type of South-South comparison so lacking in past, especially ecocritical, scholarship.

As the back matter for a recent book on *Ecocriticism of the Global South* states, “[t]he vast majority of existing ecocritical studies, even those which espouse the

‘postcolonial ecocritical’ perspective, operate within a first-world sensibility, speaking *on behalf* of subalternized human communities and degraded landscapes without actually eliciting the voices of the impacted communities.” The editors, Slovic, Rangarajan, and Sarveswaran point to the need for “scholars from (or intimately familiar with) underrepresented regions to ‘write back’ to the world’s centers of political and military and economic power, expressing views of the intersections of nature and culture from the perspective of developing countries” (back matter). Such work is essential for such regions which are by default “the front line of the human struggle to invent sustainable and just civilizations on an imperilled planet” (back matter). As this thesis implies, I envision my own work and practice as intersecting these very matrices and participating in this project.

A similarly expansive reach for postcolonial ecocriticism is posited in Simon Estok’s introduction to a collection of essays presented as “New Work in Ecocriticism” in *CLCWeb*, Purdue’s online journal on Comparative Literature and Culture:

[...] while ecocriticism began and has largely developed in the West, environmental concerns are very much present in the East, South, and North. Although there has been a flow of theorizing from West to East and from North to South, the importance of keeping available the voices which seem to get muffled in the one-way flow of traffic has never been greater than now. (1)

The need is so great for Estok, whose premise is shared by the other postcolonial ecocritics listed, because environmental degradation itself is unevenly distributed. Like the editors of *Ecocriticism of the Global South*, Estok locates the frontlines of the struggle against environmental degradation and notes how “the products and actions of corporate capitalism – the very engine that degrades the bio-sphere—has also been (and remains) distributed unevenly” (1).

2.3.1 | On Ecocritical Provincialism

Just as ecocriticism confronted “the blasé attitude toward the natural world predominant in literary studies” (Phillips 578), so can postcolonial ecocriticism offer a corrective to the view of nature as mere *mise-en-scène* to social struggle so often assumed in strictly postcolonial accounts.⁵⁸ For postcolonial ecocriticism, non-human nature is more than a marker of geographical and socio-cultural specificity; it is both participant in, and subject to, upheavals in the socio-cultural fabric itself.

Calls from within ecocriticism, to read more widely and to consider non-Western cultures such as those issued by Patrick D. Murphy in *Ecocritical Explorations*, are generally germane to postcolonial ecocriticism. Although, in these arguments, ecocritics like Murphy do tend to automatically conflate defences of local and indigenous peoples’ customs with defences of the natural world (Clark 122). As Timothy Clark observes, “[l]ocalism and resistance to international capitalism are taken to be inherently green” so that most critical attempts to wed postcolonialism with ecocriticism do not move much beyond this assumption (125). A more properly postcolonially-inflected ecocriticism would interrogate those traditions beyond simply romancing their green-ness. Ideally, these criticisms should be issued from within, by those intimately familiar with the regions in a recuperative self-criticism.

Accounts of the field of postcolonial ecocriticism are very intentionally international and conjure up by default a tension between transnational and supranational environmental concerns, against the conventional national boundedness of literary analysis. Huggan and Tiffin’s book, *Postcolonial Ecocriticism*, makes references to several countries: Australia, Antigua, Bangladesh, Belgium, Canada, Congo, England, India, Indonesia, Marshall Islands, New Zealand, Pakistan, South

⁵⁸ For example, Timothy Clark points out how John MacLeod’s conventional postcolonial reading in *Beginning Postcolonialism* of Kipling’s “The Overland Mail (foot-service to the hills)” entirely overlooks the bizarre appropriation of nature in service of colonial ideology that occurs in the last line of the poem despite its striking conspicuity in the poem (123).

Africa; but they do so to utilise convenient identifiers, or common descriptors, or to reference the nationally-mediated concerns of the formerly colonised world. These nation-names are not taken as exhaustive indexicals or compulsory containers for the ecological concerns of a given postcolony.

I have already referred to Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's important work *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* in the introduction. They attempt to survey the lay of the postcolonial ecocritical land and distinguish between ecocritical and properly zoocritical concerns. They also recuperate genres underserved by postcolonial studies for postcolonial ecocriticism. Forms and genres such as the pastoral are thus recuperated for postcolonial studies by examining works of this field through postcolonial ecocriticism. As Huggan and Tiffin point out, "[t]he emphasis of pastoral has generally been on the impact of the environment on the human rather than the other way around" (16).⁵⁹ And postcolonial ecocriticism works to elicit environmental perspectives that do not simply assume anthropocentric concerns trump more obviously ecological ones.

At this point, however, I want to note the comparative gestures seminal works in the field make. The first such gesture Huggan and Tiffin make is to suggest a perceived incommensurability between "Northern environmentalisms of the rich" and "Southern environmentalisms of the poor," related to the "ecological gap" between coloniser and the colonised (22). Related to these categories is a quantity that operates under the name "politics." For Huggan and Tiffin, as for Cilano and DeLoughrey, postcolonial ecocriticism involves the application and the foregrounding of the political dimension of literature of the environment that roughly corresponds to the rubrics of developmental economics represented by the use of terms like "Northern" and "Southern." For Huggan and Tiffin then, the plurality of environmentalisms may be usefully grouped according

⁵⁹ This acknowledgement has been made by Keith Sagar — and on no less a canonical "nature" poet than Wordsworth — in his essay "Wordsworth – Nature's Priest or Nature's Prisoner?" See especially pp. 161-62: "An almost permanent slumber sealed Wordsworth's spirit to prevent him giving due recognition to the fact that other creatures, including other people, have life-modes of their own which have nothing to do with human morality or aesthetics of the growth of his own mind" (162).

to a rubric not dissimilar to that of the three worlds theory. It would thus seem then that the work of the postcolonial ecocritic (of the North) is to navigate these environmentalisms with a critical eye.

Another celebrated work in the field is Pablo Mukherjee's fascinating study of the ecocritical dimensions of the Indian novel. Mukherjee too registers a cognisance of the dangers of comparative project. He nonetheless feels it possible to extrapolate much of the Indian experience to that of the rest of the world (5). This is because, for Mukherjee, it is obvious that while,

[i]ncidents [...] are clearly, at one level, historical, political and economic matters [...] there is no way to understand these without paying attention to their material strata, one that is composed of soil, water, plants, crops, animals (both domestic and wild). (5)

Mukherjee articulates a generous definition of "the environment" that I adopt for this thesis as well: the complex system "composed of the relationships between human and non-human agents or actors that define the history" (5). However, the tension in studies like Mukherjee's that I want to point out is that between the local and the general, and the singular and the specific. So that while Mukherjee focuses on what he delineates as the "*specific* context of the Indian subcontinent" he goes on to suggest that his "arguments have a *general* application to the understanding of large swathes of the world" (5, my emphasis). In order to reconcile these opposing levels of abstraction, Mukherjee invokes the concept of the "postcolonial." He does so in an effort "to offer an argument that has, at the same time, specific and general validity" (5). Mukherjee's concept of postcolonialism is broadly materialist and differs from other conceptions, like Spivak's that foreground epistemic, rather than ideological colonial structures (Lazarus "Introducing" 11). Mukherjee conjures up the terror of the perverse (new) cosmopolitans, in which the upward movement of capital, through mediated sites and means orders world interactions and relations via a "globalized ruling [class] whose

interests are often embodied in gigantic transnational corporations and the labyrinthine world of speculative financial transactions” (6). This rubric then allows Mukherjee to position the national subject within this global matrix. As he writes,

Once we have grasped this idea of postcolonial India as a globalized entity within a world system, it is impossible not to see that its condition speaks simultaneously at local and global, specific and general, levels. What is happening in India is also happening, has happened and will happen in the rest of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Since at the heart of both colonialism and neo-colonialism lies the historical fact unfolding, expanding capital, India (and all the other ‘new’ postcolonies) can be seen as a part of a singular, but radically uneven, world. (7)

Mukherjee goes on to argue that, while it has its own specificities, India’s story is “echoed” as a “general condition” of other regions of the world. Mukherjee’s universal category then is “the condition of global capital” (7). And he argues that his analyses reference “an open and comparative framework” so that calls to insert details from other postcolonial zones are welcome (7). He qualifies his assertions:

This is not to suggest that we wipe out all differences between them, and see Moscow and Mogadishu, Mumbai and Kinshasa as interchangeable entities, but that we compare their cultures and environments in all their specificities and in doing so derive some understanding of the singular and uneven historical conditions that is bestowed by capital on the world that it roams. (7)

DeLoughrey and Cilano, are similarly suspicious of attempts to flatten understandings of disparate postcolonial territories. They position postcolonial ecology in tension with development theory that can read cultures of the Global South as “naturally” impoverished. They also argue that postcolonial ecocriticism resists conventional postcolonial perspectives that position regions of the Global South on the receiving end of history, as sites for exploitation but without the agency that might render entities there neocolonially complicit, or postcolonially resistant (DeLoughrey and Cilano 19).

The internationalisation of postcolonial ecocriticism is by default one of inclusion, so that more voices from outside the North Atlantic might be admitted to public view. But just as necessary is the need to publicise theories that advance critiques to other regions of the postcolonial world, and thus foreground voices both from outside the North Atlantic and directed to other “outsiders”. DeLoughrey and Handley foreground this in their introduction to *Postcolonial Ecologies*. They are conscious of the gate-keeping of representation when it comes to questions of both human and non-human representations of alterity. They ask both, “who can speak for nature?” but also, “who can speak for the subaltern subject in a narrative mode that does not privilege dualist thought or naturalize the hierarchy between the human and the nonhuman?” (25). More forcefully, Mukherjee articulates “this essential task of building a properly worldly analysis and interpretation of our current environmental crises – a task on which, quite literally, our lives might depend.”⁶⁰

2.4 Ecocritical Models for Postcolonial Literary Comparison

Some writer! I'm hopeless
when it comes to birds,
Or flowers and trees,
For that matter!
No, I'm not strong
on local fauna and flora,
Flora & Fauna;
Maybe I should
Brush up on them?

– Goh Poh Seng, *Lines from Batu Ferringhi*, (2)

Robin Broad and John Cavanagh observe how (in the United States) environmentalism is often described in consumerist terms; this practice, they argue, bestows it with an “all-too-easy aesthetic quality” that transforms environmentalism into “a lifestyle issue; a matter of what you choose to eat or buy or do on your vacation” (ix). Broad and Cavanagh contest this tendency and draw from their observations a conclusion:

⁶⁰ See backmatter of Scott Slovic, et. al. (eds.), *Ecoambiguity, Community, and Development* (Lanham: Lexington Books), 2014.

It is a sign both of the success of environmentalism and of its failure that it has been so readily absorbed by the upper-middle class, but largely as a matter of gesture and taste. In the conventional stereotype, a concern with the environment is almost a defining feature of affluence—i.e., of the absence of more pressing concerns. (ix)

Broad and Cavanagh though, turn to the third world, specifically the Philippines, for a corrective to rediscover the ethical and political dimensions of environmentalism. “Fortunately,” they write, “a new kind of environmentalism is beginning to emerge from the people who might least be expected to embrace it – the literal wretched of the earth” (ix). Broad and Cavanagh’s suggestion of the third world as the location for a more “authentic environmentalism” is problematic as there are inevitably environmental heroes and villains on both sides of the international division of labour, new and old. But their suggestion of newness to the environmentalism of third world regions is also troubling.

Concerns over issues of environment and land have been present since before the beginning of postcolonialism as an institutionalised discipline. Concern for the natural world and the physical environment is therefore not the cause of the elite in rich Western countries (as some have purposely misrepresented). In fact, environmental issues have been crucial for many people in the third world. Perhaps the major difference has been simply that, while among elites in the first world environmentalism is largely concerned with what products are most ethical to purchase, in the third world, environmental issues more often are a question of livelihood, that is, of life and death, and thence, they become much more *political*.

This is not to suggest that first and third, coloniser and colonised do not share concerns. They share even more than this; they share histories. Even contemporary practices of conservation have roots in European enlightenment knowledge, natural history, conservation policy and an idea of nature that is derived from a long history of colonial exploitation of nature. Much of the documenting and cataloguing of indigenous

knowledge of plants and animals from all over the colonial world—especially the tropical colonial world—resulted from the massive project of colonialism. To illustrate this, one simply has to think about indigenous healers and mystics that are today sometimes positioned against Western science. In fact, the histories of these two ways of knowing are somewhat intertwined. Early explorers learned about native plants from natives, bush experts and *bomohs*, for example, documenting what they learned and assimilating it into the language of Western Science. Again, while colonialism facilitated the meeting and exchange of very different and diverse cultures both the playing field and the power dynamic between these groups was always disproportionate and uneven.

In terms of environmentalism as manifested in institutional literary practice, that is *ecocriticism*, another suggestion of first world provenance is encountered in Rob Nixon's early work marrying postcolonial and the environmental. What postcolonial ecocriticism brings as corrective to the caricature of ecocriticism-as-elite or North Atlantic practice is an explicit return to the political and emphasis on the global interconnectedness of environmental concerns (Heise, 2010). As Huggan and Tiffin theorise, postcolonial ecocriticism "performs an advocacy function both in relation to the real world(s) it inhabits and to imaginary spaces it opens up for contemplation of how the real world might be transformed" (13).

This thesis focuses on a particular phenomenon related to the environmentalism and representation of nature in postcolonial regions. It examines ways independence-era tropical archipelagic writers deal with the political and postcolonial temptation to conflate territory with ancestry in articulations and assertions of achieved indigeneity (DeLoughrey xi). This conflation has characterised the environmental realities and responses to nature in third world and postcolonial regions for decades. I characterise this conflation as a *postcolonial* temptation for several reasons: first, the writers of in

the time-periods I consider hold in common a tendency toward national prescription. Second, there is a desire for representation and authenticity, in especially the early writers. Third is of course, the already-articulated problem of the immanent logic of the methodology (postcolonialism) itself which saddles writers with “the sign of the native” in which “native” equals “lack” (Chow, *Ethics*). Thus, both the methodological perspective *and* the writerly strategies of the author conspire to transmogrify or simplify the complexity and nuance of indigeneity in the regions.

Thus, this thesis engages crucial concepts such as “nature” in a particular way. In basic I take Kate Soper’s theorisations of the term nature as definitive.⁶¹ I endorse her insistence on the “extra-discursive reality of nature” while acknowledging – as does Pierre Danesreau – the power of the “inscape” to affect change in the “landscape.” I also de-couple “indigenous” from “native” – in the manner of Shona Jackson – to highlight a crucial distinction in the Caribbean. This nuanced approach is extended to analyses of texts of the Southeast Asian region. In so doing, I establish a sense of nuance to indigeneity in political regions, such as Malaysia – where an ideological project exists that occludes these complications under the charged political category of the *bumiputra* – or the Philippines – where “Filipino” and “Tagalog” are often assumed as default descriptors in these otherwise supremely heterogenous territories – and even Indonesia – whose territory stretches over thousands of islands and whose “pseudo-Hellenic name” blankets innumerable people-groups as a unitary descriptor.⁶² In refusing to simplistically deploy these terms I wish to acknowledge them as highly charged and fraught entities. I take as foundational Kate Soper’s basic claim that “[r]epresentations of nature and the concepts we bring it, can have very definite political

⁶¹ Soper defends “a realist position” that acknowledges the “extra-discursive reality of nature” because, she argues, this acknowledgement is a crucial foundation for “challenging the pronouncements of culture on what is or is not ‘natural’” (8).

⁶² In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson links the chimerical nature of Indonesia’s name to the contingencies (of war) that determined the geographical swathe it currently covers: “its hybrid pseudo-Hellenic name suggest[s] that it “does not remotely correspond to any precolonial domain [...] but [to] those left behind by the last Dutch conquests” (120).

effects, many of them having direct bearing on the cause of ecological conservation itself” (9). Soper’s type of realist or materialist position, I feel, is inherently germane to postcolonial ecocriticism. This position seems to be supported by descriptive texts of the field such as that of Huggan and Tiffin, and also Cilano and DeLoughrey. For instance, in *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* Huggan and Tiffin write:

While it would be a mistake to see ecocriticism as being more concerned with inhabiting the world than changing it—as being fundamentally more interested in phenomenological than political processes – it is clearly the case that *postcolonial* ecocriticism tips the balance towards the latter, and that its own aesthetic choices reflect this. (13)

Huggan and Tiffin then, are keen to disseminate the idea in both descriptive and prescriptive senses that postcolonial ecocriticism foregrounds the political in its analyses of text and culture. Similarly, Cilano and DeLoughrey highlight how the conjunction between postcolonialism and ecocriticism calls for materialist approaches to the dynamic relationship between humans and the non-human environment. This approach “grapples with the best ways of addressing the representation of the nonhuman environment” without romanticising “prehuman (or prelapsarian) landscapes” with an ahistorical manoeuvre (79).

Cilano and DeLoughrey position themselves against environmentalists that invoke “nature” in order to transcend debates over class, race, and gender. They single out the Deep Ecologists for pretending “a global or universal ecological stance” exists and on this basis dismissing political claims and the disproportionalities characterising social groups as irrelevant. Cilano and DeLoughrey invoke Ramachandra Guha as muse by citing his seminal article “Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique.” They specifically highlight Guha’s biting observation that “deep ecology [indicates] a lack of concern with inequalities *within* human society” (72n1). Cilano and DeLoughrey note further how ahistorical renderings

of nonhuman nature ignore how these inequalities are socially and historically produced (71). These theorists' work and observations have been loosely codified in postcolonial ecocriticism and thus demonstrate its relevance for any accurate or sensitive approach to society, literature, and cultures of the Global South especially.

While ecocritics and ecologists need to consider the role imperialism and colonialism plays in fashioning an understanding of the environment and in establishing both normative and radical responses to it, postcolonialists need to consider how their projects might ironically replicate these colonial practices too. Postcolonial ecocritical perspectives are important because they acknowledge the complexity of the situation and refuse to appropriate the crisis of violence for its own (similarly violent) ends.⁶³

In order to bring the Caribbean and the Malayan Archipelagic regions into relation, I foreground the more-than-human environment and the place of these societies in relation to land and environment. This is where the conjunction of ecocritical and postcolonial methods is so useful. Because it tends to centralise socio-economic and anthropological or cultural concerns, scholarship (on both regions) tends to relegate environmental and ecological concerns to the periphery (Perfetti 89).⁶⁴ A focus on the place of the human and the human society within nature and the environment (as represented in literature) thus presents a shared concern about which literatures of both regions can orbit and interact. While comparisons and analogies are often viewed suspiciously, especially in discourses like postcolonialism, I argue in this thesis that it is precisely the sites of "misapprehension" (Aravamudan), or incongruence when deploying analogic figures that are most useful at illuminating real concerns between societies in their representation of their societies and their philosophies of indigenisation

⁶³ Walter Mignolo examines this type of "comparative violence" in Rita Felski's edited volume on *Comparisons*.

⁶⁴ Lisa Perfetti writes that "[s]cholarship on postcolonial Caribbean literature has largely ignored ecological questions in favour of social and cultural concerns considered more pressing for a region still suffering from the impacts of slavery and colonialism. Yet much Caribbean fiction interrogates the colonial legacy through its representation of the human place in nature, and thus looking closely at how nature and the land are represented in fictional works can help us to understand how peoples resist colonial and neocolonial ideologies" (89). See Lisa Perfetti (89-105).

and relation to the environment. And this work in turn facilitates treatments of the lacunae identified by postcolonial ecocritics.

Postcolonial studies, which, by definition, should introduce political difference into conceptions of world literature – specifically and especially when it concerns literature of the postcolonies – may ironically become participant in difference-erasing and universalising configurations of literature despite its insistence on specificity and contextual understanding. One of the major arguments against [Anglophone] Postcolonial studies is that, having supplanted Commonwealth Literature, it rigidifies the study of texts in an ironically imperialistic manner.

Such attempts to subsume regions such as Southeast Asia or the Caribbean under the postcolonial category are, in Shirley Lim's estimation, simply acts of hubris (2). Still, a more universal World Literature offers a space to interrogate the connections between the country – the physical landscape and its human and non-human inhabitants – and Literature – the trained creative output of human beings after sufficient social and physical environmental stimulus and inspiration.

Such is the avowed project of scholars like Elizabeth DeLoughrey, who attempt to bring disparate regions together (the Caribbean and the Pacific Islands) under an amorphous, fluid methodological approach – “tidalectics.” I have treated DeLoughrey's co-authored works in reviewing postcolonial-ecocritical work in previous sections, but it is to her earlier scholarship critiquing diaspora studies that I now turn. In this next section, I will consider the candidate methodology of “tidalectics,” which remains free from the constricting problems of the previous methodologies outlined in that it is cognisant of the national category but not beholden to it, and is neither subsumed by postcolonialism though very much informed by it. And, because it has been used productively to examine such diverse regions as the Caribbean and the Pacific islands, it presents relevance to this study and the regions of concern here: the Malay and

Caribbean Archipelagoes. However, while I will draw productively from it, I will not explicitly invoke it as a methodology in the later parts of my thesis because I find the neologism unnecessary despite its productive use in some scholarship. I will instead attempt to recuperate existing terminology and borrow from resonances in other fields to situate and justify my comparative project. Nevertheless, an acknowledgement of “tidalectics” as a candidate methodology seems necessary at this point, given its conflation with DeLoughrey’s project and her project’s resonance with my own.

2.4.1 On Tidalectics

The imagination no longer goes as far as the horizon, but it keeps coming back. At the edge of the water it returns clean, scoured things that, like rubbish, the sea has whitened, chaste. (XV)

This is my ocean, but it is speaking another language, since its accent changes around different islands. (XLIII)

— Derek Walcott, *Midsummer*

Tidalectics is a term that refers to the influence of the sea on the Caribbean artist. It first appears in the writings of the Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite in his “Caribbean Culture: Two Paradigms” and it also appears in his *ConVERSations with Nathaniel Mackey*. Given its provenance (Brathwaite) and amorphous subject, tidalectics is probably best understood as a term of evocation rather than some theoretically isolable or coherent unitary method. As a term of evocation it has been fruitfully employed by Elizabeth DeLoughrey to facilitate a navigation of Caribbean and Pacific Island texts.

While DeLoughrey’s use of the term has resulted in a valuable contribution to a neglected subject of inquiry – namely transnational comparison of island literatures – her deployment has not resulted in much recuperative terminological clarification. In *Routes and Roots* Elizabeth DeLoughrey describes the term variously as: a methodological *tool*; an exploratory *framework*; a geopoetic *model* of history; an interdisciplinary *approach*; a *methodology* of reading island literatures; and a “shifting

relationship between land and sea” (3). Despite its provocative utility, the quibble I have with the term is its descriptive distance from Brathwaite’s articulated conceptions, and more importantly the vague indications of applicability; it is not clear how one is, or is not, to use it.

Consider originary articulations and deployments: the poet Wayde Compton takes Brathwaite’s poetry as inspiration; in *Bluesprint* he describes tidalectics as “a way of seeing history as a palimpsest” (17). In this conception,

generations overlap generations, and eras wash over tides on a stretch of beach. [...] Repetition, whether in the form of ancestor worship of the poem histories of the griot, informs black ontologies more than does the Europeanist drive for perpetual innovation [...] In a European framework, that past is something to be gotten over [...] in tidalectics, we do not improve upon the past, but are ourselves versions of the past. (17)

For Wayde Compton then, tidalectics signifies an impurity that creates, or a productive volatility inherent to, diaspora. The originary explanation might come from Brathwaite himself who says, “I have a thing that I call seametrics, because the sea influences the landscape. The sea influences the nature of poetry—the pauses between the words, the tidalectic nature of the sea” (“the search for a Caribbean Aesthetic” qtd. in Brown xiii). Or in Mary E. Morgan’s vision, it is “a way of interpreting our life and history as sea change, the ebb and flow of sea movement and with the suggestion of surf comes the contrapuntal sound of waves on shore” (*World Literature Today* 68(4), qtd. in Brown xiii). Brathwaite’s ideas here develop a theme Frank Collymore started in his *Hymn to the Sea*: “And not only life and sustenance; visions, too, / Are born of the sea: the patterning of her rhythm/ Finds echoes within the musing mind” (*Caribbean Verse* 10). But, Stewart Brown, who wrote an introduction to Brathwaite’s poetry collection *Words Need Love Too*, argues how “Brathwaite’s notion ‘tidalectics’ is greater than simple acknowledgement of sea’s influence on island people’s consciousness” (xiv). Brown highlights different resonances of the term: as an image, an interweaving of

images, or ambivalences. According to Brown, tidalectics is “an image for understanding the processes of global history and the evolution of that creolised multi-layered Caribbean culture that Brathwaite’s work illustrates and celebrates” (xiv). Evidence of this type of tidalectics can be seen in formal and technical elements of poetry: in the rhythm of shorter poems and the “swell and pull” in longer poems (xv). It is also seen in content: in the “dark and light periods of life” so that the “to and fro/ back and forth then might be seen as a kind of Caribbean dialectic” (xv).

How these ideas are uniquely Caribbean is not clear; however, as I will show later, the work of Southeast Asian poets and writers might be described in similar terms. Brown argues that Brathwaite is aware of a central connection to the sea, but, he warns, “Caribbean people maintain a wary ambivalence towards the sea—both playground and graveyard...” (xxiv). Stewart Brown again connects Brathwaite to his mentor, poet and literary editor, Frank Collymore, in his introduction to Brathwaite’s poetry, quoting lines from Collymore’s poem “Hymn to the Sea”: “Like all who live on small islands / I must always be remembering the sea” (*Caribbean Verse* 10). But here it is Collymore who suggests a commonality to other island peoples while Brathwaite initially refers to this inspirational insight in proprietary terms of ownership and exclusivity.

Elizabeth DeLoughrey employs the tidalectic tool in a highly allegorical and metaphorical manner as if afraid of marking down and capturing something that is, by its nature, always changing. As such, tidalectics might resemble, as Stuart Hall enjoins, an identity that is always in production, never complete. As a neologism, though, tidalectics suggests a desire to figure something beyond this.

From the examples of its usage above, it is clear that singular descriptive definitions of the term are elusive; “tidalectics” means different things to different writers despite the commonality of its point of origin. Like other applications of the term, DeLoughrey takes Brathwaite’s usage as originary and, perhaps as consequence,

adopts Brathwaite's tendency to define the concept in negative terms of rejection and difference. Hence, her tidalectic project refuses to declare a single, monologic meaning; it instead chooses evocative terminology of difference and resistance to European, linear, positivistic conceptions of time and space, history and cultural power.

One consequence of adopting a concept of general opposition is that in being born from a *rejection* of a prior notion, it is thus immediately a fighting term. It has not organically risen from some creative space, instead it is crafted top-down by the scholar as literary prescription or an *a priori* description. For scholars to invoke it as if it refers to an actual existing practice then seems problematic unless the ultimate aim is to *evoke* rather than describe or prescribe.

Indeed at least one reviewer of DeLoughrey's book *Routes and Roots* seems to agree with aspects of my assessment above. Anyaa Anim-Addo notes the "poetically elusive" character of Brathwaite's elucidation of the term and finds DeLoughrey's usage, "initially persuasive" but ultimately "diluted [...] for much of the book" (137). Anim-Addo locates the conceptual power of the term in its ability to "[disrupt] dichotomies (roots/routes, indigenous/ diaspora, land/sea)" (137).

For DeLoughrey, Brathwaite's term places "native" historiography in opposition to linear models of colonial progress. For this reason she argues that, in its drawing from a cyclical model and its invocation of "the continual movement and rhythm of the ocean," the "'tidal dialectic' resists the synthesizing telos of Hegel's dialectic" (2).

When DeLoughrey invokes Brathwaite's evocative term as a refutation of Hegel, she is metonymically associating the term with the weight of the entire epistemological critique of Western hegemony. This is a shorthand or critical allusion that does not actually demonstrate its critique. In effect, DeLoughrey joins the ranks of scholars who – in Hegelian philosopher Slavoj Žižek's terms – are guilty of "shooting

[Hegel] too fast” (Žižek 6-7).⁶⁵ DeLoughrey dismisses the giant of Western philosophy in order to aggrandise the weight of a dubious theoretical refutation claiming Caribbean parentage.

In this instance, the *dialectic* is a metonymy of Hegel who is a metonymy of the West – the conventional object of critique of postcolonialism. To resist the “synthesizing telos” is to wield postmodernist critique for postcolonial ends. It is not clear however that “drawing from a cyclical model” or “invoking the continual movement and rhythm of the sea” is sufficient evidence for this resistance (2). Even more amorphous is Torres-Saillant, who is anxious to discriminate Caribbean roots to the term; he defines tidalectics as a *Caribbean* difference specifically, alluding perhaps to Benítez-Rojo and on to Homi K. Bhabha with their use of ambiguous phrases such as “something else besides.”

What is necessary to really recuperate the term tidalectics in this instance is a more concrete idea of the limits of the term. Anna Reckin provides a more concrete definition of tidalectics; she references “certain vectors,” within tidalectics, that reveal the notion as a “nexus of historical process and landscape, a space, a sound-space” and a “recursive movement in stasis that is anti-progressive” (2). Reckin’s descriptions indicate direction and so avoid the pitfalls of indigenous romanticising that affect especially problematic ecocritical assertions of the ecological superiority of “primitive” cultures. Her assessment does not simply rehearse a pre-modern cyclical time in opposition to Western linear time in a simple binary opposition. For Reckin, tidalectics signifies “a transoceanic movement-in-stasis, a to-and-fro and back again that is idealised and mythologized as well as highly particularized [...] and historicized” (2).

⁶⁵ Žižek argues that Hegel’s dialectic is not a cipher for “progressive overcoming” but “a systematic notation of the failure of all such attempts” (6). This is because “‘absolute knowledge’ denotes a subjective position which finally accepts ‘contradiction’ as an internal condition of every identity [...] Hegelian ‘reconciliation’ is not a ‘panlogistic’ sublation of all reality in the Concept but a final consent to the fact that the Concept itself is ‘not-all’” (6). Žižek agrees that this assessment opposes the commonly accepted idea of “‘absolute knowledge’ as a monster of conceptual totality devouring every contingency” (6-7). For Žižek, “this commonplace of Hegel simply *shoots too fast* [...] the] critics of Hegel’s presumed ‘panlogicism’ proceed [by] condemning absolute knowledge before it is ‘ten o’clock’, without reaching it—that is, they refute nothing with their criticism but their own prejudices against it” (Žižek 7).

As Reckin writes, “Brathwaite proposes tidalectic as a rejection of the notion of the dialectic which is a 3-way movement with the resolution in the third” (Naylor 145 qtd. in Reckin 1). But most concretely, Reckin applies the tidalectic descriptor to what she calls “sound-space” so that the location of a performance belies the places and meanings it signifies. Her example (T.S. Eliot reading poetry on BBC, being listened to by Brathwaite and others in the Caribbean) reveals ways [Eliot’s] references and enunciations [of, say, New Orleans’ Jazz], evoke peculiar sensations and images in the minds of particularly placed listeners. Clearly, this conception of the term recognises its metaphorical resonance for describing diasporic now-native cultures in places like the Caribbean, who gesture to symbolic belonging across the seas, perform strategies of nativisation at home, and realise a tension in mimicking or resisting imperialising forces of assimilation in turn.

With Reckin’s helpful explanation we can here clearly grasp the utility of the concept in DeLoughrey’s critique of diaspora studies and colonial apprehensions of archipelagic landscapes. In *Routes and Roots*, and elsewhere, DeLoughrey resorts to the term of convenience “island literature,” remarking that such literature is “deeply informed by the transoceanic imaginary” (20). But in the “tidalectic imagination” the “loss of land is interpreted from the perspective of the sea” (20) to “recuperate the centrality of the ocean in island discourse and also to rebut the processes that deem islands “ahistorical and isolated,” subsequently taking them as spaces for experiments of all kinds (2).

Furthermore, in this conception of the tidalectic, a sense of relation is registered (enacting tidalectic echoes) and therefore parallels can be found in Édouard Glissant’s *poetics*, Gilroy’s shipping routes (as theorised in *The Black Atlantic*), and Anna Reckin’s theorising of BBC Radio broadcasts). DeLoughrey foregrounds the time and space or “chronotope” over the sound-space (Reckin) of islands, using “tidalectics” to

position texts into dialogue, she renders the term synonymous with Glissant's idea of a "complicity of relation," a concept that "does not romanticize indigeneity nor pathologize diaspora" (xi). Reading through these models allows geography, history, and culture to inform literary analysis (6).

DeLoughrey positions her own argument against that of diaspora theorists who focus and reify "the dialectical tension between the originary space of dispersal and the space of arrival without pausing to consider tidalectics, or the experience of movement *between* national/cultural spaces" (61). This, then, is what DeLoughrey attempts to highlight: movement *between* national and cultural spaces. And this project is what leads her to "...deconstruct the land-sea binary and engage tidalectically with the complex gendering of space" so as to "pursu[e] the complexity of place" (139).

So far, we have traced the Caribbean genealogy of tidalectics and described various theorists' grappling with its originary use (in Brathwaite) and deployment in, primarily, Caribbean waters. DeLoughrey is the only theorist to consider employing this term of Caribbean provenance to explore the cultural production of other island groupings. The term however can be exported to work in another analogous situation in a Collymore-like sensibility. Consider some theory indigenous to Southeast Asia with Muhammad Haji Salleh whose poetry attempts a similar reconstruction of historical identity.

The Malaysian poet and theorist Muhammad Haji Salleh, in his poetry and essays on literary theory, invokes this term to signify an egalitarian understanding of regional geo-history and a plea to retain a universally-applicable indigenous wisdom as resistance to the globalized consumer culture present inside Maritime Southeast Asia; for example, in Singapore where "the [regional] hinterland is steadily being forgotten" (Raslan 85). In its claim to an indigenous aesthetic, *nusanterism* might operate in a conceptually similar manner to Brathwaite's *tidalectics*, as part of a dynamic tradition.

The Malay Malaysian poet Muhammad Haji Salleh, in “Tropics,” articulates a straightforward belonging: “but the beach is the brown people’s home, / their traditions / engraved by every tide. / they speak the language of the sea” (94). While he might seem to represent reactionary forces in the archipelago, of the kind intent on articulating “race-space” (Kahn 15), and the kind of ethnic absolutisms that scholars like Paul Gilroy warn against, Muhammad Haji Salleh’s conception of society and culture in the “Malay Archipelago” is not only conceived of in static racially-inflected terms. As Agnes Yeow argues, “there is more to the poetry than a racialised and narrow portrayal of Malays and the world they lay claim to” (3). Yeow complicates this reading of Muhammad’s poetry by foregrounding “his persistent description of the dynamic, mobile and cosmopolitan character of the Malay world and its classical literatures” (10). And so, he upholds the idea of a dynamic and not monolithic or static tradition fed by cultural exchange and outside influence.

Muhammad Haji Salleh and Brathwaite share a link in trying to provide a theory for their societies by appealing to an originary folk. Thus, there is something useful, on the level of analogy or resemblance for pursuing the comparison of Archipelagic literatures. As DeLoughrey writes,

The shift in focus from terrestrial history to the transoceanic spaces that enabled African, Asian, European, and indigenous crossings to the islands complicates genealogical roots and destabilizes the colonial architecture that literally constructed the region as European. (51)

DeLoughrey’s project usefully highlights problems and interpretative biases in diaspora theory despite the terminological amorphousness and the paucity of justification for her *specific* regional comparison and juxtaposition. A problem that arises with such fluid types of comparative analyses is how a *general* history of colonial engagement is linked to an otherwise arbitrary regional selection, so that the grounds of comparison float placelessly and theorists of such work apparently feel little need to

justify their regional juxtapositions.

1.42 Justifying Juxtapositions: The complexity of the Task

To justify a comparative project is to provide methodological significance for juxtaposing works of literature. A good justification provides acknowledgement of the complexity of the cultural formations involved, the unequal power relations characterising regions, and the frenzied or overdetermined traffic between them. These acknowledgements complicate any simple structural mapping. As admitted in the preface, I recognise, of course, that attempts at a comprehensive assessment of the literary output of either region is beyond any researcher. The regions' complexity, notwithstanding, theorists still offer general terms, however reductive, by which to cognitively apprehend the regions geographically, politically, culturally, and literarily.

“Third-world,” “postcolonial,” and “global south” are all examples of efforts or attempts at comprehending regions like these in *general terms*. While each term can serve specific ends, the supposed meaning behind such terms is much more often amorphous, usually wilfully so. Terms bound to the specific physical geography are especially contentious given the artificial justifications for their use. For example, Benítez-Rojo charges that “to persevere in the attempt to refer the culture of the Caribbean to geography—other than to call it a meta-archipelago—is a debilitating and scarcely productive project” (24). Isabel Hoving speaks of the complexity of the Caribbean in her discussion of Caribbean migrant women writers. Describing their literary milieu as being “radically transnational,” she points out how “Caribbean literature in itself is already a diasporic, transatlantic, multilinguistic practice” (2). Her definition of Caribbean literature already indicates the complexity within this single region: it is “the name given to a multitude of literatures that often hardly know each other [...] even within one language” because these writers of the Caribbean “are positioned between many registers, cultures, and genres” (3). Hoving reveals how

writers operate at varying and disparate levels of recognition, in disparate cultural milieux inside of the nation and region, in radically different genres. These discussions point to a Caribbean that does not exist as some graspable entity but is itself composed of shifting, amorphous, often contradictory dimensions. Often thought of as simply archipelagic or composed solely of a multitude of islands, the Caribbean also has continental (Belize, Suriname, Guyana), and diasporic (New York, London, Miami) dimensions.

Southeast Asia does not lend itself to easy interpretation either. From Ancient days styled, by various civilisations as the “land below the wind,” through to colonial-era “Indochina” and “East Indies,” and on to the contemporary ASEAN, Southeast Asia refers to multiple entities, each existing at a different point in space and time – cosmological, figurative, and contemporary scientific-geographic determinations compete for the authorial designation. After the sociological models based on dubious empirical data found disfavour in the 70s, theorists of Southeast Asia have generally extrapolated Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation, so that it might apply to the ASEAN region. If the nation is an “imagined community” then so too is Maritime Southeast Asia and the “Malay Archipelago”.

Among the more easily contested terms, much has been said. The scope of “postcoloniality,” for example, is both vast and highly contested and must be qualified and circumscribed. To refute the flattening tendencies of “postcolonial” as a label, Torres-Salliant characterises his Caribbean as impossibly complex.⁶⁶ And as, referenced earlier, Shirley Lim cautions that the academic rendering of Southeast Asian complexities under the label of postcoloniality may be simply “an act of hubris” (2).

Why such resistance towards understanding the region as a collective unit?

⁶⁶ Torres-Salliant, (Mar 1 2005). “Knowing the Caribbean,” Talk at Watson Institute, Brown University.

2.5 Approaching the Caribbean *and* Southeast Asia

Perhaps, in a sense, it could be no other way. After all, wasn't the world colonized by Europe because of Indonesia's Spice Islands? One could say that it was Indonesia's destiny to initiate the decolonization process.

– Pramoedya Ananta Toer, "The Book that Killed Colonialism" (114)

This is because the Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago (an exalted quality that Hellas possessed, and the great Malay archipelago as well), and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center.

– Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, (4)

One finds isomorphisms [...] that ignore the extreme diversity of the objects under consideration

– Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (xi)

The literature reviewed in the previous sections suggest that it is right to approach the two distinct regions – the Caribbean and Southeast Asia – with a specifically attuned dialectic gesture. But I do not wish to employ neologisms like "tidalectics" unnecessarily. Neither will it do to encapsulate each work with the obfuscatory trappings of the nation-state, treating works of literature as epiphenomenon of the nation in some facile and palimpsestic mapping. Nor will it do to situate these works on some placeless, postnational sea. As Fanon ascertains, a cognisance of the national category is needed to weaken its jealous, constitutive, assimilative sway. To chart a path between national and global cultural flows is to avoid reducing works to national products but also to affirm creative genius; it is to debunk unwieldy and overreaching global analyses while still considering context. Just as Indonesia hosts the historic first meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement, known as the Bandung conference, Pramoedya Ananta Toer is able to invoke the category of Indonesia while simultaneously referring to the great multi-national network and process, decolonization, described by Neil Lazarus as "sheer, irrevocable advance" in his essay "The Global Dispensation after 1945."

Because it refers to so many things, times, places and contexts, postcolonialism has come under fire for being too general, reductive, and ahistorical (Sohat; McClintock; Ahmad; Dirlik). And yet, nationalist and Postcolonialist approaches have

been default theoretical perspectives for approaching the individual regions in question despite being repeatedly labelled insufficient or else neglectful (S. Lim; Chua; J. Graham *et al.* 468; Bishop *et al.*).

Despite the methodological suspicions and failures of comparative methods and frameworks, a form of South-South comparison seems necessary given the neoliberal hegemony of global economic flows between the regions. As Robbie B.H. Goh and Brenda S. A. Yeoh ask of Singaporean comparative gestures, in their interesting introduction to *Theorizing the Southeast Asian City as Text*,

Why is it that many planners in Asia still look to the West for ideas and standards in urban design, planning architecture while they speak of an Asian identity, Asia democracy and the Asian way? Even though Curitiba in southern Brazil is an excellent example of effective public transportation and excellent city planning, social planning and environmental management, why is it that few Asian planners look to it for inspiration? Is it because Brazil is by definition not an “advanced country” like those of the West? The lessons of Curitiba have thus gone unnoticed and unrecognised in Asia even though Curitiba’s lessons are especially relevant. And so Asia doggedly labours in the shadow of the West while loudly continuing to disavow this adoptive congenital bind. (13-14)

In this historical narrative of Singaporean ideology of self-development, Yeoh and Goh, make an interesting suggestion – that Singapore would have been better off taking notes from Curitiba (Brazil) than from the US or European models. That Singaporean authorities do not do so, the authors ascribe to a problem of epistemic (read ideological) proportions. Singapore has imbibed a neoliberal form of transnational capitalism that blinds or deafens it to the lessons so-called developing-nation competitors might provide. Instead, a chronotope of North-Atlantic progress persists as a dominant narrative that might be analysed as a form of sly mimicry. This discussion and these suggestions then bring the following dimensions into play: the need for South - South comparison; the rubric of national difference; and the hegemonic cosmopolitanism of transnational capital. Yeoh and Goh’s plaintive plea then issues a call for the type of

project I propose here. Consequently, the model that this thesis develops must acknowledge these parameters.

There are actually a few studies purporting to consider the regions I focus on, in explicit or tandem fashion. One of the few theorists who explicitly consider an East and West Indies trajectory in their work is Shih Shu-mei, whose recent work on comparison theory draws heavily on Édouard Glissant to figure comparison as relation in an approach very similar to my own which she labels “relational comparison” (the phrase appears throughout her essay, “Comparison as Relation”).

Shih highlights two ethical conundrums that plague comparative studies: because the grounds are never level one side ends up being privileged; and second, that “comparing two entities at their intimate juxtapositions paradoxically further distances them” (79). In Shih Shu-mei’s conception, revealing the power structures inherent to comparison goes some way towards producing more ethical readings. To this end she invokes Glissant’s attempts to theorise a “poetics of relation.” I have briefly addressed Glissant’s *Poetics* in my introduction and I look more closely at it in Chapter Three, but what is interesting in Shih Shu-Mei’s project is her use of “relational comparison” to bring into productive relation works from East and West Indies.

Strangely, Shih does this neglected work by drawing out a connection via the American Deep South: William Faulkner (88). Such a move is perhaps understandable given her institutional situation (located in California; she desires immediate relevance to US American audience and therefore Literature). Shih Shu-mei reveals the connection to Faulkner in Chang Kuei-hsing’s Sinophone novel *Monkey Cup* (Houbei, 2000), stating that he (Chang) was an avid reader of Faulkner (and Conrad). However partially relevant, limiting this comparative manoeuvre to her institutional profile is unfair and inaccurate. The similarities of the plantation system also draw the works into relation:

The dynamics of the Chinese plantations in Borneo may be historically specific to Borneo, but the plantation system leaves similar legacies as those in Faulkner's South [... but] there seems to be a possibility for redemption, a solution that Faulkner's white southerners refused to take: a willing mixing with the native Dayaks and a surrender to the rain forest. In Chang's novel, it is through affinity and kinship with the Dayaks that our locally born, fourth-generation protagonist is able to arrive at some sort of reconciliation. The rain forest may be the heart of darkness, the tourist mecca, the site of sex safaris for others, but it is also where the logic of the plantation system can be reversed through the process of mixing, leading to unpredictable, unexpected, but diverse and rich possibilities for something new. This is Glissant's world of creolization. (92)

Shih wishes to find the liberatory power of the creole in Glissant and reads this in narratives formed on the "postslavery plantation arc" (80). Although starting with the connection through Faulkner she then discards this connection to privilege the affinity born of oppression from plantation slavery:

The stylistic affinity and thematic parallel in Chang's *Monkey Cup* with that of Faulkner's southern novels is then no longer about the canonical metropolitan writer's influence on a practically unknown writer in the West, but about interconnectedness along the postslavery plantation arc in world history where each literary text's singularity stands out. (92)

And thus she claims for relational comparison the postcolonial honour of allowing periphery-periphery models of relation. I highlight and extensively quote from Shih's essay because I too find drawing upon Glissant an appropriate strategy for comparing the two regions in question. Glissant recognises "the inescapable *shaping force* in [the Caribbean] production of literature," as what he calls "the language of landscape" (*Caribbean Discourse* 146). Moreover, Glissant's suggestion of ecocritical approach acknowledges a constituent or inherent violence. As he continues, "[t]here is something violent in this American sense of literary space. [...] I do not practice the economy of the meadow, I do not share the serenity of the spring" (146). Glissant identifies as common to the Caribbean experience, an "irruption into modernity" which

he sees as the antithesis of “a literary tradition that has slowly matured” (146). Instead Caribbean literature’s birth, its emergence was “brutal [... a] violent departure from tradition, from literary ‘continuity’” (146). This Glissant sees as “a specific feature of the American writer when he wishes to give meaning to the reality of his environment” (146). Shih’s essay, which charts these Glissantian resonances in a novel produced on the other side of the world, captures some of the shared types of environmental and subjective violences characterising the territories of which she writes. Moreover, Shih’s project represents a rare comparative focus on a specifically Indies-oriented brand of South-South comparison.

Having thus reviewed, rehearsed, and set out some problems with extant frameworks and methodologies, I now move to an articulation of the specific comparative methodology I employ in the chapters of analysis that comprise Part Two. And, like Shih Shu-mei, I will start with Glissant.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY – ANALOGOUS STRUCTURES: LITERARY

ISOMORPHISM AND THE MALAYAN AND CARIBBEAN ARCHIPELAGOS

Martinique is not a Polynesian Island.

– Édouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (1)

Édouard Glissant opens *Caribbean Discourse* with a straightforward declaration of specificity that seems to forestall any attempt at archipelagic comparison. With this provocative opening, Glissant rebuts past and present colonists and tourists who apprehend the land in a particularly insensible fashion: namely, as existing solely for the pleasure of the privileged. Martinique, he seems to insist, is not simply one of “many islands” – interchangeable and dismissible as a group. As such, Glissant’s qualification undermines colonial and touristic discourses of exploitation.

However, it is only on a first reading that Glissant’s invocation of Polynesia insists on Caribbean (more specifically Martiniquan) difference. A second reading reveals how Glissant simultaneously invokes the shared predicament of (post)colonial islands apprehended within colonial discourse. In articulating the “opacity” of the Caribbean island in question, he seems to reject the invitation for comparison by preventing the two regions’ inclusion within the same intellectual frame; but at the same time – in rejecting this colonial comprehension of tropical islands – Glissant necessarily implies a counter-discursive equivalence. That is, insisting on Polynesian and Caribbean islands’ shared rejection of colonial comparison ironically reifies a comparative project; the archipelagos begin to resemble one another in the similarity of their strategic claims to postcolonial opacity. Thus, Glissant’s insistence on the specificity of the island immediately plunges it into relation with other islands.

This relationship between specificity and relationality, or comparison, is almost a disavowed dialectic within postcolonial studies; only recently have attempts to

theorise the field from regionalist perspectives been re-examined.⁶⁷ Comparative approaches within postcolonial studies are frequently greeted with suspicion, risking charges of a- and de-historicisation, or de-contextualisation.⁶⁸

As discussed in the introduction, critics of the comparatist approach argue that the comparative gesture ironically invokes the spectre of colonial history (Robinson). Recall Jennifer Robinson's argument that the methodological manoeuvre of comparison is problematic in that the privileged swath of its gaze – which registers disparate cases indistinguishable for analytical simplification – resembles that of colonial procedures. The comparative methodology mirrors colonial logic in its desire and power to apprehend diverse regions from a domain of intellectual and material privilege.

If – as Peter Hallward has argued – Glissant's work is, in fact, broadly opposed to the current postcolonial consensus advocating increasingly greater specificity in postcolonial scholarship, then reading his opening invocation as a double-gesture is an appropriate one. Such a double-gesture highlights a useful corrective to the dominant mode of postcolonial scholarship overly preoccupied with centre-periphery interactions to the exclusion of South-South, or periphery-periphery, global flows.

In his essay, "*Beyond the Straits: Postcolonial Allegories of the Globe*," Peter Hulme offers a critique of comparativism that reveals its colonial genealogy (47). He writes, "[o]n one level, globality – even in a restricted sense of the term – is clearly directed at the attainment of military and commercial power."⁶⁹ He therefore opens his essay questioning the change to a larger scale given "postcolonial studies' fundamental commitment to ideas of the local and the marginal" (47). Detouring from Hulme, I ask

⁶⁷ See Kerstin Oloff's essay "Wilson Harris, regionalism, and postcolonial studies" for an excellent reassessment of Wilson Harris's early work from a regionalist perspective that reveals both its attractiveness for postcolonial studies and its importance as an intervention in the specific national-level discourses of its time. I discuss Oloff's essay more fully in Chapter Five.

⁶⁸ Perhaps the most (in)famous of these attempts is represented in Jameson's "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" which Aijaz Ahmad famously denounces for the presumption of attempting to articulate a cognitive theory of the third world aesthetics.

⁶⁹ Or as Neil Lazarus puts it: "globalisation" was never the deterritorialised and geo-politically anonymous creature that neo-liberal ideology projected it as being. On the contrary, it was from the outset a political project, a consciously framed strategy designed to restructure social relations world-wide in the interests of capital" ("Postcolonial Studies after the Invasion of Iraq" 11).

here how one might invoke a Glissantian double-gesture, approaching specific, national or local contexts *and* broad, comparative, transnational flows within the same dialectic.

To this end, the concept of *analogous structures* – a technical term borrowed from the biological sciences – is apposite.⁷⁰ Extrapolating the definition from the biological to the humanities and social sciences, it refers to: any comparison of *structures* with different *evolutionary pathways* but having the same essential *function*.⁷¹ Analysing the functional element within postcolonial literary studies, for example, identifies analogies on the level of performance between literary works appearing out of very different socio-cultural environments.

But is it possible to give an account for such similarities, without relying on a standard “postcolonial” explanation – that similarities in literary works of postcolonial regions simply result from resistance to colonial hegemony, and the chief task of the critic is to locate instances of such resistance? In this, albeit crude and grossly caricatured perspective of postcolonial practice – that nonetheless persists in certain quarters – the true merit of a work of literature might be measured by tallying up instances of the “resistance” they display; or, as in Peter Hallward’s caution (and Réda Bensmaïa’s complaint),⁷² the danger lies in taking perceived authenticity of representation as an example of resistance simply for the fact of presenting a non-European subjectivity from the margins.

⁷⁰ In one of the very few anthropological studies done that consider East and West Indies within the same intellectual frame – Murray, Boellstorff, and Robinson’s “East Indies/West Indies: Comparative Archipelagoes” in *Anthropological Forum* – the related term “homologous” is invoked as the apposite descriptive nomenclature. The authors write, “looking at the East Indies and West Indies, which might be seen to sit at opposite poles of anthropological inquiry, as a single unit, a unit of comparison but also one of homology and surprisingly parallel themes (222). I contest this assertion in this thesis. Rather than offering remarkably parallel structures that perform differently, comparative literary studies of both regions yields, to my mind, the realisation that very different cultural forces have impelled the development of works that perform similarly.

⁷¹ In its orthodox usage in the context of the biological sciences “analogous structures” signifies appendages that perform the same function though they developed as a result of very different evolutionary pathways, for example: birds’ and bats’ wings.

⁷² I quote Bensmaïa in the Introduction to this thesis. She writes, “[w]hat has long struck me was the nonchalance with which the work of these writers was analyzed. Whenever these novels were studied, they were almost invariably reduced to anthropological or cultural case studies. Their literariness was rarely taken seriously. And once they were finally integrated into the deconstructed canon of world literature, they were made to serve as tools for political or ideological agendas. This kind of reading resulted more often than not in their being reduced to mere signifiers of other signifiers, with a total disregard for what makes them literary works in and of themselves” (6).

Perhaps a change in methodological perspective can cure this predilection. To illustrate this claim, I will track the figuring of Southeast Asia, (including the “Malay Archipelago”), and the Caribbean (both continental & island) as analogous structures within three different, but interlinked, intellectual paradigms: the colonial imaginary, the postcolonial literary, and postcolonial ecocriticism.

3.1 The Colonial Imaginary

The role of agriculture is undertheorized in the study of colonial expansion
– Beth Fowkes Tobin *Colonizing Nature* (10)

In this section I rehearse and review scholarship on the colonial strategies of re-shaping, or creating the land anew according to a logic derived from the imperial enterprise. As scholars of the history of science show – especially those who trace histories of botanical gardens – colonial powers altered the very landscape, introduced new species of plants, animals, even people, intentionally but also sometimes unintentionally, so that a new environment arises with the onset of colonialism.⁷³ The point I want to emphasise here, is the power of this phenomenon to render landscapes similar, and the ability within a colonial intellectual frame to consider or compare vastly different territories analogously.

Beth Fowkes Tobin insists – in *Colonizing Nature: The Tropics in British Arts and Letters, 1760-1820* – that “agriculture is crucial to understanding the British empire,” despite the role of agriculture being “undertheorized in the study of colonial expansion” (10). Tobin argues that “[t]he economics of imperialism is usually discussed in terms of the foraging of trade routes, the rise of mercantile capitalism, and the concomitant military conquest of territory,” but “vast plantations devoted to the monoculture of sugar in the Caribbean and Pacific, and the cotton, tea, and indigo estates of India not only transformed these regions but also radically altered their

⁷³ Again, R. H. Grove’s *Green Imperialism* (1995) is seminal here.

populations through genocidal policies and the massive movements of people from one region of the globe to another” (10).

I build upon Tobin’s work of rendering agricultural processes of colonisation plain, by highlighting how these actions worked to make discrete regions *similar*. In particular, I claim that, historically, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia were *analogous* in Colonial European thought; that is, while they developed independently, they served the same function.⁷⁴ Perhaps corroborating the claim that colonial imaginative responses to these regions were largely functional is Tobin’s observation in *Small Axe*:

What is striking about the visual representation of Caribbean landscapes during the earlier part of the eighteenth century is the relative absence of picturesque views. Compared to other colonized regions, India and the Pacific, with their huge visual archive, landscapes in particular, the British West Indies was never depicted by a major British artist. The dominant visual representation of the land appears in the form of maps and military officers’ harbor views, suggesting an interest in the strategic rather than the aesthetic. A handful of writers – Janet Schaw, William Beckford, and Edward Long – tried to describe the landscape in traditional aesthetic categories of the beautiful, sublime, and picturesque, but their deployment of these tropes are strained and, on the whole, unconvincing. The failure to aestheticize West Indian landscape suggests that the plantation economy with its sugar-slavery nexus was not conducive to the operation of the aesthetic. (145)

Despite the lack of contemporary critical attention (resulting from methodological biases), both geographical regions have been historically and imaginatively comprehended (etymologically, “grasped together”) in the colonial imaginary.⁷⁵ Recall how, historically, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia are analogous in colonial European thought because – while they developed independently – they served the same function. That is, within the logic of colonial mercantilism, both

⁷⁴ Analogous Structures is a technical term in the biological sciences whose definition I extrapolate here to refer to any comparison of structures with different evolutionary pathways but having the same essential function. This function often develops from a convergence of environmental factors that cause the subjects in question to evolve accordingly. Thus, while initially being quite different, the need to accomplish some similar function creates a demand for a specific form of performance. Different strategies may be employed but on the level of performance, it is the same.

⁷⁵ The word imaginary has resonance in other fields, but I take Martiniquean poet and theorist Edouard Glissant’s definition, that is, “all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world.” (*Poetics* xxii).

regions were perceived and conceived of as regions of fecundity and commodity, providing gold and spice, sugar, and tobacco, the commodities of empire and power in colonial times.

This comprehension is represented visually in the early European attempts at mapping the world. Indeed, as Thomas Suárez mentions in his discussion of a Ptolemaic world map found in Gregor Reisch's *Margarita Philosophica* of 1503 and the antiquated geographical conundrum of whether or not the Indian Ocean was an open or closed body: "at the time the Caribbean and the South China Sea were essentially synonymous and it is unlikely that [...] any distinction between the two island worlds [was made]" (Suárez 89).⁷⁶ Columbus, and others who thought of that journey, when trying to plot the new lands they had "discovered" would have inserted them near the South China Sea of their colonial mental geography.

Paravisini-Gebert locates the earliest expression of "the Caribbean as new Eden" (land of exotic and bounteous beauty) in Christopher Columbus's own letters and ship logs. She quotes Columbus writing that the islands were "most beautiful, of a thousand shapes." Of importance to her are his descriptions of the trees: the islands were "filled with trees of a thousand kinds and tall, so that they seem to touch the sky" (Columbus qtd. in Paravisini-Gebert 99). This is a notable description because, according to Paravisini-Gebert, "[f]or sailors like Columbus, accustomed to an increasingly deforested Europe, the densely wooded islands of the Caribbean recalled a primeval, pre-Adamic world" (99).

Early descriptions of Southeast Asia too were pre-empted by symbolic or idealised descriptions, such as perhaps most famously in the case of Malaya, Pomponius Mela's AD 43 reference of the "Golden Chersonese" – a peninsula of

⁷⁶ According to Suárez, "it was not until 1503 that a map reflecting any knowledge of an open Indian Ocean, finally appeared in a printed book, and even this was speculative. The map in question [...] retains the Africa-Asia land bridge but qualifies it with a legend stating that 'here there is not land but sea, in which there are such islands not known to Ptolemy.'" From a Modern perspective we may wonder whether the author of this statement had in mind the islands of Southeast Asia or the islands of the Caribbean..." (89).

golden soil, and Argyre, an island of silver – famously and seminally referenced in Ptolemy’s *Geographica* and thence to innumerable other luminaries in the European world who had access to the Greek tradition (Sardar 16-19). While a simplification, it is nevertheless easy to see how this idealised worldview translated into the aim, by European powers in Southeast Asia, “to profit, rather than to rule” (Tarling 4), or as Clifford Geertz writes, in the case of Dutch Indonesia, “one long endeavour to bring [the country’s] crops into the modern world, but not her people” (“Agricultural Involution” 48). Analyses of either region, at least since Said’s seminal *Orientalism*, have pointed to the regions’ providing an “other” against which Europeans defined themselves. And Richard Grove, in *Green Imperialism* has clearly demonstrated how the tropical islands of both regions provided a stimulating encounter that led to the development of the natural sciences and Western thought. These general academic responses to colonial treatments of the regions in question inform contemporary analyses in large measure.

In her article, Paravisini-Gebert draws on Richard Grove’s influential *Green Imperialism* – a book that reveals how the colonial experience has been centrally significant to the formation of western environmental attitudes and critiques (Grove 3). Many postcolonial ecocritics take as seminal Grove’s revelations on how the “tropical environment was increasingly utilised as the symbolic location for the idealised landscapes and aspirations of the western imagination” (5). Paravisini-Gebert usefully implicates this discourse of symbolism in the appropriation of land by “naturalisation” practiced by conquistadors. In sum, by describing the land as “Edenic,” “natural,” or “virginal,” the explorer simultaneously erases the indigenous presence in the region⁷⁷ thereby legitimising his appropriation of land. As Paravisini-Gebert writes, (quoting Grove), “the [Caribbean] region entered the European imaginary as a virginal space

⁷⁷ Peter Hulme has explored this discursive or symbolic strategy in *Colonial Encounters*; he sees in the “gesture of discovery,” also a “ruse of concealment” (2).

vulnerable to ‘colonisation by an ever-expanding and ambitious imaginative symbolism’” (Grove 5; Paravisini-Gebert 99); this strategy “allowed [conquistadors] to claim the land without due recognition of prior indigenous rights” (99).

Most attempts at postcolonial comparison delve straight into thematic unities or contrasts – often studies of postcolonial literatures group texts according to a properly postcolonial thematic concern, such as hybridity – likewise, “conventional ecocriticism is heavily thematic” (Morton 2). Timothy Morton acknowledges the tendency to explore what he calls the “elements of ecology, such as animals, plants, or the weather” or the “varieties of ecological, and ecocritical, language” (2). Postcolonialists might contend here, that if one is to group texts under theme, sufficient grounding by way of context is required on a case by case basis. More than simply a call for increased contextual specificity, however, I engage the very grounds of comparison for these literatures of vastly different contexts. Therefore, while the literatures of both regions bear witness to shared histories of colonial exploitation and share the ignoble distinction of having been positioned as subordinates in the realm of economic development – and a postcolonial comparison *may* be made on that basis alone (though open to criticism as it positions these entities on the receiving end always [Ahmad]) – I rehearse an alternative comparative grounding in some specific overlooked or under-theorised connections.

First, one of the most obvious analogies between the two regions – within the paradigm of the colonial imaginary – is that both regions, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia, have had the same name: “Indies.” The significance of this name for the regions is typically under-theorised. “Indies,” the name that both regions share, is too easily dismissed as a kind of geographical malapropism on the part of early European explorers that has evolved into a misnomer that stuck. The definition and etymology of the word “Indies” yields, from the Oxford English Dictionary, two definitions, one obsolete. The first is the standard usage, that “Indies” is a “plural adaptation of “India”

and signifies India and the adjacent regions and islands, and also those lands of the Western Hemisphere discovered by Europeans in the 15th and 16th centuries, originally supposed to be part of the former”; the OED records how “with the progress of geographical knowledge the two were distinguished as East Indies and West Indies” (OED).

Now, in addition to this standard definition, the OED notes a now obsolete usage of the word: that is, it is “used allusively for a region or place yielding great wealth or to which profitable voyages may be made.” This latter – now obsolete – usage of the word is much more interesting. It is one that would have had currency during the age of European exploration. Naturally, the OED also documents early recorded instances in the English Language of the word with this usage; the earliest listed in the OED happens to be found in Shakespeare, specifically his *Merry Wives of Windsor* (1598). In the scene in which it occurs, we have Falstaff discussing two women whom he describes as his personal “Indies.”

Fal.: Heree’s a Letter to her. Heeres another to misteris Page. Who euen now gaue me good eies too, examined my exteriors with such a greedy intention, with the beames of her beautie, that it seemed as she would a scorged me vp like a burning glasse. Here is another Letter to her, shee beares the purse too. They shall be Excheckers to me, and Ile be cheaters to them both. They shall be my East and West Indies, and Ile trade to them both. Heere beare thou this Letter to mistresse Foord. And thou this to mistresse Page. Weeethriue Lads, we will thriue. (I.iii. 60-8)

Here, we get a gendered construction in which the riches Falstaff can take from both women are analogous to the great wealth that may be “cheated” from both Indies. Here Shakespeare plays on the word “cheater” which also signifies a seafaring vessel for transporting said wealth. As the OED indicates, an “Indies” for the Elizabethan colonist is simply a source of great wealth; the geographical location of the “Indies” is of no particular importance so long as it is apprehended as such.

Strangely not listed in the OED – given that it must be earlier – is another instance of this use of the Indies in Sir Walter Raleigh’s *Account of the Discovery of Guiana* of 1595:

[...] I have anatomized the rest of the sea towns as well of Nicaragua, Yucatan, Nueva España, and the islands, as those of the inland, and by what means they may be best invaded, as far as any mean judgment may comprehend.

But I hope it shall appear that there is a way found to answer every man’s longing; a better Indies for her Majesty than the king of Spain hath any [...] (9)

Raleigh’s account is of a journey performed in 1595 that undoubtedly provided source-material for Shakespeare’s play. His usage renders the term explicit: “Indies” is no specific geographical location, it is a project and an ideological position; installing an extractive colonial machine, one can *make* an “Indies.”

In John Donne’s “The Sun Rising” from *Songs and Sonnets* we get another literary application in which the persona invokes the metaphor of riches to describe his lover. In the poem, the persona addresses the rising sun, which has intruded upon the persona lying in bed with his lover, with a commanding, “Look, and tomorrow late, tell me/ Whether both the Indias of spice and mine/ Be where thou leftest them, or lie here with me” (ln16–18). Donne’s persona compares, metaphorically, the riches he enjoys in his lover’s arms with the riches of gold and spice got from the colonies – East and West. Now the object of his description is his lover, but if we reverse the metaphor, we see that Donne has likened the exploitation of a geographical region to seduction and intercourse – conventional tropes of the colonial penetration of new lands at least since Raleigh declared “Guiana is a contrey that hath yet her maidenhead” (*Discoverie* 210).⁷⁸

These two regions are linked in the Colonial European imaginary through a violent comprehension characterised by that remarkable tendency to convert difference

⁷⁸ For an intriguing discussion on the sexual and gendered dimensions of the Elizabeth – America relationship, see Kristen G. Brooks, “A Feminine Writing that Conquers.” Louis Montrose and Peter Hulme also offer extended discussions on related themes.

into the same. Just as Joseph Roach insists we consider how the “New World was not discovered in the Caribbean, but one was truly invented there” (4), it is worth exploring how certain European powers attempted to create what they wanted to find (by first erasing what existed). Elizabeth DeLoughrey points to the remarkable ancestry and continuance of the imaginary in such colonial comprehensions when she references Marco Polo’s narrative, which, because it “had already described great archipelagos in Asia,” made Columbus’s Caribbean landfall seem predestined, so that what occurs is “a collapse of time-space between Antillean and Asian islands” (11).⁷⁹

We can trace this colonial comprehension in cartographic representations and in the transportation and transplantation of flora and fauna between regions: animals and fruits, plants and people.⁸⁰ For example, tropical species – from weeds to fruit-trees – have crossed the world from West Indies to East Indies, and vice-versa, via natural dispersion, but also following colonial trajectories. Several tools exist to track and trace the paths of these biotic cosmopolitans through time and space. A recent study of the history of cultivated fruit in the Southeast Asian peninsula, for example, reveals how, “in the absence of other data, comparative linguistics is an important source for tracing the[ir] spread” (Blench 115). Indigenous Amazonians, the pineapple and the cashew became nativised in Southeast Asia after the Portuguese brought samples in diverse itineraries between Malacca and northeast Brazil. The Amerindian Tupi word for cashew is *caju* and for pineapple, *nana*; the Malay names for these fruits, *gajus* and *nanas*, are blatant derivatives of the Tupi via Portuguese (Blench 117). The multiplicity of local varieties of pineapple celebrated among specific ethno-geographic regions of

⁷⁹ DeLoughrey’s point is made in her study *Routes and Roots* which takes the Pacific Islands as that “Asian category,” but the point she makes on the “collapse of time-space” is more germane to my project than it is hers; after all, it was the “East Indies,” Pramoedya Ananta Toer’s “Spice Islands,” which provided the motive for Columbus’s colonial enterprise.

⁸⁰ I have attempted just such a tracing for a specific cosmopolitan genera of plant, the amaranth, in Gabriel, Sharmani Patricia and Rosa, Fernando (eds.) *Lived Cosmopolitanisms in Asia: Littoral Epistemologies of the Global South* (Routledge: Abingdon, 2015) (in Press). See also, De Shield. “The Cosmopolitan Amaranth: A Postcolonial Ecology.” *Postcolonial Text* 10(1), 2015.

Borneo, or the Philippine archipelago, is testament to the fact that these fruits have found their way into native dishes and cultures.

This sort of situation, in which a fruit, plant, or animal has been present in an environment so long as to become native, is commonplace. For instance, R Michael Bourke defines as indigenous in Papua New Guinea any fruit found there prior to 1870—the earliest date for which settlements by “foreigners” (Europeans, Asians, and other Pacific Islanders) can be traced, which caused major changes in agricultural production (Bourke and Harwood 22).

I provide these examples simply to highlight the material realities of the postcolonial regions, to suggest that in postcolonial ecocriticism, geography is not simply a metaphor for the regions but considers the extra-discursive reality of these places. While it may seem obvious for postcolonialists to invoke the sea, the land, geography, and environment in the struggle to assert identity in the face of colonial oppression, in practice postcolonialists have generally treated claims to land as metaphorical. A survey of all the titles related to the idea, since Benedict Anderson, of *imagining* nations, cultures, countries, people, and, of course, communities bears witness to this. James Proctor and Peter Morey have discussed this observation in their review of *Postcolonial Geographies* edited by Alison Blunt and Cheryl McEwan: “the relationship between postcolonial discourse and geography has been axiomatic”; “the map, the field, contact zones, borders and boundaries are today staple spatial metaphors within the field” (57). But, as Proctor and Morey later paraphrase, “while geographical figures have tended to saturate postcolonial discourse, they have been allowed to float free of their material co-ordinates” (57). In other words, while geography and geographical terms and references permeate much postcolonial analysis, they in the end do not refer to the physical, actual, or material world they ostensibly represent. Instead

postcolonialists take the terms as indicating a mythical, symbolic, or ideological connection to place.

Proctor and Morey trace this idea back further than Benedict Anderson, to Edward Said who, in *Orientalism*, invokes the idea of “imaginative geographies.” It is important to note here that Said did not *deny* the existence of an actual “Orient” or “Occident”; he *does* acknowledge their existence (however tacitly). And he reveals three qualifications for his thesis that address these concerns over the existence of a real, physical geography and material reality. The first is that “there exists real peoples and cultures located in the East. But about these facts of the Orient [his book *Orientalism*] has little to contribute” (53). He also states that his book should not be taken as “a defense of Islam and the Arabs” because he has “no interest in, much less capacity for, showing what the true Orient or Islam really are” (53). In the introduction to a later edition of *Orientalism*, Said addresses these concerns explicitly; he says, “actually I go a great deal further when, very early in the book, I say that words such as “Orient” and Occident” correspond to no stable reality that exists as a natural fact” (330). Thus, while work that follows Said, does take terms from the actual geography and deploy them metaphorically, this does not mean that part of their signifying function does not refer to an actual land or place. What such work does is question or suspend the idea that knowledge of the land has representative access to the actual, physical land accurately and immediately.

Much scholarship has been devoted to exploring this disconnect. As Peter Hulme writes in *Colonial Encounters*,

during the colonial period large parts of the non-European world were *produced* for Europe through a discourse that imbricated sets of questions and assumptions, methods of procedure and analysis, and kinds of writing and imagery, normally separated out into the discrete areas of military strategy, political order, social reform, imaginative literature, personal memoir, and so on. (2)

These concerns and theories are crucial for this thesis, which seeks to interrogate the approach to comparison in examinations of the processes of world production. However, in contrast to Hulme, I wish to highlight not only those discursive processes by which the colonial world was represented and “produced” but also the material or “extra-discursive reality” of nature from which much justificatory illustrations and examples are borrowed to legitimise imperial processes as natural, destined, or inexorable (Soper 8). In her book, *What is Nature?* philosopher Kate Soper calls this materialist position “realist” (8). She argues that, “unless we acknowledge the nature which is not a cultural formation, we can offer no convincing grounds for challenging the pronouncements of culture on what is or is not ‘natural’ [...]”; however, she acknowledges that “[r]epresentations of nature and the concepts we bring it, can have very definite political effects, many of them having direct bearing on the cause of ecological conservation itself” (8, 9). Soper makes clear what is lost in privileging discursive understandings of nature over more properly materialist ones. At the same time, the discursive underpinings to actual colonial exploitations of the natural environment must not be de-emphasised.

In *Consuming the Caribbean: from Arawaks to Zombies*, Mimi Sheller looks at practices of Caribbean consumption. According to Sheller, “[a]lthough the Caribbean lies at the heart of the Western Hemisphere and was historically pivotal in the rise of Europe to world predominance, it has nevertheless been spatially and temporally eviscerated from the imaginary geographies of ‘Western modernity’” (1). She continues, writing that the Caribbean has an “indisputable narrative position at the origin of the plot of Western modernity” but that the “history has been edited and the Caribbean left on the cutting-room floor” (1). While her analyses focus on the Caribbean alone, Sheller’s point about the disavowal of the centrality of the region to

Western Modernity, is a crucial one. Accordingly, it is taken up by several other academics, although for discrete and various reasons.⁸¹

What draws Sheller's analysis into this discussion, however, is not the fact of the Caribbean's intellectual excision alone but how that excision draws it into relation with the Southeast Asian region. A similar point could be made – indeed, in some ways it has been made – of Southeast Asia within the field of postcolonial studies. Graham, Niblett, and Deckard, among others, note how postcolonial literary studies has persistently privileged “writing from certain Anglophone sites of empire, particularly South Asia and the Caribbean” (468). Just as it is popular to speak of the “trinity” of postcolonial theorists (in Bhabha, Said, and Spivak), the regional triumvirate in postcolonial literary studies has been Africa, the Caribbean, and South Asia. Other regions, just as other theorists, have been occluded by the celebrity and presence of these entities. Chua Beng Huat, has issued a compelling essay theorising the “absence in Postcolonial Studies [of] analyses of Southeast Asia, one of the most colonized regions by European powers” (239).⁸² Chua concludes that “there are substantive and conceptual issues emerging out of local Southeast Asian colonial and postcolonial experiences, which bear comparison with those of the rest of the postcolonial world” (239).

Here then, in Chua's critical editorial, is an explicit call for postcolonially inflected comparative work relating to the region. This thesis takes calls such as these as foundational, but it also seeks to raise comparison to the analogical at the level of theory: is the evisceration of the Caribbean from accounts of Western modernity methodologically related to the elision of Southeast Asia from the same?

Charting historical studies documenting the processes of environmental exploitation in both regions is obviously beyond the scope of this study and it is not my

⁸¹ See Torres-Sailant's *Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (2005) for instance, which argues for a return to Caribbean specificity with regard to terminology appropriated from the region under the name of postcolonial theory.

⁸² Other Southeast Asian scholars point to the same phenomenon. See (Philip, Bishop, and Yeo): “First, despite the fact that the Southeast Asian region has been heavily colonized in the past, it has, with a few outstanding exceptions, been largely neglected in postcolonial theory and in discussions of global urbanism” (3-4).

purpose here to offer a comprehensive investigation of this colonial tendency.⁸³ In brief, both regions were envisioned as places of *natural* fecundity and therefore, exploitable commodity. Grove argues that it was in the mid-seventeenth century (when the island-as-Eden discourse was fully in play) that the very stakeholders in the plantation system realised that their exploitative colonial economic demands resulted in potentially catastrophic environmental degradation (5). In *Transatlantic Translations*, Julio Ortega abstracts this island-Eden discourse even further to identify the “syntax of the discourse of abundance,” a paradigm of “fertility, extravagance and inexhaustible wealth” (187). This realisation became instructive for astute observers of colonial possessions. Colonial intellectuals occupied a unique perspective that enabled a comparison of processes of administration – colonial experiments in which failures in one Indies then provided lessons for administering others. In the same way, successes of colonial administration in one Indies were translated into templates for deployment in the other region. These comparative endeavours were veritably consolidated under the science of “comparative colonial administration” (Aravamudan 293). Both regions were figured as sources of gold and spice, sugar, and tobacco, the commodities of empire and power in colonial times. They were perceived and conceived as regions of fecundity and commodity. While the Caribbean is taken to be the “best example of this excess of variety” (Ortega 8), the history of the region’s apprehension through colonial discourse (which I have outlined above) indicates that it was the fecundity of the Malay Archipelago that was being there misapprehended and sought. As Julio Ortega writes in *Transatlantic Translations*, “the Indies were seen as nature’s most fertile terrain, where the fruits of Spain flourished even better than on the peninsula itself [and peninsulars] attributed this to the diversity of favourable climates” (8). What colonialists wanted to

⁸³ I have already discussed Mimi Sheller, and Silvio Torres-Saillant’s work on the Caribbean. To this I should add Franklin Knight’s name as an influential historian. I have also discussed Richard Grove and Beth Tobin’s influential studies of environmental intersections with colonialism. As regards Southeast Asia and Malaysia in particular, Leonard and Barbara Andaya figure significantly as historians of the region. Even more celebrated is, of course, Benedict Anderson.

find – and thus what they created – was already described and misapprehended as an Antillian reality and ideal generated from idealised descriptions of Asian islands (DeLoughrey). In Julio Ortega’s terms, what we witness in colonial accounts is a process by which “the new was perceived in terms of the already conceived, the different constituted by what was already known, and the unnamed seen through what had been already read” (9).

To use the phraseology of Edward Said, not only did both regions provide an “Other” against which the European defined himself, they did so in remarkably similar fashion. Both regions also provided, in varying degrees of similarity, a stimulating encounter that led to the development of the natural sciences and western thought (Grove). Early European explorers, taxidermists, naturalists added to the Linnéan archive such an astonishing variety of species as to impel new categories of classification.⁸⁴ The very novelty of species presented science with a problem that enabled its development and increasingly accurate, or nuanced, (re)calibrations. Thus, we see in these regions, the relationship between Kate Soper’s antinomy of discursive and material conceptions of nature. The logic of the colonial analogy works discursively but also changes the material reality of these regions.

Of course, the two regions were not analogous in indigenous epistemologies and imaginaries during the time of colonialism, which constituted a rude intervention in the civilisations of diverse people-groups.⁸⁵ We might be tempted to sum up these analogies, and declare them false, by adopting some idealised anti-colonial perspective of the colonised. With this dismissive manoeuvre we might try to declare that, while the hegemony of the European colonising forces created a situation in these regions derived from European exoticist project, this project was resisted on different levels by much of

⁸⁴ In some cases, it is true, dishonest taxidermists and naturalists conjured up false reports and stitched together imagined species – sometimes literally (by contorting specimens and using pelts, talons, feathers, etc. of multiple species to sensationally craft bizarre chimeric forms) in order to shock European and other audiences.

⁸⁵ The subtitle of J M G Le Clezio’s book signifies this well: *The Interrupted Thought of Meso-American Civilization*.

the native populaces of these regions. This manoeuvre then attractively assigns the analogies to history, and denies their relevance or influence outside a specific colonial time and place. In the next section, however, I will argue that it is not possible to do so.

3.2 The Postcolonial Literary

In Kuala Lumpur in 1979 I shifted for some days from hotel to hotel before settling in at the Holiday Inn. It was quietest place I could find, and I liked the setting. To the left was the race-course, with a view in the distance of the Kuala Lumpur hills. Around the race-course and in front of the hotel was the rich greenery of the wet tropics: banana fronds, flowering frangipani, the great, branching saman or rain tree of Central America: the mingled vegetation of Asia, the Pacific and the New World that spoke both of the great European explorations and the plantation colonies. It was the very vegetation I had known on the other side of the world in Trinidad.

And then what was familiar became strange [...]

– Naipaul *Beyond Belief*, (385)

I have ended the previous section with the suggestion of a false analogy between the two regions when perceived through the corrective lens of non-colonial perspectives. In this section I will qualify this objection and demonstrate that in some peculiar ways the analogy is revived even in “local” or “native” perspectives. Native subjects may have often resisted the colonial comprehension of spaces. And yet, within postcolonial literary studies – which ostensibly sets out to represent such “marginalised positions” we see, ironically, certain inheritances from the colonial imaginary. Here I recall the discussion in the introduction to this thesis and in Chapter Two, in which the colonial genealogy of comparison is rehearsed. The manner of the regions’ ironic postcolonial analogic comprehension is this: while the two regions might not be perceived as analogous in native imaginaries prior to the struggle for independence, when approached via postcolonialism, both regions are *in practice* comprehended together under a single hegemonic category, ironically replicating the colonial tendency.

Here I quickly reiterate the positions of key theorists invoked in the introduction and Chapter Two to illustrate the postcolonial literary dimension of the analogous structures I am exploring. Rey Chow takes the Eurocentrism inherent to the comparative method to task in her essay “The Old/New Question of Comparison in Literary Studies:

A Post-European Perspective.” Chow advances the notion that, in comparative literature, the formulation “Europe and its Others” is fully in play, where national literatures are aligned and inserted into a European grid-of-reference “in subsequent and subordinate fashion” (294). In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan notes how, tellingly, institutionalized postcolonialism operates under domination by the former colonial metropolises (4). And both Huggan, and Chow, have shown, in their own ways, how postcolonialism can induce a tendency so that texts are pre-read for the “resistance” they show. In postcolonialism, aggrandized claims to marginality or minority effect a strategic accumulation of “lack” (for Chow) or “exoticization” (for Huggan), valuable for the academic market.⁸⁶

Re-conjuring these influential arguments, I now return to the “second reading” of Glissant that opens this chapter. Following Glissant’s paradoxical manoeuvre that simultaneously insists on opacity and relation we can make the following claims about postcolonial methodological practice: at its most universal and reductive, postcolonialism apprehends the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia as equivalent signs of difference, or resistance, for the West.⁸⁷ In so doing, postcolonialism operates at the totalitarian level; it renders whole communities flat. The Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia then become new products, intellectual commodities for increasing knowledge and consequently, the power of, especially, the West.⁸⁸ Glissant points out a similar danger in his *Poetics of Relation* regarding orientalisising poets: “the elsewhere, full of diversity ... somehow always ends up contributing to the glorification of a sovereign here” (37). In a curious way, Naipaul too conjures forth the opposing

⁸⁶ Julio Ortega historicises “native and postcolonial resistance” in academia as “a project inherited from the spirit of the sixties in which ethnology privileged autarchic visions.” Ortega is critical of attempts to present “the native as heroic or especially endowed with wisdom, and [...] as a victimized ‘minority’ in need of compensation” (9). Huggan, and Chow, both criticise this same type of native apprehension and resonance.

⁸⁷ Perhaps this is why, despite his obvious relevance to postcolonial (and ecocritical) studies, Naipaul actively scorned such labels as “postcolonial” and detested what he dismissively labeled “protest literature.”

⁸⁸ Graham Huggan complicates this position in *The Postcolonial Exotic* by arguing that successful postcolonial writers are often aware of their position within the global literary economy as “exoticised agents,” and can offer a critique of their own relation to power via a “cultivated exhibitionism” (xi).

positions of Glissant's dialectic. He recognises, in the vegetation of Kuala Lumpur, a shared landscape born of the similarity of colonial experience (what he later refers to as "the composite tropical greenery of colonial days" (387), but his meditations on this shared colonial ecological intervention are belied by specificities of experience (the "strange"). Indeed, Naipaul's own reminiscences (in the epigraph) are issued from a position of "complete uninvolvedness" – his own sovereign imperial space – rather than from some suspect farcical solidarity with those he depicts in his novels (and non-fiction).⁸⁹

While it would seem logical to turn to the nation for shelter from the globalizing gaze of theory, many have recognized problems in the privileging of the novel and the nation as analytical categories in postcolonial studies. In this postcolonial literary framework, each country's literary output is set side by side with the only apparent justification being a shared project of decolonization, thereby re-invoking the suggestion of strictly analogous situations. In Pablo Mukherjee's phraseology – in *Postcolonial Environments* – we risk "wip[ing] out all differences between [regions] and see Moscow and Mogadishu, or Mumbai and Kinshasa as interchangeable entities" (7). This is exactly why some theorists of the Caribbean and Southeast Asia consider postcoloniality a hubristic attempt at framing the complexity of the regions (Lim 2). Like Aijaz Ahmad – in his famous critique of Frederic Jameson – they scorn the tendency to "submerge" the "enormous cultural heterogeneity of social formations" into a "singular identity" (10). Of course, much has been said about the perceived inadequacy of the term "postcolonial," but what is worth reiterating here is how these regions remain effectively analogous moving from the "universal" colonial European perspective through to the postcolonial literary.

⁸⁹ See Patrick French's authorised biography of Naipaul *The World is What it Is*, for scandalously frank admissions of the same.

3.3 Postcolonial Ecocriticism

Despite analogy being a veritable dirty word in literary studies of the current age that insists on an ever-increasing contextualisation,⁹⁰ throughout this thesis I have been suggesting that looking at these regions analogously *can* be enabling. My caveat is that here we must use “analogous” in the specific sense outlined earlier, that of taking into account its specific evolution and concrete historical context when remarking on performative similarities.

Tracing affinities between regions, while remaining aware of their emergence from very different contexts, approaches, I think, a responsible methodology of comparison that considers them in an analogous fashion without reducing their unique complexities. An appropriation of Foucault works nicely, within a postcolonial, ecocritical attempt at comparison: “One finds isomorphisms ...,” says Foucault in *The Order of Things*, “that ignore the extreme diversity of the objects under consideration” (xi).

Although examples of isomorphisms abound, explicit comparisons of Caribbean and Southeast Asian literatures fall under the category of generally neglected transnational scholarship.⁹¹ As Part One of this thesis demonstrates, there are only a few ready, or explicitly relevant, models attempting similar trans-oceanic comparisons.

In *Routes and Roots*, Elizabeth DeLoughrey provides insightful affinities, or what Édouard Glissant might term (in English translation) “succulencies of relation” between the Caribbean and the *Pacific* Islands. DeLoughrey seeks “trans-oceanic trajectories of diaspora [...] , underlining the[se regions’] shared similarities in geipelagic relation rather than the limiting model of national frameworks” (23). To this end, she locates conceptual similarities between regions. The justification for such

⁹⁰ See Rita Felski’s “anti-context” polemic “Context Stinks!” in *New Literary History* for a reassessment of the dictum.

⁹¹ Elleke Boehmer and Bart Moore-Gilbert have discussed the neglect of the transnationalist dimension within postcolonial studies. Among other issues, they implicate the tendency to focus on centre-periphery (rather than periphery-periphery) dynamics.

comparison perhaps arises from the history of US-military involvement in the Caribbean and the Pacific. Indeed, in her preface she expresses an interest in “decoloniz[ing] the trajectories of US militarization across the seas” (xiii).

DeLoughrey’s work is thus postcolonial and in its foregrounding of geography and belonging, ecocritical. I highlight DeLoughrey’s project because interestingly, she builds much theoretical foundation for comparing/or “navigating” Caribbean and Pacific Island texts on the work of Édouard Glissant, and she does this despite Glissant opening his monumental work *Caribbean Discourse* with that declaration of Caribbean opacity or singularity: “Martinique is not a Polynesian island” (1). Though DeLoughrey never explicitly engages with this particular statement, the discourse of relational islands pervades her work.

While her study chooses to privilege the islandism of the regions over and above the continental element of the Caribbean, she demonstrates the benefits of considering the regions in their complexity, interrogating both indigeneity and diaspora through Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s evocative term “tidalectics” (discussed in Chapter Two) as an alternative epistemology to western colonialism. Despite its nebulosity as a theoretical category, the work DeLoughrey does while wielding the term is very important, especially in the Caribbean where there exists what Maximillian Forte calls “the historical trope of anti-indigeneity” (1) where diaspora is taken as an over-arching principle despite the presence of Caribbean texts that “nativize the Caribbean landscape” (DeLoughrey, 229).

DeLoughrey *does* explicitly engage with another influential metaphorical entity, however: “the repeating island,” which, in Antonio Benítez-Rojo’s specific usage, signifies the “meta-archipelago” that is the Caribbean. For Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean – that marvellous place of “sociocultural fluidity,” “ethnological and linguistic clamor,” “historiographic turbulence,” of creolization, supersyncretism, heterogeneity (3) – is

best thought of in metaphorical terms. Benítez-Rojo goes so far as to write that “to persevere in the attempt to refer the culture of the Caribbean to geography – other than to call it a meta-archipelago – is a debilitating and scarcely productive project” (24).

There is an interesting isomorphism suggested in Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island*; he declares that, “...the Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago (an exalted quality that Hellas possessed, and the great Malay Archipelago as well), and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center” (4). Because Benítez-Rojo’s focus is strictly the Caribbean, this analogy is only a suggestion. But here we have an explicit, if brief, reference of a structural affinity between the Caribbean and the Malay, or Southeast Asian, Archipelago; as well as the Greek. How are these related? We know already how much the Grecian model informs, if circuitously, Western culture.

In Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s critique of Benítez-Rojo, she examines the pernicious flip side of his concept of the repeating island exemplified by Britain (and by extension here we can add other European powers like Spain and France). DeLoughrey demonstrates how the concept of the repeating island “has ample historical precedence in British imperialism,” “an older and more pernicious model of colonial island expansion” and that all it takes is a glance at the “long colonial history of mapping island spaces” to recognise a pathology of “nesomania,” or “desire for islands” symptomatic of European empires (6).

In direct contrast to Benítez-Rojo’s approach, which dismisses attempts to locate an original island, DeLoughrey considers, “the “root” or originary island” of British imperialism: *England*. As DeLoughrey points out, England can only call itself an island if it suppresses Scotland and Wales. And the United Kingdom exists because of its colonial *expansion* overseas, *first*, into the territory of its immediate neighbours (for e.g. Ireland) and then a rapid, fractal replication in seemingly random remote locations

farther overseas such as Singapore, Jamaica, India, Guyana, Australia, Canada, the Falklands, Belize.

In these cases, Britain is articulated as an expanding isle that is extended through the work of “transoceanic male agents of history” (DeLoughrey, 26). We get, with British colonialism, the projection of imperial England’s cultural topography onto other spaces in repetitive fashion. DeLoughrey argues that the colonizers repeated what they knew of Europe, so that we get so many Britains. This is also an easy point to illustrate, just think of all the New Englands there are, New York, Little Britain, Nova Scotia, New Albion, New Hebrides, New Ireland, all of the places named after Victoria....

Focusing more specifically on the colonial city, Latin American theorist Ángel Rama locates a period in colonial history when Spanish conquerors

adapted themselves to a frankly rationalizing vision of an urban future, one that ordained a planned and repetitive urban landscape and also required that its inhabitants be organized to meet increasingly stringent requirements of colonization, administration, commerce, defense, and religion. (4)

The cities that the colonizers left, having roots in medieval European cultures, were, in Ángel Rama’s words, “organic” rather than “ordered” (3). It was only the lands of the newly conquered and colonized that would provide a “blank space” on which to construct an urban project ideally suited to the reigning social order of the day: colonial administration.

Different strategies of ordering were used for particular contexts. For example, in his contribution to the book *Theorizing the Southeast Asian City as Text*, Rajeev Patke points out that differences in policy for places as near to one another as Singapore and Malaysia had ramifications for the urban landscape that were different in each place and can be seen in the patterns of urban assimilation in each. However, in both cases, with colonization, the world is ordered according to an ideal of empire. This ordering

consists of a palimpsestic new creation, just as Peter Hulme pithily states: “the gesture of discovery is also a ruse of concealment” (1).

Not all models of repetition are so epistemologically violent, Benítez-Rojo figures the Caribbean model as a non-violent, creolizing fractal expansion. While creolisation is something of a clichéd term in Caribbean discourse, it is helpful to place it in juxtaposition with an isomorphism in Maritime Southeast Asia: *nusanterism*.⁹²

Nusantara is the word in Bahasa Melayu used to describe the East Indian archipelago. In an isomorphic literary strategy, writers from this region have attempted, less conspicuously than in the Caribbean, to identify forms of literary performance common to their region. Thus, *nusanterism* might be considered a native imaginary of the “Malay Archipelago”. The Caribbean experience with projects that attempted to identify an originary or a singular Caribbean culture (most often associated with attempts to synthesise a “folk”) presents a useful model that might function prescriptively for such comparable, if belated, assertions in the East Indies. Debates from the 1960s and onwards in the West Indies revealed the politics of representation in occasionally fractious assertions of Indo-Caribbean, Afro-Caribbean, and Indigenous Caribbean identity (these categories themselves composite and diverse). Applying the insight the Caribbean experience provides allows new perspective on, for example, the work of Malaysian poet and theorist Muhammad Haji Salleh.

In his poetry and essays on literary theory, Muhammad Haji Salleh invokes *nusanterism* to signify an egalitarian understanding of regional geo-history and a plea to retain a universally-applicable indigenous wisdom as resistance to the globalized consumer culture present inside Maritime Southeast Asia; for example, in Singapore where “the [regional] hinterland is steadily being forgotten” (Raslan, 85). In its claim to an indigenous aesthetic, *nusanterism* might operate in a conceptually similar manner to

⁹² Silvio Torres-Saillant argues that terms specific to Caribbean discourse are coopted by the more fashionable postcolonialism. Here, in comparing a Southeast Asian discourse with a Caribbean one, both retain their specificity in relation.

Brathwaite's *tidalectics*, as part of a dynamic tradition. The Malay Malaysian poet Muhammad Haji Salleh, in "Tropics," articulates a straight-forward belonging: "but the beach is the brown people's home, / their traditions / engraved by every tide. / they speak the language of the sea" (94). When left to operate solely in its originary context, the concept risks turning from a symbolic attachment to place into a series of ethnic essentialisms. In *Romance and Laughter in the Archipelago*, Muhammad Haji Salleh describes his project as an "attempt to reclaim territories of literary theories and their worlds — mostly sketching the Malaysian perspective, but perhaps also hoping that they may carry echoes for other literary heritages colonised and severed from their roots" (107).

On the plus side, this is obviously a welcome call for constructive comparison. Muhammad Haji Salleh uses the word "territories" to figure theory as land (reclaimed), so wielding a land metaphor for what might be understood as a theoretical project of annexation. He further claims representative status for the nation, privileged access to *the* Malaysian perspective (rather than *a* Malaysian perspective) in a slippage of national, native, and indigenous identity. Interrogating further, we can ask exactly which perspective Muhammad Haji Salleh is choosing to privilege as the ostensible or putative socio-cultural national universal. The phrase, "severed from their roots" indicates his is a conservative project, fighting off its nostalgic implications. Agnes Yeow argues against reading Muhammad's project as mere nostalgic celebration of older ethnic folkways; she reads his project as an environmental advocacy in its recuperation of place-based sensibilities that might mitigate the alienation and endangerment of the natural world from which he draws inspiration and cause.

It may be easy to read the petty politics of the region — in which a religious-inflected and racially-tinged cultural xenophobia impels Malaysian citizens to articulate competing claims to national belonging — in Muhammad's poetic attempt to further

organicise or indigenize Malay claims to national authority or cement current Malay political domination with the mortar of myth. But Yeow registers, in contrast to this, a more egalitarian understanding of regional, geo-history and a plea to retain a universally-applicable indigenous wisdom as resistance to the globalised consumer culture very present inside the Malay Archipelago.

Recuperations of Muhammad Haji Salleh's vision, such as Yeow's would benefit from juxtaposition against Caribbean instances of regional imaginary. Rather than Muhammad's ideological battle that may (un)intentionally result in "other" indigenous values being supplanted by a generic trauma of Malay separation from place, a much more productive dialogue might be enabled via comparison with Caribbean articulations of geo-historical belonging.

To interrogate *nusanterism* alongside Aimé Césaire's notion of *négritude* for example, or the regional imaginary expressed in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, where the persona declares, "and my original geography also: the map of the world drawn for my own use, not dyed with the arbitrary colours of men of science but with the geometry of my spilt blood, I accept..." (125) would be to inject a helpful and broadening discourse into interpretations of *nusanterism*, where one could see clearly how critiques of Césaire's *négritude* might apply to *nusanterism*, and vice-versa. Muhammad Haji Salleh's project in *Romance and Laughter in the Archipelago* is an attempt to affirm an identity, and wave a flag that of independent literary tradition distinct and as august as that of the West. In his attempt to reveal and articulate this, Muhammad argues that literary forms such as the *pantun*, being indigenous to the region, are more capable of expressing its reality. In other ways too, Muhammad Haji Salleh's argument parallels Aimé Césaire's understanding of "négritude": both — Muhammad, and the early Césaire, for example — attempt to delineate an ideological self-understanding assumed to be more in touch with nature and the natural tendencies

of the natives than those foreign elements of western colonialism. But Césaire's ideal is recognized as being dated in the Caribbean, where contrasting ideals of Édouard Glissant's *créolité* or the "adamic possibilities of the archipelago" articulated by Derek Walcott, reveal the failure of Césaire's (and Muhammad's) type of atavism (Clark 134).

There have been recent complaints of the omission of Southeast Asia in postcolonial studies. Chua Beng Huat writes that "there are substantive and conceptual issues emerging out of local Southeast Asian colonial and postcolonial experiences, which bear comparison with those of the rest of the postcolonial world" (239). Rather than belatedly insist on a Southeast Asian contribution within existing conventional frameworks, however, a responsible approach is mandated in ecocritical postcolonialism, especially the type of South-South (periphery-periphery) comparison I propose here. Removing Europe as the sole intermediary in relation avoids conventional postcolonial frameworks where both the Caribbean and Southeast Asia are cut up into discrete parts by colonial language. The Philippines is no longer linked to Cuba only through Spain; the anti-colonialism in the work of Cuba's José Martí is comparable to that of Philippine's national hero José Rizal on other grounds. Suriname and Indonesia need not be brought into comparison only because of the Dutch movement of Malay peoples, culture, and language.

The range of themes introduced in this chapter, and in Part One of this thesis in general – i.e., the Non-Aligned Movement, contemporaneous figures in anti-colonial and postcolonial struggles, nusanterism, and *négritude*, the pernicious effects of colonial and touristic models of the regions, the historical ironies of postcolonial conservation and environmentalism, the concepts of the meta-archipelago, tidalectics, the shared sense of architectural impermanence of these tropical regions, the role of the writer, strategies of representation of landscape, strategies of indigenization – all reveal the justification for comparison present in the enabling interrogation of analogous

structures. Refusing the centre-periphery dynamic, the works of these two regions present themselves as candidates for comparison.

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CHAPTER 4: NATIVE MAGIC – ALEJO CARPENTIER’S *EL REINO DE ESTE MUNDO* (1949) AND ISHAK HAJI MUHAMMAD’S *PUTERA GUNUNG TAHAN* (1938)

Land is central to the process of self-possession.⁹³

In this chapter, I examine in tandem two “archipelagic” writers’ important early novels: *El Reino de Este Mundo* (*The Kingdom of this World*) by the “dean of Cuban novelists,” Alejo Carpentier, and *Putera Gunung Tahan* (*The Prince of Mount Tahan*) by Ishak Muhammad Haji, the Malay writer-politician. Both writers employ different registers of magical realism to figure an epistemological struggle between colonial-foreign and autochthonous-native regimes of value. In particular I will examine both authors’ appropriation in different ways of the *metaphor of indigeneity* and the subsequent magical mastery over nature this relationship provides. My discussion of both literary works reveals how, in both cases, nature is harnessed through mystical means to oust that which is figured as foreign to the land. But also, both implicitly and explicitly, this discussion explores the question of what rubrics, methodologies or literary theories might appropriately assist comparison of these works.

4.1 Introduction: Why Compare?

On the one hand, there is reason for *not* placing the two works together at all, not least of which is the unequal or disproportionate literariness displayed between the two works. In contrast to Ishak’s sparse, moralising fairy-tale, Carpentier’s text comes across as far more complex, serious and of deeper philosophical import. And while both artists may be employing a technique described as “magical realism,” the style and meaning of this term is radically different for each writer. Moreover, simply juxtaposing the two texts without recourse to an over-arching methodology or justificatory principle of comparison, be it the postcolonial, or indeed World Literature, renders the comparison arbitrary regardless of the works’ possible thematic congeniality.

⁹³ See J. Michael Dash’s introduction to *Caribbean Discourse* by Édouard Glissant (xxxv).

On the other hand, there has been a call in recent years for a renewed engagement with postcolonial theory that would admit new texts to its strangely repetitious and circumscribed canon of texts. Neil Lazarus, in the *Postcolonial Unconscious*, and in his essay “The Politics of Postcolonial Modernism,” argues that a tiny fraction of postcolonial literature gets talked about and written on, over and over, so that the vast majority of postcolonial literature – postcolonial, that is, in theme, concern, and aesthetic – goes unnoticed (424). He looks for a corrective to this institutionalised neglect he calls “the politics of postcolonial modernism” (423).⁹⁴ Curiously, the bias toward unearthing Anglophone and Francophone colonial legacies that emerged in postcolonial studies in the wake of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* means that other literatures – significantly those from Malaysia and other Southeast Asian nations – are underserved by theory (Loomba *et al.* 4). To include Malaysian and other Southeast Asian literature in a dialogical dimension with selected texts of the Caribbean then, is to address this concern in some small way.

In a recent study of *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel* Christopher Warnes declares, “Magical realism’s greatest claim to usefulness is that it enables comparison of texts across periods, languages and regions” (18), yet, strangely, despite acknowledging this, Warnes chooses to focus on familiar, key texts, such as *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *The Satanic Verses* that do nothing to extend what Neil Lazarus describes as the “woefully restricted and attenuated corpus of works” dominant in postcolonial studies (“Politics” 424).

I wish to heed Lazarus’s call to admit new works to the postcolonial canon. In this chapter, I describe these two novels, not for the purpose of determining to what extent they conform to particular definitions of magical realism over other more or less valid interpretations of the term. Rather, invoking the debate over the efficacy of

⁹⁴ John Marx points out that this situation is hardly unique to the field of postcolonial studies. He observes that “[m]any literary fields combine sublime abundance with restrictive canonicity” (389).

magical realism for postcolonialism elucidates certain features of the texts made visible when situated within these parameters. That is, following Warnes, I view magical realism as a tool enabling a comparison of texts across different regions; as well, specifically via a postcolonial and ecocritical method, a way of engaging this “specifics of history” and the “critical context” of the works in question (Warnes’s terms). Erik Camayd-Freixas asks a rhetorical question in “Reflections on *Magical Realism*” that demonstrates the utility of the theme for cross cultural comparison:

[W]here else can the recent and most notable fiction of North and South America, Eastern and Western Europe, India, Morocco, Japan and Oceania meet under the same roof (or, indeed, between the covers of a single book), if not at the table of that unusual concept, Magical Realism, where they have come, not to negotiate per se, but to feast and be dissected? (580)

While enabling an otherwise ignored comparison is undoubtedly useful, simply including neglected literature is not enough. Rather, introducing methodology and rubrics *necessitating* the inclusion of such material is a better manoeuvre, and one that I explore here. As such, investigating alternative frames to the conventional postcolonial with which to stage a meeting between Ishak and Carpentier is therefore germane to Lazarus’s project (not to mention that of Brennan in *Wars of Position*, Arif Dirlik’s various critiques of postcoloniality, and Simon Gikandi in his “Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality,” among others).⁹⁵

In contradistinction to those frameworks and methodologies that set out to test the integrity of the universalising theory itself, which thereby dissect the works on the bench of theory, I test and juxtapose potential points of relation and mutual concern, by reading in tandem, to elicit respectful and dialogical re-readings of each work.

⁹⁵ See John Marx’s assessment of Lazarus’s book in his review essay, “The Whole Field of Postcolonial Literature” in *Diaspora*, 2013.

3.11 What the Authors share

What Carpentier's *El Reino de Este Mundo* shares with Ishak Haji Muhammad's *Putera Gunung Tahan* is the depiction of an epistemological struggle between those harmoniously acclimatised to land and nature, and those whose attempts to exploit it result in an increasing alienation, frustration, and fear of it. Although these two writers are very different in terms of historical context, personal style, and artistic impetus, the performative strategies between the two nevertheless resemble one another: though culturally and geographically distinct, in both cases, there is a strategic appeal to the magically indigenous in the face of colonial encroachment. But what the two texts reveal when read in tandem is how crucial the appropriation of the indigenous really is for postcolonial claims to authority. Even the ostensibly native must ground their claims to indigeneity through some type of magical or mystical means.

It is to the authors and their specific works that I now turn. Alejo Carpentier, in addition to having held multiple offices – including the political (as cultural ambassador for Cuba to France) – is one of the foremost writers of the Spanish Caribbean, Latin America in general, and indeed, World Literature. His works are most often categorised according to these national and regional descriptors (Cuban, Latin American, and World Literature). While discussions of his themes, style, and techniques have been present since the fitful start of his novelistic career,⁹⁶ in the postcolonial era – and under the category of “World Literature” – these discussions of Carpentier's technique normally revolve around his much debated method for representing Latin American “marvellous reality” (*lo real maravilloso*) and the validity of his claim to have presented a historically accurate rendering of the incredible history of the Haitian Revolution. Both of these claims appear in his prologue, which is probably quoted far more frequently

⁹⁶ Carpentier's first novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* (1933) was written in prison.

than the text of his story proper.⁹⁷ While my discussion of Carpentier will inevitably impinge on the concept of marvellous reality that Carpentier, and others, promulgate – not least because it is in *El Reino de este Mundo* that Carpentier first inaugurates the term – I will argue that important elements present in his representation of the native and the idea of indigenisation that occur in his novel *El Reino de este Mundo* (1949) surface from a perspective that juxtaposes interpretation with that of the novel *Putera Gunung Tahan* (1938) by his Malayan near-contemporary, Ishak Muhammad Haji (known affectionately in Malaysia by his Japanese-derived alias, Pak Sako).

Ishak Haji Muhammad, an early Malay politician and novelist who participated in the nationalistic flexing and twisting of pre-*Merdeka* Malaya is not nearly as well-known among literary scholars outside Malaysia and the Malay Archipelago as Carpentier is outside his national milieu. One reason may be that, in contrast to Carpentier's novel – which was written in a major colonial language (Spanish) – Ishak's thin and slightly farcical novel, *Putera Gunung Tahan*, was written in the author's native Bahasa Melayu, and not the English in which he learned at the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar while training to become an administrative assistant to the British. In contrast to New World and Caribbean writers who used colonial languages as *lingua francas* (many for whom such European languages were mother tongues, or first languages), the peculiar development of Malay writing in the Peninsula meant early Malayan writers who did not write in European languages would have used Jawi script. And apparently, because the use of Jawi script had diminished in neighbouring territories of the so-called “Malay Archipelago” earlier than it did in the Malayan peninsula, Malayan writing in general did not spread far beyond the peninsular borders (Putten 11). Therefore, as Jan van der Putten argues, Malay writing did not have nearly

⁹⁷ Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, “The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows: A Re-Reading of Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*.” *Research in African Literatures* 35 (2004), 116.

the kind of impact on its neighbours, for example, that Indonesian writing had on the national culture of Malaysia (11). As such, while it occupies a prominent place in Malaysian national history,⁹⁸ Ishak's novel did not, as a result, participate internationally in a context beyond that of representing narrow, state-level and nationalistic concerns;⁹⁹ this is so, even if its themes are broadly anti-colonial (and, as I will go on to argue later, constitutive of the theoretical arguments of early postcolonial theorists).¹⁰⁰ Such a local focus seems to have been Ishak Haji Muhammad's original intent however; he himself explicitly addresses a Malay audience in the preface, describing the novel as "a very satirical book," containing "many valuable moral lessons" towards providing readers with "greater awareness of [their] various obligations towards [the] nation and its people" (Aveling's translation) though, in so doing, Ishak therefore implicitly addresses British administrators of the territory whom he subjects to ridicule.

4.1.1 Summary of the Plot: *Putera Gunung Tahan*

Because *Putera Gunung Tahan* is not as well-known a text as Carpentier's *El Reino de Este Mundo*, I offer here a simple summary of the Malayan novella's plot and brief context to introduce discussion and analysis.

The author of *Putera Gunung Tahan*, Ishak Haji Muhammad, provides some cursory details on the more renowned natural aspects of Pahang – the Malaysian state in which the novella is set – after which he belatedly chastises the many cowards, liars, traitors, and bribe-takers that made it easy, according to his forebears, for the British to take Pahang "once upon a time" (3). The narrator immediately reveals the origins of the titular prince; he is in fact a young descendant of a royal family who had no other

⁹⁸ *Putera Gunung Tahan* is required reading as part of the national curriculum and children read it as part of their form 5 (tingkatan 5) syllabus. It was also re-published at Malaysia's independence.

⁹⁹ His novella is also sometimes cited in representations of the debate for national parks in the peninsula, especially the establishment of the park around Gunung Tahan, in Pahang, his native state. *Putera Gunung Tahan* is mentioned, for instance, in Kathirithamby-Wells's book *Nature and Nation: Forests and Development in Peninsular Malaysia*, (Singapore: NIAS Press, 2005), 246.

¹⁰⁰ in particular the writings of Albert Memmi, whose fundamental insights mirror those of Ishak Haji Muhammad despite the latter's work appearing some 20 years earlier.

recourse but to flee the battle to safety in the forests. The narrator then reveals that his name has been forgotten, and so we are introduced to him only as the Prince of Mount Tahan (translated as such from the archaic Malay [feminine] formulation, *Ratu Bongsu*). The next major characters to be introduced are two English explorers, adventurer-naturalists, or scientist-speculators, who desire to explore the region of Mount Tahan with the intention to establish a hill station high on its summit where the climate resembles that of the cooler temperate zones. Despite their apparent scientific expertise, they evidently lack local knowledge and foolishly attempt to explore the mountain during the rainy season. Flash floods and other misfortunes meet with them, their guides and porters all die, and they are left stranded. In short order they are separated and we follow their individual adventures in the forests in the shadow of Mount Tahan.

Thus separated, the story reveals the fates of each Englishman in turns. Mr. Robert is taken by an indigenous band of “Sakai” and installed as their village “*Batin Putih*” or “Great White Chief” (16).¹⁰¹ In trying to secure an item of great monetary value (a white tiger skin), Mr. Robert gets into a passionate discussion with an old Malay woman who was also rescued by the indigenous people of the forest; she instructs the Sakai in her manners and religious customs. Mr. Robert in arguing for the superiority of British customs and dismissing the Sakai “magical arts and charms” as “superstitious nonsense” (29), angers the old Malay woman and she gets even by demonstrating their efficacy on his person: after spiking his food and drink with a Sakai love potion, Mr. Robert becomes irresistibly infatuated with a homely Sakai girl. An inordinate desperation to possess the Sakai girl overcomes Mr. Robert and he agrees to undergo a series of tests that function as a marriage ceremony. He fails the first and is denied marriage to the girl. He appeals for a second trial, which he is granted only to

¹⁰¹ The term Sakai here is a specific ethnic descriptor that functions in contemporary usage as a general derogatory colloquialism for “primitives.”

fail again slipping from a greased tree he is challenged to climb in pursuit of the girl. The fall unfortunately is fatal, and Mr. Robert's second failure is also his death.

Mr. William's adventure in Pahang foregrounds far more in the way of magic than Mr. Robert's misadventure. Mr. William's attempts to track Mr. Robert prove difficult and he turns from noting the striking biodiversity of the mountain ecology to contemplating the sublime in the form of "magnificent scene[s]" like that of the river's transformation into "a thunderous, cascading waterfall" (34). Indeed, it is while sitting entranced by the natural scenery that he is approached by "a handsome young man," "strange," and "neat and properly clothed" (34-35). After being hailed politely by the "wonderful young man" and exchanging pleasantries, the figure introduces himself as Kusina, a *Bunian*, or spirit person, who can vanish from mortal sight at will. The young man agrees to guide Mr. William to the summit where he would meet with the Prince but warns him that he will not be permitted to leave. Mr. William agrees to these terms.

Upon meeting the Prince, Mr. William reveals his plan to assess the climate of the mountain summit and, if agreeable, build a hill station, or as Mr. William describes it to the Prince, "a holiday resort – a sort of second heaven, if you know what I mean" (40). The Crown Prince, immediately perturbed by the Englishman's audacity and insolence in proposing to buy the land from him, takes Mr. William into permanent custody and prohibits his ever leaving the mountain.

Despite not being allowed to depart from the Prince's domain, Mr. William is afforded access to the outside world, and even granted vision of his own English home via magical natural technologies such as the "bamboo telescope" (*teropong halus*), the "talking banyan tree" (*pokok beringin bercakap*), and the "ambassador bird" (*burung pesuruh-jaya*) which are presented in the text as cognates to the Western television and radio. These technologies only leave Mr. William more distressed, however, as they reveal his wife's infidelity, provoking moralising rhetoric from the Prince on the need to

prevent mixing of the sexes. Mr. William submits to the Prince's paternalistic naïveté and accepts the analysis that British rule has sparked moral decline among the otherwise "noble and virtuous people" (48).

Mr. William soon restarts plotting on how to take the mountain from the Prince, and after he discovers the nature of the ambassador bird which sends messages across vast distances, he employs it to deliver a message to London to have bomber planes drop poisonous gas onto the mountain, and remove the inhabitants. The Prince, wise to Mr. William's schemes has him tricked into a room and locks him in to his demise. The novel ends abruptly – and much too neatly – with both planes' destruction (while attempting a difficult landing on the mountain) and everyone on board dying save one "particularly attractive young woman" (who happens to be Mr. William's wife). None of the *bunians* were injured, and Mr. William's wife eventually falls in love with Ratu Bongsu desiring to bear his child.

4.1.2 On Magical Realism and Postcolonial Theory

As a literary genre, narrative strategy, or narrative mode, magical realism lends itself to postcolonial applications and exploitations.¹⁰² Not only do some of the most celebrated writers in modern times make ample use of the magical realist form (e.g. Salman Rushdie, Gabriel Garcia Márquez); arguably, the most studied of these do so as inhabitants of the postcolonial realm. Among those who argue for the genre's particular affinity with postcolonialism, it is standard to cite the genre's capacity as an equalising or levelling force.¹⁰³ More forcefully, for many postcolonial theorists, magical realism is a discursive arena that allows an inversion of disproportionate power relations characterising the political realities of the writers who wield it. Herein lies the appeal of

¹⁰² In *Ordinary Enchantments*, Wendy Faris cites the term's eastward movement from Latin America to the world and its [ab]use by other authors (such as Rushdie) who she suggests are intent on absorbing or exploiting its general decolonising power (38-9).

¹⁰³ Wendy Faris states this basic premise succinctly in her chapter on magical realism and decolonisation, writing that the "questioning of realism makes way for other forms of representation" (133).

the mode for postcolonial and anti-colonial writers who are often interested in locating articulations of resistance to colonial meta-narratives.

Carpentier's work, in general, but especially his articulation of *lo real maravilloso* in *El Reino de Este Mundo* in particular, have been foundational to notions of literary magical realism.¹⁰⁴ It is in Carpentier's prologue to *The Kingdom of this World* that the term *lo real maravilloso* (the marvellous real) is first introduced. Ishak Haji Muhammad's text, *Putera Gunung Tahan*, an earlier book than Carpentier's, has also recently been described as magic realism. However, while invocations of magical realism are present in discussions of Ishak Haji Muhammad's text by scholars such as Jan van der Putten and Muhammad Haji Salleh, these scholars do not adequately theorise magical realism and its potential applicability to this text. Rather, because of the inclusion of magical elements in the text, the scholars seem to simply assume the text fits this generic description; moreover, in their analyses, neither scholar provides a definition of the form and both fail to describe its formal characteristics.

According to Eva Aldea, the tendency to describe diverse works as magical realism, without also offering a formal definition is a common tactic that probably results from the term's academic cachet. In order to distinguish the text as magical realism, one must examine how magical realism differs from fantasy, say, or fairy-tale – otherwise all three generic categories remain contradictory candidate descriptors for Ishak's work.¹⁰⁵ To accomplish the work of this distinction I turn to recent theory of magical realism.

3.14 Recent work on magical realism: Eva Aldea, and Christopher Warnes

Christopher Warnes usefully provides “a basic definition of magical realism[: ...] a mode of narration that naturalises or normalises the supernatural; that is to say, a

¹⁰⁴ His essays are considered foundational to the genre; English translations of them open the seminal edited collection on the subject: Zamora and Faris's *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*.

¹⁰⁵ See Chanady's 1985 study *Magical Realism and the Fantastic* for a good discussion theorising critical distinctions between these often conflated genres.

mode in which real and fantastic, natural and supernatural, are coherently represented in a state of equivalence (3). I adopt Warnes's definition because his invokes the seminal scholarship (Echevarría, 1973; Chiampi, 1980; Chanady, 1985; Faris and Zamora 1995; Durix, 1998; Faris, 2004) in a synthesising re-examination of the form that takes into account a far older genealogy of the genre than other attempts at historicising it do.¹⁰⁶

Warnes definition right away signals the tension inherent to the term: the putative mutual exclusion of the natural and the supernatural. What magical realist texts share is the strategy of presenting supernatural elements as “perfectly acceptable and understandable aspect[s] of everyday life” (Warnes 2-3). Warnes's parameters are derived from earlier theory on the genre. Notably, Warnes builds on Chiampi, who argues that the genre facilitates “the denaturalisation of the real and the naturalisation of the marvellous” (205, qtd in Warnes 3), and Chanady's seminal distinction between magical realism on the one hand and fantasy, science fiction, and fairy-tale as three respective generic contenders on the other. According to Chanady, the fairy-tale, the work of science fiction, and the work of fantasy do not derive their authority from the real because these genres usurp the privileged status of the real by reifying an explicitly alternative realm.

Warnes's premise is that it is wrong to assume a monolithic magical realism, as if Márquez or Rushdie's version were in fact the only kind. Warnes decries the distortions resulting from impoverished comparative approaches that take one particular author's instance of magical realism as the normative one. Instead, Warnes outlines and describes two general strands of magical realism: one of faith, or ontology, and the other irreverence, or discursivity.

¹⁰⁶ Warnes dates the earliest expression of magical realism to 1798 in the writings of Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg a “German Romantic poet and philosopher better known by his pen-name of Novalis” and then suggests the term did not reappear until the 1920's with Franz Roh (Warnes, 2009: 20).

At root, if the supernatural or magical element in the narrative is explained away as a dream, a mental illness, a hallucination, the result of paranoia etc. then the story cannot be considered magical realist because realism takes a dominant normative role. If, however, the tension between the magical elements and the realist elements is sustained, so that no dismissal of the supernatural is possible, so that, *based on evidence presented by the text*, the magical aspect remains irreducible, then the work satisfies basic conditions of magical realism. As Warnes writes:

if the supernatural is in any way explicable – such as when Lewis Carroll’s Alice awakes to find that her adventures were all a dream, or when the fantastic bats swooping down on one of Hunter S. Thompson’s characters are revealed to be the result of drug-induced hallucination – then the code of the real is effectively privileged over that of the fantastic, and magical realism is therefore not the best category within which to consider the text.

The inability to sustain consistency of definition [...] result[s] in a vague and arbitrary approach which allows vastly different texts to be grouped under the same rubric with no measure of caution as to the distorting consequences this generates. (4)

Wendy Faris’s *Ordinary Enchantments* outlines several more conditions for a magical realist text (7), though Warnes maintains that the basic condition outlined above (which corresponds to the first two of Faris’s five conditions) to be the only requisite aspect.

Contrasting Warnes’s approach, which takes the affinity between postcolonialism and magical realism as theme, Eva Aldea adopts a wider, general theoretical perspective. In her book, *Magical Realism and Deleuze*, Aldea begins with the premise that major magical realist texts (such as *Cien Años de Soledad* and *Midnight’s Children*) have been read primarily as postcolonial or postmodern works, and that this proclivity then distracts from a more proper examination of their *form* and *function* as exemplars of magical realism. Furthermore, Aldea disparages the wanton

use of the term *magical realism* that sees it plastered as descriptor to vastly different works (a point that might challenge my decision to invoke the narrative mode as a method for comparison of a Caribbean and Southeast Asian text). While she acknowledges that this practice is likely prompted by its academic cachet, the haphazard use of the term, in her view, necessitates “a reconsideration of the genre” (1). To this end, she summarizes the work of the major scholars of magical realism, including Roberto Gonzalez Echevarría (1973), Wendy Faris (2004), Christopher Warnes (2007), and Amaryll Chanady (1985).

Aldea is broadly dismissive of two broad gestures dominant within theory of magical realism: the first is the gesture suggesting magical realism’s affinity with generically postmodern concepts; the second is the postcolonial gesture that suggests the power of magical realism lies in its capacity to invert existing hierarchies. For Aldea, both of these gestures fail to provide “a fully developed or convincing definition of the genre” (10). Regarding the first gesture, she concludes that “[d]espite these critics’ attempts, it remains unclear how magical realism can be satisfactorily described as a particularly postmodern genre” (10) and she judges attempts to align magical realism with postmodernism a failure insofar as they are unable to provide a satisfactory definition of the genre.

Most usefully for this chapter, which considers postcolonial (and anti-colonial) inflections in Alejo Carpentier’s and Ishak Haji Muhammad’s works, however, is Aldea’s critical engagement with the second gesture – those specifically postcolonial appropriations of the magical realist genre. Aldea locates in Christopher Warnes recent contribution to theory of magical realism, *Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel: Between Faith and Irreverence*, an articulation of the problem: “a formal approach is necessary in order to provide a definition which can then be applied to any context” (Aldea 17). But Aldea criticises Warnes’s reluctance to follow through with a

comprehensive reassessment of the term. Instead she argues, Warnes merely restates characteristics of the term with which scholars are already familiar. Warnes declares magical realism in its postcolonial forms to be “an attempt to escape from the violence, epistemic or actual, of rational truth’s “grasp on things” by calling into question post-Enlightenment certainties about what is real and what is not” (Warnes 152). Aldea steps back to ask, what if we do not begin, as postcolonialists like Warnes seem to do, with “a socio-cultural or geo-political contextual approach to the genre” and instead ask what the formal characteristics of magical realism look like beyond the specific political concerns of postcolonial theory (17).

Aldea’s criticism of Christopher Warnes’s approach reveals a further set of basic generic assumptions inherent to postcolonial approaches to the term. First, postcolonial approaches to magical realism have generally failed to offer a formal definition of the term (something Aldea also criticises in postmodern approaches as well) and second, that the “only available working model of magical realism may simply not be suitable for postcolonial readings” (17). Aldea argues, drawing on Jean-Pierre Durix, that magical realism is a problematic genre in the postcolonial context insofar as “the magic is always in danger of undermining political readings” and that it “offers nothing but a futile inversion of existing hierarchies” (13). This is not a novel claim, however. That such a process is damaging to postcolonial work in that it participates in an ironic literary economy has been noted by, among others, Graham Huggan who labels this the “postcolonial exotic.” And a few years earlier than Huggan, Jean-Pierre Durix claims that this magical realist inversion merely “[panders] to the tastes of Westerners eager to read about quaint exotic worlds.”¹⁰⁷

Aldea wishes instead an “inversion” of standard postcolonial appropriations of magical realism, one that “[privileges] ontology over anthropology” (148). This

¹⁰⁷ Durix is quoted in (Aldea 13).

inversion is accomplished by abstracting both the real and the magical aspects of examined texts from the social, cultural, and geopolitical context of the works in question. And this theoretical approach and manoeuvre provides a unique vantage point to assess magical realism as a form, one that does not simply “[erase] the differences between the real and the magic” thereby “subver[ting] realism and all that it stands for [...]” Aldea’s approach [re]defines the magic as that which escapes [the limit of the real].” The magic therefore “becomes a supplement to realism, not by negating it, by adding fanciful elements, or supplying an alternative world-view, but as an element which allows for the imagining of a new people unfettered by the constraints of existing politics, society and culture; unfettered, indeed, by the real” (149).

4.2 Magical Realism and Ishak Haji Muhammad’s *Putera Gunung Tahan*

With that, I’d like to turn to Ishak Haji Muhammad’s slim text, which may seem to present some difficulty here because, under some strict definitions, it is not a work of magical realism at all, but rather fantasy, or fairy-tale.¹⁰⁸ However, my intention here is neither to pigeonhole the works according to some placeless critical literary taxonomy nor to extend a specific, historically contingent definition of the form so that it might belatedly encompass a Southeast Asian text. Instead, the object is to invoke the parameters of the theoretical debate surrounding magical realism in order to orient the works into productive relation.

The Prince of Mount Tahan, relates the misadventures of two British scientist-speculators, Mr. William and Mr. Robert, who desire to explore the region of Mount Tahan with the intention of establishing a hill station on the cooler altitudes of its summit.¹⁰⁹ Despite their apparent scientific expertise, they lack local knowledge and

¹⁰⁸ An example of such a strict definition is that articulated by Chanady in her chapter, “Territorialization of the Imaginary,” in Faris and Zamora’s collection *Magical Realism*, pp. 125-144. Chanady re-asserts the Latin American provenance of the term in ways that deny other literatures the use of the descriptor. She also defends its particularity and difference from related forms, such as the fairy tale.

¹⁰⁹ Ishak’s novella opens with some quick facts about the Malaysian state of Pahang: Ishak tells us that Pahang is the largest state in the Peninsula of Malaya, and that a Governor once said that it possesses “the longest rivers, biggest elephants and tigers, and the

foolishly attempt to explore the mountain during the rainy season. Flash floods and other misfortunes meet with them, their guides and porters all die, and they are left stranded. In short order they are separated and the story follows their individual adventures in the forests and on the sacred mountain.

4.2.1 Mr. Robert's Misadventure

Mr. Robert's misadventure finds him captured by "a band of Sakai" who sneak up on him while he was entranced by the natural scenery. The band takes him back to their camp and installs him as the "Great White Chief." The only person with whom he can communicate is an old Malay woman. Unfortunately, he angers her.

Curious to extract any special lore from the Old Woman, Mr. Robert engages her in conversation learning that she is "... trying to teach [the Sakai because they] worship rocks, trees, ant-hills and other things as well." She says, "I want them to realise that there is only one God. In return, they teach me various magical arts, such as how to make love-charms, curses and medicines."

While Mr. Robert "heartily approves" of the Old Woman's efforts, he ends up affronting her by declaring his preference for "the more progressive religion, Christianity" and ridiculing her apparent belief in Sakai magic: "Those 'arts' you mention are nothing but superstitious nonsense!" (28-29).

In Mr. Robert's tale, three distinct subject-positions are immediately apparent: there are the Sakai, Mr. Robert himself, and the Old Woman. The Sakai, by virtue of their close association with nature, possess some mastery over it. The Old Woman occupies the position of canny mediator, able to understand both the "primitive," nature-worshipping Sakai, and also the "modern" profiteering Westerner. As teacher, she slowly guides the Sakai to orthodox religious belief. As hostess, she engages Mr.

thickest forest," parts of which "have never been visited by man" (1). That Ishak foregrounds the natural history and biodiversity of the state at the onset of his novella, is an interesting performative strategy, for it heightens the subsequent drama: the British are making an incursion into a valuable place, and the natives of that place seem unaware of alternative estimations of its value.

Robert, and when he challenges her authority, she chastises him by appealing to indigenous wisdom.

Mr. Robert's affront, implied insult, and dismissal of Sakai cultural practices, causes the Old Woman to become "filled with anger" (29). She thinks to herself:

I'll make a love-spell [...] then he will find out for himself. So he doesn't believe in Sakai magic and thinks it's all bunk, does he? Once he's mad, he'll know otherwise. I'll give him some special herbs to make him fall madly in love with one of these girls, then I'll teach her to ignore him in such an outrageous way that he won't know which way to turn. (29)

But most important here is the following section:

Having decided to avenge herself on the lonely, lost white man, she called the prettiest member of the group and explained to her what she wanted done and why. Then she went to the old Chief and explained everything to him. He approved of her actions. (29)

In this second passage, the old woman makes an appeal to indigenous authority in order to check the colonial mentality symbolized in Mr. Robert. And exemplified here is the equalising or levelling force of the novella: colonial and indigenous epistemologies are presented in competitive equivalence.¹¹⁰

4.2.2 Mr. William's Misadventure

Mr. William's misadventure begins upon meeting the titular Prince to whom he stupidly reveals the plan to build a hill station, or, "a holiday resort – a sort of second heaven, if you know what I mean" (40). In response, the Crown Prince has Mr. William placed under mountain-arrest, prohibiting his ever leaving Gunung Tahan.

Despite his captivity, Mr. William is afforded access to the outside world, and even granted vision of his own English home via magical natural technologies such as the "bamboo telescope" (*teropong halus*), the "talking banyan tree" (*pokok beringin*

¹¹⁰ The equalising agenda provides some clues as to why, in an avowedly anti-colonial novella, Ishak opens with a quote from no less a colonial authority than the governor, who once said that Pahang possesses "the longest rivers, biggest elephants and tigers, and the thickest forest", parts of which "have never been visited by man" (1).

bercakap), and the “ambassador bird” (*burung pesuruh-jaya*) which are presented in the text as cognates to the Western television and radio.

The simple, moralising, fairy-tale-like tone of the novella lends itself to allegorical readings which might discount it as a text of magical realism, if not for its participation in the Malay storyteller tradition of the *penglipur lara*.¹¹¹ Situated thusly, Ishak’s narrative self-insertions arguably serve to heighten and maintain the realism as he continually refers to historical and geographical realities.

According to Warnes’s revision of Wendy Faris’s definitional rubric, if *Putera Gunung Tahan* fails to demonstrate the *first two* of Wendy Faris’s five characteristics – that it contains an “irreducible element” of magic, and that the descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world (Faris, 2004) – magical realism is then an unsuitable descriptor for the novel.

Here I will offer close readings of several passages from the novel to determine to what extent these passages fulfil the generic requirements separately outlined by Faris (2004) and Warnes (2007).

One potential objection to the novel’s fulfilling Faris’s first, and Warnes’s main requisite characteristic is evident in Mr. Robert’s fall and death. Mr. Robert seems magically transformed under the spell of a love-potion that defies rational explanation. The existence of natural aphrodisiacs is not remarkable in itself; what is extraordinary is the efficacy, potency, and target-specificity of the magic in question. In the scientific sense, natural aphrodisiacs work by promoting sexual response – none has been proven to trigger romantic feelings or cause someone to “fall in love” as the Sakai magic does. Mr. Robert does lose his head, and his sexual desire is piqued but the potion is not an intoxicating or hallucinating one and does not overcome him – there is no scene of mindless rape.

¹¹¹ Malaysian critics have argued that Ishak’s narrative interludes are actually remnants of a properly Malay literary tradition known as the *penglipur lara* (roughly translated as “story-teller” tradition); see (Jaaffar et. al.140).

Ishak manages to balance the antinomy in the scene, and the two claims seem reasonable within their own context. In one sense there are likely natural aphrodisiacs scientifically un-described in the forests that the indigenous people would have a better chance of knowing – this renders the scene almost credible, on the other hand the Sakai magical practices and sympathetic magic is what causes the love potion to work.

But there is another dimension here that should not go unremarked because it challenges the magical realist prerequisite of not “definitively explaining away” or privileging one particular cause for the magical element. The object for the magical realist is to maintain the antinomy to keep it afloat.

The problem I identify here is that Ishak does provide an explanation for the events (effectively explaining them away) in one particular sense: they were allowed by Allah (33). Here, in English translation, is the section relating the event leading to Mr. Robert’s death.

Now it came to pass that on a certain day she [the old woman] sent the young woman to Mr. Robert with some food which contained a number of love potions and some water with “love magic” from a hill known in Sakai as the “Softener”. Suspecting nothing, Mr. Robert ate and drank everything.

The young Sakai woman is instructed to pass in front of Mr. Robert’s tent, semi-nude, as enticement, though Ishak enters *penglipur lara* mode to provide the detail that “no one would have said she was beautiful. But she was young, her skin wasn’t scabby [...] and she was cleaner than the rest (29). Continuing in the mode of *penglipur lara*, Ishak then declares that:

... it would normally have been completely out of the question for him to fall head over heels in love with a girl like this. But God is merciful; the old woman’s request was granted – in other words, the medicine worked.

Gradually, Mr. Robert’s feelings began to change. Each time he saw the girl, his heart beat more quickly. In the end it was quite obvious that he was passionately in love

with her, because his behaviour had changed so completely.

With the old woman's help as intermediary, Mr. Robert arranges a marriage ceremony, the conditions of which he fails to complete – rendering him even more miserable and desperate. A month after this first marriage ritual, he secures a second arranged again by the old woman who is moved to mercy owing to his pitiful condition (33). This time, after the celebration, according to the rite, “the girl had to climb a tall tree, pursued by Mr. Robert” (33).

After the feast and the ritual were over, the young woman quickly started climbing the tree. Mr. Robert ponderously hauled himself up after her, like a pig-tailed monkey with a broken foot.

The bark was very smooth. When he had almost caught her, Almighty God allowed Mr. Robert to slip. He fell to the ground and died. That is the end of the story of Mr. Robert. Poor Mr. Robert.

Thus the magical element in Mr. Robert's story is rendered intelligible or domesticated for Malay audiences by situating the magical act – and thereby the entire Sakai epistemology – within an Islamic cosmology. The magical realism in this moment is ultimately theological in nature because it is ultimately the work of Allah who intervenes in an ictic deed. Because Allah “allow[s] Mr. Robert to fall” by permitting the desires of the Old Malay Woman (despite her entreating the deed through unorthodox means – namely, indigenous Sakai magic) it can then be concluded by logical extension that the efficacy of Sakai medicine depends on Allah's permission.

Implicit to this theological function is the narrative installation of a social hierarchy that does not dismiss the truth-claims of the Sakai, or indigenous peoples, but instead subsumes them under the religious regime of Malay Islam. In more general terms, this understanding does not outrightly dismiss the efficacy of alternative epistemologies and realities; it merely hierarchises them. Kathirithamby-Wells's reading of the novel, which seeks to ascertain the significance of the forests for national

memory, identifies several discourses at play in the novel including the effort to re-hierarchise society so that the *Orang Asli*, who are indigenous peoples, are assimilated into the socio-cultural and religious fabric of Malay society; related to this function is the work of establishing Malay sovereignty in the hinterland, or “reclaiming Malay rural dominance” (Kathirithamby-Wells 247-8). Thus, the appeal to magical knowledge of the Sakai, which would suggest and cement *Orang Asli* mastery over land as a nature-endorsed right, or natural law, is ultimately subsumed under the theological, or divine right (because of orthodox and correct practice and belief) invoked by Ishak in the old Malay woman.

Such are the religio-political parameters of Ishak’s invocation. As for the formal, or technical, literary parameters this invocation of Allah creates, one point in support of treating the text as magical realism must be raised. Insofar as Allah’s purposes are inscrutable, or beyond man, neither narrative explanation for supernatural events has a claim greater than the other in referentiality and efficacy. Therefore the antimony is left unresolved (a condition supporting the text’s candidacy as an exemplar of magical realism).

What Mr. Robert’s misadventure and eventual death reveal upon close analysis is that the postcolonial satirising of the English presence in Malaya conceals a consolidation of disparate subject-positions under the sign of the *native*. Reading the work against the grain uncovers more nuanced understandings of indigeneity and different degrees and modalities of the native. A first (postcolonial) reading of the novella might suggest the opposition between foreign and native regimes of value, but only at the cost of ignoring nuanced accounts of both categories. As revealed above, implicit to a homogenising anti-colonial regime is a reconstitution of the indigenous into a native imaginary that, while employed to contest and rebut colonial claims to authority and land, is itself politically fraught and prescribed.

4.2.3 Nature as Realist-Matrix in *Putera Gunung Tahan*

In the section above, we see that the magical element in the novella is not irreducible; neither is it explained away; this condition supports the magical realism of the novella. The second and last distinction to be proved is that Ishak's story does not "de-privilege codes of the real by taking as settings realms removed from our recognisable, empirical world" (Warnes 3). In other words, if Ishak Haji Muhammad's piece is set in a locale that bears no actual resemblance to the real world – if it inhabits some fantasy landscape – then it cannot really be an example of magical realism at all, but rather an example of the postcolonial fantastic. In my view, this is the real test for the novella, and where it begins to complicate any attempt to classify it as such. As shown in the summary, there are two stories being told in the novella: that of Mr. Robert and that of Mr. William. In the section above, relating to Mr. Robert's story, we see that the generic requirements for magical realism are fulfilled in that the antinomy is maintained throughout the novel, and the domain of the real and the domain of the magical are often simultaneously applicable. In addition, the category of the theological simply maintains this quality.

In Mr. William's section of the novella, Ishak begins to refer unabashedly to magical elements, employing the rhetorical device of justifying things that happen in the name of magic. This is a problem under some conceptions of magical realism. In an essay in Faris and Zamora's seminal collection on magical realism, Amaryll Chanady summarises the need to distinguish between magical realism and fairy tales:

Fairy tales cannot be considered magical realist because they adhere to relatively uniform plot structures, as Vladimir Propp demonstrated in 1928, an inevitable moral resolution of the Manichean conflict of the characters, and a classifiable number of motifs that have been cataloged by folklorists since the beginning of the century. The rigid-fairy tale form effectively restricts the imaginary to well-defined models, even more than the strictures of realism. (Chanady 129)

As we have seen, Mr. Robert's misadventure, while fantastic, was never easily dismissed as necessarily magical. The supernatural in Mr William's story is not in any way *explained away* and thus "the code of the real" is *not* effectively privileged over that of the fantastic (Warnes 4). And, as we shall see later, in Carpentier's *El Reino de Este Mundo*, the story hosts an uneasy or uncomfortable balance of magical and realist codes that do not submit one to the other either.

On the other hand, because Ishak's novella does situate itself in a realist matrix, Mr. William's tale included, it would seem to be not simply a fairy-tale. It could then be considered a hybrid tale, realist and magical for postcolonial reasons. *Putera Gunung Tahan* is definitely situated in a certain real part of Pahang and, at the opening of the novella, Ishak provides links and facts to the real world of the Pahang rainforest.

Ishak's foregrounding the natural history and biodiversity of the state at the onset of his novella heightens the subsequent drama: the British are making an incursion into a valuable place, and the natives of that place, either too naïve or simply innocent of alternative estimations of its value are likely to be caught unawares.

Viewing it simultaneously as home, refuge, pharmacopoeia, the natives have a different regime of value, however utilitarian. This setting has significant implications on the philosophy of nature represented in the novel. While both native/indigenous and foreign/colonial view nature primarily in utilitarian terms, that is, nature-as-resource, in the novella, only the colonial/foreign subjects seem to actively subscribe to considerations of nature-as-sublime. Interestingly, both Mr. Robert and Mr. William are hailed or captured while admiring the natural beauty and biodiversity of the forest. Their momentary experiences of the sublime however, do nothing to deter their designs on it.

Implicit to this depiction is Ishak's critique of romantic conceptions of nature that some Europeans would have espoused. By foregrounding the historical occasion for

this depiction in the campaign for national parks, Ishak presents a representation of the role of imperialism in fashioning the Western ecologists' understanding of the environment. The ostensible opposition here occurs between British attempts to install a protected park for the flora and fauna of the peninsula. Simply taking up the narrative as a simplistic instance of anti-colonialism, emphasising the anti-colonial spirit of the piece, can blind us to nuances and complications in his polemic.

Ishak's representation reveals an incommensurability between native and colonial regimes of value. The natives are incapable of assessing the value in colonial, that is monetary, terms. The natives have a different regime of value, however similarly utilitarian. The difference perhaps lies in the degree of rapacity and exclusion, as well as alienation from nature that each utilitarian schema provides. While the native regime may value nature for its uses, these are to a greater extent derived from the natural outputs of the jungle, rather than shaped and formed into fantastical shapes by the British who wish to see a rest station. Accordingly, Ishak – in *penglipur lara* mode – reveals that “some may say that they [the British] were looking for a new heaven” (5). Obviously, Ishak's statement is intended as a satirical send-up of foreign designs on the jungle and Ishak wields considerable fantasy and magical elements to this end. In this way Ishak works to level the ground with counter discourse by foregrounding a fantastic contrast of values. This is not accomplished via the simple anti-colonial discourse of resistance because, in showcasing competing epistemologies, Ishak necessarily orients them on equal footing. In other words, Ishak's story pits and reveals the similarities between the “magic” of the native Malay prince and Orang Asli, alongside the “fantasy” and magic, not just of technology, but of the dreams for harnessing nature for unsustainable benefit of British fantastic, or bizarre, other-worldly (ecologically out-of-sync) dreams. Creating a piece of British climate in Malaysia, while technologically possible, is no less fantastical than the magical elements herein. In presenting the

Prince's magical realm in opposition to alien exploitative design, Ishak suggests their equivalence in the realm of fantasy: while technologically possible, the British conversion of a tropical mountain top into a manicured holiday resort is no less fanciful – or ideological – an idea.

University of Malaya

4.2.4 Magical Realism or Fairy-tale? Style and the magical realist mode in

Ishak Haji Muhammad's *Putera Gunung Tahan*

There are many instances of Ishak's heavy-hand with the dialogue, his rather simple ideological polemic surfaces in completely non-realistic ways and can render the prose naïve, or even backfire. However, it has been argued that in fact these moralising interludes are actually remnants of the Malay literary tradition of the *penglipur lara* where a storyteller would interrupt the flow of the narrative in order to illustrate an edificatory principle, or moral lesson (Jaaffar *et al.* 140). In their *History of Modern Malay Literature*, Jaaffar *et al.* observe how "the writers [including Ishak Haji Muhammad] continue to deliver sermons, in fact the tendency to teach is very obvious [...] Sometimes they straightaway interrupt either to convey a moral lesson or to give some explanation to the readers. Thus the function of a writer as storyteller does not change" (140). Divorced from this historical tradition and context, the structure of the novel shies clear of realism to veer into the fairy-tale proper. A case in point would be how the supposedly dishonest, scheming, and conniving Mr. Robert reveals, at the first instance, the exact nature of his deceit, so that, rather than deceitful or scheming, he comes across as an innocent buffoon and the discussion is rendered bizarre:

Mr. Robert: Would you be willing to sell me the skin?
How much do you want for it?

Old Woman: What will you do with the skin if I sell it to you?

Mr. Robert: Why, I'll take it back to England and show it to everyone. I'll tell them I shot the tiger.

Old Woman: That would be a lie. I thought Englishmen never lied.

Mr. Robert: There's nothing wrong in telling a white lie if there's something to be gained by so doing. A lot of people have become famous and been appointed to high positions for telling lies.

When received more strictly as a fairy-tale, Ishak's novella lends itself to being read allegorically. Assessing authorial intention aside, any critical analysis should approach at least a second reading of the novel with a healthy dose of scepticism. I make this remark noting that this level of scepticism is somewhat absent from several local readings of the novel which, driven by the immanent ideological concerns of a dominant theory, offer what Neil Lazarus deplors as "opportunist" or "appropriative" readings. Opportunist or appropriative readings inadequately consider vital aspects of the narrative because of their tendency to "programmatically refer" a region's literature to a pre-framed dominant theoretical concept at hand, regardless of any natural affinity it may, or may not espouse.¹¹² Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir's reading of the novel in *Akademika*, for instance, claims in the abstract "to highlight a counter discourse that challenges the colonial claim of superiority *vis-à-vis* the colonised" (Ungku 65).

Ungku Maimunah offers what Lazarus might call an appropriative or opportunist reading – or a first reading (*à la* Benítez-Rojo) – but I will label it a standard postcolonial *pre-reading* for the following reasons: while generally applicable to Ungku Maimunah's reading above, Lazarus's terminology suggests that an appropriative reading is dismissive, or at least, not harmonious with authorial intention (so far as authorial intention can be established – and in Ishak Haji Muhammad's case, authorial intention is arguably more easily determinable given the frequent narrational interludes), for example, those scholars situating the text within its historical context argue how "[...] *Putera Gunung Tahan* is more of a political manifestation which Ishak Haji Muhammad attempted to fight for" (Jaaffar, *et al.* 141), and Jan van der Putten argues that Ishak Haji Muhammad's parody of British domination in the Malay Peninsula reveals how he "looked at the British as a means to help configure Malay identity" (Putten 11).

¹¹² See Neil Lazarus's essay "The politics of postcolonial modernism" (Lomba *et al.*, 2005), especially pages 424 and 427 for his use of the terms in quotation.

The virtue of Ungku Maimunah's reading is precisely that it is easily harmonious with the dominant ideologies present at the very surface of the text. Jaaffar *et al.* read the book as a social prescription for instilling an ethno-national patriotism: "[...] it is quite obvious how firm the spirit of love for one's homeland is" (Jaaffar *et al.* 141). They also deem it broadly anti-colonial: "On the whole we find the censure and the anti-colonial attitude as voiced by Ishak Haji Muhammad was indeed powerful...". Jaaffar *et al.* go on to suggest that "[...] indirectly the novel shows the failure of the elements of modernization" (141).

In "Non-English Postcolonial Fictions? The Malaysian Case," Harry Aveling argues that the novella is "undoubtedly 'distinctively post-colonial,'":

it foregrounds a tension with the imperial power and emphasizes the differences between the indigenous culture and the imperial power. It does this, in 1937, by using the devices of allegory, irony, and magical realism, if not perhaps discontinuous narrative. (400)

Ishak's work does open with some telling anti-colonial invocations, but perhaps more interesting are the colonial invocations he employs, however subversively: the quick facts about the Malaysian state of Pahang opening the novella, and the Governor's quote on the length of the rivers, and the strange immensity of the flora and fauna (1). Perhaps the foremost reason for this invocation lies in the historical event that inspired or, more accurately, provoked Ishak's artistic endeavour: contesting the plan to establish a protected area in Pahang.

4.2.5 Ishak's Colonial Invocation

Why would Ishak invoke colonial authority by quoting the governor of the territory, in an avowedly anti-colonial novella? The answer lies in Ishak's strategy of postcolonial inversion as a counter-discourse, or response to the British pro-colonial ideology fronted in popular English literature during the period. As Aveling writes:

Ishak's model for this was not, however, postmodern fiction, but an inversion of the British "boys' weeklies"

and their tales of brave English adventurers subduing hordes of savages in distant settings.... (400)

Another answer is that Ishak wishes to highlight the *value* of the territory. Ishak is obviously very concerned about issues of Malay sovereignty, and judging from his expression of creative outrage (in the form of his novella) at the territorial concessions granted to the Colonial Office by the Malay Sultanate for the establishment of a national park, he was especially concerned about territorial sovereignty. Allowing colonial authorities to annex and protect the territory under the rubric of conservation was something he was deeply suspicious of. After all, were not the British, *protecting* and *administering* Malaya under much the same rhetoric? By highlighting what was valuable about the territory for the British, Ishak could then appeal to (Malay) others concerned about what the British would do with the territory.

Formal or literary reasons for highlighting this speech are also easily evident. Ishak's novel features magical aspects of Malaya and had to be associated with the most remote, mysterious, even magical parts of the state: the unexplored interior, to maintain a modicum of credibility.

Commentators on the novel have offered summaries of the work of the novel but are unsure of what to do with the magical element besides figure it in postcolonial terms of resistance which is however ultimately futile. For the colonised peoples of administered regions such as Malaya, however, it was only in the realm of culture that natives could have their own way, or compete on even terrain, when the administration of the territory was kept beyond them.

Ishak draws on history, myth, and legends that revolve around his native Temerloh, and the Malaysian state of Pahang to fashion a story that is part propagandistic fairy-tale, part postcolonial satire. He sets the story in the forests around

and on Gunung Tahan where a “fairy prince” resides.¹¹³ In an interview Ishak would indicate how “The Malay community in that period were still very much influenced by fairytales of heroic kings, the special status of nobility” (1976: 23). He therefore “modelled the protagonist of the Prince of Mount Tahan as a prince, but different from an ordinary prince: he does not have a proper name, rank or splendour, and he also possesses an anti-colonial spirit” (*Ilham-ilham mencipta Putera Gunung Tahan*, 23). However, as Van der Putten notes, while it was arguable that the Malay community might be best “influenced” via the mode of fairy tale, one definite problem was “the colonial prejudices and contempt for this type of Malay story, which was infused into the Malay community via the enterprise of vernacular education” (14).

Van der Putten argues that Ishak’s literary mode of choice – parodic allegory – is specifically suited for its anti-colonial valence. Ishak draws from the *penglipur lara* tradition to ground the postcolonial critique.

Making the story an allegorical parody of how the British had managed to subjugate savage tribes saturated with magical realism – a world filled with fairies and genies – may also be considered to be “writing back at” the British scholar–educators who usually regarded traditional Malay writing as a collection of nonsensical tales. (Putten 14)

Van der Putten here uses the term magical realism uncomplicatedly – in that it refers to a real event that is used as inspiration for the fictional tale. He later points to Sir Hugh Clifford’s short story, “Albert Trevor,” in *Bushwhacking*, which was modelled after the real (and possibly the same inspiration as Ishak) exploration by H. M. Becher, which ends tragically.¹¹⁴ Putten suggests however, that “Ishak gives the knife an extra turn in the colonial wound by letting the British woman offer herself to bear the prince’s

¹¹³ That a magical being resided on the mountain was in scientific journals of the time, In F. F. Laidlaw’s article on a new dragonfly species on Gunung Tahan [sic] in the Malayan branch of the Royal Asiatic Journal of 1923 for instance, the author writes: “The mountain of Gunung Tahan was until the close of the last century somewhat mysterious and until actually climbed by Europeans its height was the subject of rather exaggerated surmises. According to native tradition the mountain is guarded by its own “genius” of Jin.

¹¹⁴ Amin Sweeney writes that Clifford’s short story was a “thinly-disguised or slightly fictionalised account” of H. M. Becher’s (mis)adventure scaling Gunung Tahan written to skewer the Royal Geographic Society in Malaya, for whom Clifford had lost respect after observing the arrogance of Becher himself covered up by the society (Sweeney 70).

child. For many colonial officials this must have been the ultimate humiliation” (Putten 15).

Aveling’s reading of the story highlights two “post-colonial” manoeuvres: first, that it “foregrounds tensions with the colonial power,” and second, that it “appraises the indigenous culture” (Aveling 5 qtd in Putten 12).

Western knowledge and technological skill are trumped by indigenous wisdom. However, the possessors of that indigenous power capable of contesting Western epistemology are the Sakai people, who are themselves – significantly – administered by an old Malay woman. This situation then reveals an explicit “hierarchical relationship of Malays ruling over the Sakai” (12). Van der Putten also notes this “nativist” dynamic in Ishak’s work:

Again we see how Malays are presented as extending powers over the aboriginals through their composure, while the Sakai are depicted as the “older” people who have retained their savagery and (magic) knowledge. In Ishak’s early works, we detect a similar form of nativism, but at the same time he distances himself from a stance that designates the aboriginals as “ideological forefathers” for an “indigenous self” of Malays. (12)

Intriguing here is the idea of the aboriginals as “ideological forefathers” for an indigenous (Malay) self. It subscribes to the view seminally articulated in Johannes Fabian’s *Time and the Other* of the positing of an “earlier” people in the indigenous. This view has remarkable parallels in ethnographic ideologies that have been critiqued as colonial. In this, Ishak’s ethnographic account ironically mirrors colonial understandings of indigenous peoples despite his avowedly anti-colonial concerns. The ambiguous status of indigenous peoples in peninsular Malaysia participates in similar ambiguity world-wide, regarding the place of human beings in nature. Gillian Beer notes the interpolation of indigenous informants as observed nature (akin to botanic or zoological subjects, which, however, cannot perform simultaneously as informants) in her contribution to the volume *Cultures of Natural History*:

Over and over again the narratives of voyages demonstrate how the borders of natural history were blurred by human encounter and how evolutionary theory profited from that growing uncertainty about the status of the human in knowledge and in nature. (“Travelling the Other Way” 327)

It is only in Ishak Haji Muhammad’s time that the perception of the Orang Asli (literally “original people”) was changing from being “regarded largely as part of the country’s fauna” to deserving treatment as humans (Kathirithamby-Wells 182). Kathirithamby-Wells cites one Indian court interpreter in Pahang, Rama Menon, as having a typical opinion of the time: that “bringing [the Orang Asli] under the civilizing influence of the other races in the Peninsula would best serve their interests” (182). However, Kathirithamby-Wells also cites a competing ethical perspective in that of Theodore Hubback, “the wildlife fanatic” who “viewed the Batak (Pangan) in the vicinity of Gunung Tahan, as simply part of the threatened fauna he fought to preserve” (182).

Hubback’s case is illustrative of Richard Grove’s point that the modern conservation movement in postcolonial countries had clear colonial roots (Grove, 1995). Another apparent irony or paradox was that among the most ecologically sensitive protectors of wildlife flora and fauna were the game hunters, who protected the wildlife out of simple self-interest; it represented their love and its destruction would also obliterate their cherished hobby. As Kathirithamby-Wells observes, only “seasoned hunters possessed the firsthand knowledge of wildlife habits and habitat” (204) and so it is not surprising that Theodore Hubback officially proposed, in April 1927, the establishment of a national park to the colonial office, though he met fierce opposition in both High Commissioners serving at that period (203).

While the idea of a national park did much to solidify the diverse elements of Malayan society into a properly national fashion by functioning as a “symbolic monument” capturing the “collective imagination” and helping “put the nation [Malaya]

on the map” (Kathirithamby-Wells 213), the territorial concession by the respective sultans of Pahang, Kelantan, and Terengganu, was not seen by Ishak Haji Muhammad as a necessary conciliation for a greater national good, but simply more evidence of colonial usurpation of Malay sovereignty. In fact, developing a united identity at the national level among disparate Malay peoples was part and parcel of British colonial policy. Efforts to homogenise the diverse Malay groups into a common culture based on a shared heritage was encouraged by British agriculture programmes in the settlement; they worked to inculcate a near-mythos of rural folk origin to Malay life (signified locally by the term *kampung*) (Kathirithamby-Wells 213). Joel Kahn’s work *Other Malays* emphasises this colonial origin to Malay cultural spatial identification with the *kampung* arguing that this policy has contributed to the phenomenon of the “race-space” in which areas of the country are devoted or associated with certain racial groups, the physical cultural manifestations then changing the land as a result in the forms of culturally-based agricultural practices, religious architecture, and socio-cultural ordering (15).

But the British colonial policy existed for more than just instituting a paternalistic ordering and control over social and ethnic relations of its subjects. The British government had a “policy for nature conservation as a flagship for Empire” (Kathirithamby-Wells 214). As one Whitehall spokesperson lobbied:

Preservation of Imperial fauna should be one of the purposes of the Colonial Office, so far as it has responsibility, and I would like to see that responsibility more realized. Much has been destroyed that can never be replaced.¹¹⁵

A new “empire of nature” was one of the policies proposed. This rhetoric and policy is exactly that lampooned in Ishak’s work; the two British civil officers are to be rewarded back home for their efforts at expanding this Empire of Nature. The figures

¹¹⁵ T. D. Shaw Minutes 1931 No. 7310, CO 717/69/3 quoted in (Kathirithamby-Wells 214).

are appropriately allegorical to stand in for various colonial positions regarding nature: as hunters, explorers, naturalists, ethnographers, no precise title is given them, and we know only that at least one of them had good knowledge of botany.

However laudable the colonial policy of defending nature was in various territories, it only takes one example to justify Ishak's scepticism and criticism: King Leopold (that infamous despoiler of the Congo) who, after a Berlin Conference lecture, spoke of "nature conservation as an 'ethical and economic necessity of civilized nations'" (qtd in Kathirithamby-Wells 214).

Because the King George V National Park (later dubbed simply *Taman Negara*) "was the product largely of the tenacity of one man, Hubback" (215) we might attribute some of the characterisation of Mr. Robert and Mr. William to him, regardless of how well Ishak knew him or of him.

4.2.6 *Putera Gunung Tahan* – Concluding remarks

Poet-critic Muhammad Haji Salleh calls Ishak Muhammad Haji's novel *Putera Gunung Tahan* his "most important post-colonial work" (post-colonial here standing for a particular anti-colonial ideology) and generously describes it as being "insightful in its analysis," though he qualifies that the novel is "raw in construction" (*Modern Malay Literature* 16). This may be true, but the only insight Muhammad highlights is that the novel showcases colonial "selfishness and greed" (16). Given the discussion of Theodore Hubback and the colonial roots of the conservation movement (see also Grove), claims for the novel's insight might be exaggerated ones. In another essay, Muhammad Haji Salleh makes the rather banal point that the author's political beliefs contribute to the novel's "colour, the slant of the plot, and the meaning" ("Turning the Pahang Colonial Page," 28). Indeed, money-minded avarice does summarise the presentation of the (male) colonial characters, but their greed and selfishness is not

really presented insightfully given the caricatured characterisation in the novel as a whole. However the point that Ishak makes is clear. As Aveling writes,

It is this disgust with his own people, corrupted by colonialism, that leads Ishak to construct a pure Malay society – the proto-Malay society of the jungle – beyond the deuterio-Malay world of the larger cities. (402)

It is useful to read Ishak Haji Muhammad's work alongside Albert Memmi's *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957) for the ways in which the former fleshes out in story the latter's theories despite predating that work by some twenty years. Both identify, for example how the profit motive of colonial empire results in mediocre officers attending positions of authority.

Ishak's story also articulates, in its own way, Memmi's "Nero complex": the more the usurped is downtrodden, the more the usurper triumphs and, thereafter, confirms his guilt and establishes his self-condemnation. In Ishak's story one of the British scientists are on foreign ground – Mr. Williams's efforts to usurp the prince of this land result only in his self-conflagration by poison-gas bomb. But the final triumph against the predatory British is sexual: The first scientist, Mr. Robert, is successfully charmed by magic (in which he doesn't believe), falls perilously in love with a Sakai girl, before further falling, fatally, from a slippery tree while trying to participate in a marriage ritual to obtain her. The white wife of the British scientist Mr. Williams falls irresistibly in love with the brown Malay Prince after Mr. Williams dies by the bombing he himself initiated.

"Crown Prince: ...Will you marry me? Will you be the Queen of the Mountain?"

Mrs. William: Oh I will, I will. Take me, I'm Yours, body and soul. I hope we have a son; one day this mountain and all this lovely land will be his domain.

Crown Prince: I hope so. Come on, let's go..."

(68)

Harry Aveling concludes:

The imperial centre has been obliterated by a postcolonial, indigenous voice that puts its own land and nation at the centre of its literary discourse, using its own language. Ishak knows no “crisis of identity,” or at least none without an obvious indigenous solution. (403)

Regardless, the novel’s presentation of an ideologically-inflected exotic charm unique to the particular colonial setting in the Malayan hinterland is noteworthy given the anti-commodification that forms a narrative undercurrent for the novel. The novella’s appropriation of the exotic mode for thinly disguised anti-colonial ideological purposes and Ishak Muhammad Haji’s literary technique, is clearly traceable to his politics; his choice of genre, anti-colonial satire, is put in service to this end at the cost of representational complexity.

4.3 Alternative Epistemologies and *El Reino de Este Mundo*

In Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World*, a distinctly African reality is presented as an alternative to the colonial reality of plantation slavery foisted upon black subjects in the French Caribbean. The novel’s protagonist, a bumbling slave named Ti Noël, learns of an alternative, African epistemology from stories told him by Macandal, a one-armed Mandingo, Vodou-priest (*houngan*). Macandal functions as an inspirational cultural repository because he remembers an Africa most of the slaves, including Ti Noël, never knew.

Carpentier subtly, and skilfully, reveals competing versions of reality in several places early in the novel: When the slave owner M. Lenormand de Mézy and his slave Ti Noël leave the barbershop at the opening of the novel, a gun salute issues forth from one of the French ships returning to the island. The sound stirs memories in Lenormand de Mézy of his days as a petty officer, and so, in response, he starts whistling a fife march. Carpentier includes the small but not insignificant detail that Ti Noël, “*in a kind of mental counterpoint*, silently hum[s] a chanty that was very popular among the harbor coopers, heaping ignominy on the King of England” (10, my emphasis).

The phrase “a kind of mental counterpoint” is indicative here. This small detail illustrates clearly, using a musical metaphor, how a singular reality is perceived or differently accessed by various subjects; in this case, the reality of the black slaves differs radically from that of the *Grand Blancs* (big whites) on the island. More than this, as in musical counterpoint – where “the equality of all the voices is the basic ground rule, the *sine qua non*”¹¹⁶ – Carpentier suggests a fundamental equality (if only at the level of register, essence, or value) between voices. While there is clearly a gulf between the two characters in terms of their political power, the novel allows both points-of-view an equi-valence, or representational power, by offering the reader internal access to both characters. There is much to be said for the philosophical power of this basic novelistic approach.¹¹⁷ However, several commentators and critics, with whom I will presently engage, in their tendency to associate the marvellous (in Carpentier’s term *marvellous reality*) with the Black epistemology privileged by Carpentier, fail to appreciate some specific nuances of this technique.

Consider a more complex example of this novelistic counterpoint presented in a passage relating a strange execution organised to intimidate black slaves in the Haitian plantations. In order to punish and cow the slaves for their insurrection M. Lenormand de Mèzy orders the execution of Macandal to set an example for other potential sowers of discord. Instead of cowering in submission however, the slaves are sceptical of the *grand blancs*’ claims. The point-of-view Carpentier affords the reader is a coherent amalgamation or auscultation of the gathered masses’ thoughts. In Carpentier’s depiction of the execution of Macandal,¹¹⁸ the masses begin to question:

[...] What did the whites know of Negro matters? In his cycle of metamorphoses, Macandal had often entered the

¹¹⁶ Milan Kundera interview No.81 in *The Paris Review*, No.92 1984.

¹¹⁷ Erik Camayd-Freixas for example argues that this fragmentation of narrative “should not be considered a mere aesthetic whim, but understood within the generalized primitivist optic that affords [the narrative sections] their consistency” (*Primitivism and Identity* 116).

¹¹⁸ Isabel Allende has written this scene too in her *La Isla Bajo el Mar* (2009).

mysterious world of the insects, making up for the lack of his human arm with the possession of several feet, four wings, or long antennæ. He had been a fly, centipede, moth, ant, tarantula, ladybug, even a glow-worm with phosphorescent green lights. When the moment came, the bonds of the Mandingue, no longer possessing a body to bind, would trace the shape of a man in the air for a second before they slipped down the post. And Macandal, transformed into a buzzing mosquito, would light on the very tricorne of the commander of the troops to laugh at the dismay of the whites. This was what their masters did not know; for that reason they had squandered so much money putting on this useless show, which would prove how completely helpless they were against a man chrised by the great Loas. [...] (46)

Carpentier's narrative is related through a kind of limited omniscience that follows his bumbling protagonist Ti Noël. After the incident, the narrative registers two representative perspectives on the execution of Macandal: that of the slaves, who

“[t]hat afternoon [...] returned to their plantations laughing all the way. Macandal had kept his word, remaining in the Kingdom of This World. Once more the whites had been outwitted by the Mighty Powers of the Other Shore” (46).

And the other perspective, that of M. Lenormand de Mézy who,

in his nightcap commented with his devout wife on the Negroes' lack of feelings at the torture of one of their own – drawing therefrom a number of philosophical considerations on the inequality of the human races which he planned to develop in a speech larded with Latin quotations... (46-7)

There are several striking aspects of this passage that are worth noting which I'll list here and develop individually.

4.3.2 Carpentier's use of Point-of-view

First, the changing point of view: it slips or slides from one perspective to the other, all the while being told from the single limited-omniscient narrator. There are at least three basic Points of view divided along socio-racial lines: there is that of the *grand & petit blancs* (including also most of the *affranchis*); next, that of the Blacks and slaves; and last, of course, the narrator's perspective; though it follows Ti Noël around,

this narrator is privy to far more than the protagonist, and deftly moves between the various point-of-views so that none become hegemonic. This slippage between points-of-view invites a sympathetic understanding of the various concerns being represented as the reader attempts to synthesise and differentiate between varied accounts of the same incident.¹¹⁹ At the very least, this style of narration requires a “double-take”, which in itself forestalls judgment and permits engaged deliberation on grounds of credibility, morality, ethics, and the like.

The virtue of these perspective shifts is to render every perspective suspect. The point-of-view of, say, the *grand blancs*, is held as neither normative nor necessarily the most realistic. The perspective of M. Lenormand de Mézy is just as problematic as that of the slaves who fail to believe Macandal’s physical body has perished in the fire.¹²⁰ This is a point that several critics fail to register in their otherwise nuanced accounts of Carpentier’s technique. For example, David Mikics seeks a liberatory function in Carpentier’s magical realism. He registers a disappointment or unrealized hope in the novel, a hopeful but uncertain conjunction between history and nature, imagination and historical facts (385). As he writes, although the novel “suggests the possibility that an African magic associated with nature might escape colonial history [i]n fact, [...] Ti-Noël’s magic [...] offers liberation only on the fictive level. The black man’s real, historical status as victim will continue” (385). This is a useful reading for examining the failed attempt at indigenizing an African magic and power in the New World, but Mikics’s reading still fails to register a magical or marvellous element to any but the version of events Carpentier presents to the reader as “African”. As such, by virtue of this omission, the colonial version of events by default assumes the patina of

¹¹⁹ In “Narrative, imitation, and point of view,” Gregory Currie argues that “narrators give us insight into a character’s point of view by imitating aspects of that character’s response to the world, and thereby encouraging us to do the same” (337).

¹²⁰ Lenormand adopts the same kind of hypocritical Eurocentric pseudo-humanism Aimé Césaire famously castigates in his *Discours sur le Colonialisme* and Edward Said analyses in *Orientalism* (1978).

normativity. In fact, both versions of events are contrapuntally invoked and in play throughout the novel.

Another commentator, Raymond D. Souza writes, “Carpentier uses Ti Noel to bridge the gap between the objective truths of history and the subjective beliefs of the slaves, who fought for their freedom. He spans this dichotomy in order to present his reader with the extraordinary nature of the events that took place in Hispaniola” (36). Thus, in Souza’s view, the distinction between the marvellous and the real is presented as unproblematically discernable. Moreover, it is the slaves who have a “subjective” view of the events. According to Souza, the reason Carpentier presents the slaves’ subjective view (tellingly, it is a collective view) is simply to highlight how extraordinary the slave struggle really was. But Souza limits the extraordinary to the realm of bizarre-but-verifiable: “It was a time of bizarre events, when the extraordinary seemed natural and the miraculous appeared normal” (36). Problematically, however, these bizarre and extraordinary events seem to be confined to the slaves’ strange perceptions, and thus Souza suggests they are explainable and therefore inadmissible as truly magical, and thus dismissible as objective accounts of reality. In Souza’s reading, there is no indication that the perspective of the *grand blancs* might be similarly “subjective”.

I argue that Carpentier’s presentation of the events is far more nuanced than this. Carpentier’s presentation of events takes on so many, often differing, even opposing, points-of-view and, in doing so, shows that none of them have a complete purchase on the reality of what has occurred.

Carpentier’s particular achievement in *The Kingdom of this World* is to allow the reader access to these different versions of singular reality without privileging one over the other. This is, in part, what Carpentier’s magical realism means. And the refusal to acknowledge one meta-narrative over the other is crucial for works of magical realism,

because – for most theorists – this aspect is constitutive of the form. That is, magical realist works are often identified as such because of this narrative feature in particular.

What is unique about Carpentier's magical realism, as pointed out by Chanady (1995) is his territorialisation of it as a unique phenomenon of Latin America (Chanady 133). Souza describes this as Carpentier's view that "Latin American reality is so contradictory and awe inspiring that real events seem bigger than life" (34). Accordingly he cites Carpentier as saying, "[...] the American continent is the most extraordinary world of the century because of its all-embracing cultural scope. Our view of it must be ecumenic" (34).¹²¹ Carpentier's prologue describes its characteristics: an impressive geography, cultural and racial miscegenation, early chronicles fictionalising the continent, and a turbulent political situation (21-22). As Chanady surmises, for Carpentier, "the existence of a marvellous reality legitimated and territorialized a literary marvelous" which Carpentier opposed to the literary artifice of European writers of fantastic and surrealist literature ("The Territorialization of the Imaginary in Latin America" 133).

4.3.3 Carpentier's Magical Realism and Wifredo Lam's painting

Erik Camayd-Freixas's work on the primitivist basis of magical realism provides crucial theoretical contextualisation for Carpentier's strategies. In his chapter on "Narrative Primitivism" in *Primitivism and Identity in Latin America*, Camayd-Freixas briefly considers the musical analogue Carpentier had (for *El Reino de Este Mundo*) in Igor Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*. According to Camayd-Freixas, Stravinsky "evokes primitive rhythms" by abolishing the "melodic-harmonic sequence" (116) and the parallel in Carpentier's work is to be found in the "chronological and syntagmatic aspect of narrative" that he employs (116). Accordingly, Camayd-Freixas argues that

¹²¹ Luis Harss and Barbara Dohman, *Into the Mainstream: Conversations with Latin American Writers*, p. 47; quoted in Souza, p. 34.

“[b]oth works break with those linear aspects of composition, favoring a rhythmical unity where cyclical repetition produces an annullment of time, an impression of timelessness” (116). Camayd-Freixas clearly underscores Carpentier’s attempt at a primitivist aesthetic. But, while the musical analogue is an apt correlate, one from the visual arts, especially painting, is more immediately demonstrable of Carpentier’s yearning for the primitivist aesthetic.

Moreover, Carpentier’s special brand of magical realism is also more clearly seen when approached via the intersection of painting, in particular the work of Wifredo Lam his compatriot and contemporary.¹²²

In his capacity as cultural critic, Carpentier commented on Lam’s work in a 1944 article titled “Reflexiones acerca de la pintura de Wifredo Lam.” He describes Lam’s special achievement to be a revelatory perspective and the creation of an atmosphere tied to the soil of Cuba, yet also essentially Antillean.¹²³ Tellingly, for Carpentier, in Lam’s vision, “fiction and reality collide” (*Reflexiones*). This apparent affinity therefore suggests Lam’s visual art offers analogues to Carpentier’s literary art.

In his much cited prologue to the original Spanish version of the novel, Carpentier argues that the extreme diversity and lushness of American nature renders the European painter inarticulate:

Pero obsérvese que cuando André Masson quiso dibujar la selva de la isla de Martinica, con el increíble entrelazamiento de sus plantas y la obscena promiscuidad de ciertos frutos, la maravillosa verdad del asunto devoró

¹²² Carpentier’s relationship with Wifredo Lam’s work is well documented. Lam’s work has even been featured as cover-art to Carpentier’s novel, *Los Pasos Perdidos*. But these points are not that significant on their own, I argue, because Lam’s work has been used for several other works of Caribbean theorists and writers, perhaps most famously for the work of Aimé Césaire. I would venture to guess that Wifredo Lam has to be one of the most reproduced Caribbean artists anyway, and he might be the go-to visual artist for articulations of Caribbean difference – a concept with which cultural theorists of the region are much preoccupied.

¹²³ “Y rápidamente se operó en él un proceso de revelación. Solicitado por atavismos precisos, libres los ojos de imágenes preconcebidas o de formas d’après l’art en lo criollo, Lam comenzó a crear su atmósfera, por medio de figuras en que lo humano, lo animal, lo vegetal, se mezclaban sin delimitaciones, animando un mundo de mitos primitivos, con algo ecuménicamente antillano, profundamente atado, no sólo al suelo de Cuba, sino al de todo el rosario de islas” (*Reflexiones*). (And quickly, a process of revelation came over him. Solicited by a singular atavism in the Creole, eyes free from preconceived images, or shapes *d’après l’art*, Lam began to create his atmosphere, using figures in which the human, the animal, the vegetable, mixed without boundaries, animating a world of primitive myths with something ecumenically Antillean, deeply attached, not only to the ground of Cuba, but to the entire chain of islands [my translation]).

al pintor, dejándolo poco menos que impotente frente al
papel en blanco. (22)¹²⁴

In his prologue he continues citing how it takes a native, like Wifredo Lam, to truthfully confront the marvellous reality of, for example, tropical vegetation:

Y tuvo que ser un pintor de América, el cubano Wifredo Lam, quien nos enseñara la magia de la vegetación tropical, la desenfrenada Creación de Formas de nuestra naturaleza – con todas sus metamorfosis y simbiosis – en cuadros monumentales de una expresión única en la pintura contemporánea.¹²⁵

In fact, in reading Carpentier's novel, one often comes across a passage like the following one – perhaps best described as basically the literary equivalent of one of Lam's most celebrated works, *La Jungla* (It hangs next to Picasso's *Guernica* in the Museum of Modern Art in New York City):

... así como a los dioses que regían el mundo vegetal y solían aparecer, mojados y relucientes, entre las junqueras que asirdinaban las orillas de lagos salobres. (*El Reino de Este Mundo* 35)

[... as were the gods who ruled the vegetable kingdom and appeared, wet and gleaming, among the canebrakes that muted the banks of the salt lakes. (*The Kingdom of this World* 14)]

4.3.4 Description of Lam's *La Jungla*

The similarity in content is unmistakable. In Lam's painting, *La Jungla*, humanoid figures inhabit the vegetation. Horse-like body parts and the herbalist's scissors are clear symbols of Vodou. Fertility is suggested in the lush vegetation but also protuberant fruit-like buttocks and breasts. Upon close examination however, the vegetation resembles the cash-crops sugarcane and tobacco and the colours display an iridescence of blood and ochre.

¹²⁴ But observe how [the surrealist painter] André Masson, in wanting to draw the jungle on the island of Martinique, with its incredible intertwining of plants and obscene promiscuity of certain fruits, was devoured by the marvellous reality of the matter, leaving him little more than impotent before the white canvas (my translation).

¹²⁵ And it had to be an American painter, the Cuban Wifredo Lam, who taught us the magic of tropical vegetation, the rampant multiplicity of created forms in our nature – with all its metamorphosis and symbiosis – in monumental works of unique expression in contemporary painting (my translation).

The palette of blood-reds and earthy ochres are clear invocations of colonialism, including the transplantation of peoples. The crops themselves are symbols of especially plantation slavery. The shocking presentation is linked to a counter-colonial expression of indigeneity and the role of the painting to disturb tourists and colonial apologists who value a strict and cultivated, stereotypically Western high-art style of representation. Lam's is a primitivist aesthetic in service of anti-colonial attitude. As such, it is a *primitivism* (the -ism indicates this is an ideology) and a specifically anti-colonial one. Herein lies the first level of correlation between Carpentier's literary work and Lam's visual art. As Camayd-Freixas argues, "at bottom, the real-marvellous, turned Magical Realism, was a type of narrative *primitivism* ("Reflections" 584). In another article, Camayd-Freixas differentiates between primitivisms, soft and hard; it is obvious according to this rubric, that Lam's would be categorized as "'morbid or hard" primitivism [which] values the grotesque, monstrous, animalistic – but liberating – force of primitive forms" (*Primitivism and Identity* 110). Crucially, Lam here, like Carpentier, attempts to capture and utilise a primitive aesthetic to serve his liberatory counter-colonial concerns.¹²⁶

Naysayers may point to the fact that this line comes from a passage in which Ti Noël, transported via the spellbinding narrative of Macandal, imagines the ancient city of Ouidah. And that this description, strictly speaking, refers to Dahomey (in modern-day Benin) and not the Caribbean. To that we can say, yes, it is of Africa, but both Lam and Carpentier are locating Africa in the Caribbean – a well-known intersection.¹²⁷ More theoretically, this is an act of naturalisation, or indigenisation. To annex the

¹²⁶ Camayd-Freixas goes on to suggest that "[...] all representations of primitive otherness began to be revealed as *pastiche*" (585). This observation is echoed in scholarship on Lam's work, where Robert Linsley has written of the drop in quality of Lam's later oeuvre, which consists primarily of hieratic figures variously drawn from African masks the majority of which were later found to be fakes (See Robert Linsley, "Wifredo Lam: Painter of Negritude." *Race-ing Art History*. (Psychology Press), 2002.

¹²⁷ Thus the Gods at the cane-breaks are evocations of Africa in the Caribbean. In Benin, it was the Tofin refugee people who dried and smoked fish using salt from the edge of lagoon at Lake Nokoué (pg 88, from Manning, Patrick. *Slavery, Colonialism and Economic Growth in Dahomey, 1640-1960*. CUP, 2004)

Caribbean territory as the province of certain *Loas*, i.e. representative spirits of African gods, is to make an epistemological claim to the land.

4.4 Native Magic: Power and Indigeneity

Extraordinary powers the *Loas* grant are proof of this annexation and indigenisation. In one striking and symbolic passage, for example, Macandal's blood mingles with the sugarcane juice in the press that crushes his arm. But Macandal's loss leads to his induction under the *Loas* of the Rada rite, giving him knowledge of certain plants and fungi that results in his leading a poison campaign on the island. The novel recounts this event from the "ecophobic perspective of the colonists" (Oloff 40):

The poison crawled across the Plaine du Nord, invading pastures and stables. Nobody knew how it found its way into the grass and the alfalfa, got mixed in with the bales of hay, climbed into the mangers. [...] Soon, to the general horror, it became known that the poison had got into the houses. [...] The sinister hammering of coffins could be heard at all hours" (33; 34).

Kerstin Oloff has noted the ecocritical resonance of the above passage:

The threat perceived by the colonists is both "natural" and human, as Makandal's superior knowledge of the plants and fungi of the island causes the death of those animals naturalized in the Caribbean, as well as of the colonists themselves. (Oloff 40)

Carpentier's early experimentation and novel means of artistic expression reveal his participation in the *avant-garde* trends in vogue during the first half of the twentieth century (Souza 30). Carpentier's first novel *¡Écue-Yamba-Ó!* focuses on religious elements of the native black population descendent from slaves transplanted from Africa during Spanish colonisation. In his chapter on Carpentier, entitled "Timeless History," Souza mentions that this first novel manifests not only "the growing interest in the Negro [...] in the late 1920s," which Souza attributes partly to the rapid outgrowth of anthropological data on New World Africans" (31), but also to the "cultural and intellectual turmoil occurring in Cuba [...] characterised by a search for a

new cultural orientation and a reappraisal of national values” (31). Or, as Roberto Echevarría later argues, Carpentier was participating in a “search for origins, the recovery of history and tradition, the foundation of an autonomous American consciousness serving as the basis for a literature faithful to the New World” (*The Pilgrim at Home* 107).

Practically, or effectively – as with the Surrealists – this search was reduced to a valorisation of the indigenous, or “the primitive.” However, where the autochthonous element is unclear for a particular nation or region, a processes of indigenisation ensues.

As Souza explains,

At times these preoccupations centered on the identification of the most autochthonous elements in Cuban culture – an undertaking that also took place in many other Spanish-American countries. In some nations, the Indian became the object of this search for roots; in Cuba it was the Negro. (32)

Carpentier finds this autochthonous element – in his search for the American Baroque – in the proliferating forms present in the earliest literature and architecture of the hemisphere. In his essay, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” Carpentier declares “America, a continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, mestizaje, has always been baroque” (98). His examples are various: “Aztec sculpture could never be seen as classical sculpture ... It’s baroque” (98); “The Popul Vuh [...] is a monument to the baroque” (99); “so is Nahuatl poetry [...] It is the most baroque, the most brilliantly baroque poetry one can imagine” (Zamora and Faris 99). For Carpentier, even the tropical world is part of this: “[...] the jungle is nothing if not baroque” (107).

For Carpentier, the unique advantage of the American writer is that the marvellous does not need to be invented. It is readily accessible. He writes, “[a]s far as the marvelous real is concerned, we have only to reach out our hands and grasp it. Our contemporary history presents us with strange occurrences everyday (“The Baroque and the Marvelous Real” 107).

Critically, Carpentier introduces an ecological and racial element to his concept of the marvellous real:

Because of the virginity of the land, our upbringing, our ontology, the Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man, the revelation constituted by its recent discovery, its fecund racial mixing [mestizaje], America is far from using up its wealth of mythologies. After all, what is the entire history of America if not a chronicle of the marvelous real? (“On the Marvelous Real in America” 88)

Several readings of Carpentier’s work focus on his play with history. Chanady (1995) describes Carpentier’s treatment of history in *The Kingdom of this World* as a “rearrangement of the “normal” chronology.” Instead, she argues, Carpentier’s presentation

involves more than poetic license and structural experimentation. It challenges the dominant historiographical paradigm based on empiricism, and replaces it with one that does not correspond to what is traditionally regarded as truth, but which produces meaning in what Carpentier considers a far more effective way. (138)

According to Chanady, this goes beyond mere adaptation of “facts” for fictional support, as in most historical novels; instead:

Carpentier creates a different chronology whose structure illustrates one of the dominant themes of the novel, eternal return and the cyclical notion of time of “primitive” mentalities. Chronological historiographical “reality” is only one of the infinite number of truths, and maybe not even the most effective one. (138)

Chanady’s discussion locates Carpentier’s power in his novel’s suggestion of relativism. In Chanady’s argument, empiricism is dethroned by a legion of potential alternative realities. But here too, Chanady’s argument rests on the subversive potential of alternative perspectives.

Similarly, Paravisini-Gebert (2004) considers Carpentier’s presentation of Haitian history in a more critical or suspicious light. For Paravisini-Gebert, Carpentier’s tale is “fractured” – despite the claims he makes for the “minute correspondence of

dates and chronology” between actual historical events and those narrated in *The Kingdom of This World*. In her critical estimation Carpentier’s literary version subverts “the adherence to the facts of Haitian history and its primary sources that the author claims for his text” (114). This may appear to be no different a claim than most other commentators on Carpentier’s technique, but Paravisini-Gebert is more specifically attuned to the mode of presentation he does choose. She argues that, while it was Carpentier’s intention to privilege connections between history and faith in his account of the Haitian Revolution, Carpentier’s attempt is sabotaged by his succumbing to titillating codes of the exotic in his presentation (126). Because of this, Carpentier remains blind to the positive contributions of persons like Dessalines (whose presence is obliterated from Haitian history in Carpentier’s account) and so he conveniently ignores the latent emancipatory potential history actually presented in favour of conformity to his own cyclical and pessimistic cosmic vision.

4.4.1 Carpentier and Ecocriticism

El Reino de Este Mundo, is one of the few sustained accounts of the Haitian Revolution in Spanish-Caribbean literature.¹²⁸ Most of the scholarly attention directed to it has either cited its singular perspective of Haitian history and plantation slavery, or else has focused on the claims Carpentier makes in the original preface to the work – not reproduced in the English translation – regarding the representation of marvellous realism in the Americas (Paravisini-Gebert 115). The preface to this work is a fascinating oft-quoted text. The preface deserves attention for two major reasons: first, for its value as a text in and of itself which offers much of Carpentier’s insight on the major aesthetic concerns of the day for counter- and post-European sensibilities. Second, the preface is also useful to literary scholars as a document to aid

¹²⁸ Paravisini-Gebert claims that *El Reino de Este Mundo* remains the only sustained account of the Haitian Revolution in Spanish-Caribbean Literature (115). However, Isabel Allende’s recently published *La Isla Bajo el Mar* (Spain: Random House Mondadori, 2009) translated and published in Great Britain in 2010 as *Island Beneath the Sea* (Fourth Estate) now renders this assertion obsolete. However, Allende’s chapter on Makandal demonstrates clearly how she takes Carpentier’s work as precedent.

interpretations of his novel. The first reason has dominated Carpentier scholarship in general – as any discussion of his concept of *lo real maravilloso* inevitably engages and is bound up with it. It is this latter use, subject to theory of (actualist) authorial intentionalism,¹²⁹ that is applicable to discussion here. One advantage of a (postcolonial) ecocritical approach to Carpentier's novel is that such an approach is not as easily seduced by the prefatory claims to Latin American (magical) difference however appealing for considerations of Carpentier's postcolonialism.

Carpentier's work has recently attracted critical attention among postcolonial ecocritics, including notably, Paravisini-Gebert, for its depiction of enduring ecological devastation – the legacies of twin violences Haiti experiences: that of plantation slavery, and that of the Revolution.

But around the turn in the road, plants and trees seemed to have dried up, to have become skeletons of plants and trees in earth which was no longer red and glossy, but had taken on the look of dust in a cellar. There were no bright cemeteries with little tombs of white plaster like classic temples the size of dog-houses. Here the dead were buried by the side of the road on a grim, silent plain invaded by cactus and brush. At times an abandoned roof on four poles told of the flight of its inhabitants from malignant miasmas. Everything that grew here had sharp edges, thorns, briers, evil saps. (108)

In her re-reading of *El Reino de Este Mundo*, Paravisini-Gebert criticises Carpentier for his failure in the novel to accurately represent certain key figures in Haiti's history, given that he makes explicit claim for historical veracity in his prologue (in the original Spanish edition).¹³⁰ She writes,

Carpentier's despoiled earth is a crucial element in a meditation on Haitian history that has as its focal point the failure of the Revolution's leaders to imagine a landscape without the plantation. As portrayed in the novel,

¹²⁹ In a short survey of varieties of intentionalism, Paisley Livingston identifies the work of actualist intentionalism as the process of determining the actual author's actual intentions in the interpretation of the meaning of a work. As such, extra-literary material, including letters, prefaces, other essays may be brought to bear upon the work. Contrast this to other less strict kinds of intentionalism where hypotheticals, conditionals, and unintentional meanings are all taken into account (Livingston 401-19).

¹³⁰ Carpentier claims to have done meticulous research so that his novel's characters have real-world antecedents, even the secondary characters. See the last paragraph of his prologue (in the Spanish edition).

Makandal, faith and the blessings of the lwas notwithstanding, dies leaving the Revolution in the hands of leaders incapable of redressing the natural balance that would have returned the land to the people and their gods. Boukman, who early in the novel had “stated that a pact had been sealed between the initiated on this side of the water and the great Loas of Africa to begin the war” (66), disappears from the text, dismissed in two lines that speak of how his corpse was left to rot and feed the crows.

Kerstin Oloff has recently turned to Carpentier in her meditations on world-ecology and the Caribbean gothic, and George Handley, editor of two collections of essays of postcolonial ecocriticism with Elizabeth DeLoughrey (2005; 2011), focuses on Carpentier’s novel in the later collection in an essay titled “The Postcolonial Ecology of the New World Baroque.” Oloff, building on Paravisini-Gebert’s work of foregrounding the religious and ecological dimensions in the novel, examines specifically the Gothic elements. She focuses on the representation of Vodou in her discussion of Alejo Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World* to illustrate a literary progression and evolving tradition from the gothic to the magical realist in Latin American and Caribbean Literature (11). Positioned thusly, Carpentier’s novel is viewed as a seminal transition point in the aesthetic of the region. And a new perspective on nature is implicated as catalyst for this trend.

David Mikics’s reading of the novel considers the importance of nature for Carpentier’s narrative:

In Carpentier’s novel, fantastic Afro-Caribbean myth and natural landscape join forces to battle against a cyclical, inevitably recurring historical violence that binds its victims to the colonial past even after the revolutionary achievement of independence. The malevolent power of history looks even more threatening as a result of the analogy between history and nature in *The Kingdom of this World*. (383)

Mikics’s reading wonderfully exemplifies concerns of postcolonial ecocriticism – giving further proof (if any were needed) that ecocritical work in Caribbean and postcolonial setting and concern is in no way merely a recent, mostly contemporary,

fashion. In Mikics's reading nature serves and works alongside the political to make meaning for the work. In Mikics's view, nature both reveals the limits of the historical in Carpentier's work and suggests alternative realities free from the bondage – both of man (in the form of slavery) and of nature (in the form of the plantation economy) – that characterises Haiti at this historical moment.

Carpentier's novels demonstrate a creative unease with the confluence of history and nature in the New World [...] the celebration of the sublime that occurs in Carpentier as a reaction against a history that claims omnipotence for itself. (384)

Mikics notes how the plot in the novel which surrounds the Haitian slave revolt, is served by the inclusion of dramatic natural elements, like thunder, that accompany the propitiary rituals so that “nature itself seems complicit in the upheaval” (384). In Carpentier's novel, Boukman insists that the invocation of Ogún “would bring the thunder and lightning and unleash the cyclone that would round out the work of men's hands” (384).

Mikics further notes that Carpentier fuses history and nature by demonstrating their shared sense of inevitability and parallel cyclicity. During the course of the novel Ti-Noel makes a complete revolution – from slave to free man to slave – under the new black masters of Haiti. For Mikics, this is evidence of Carpentier's “grim implacable vision of history” (384). As he writes, “[f]or Carpentier, history offers a cycle of punishment as repetitive and irresistible as nature itself” (384).

In most accounts, it appears, Carpentier's critics remark on his tendency to conflate history and nature and position both in service to a marvellous, strange, or uncanny interpretation of reality. Mikics is correct to highlight the importance of nature to both Carpentier's presentation of history and his literary technique of the marvellous real, but Mikics's preoccupation with discovering an emancipatory conclusion in the work blinds him to certain subtleties in Carpentier's presentation of that history. Mikics

seeks a liberatory function from the novel and looks to Ti Noël, who is, after all, the protagonist, to point the way toward this emancipation, or at least suggest one. In doing so, Mikics seems to assume that the magical elements of the novel must point or suggest this emancipation, but he fails to register a magical element in any but the African “reality” that Carpentier offers.

Crucially absent from Mikics’s reading is any suggestion that the white version of events is similarly magical. In fact, as evident from Carpentier’s use of point-of-view, the perspective of Lenormand de Mèzy among the other *grand blancs* is no less magical or skewed toward the fantastic and strange, that is, divorced from “the Real.”

Similarly, despite her critical reading of *The Kingdom of this World*, and despite identifying problematic aspects of Carpentier’s own presentation of history, Paravisini-Gebert reads the execution of Makandal in a one-dimensional way. She argues that it “is intended to signal the extraordinary power of the slaves to maintain their faith in Makandal’s survival despite the reality before them” (126). Again, the significance of Carpentier’s presentation of *multiple* points of view is elided. Paravisini-Gebert complains of the exoticism and caricature in especially Pauline Bonaparte’s flirtatious dalliances with the Vodou religion – she specifically finds Carpentier’s suggestion of the conflation of the lwa, Ezili Freda, with Pauline to be inane and titillating (125-26). While this may be true, such a view ignores the (no less) absurd passage Carpentier presents: Pauline instructs her servants to “kneel before her and kiss her feet in a gesture [...] interpreted as a symbol of the noble gratitude of a simple soul brought into contact with the generous teachings of the enlightenment” (*Kingdom* 89). This latter passage indicates that Pauline had black servants perform an act no less fantastic or ritualistic for being rationalist. Aimé Césaire famously lambastes similar so-called Enlightenment humanism as a perversion and *fantasy* in his *Discours*. What Paravisini-Gebert criticises here is simply the other side of Mikics’s reading. For Mikics, Carpentier’s presentation

is of a pro-“African” epistemology but it is insufficiently emancipatory. For Paravisini-Gebert, Carpentier’s presentation performs no service for an accurate rendering of Haitian history, nor does it accurately represent Vodou ceremony, and it fails again at providing an emancipatory function for “African” epistemology. These are essential caveats to any contextual reading of the novel. But, strikingly neither critic engages with the parallel failings in Carpentier’s presentation of “Western” epistemology. Such an engagement provides an essential perspective for critiquing the discourses of representation of nature present in the book, that is, how nature is subjected to ideologically motivated appropriations on opposing sides of the spectrum of colonial ideology – between coloniser and colonised.

4.4.2 Ecocritical Comparison and the Postcolonial Novels

As is obvious, I do not suggest Caribbean and Malayan works and literatures are strictly analogous. Such a claim is only true at the most banal level of generalisation. To reiterate, with the works in question, I take as premise that the performative strategies between the two resemble one another: in both cases, there is a strategic appeal to the magically indigenous in the face of colonial encroachment. But that appeal itself must be understood in its historical and political context. Appeals to nature can often be made at the cost of nature, just as appeals to an anti-colonial spirit can also ironically replicate colonial concerns. In both *The Kingdom of this World* and *The Prince of Mount Tahan* nature is subjected to ideological ends via literary representation. In Carpentier’s case, via manipulation of perspective and point-of-view (not coincidentally, these are also crucial aspects of painting and architectural art), nature itself seems to rise up against the colonists who have instituted an unnatural and imbalanced ecosystem in the plantation economy. The slaves who are unwilling participants in this economy then are revealed as being closer and more in tune with nature, and, as a result, wield it alongside spiritual and religious discourse to oust the incompatible regime.

In *The Prince of Mount Tahan* the two colonial explorers who possess a striking academic and empirical knowledge of the forest flora and fauna are nonetheless alienated from it and their instrumentalist perspective of it is corrupted by colonial greed. While indigenous wisdom is shown by Ishak Haji Muhammad to be no less instrumentalist in function, indigenous and native motives are presented as being artless. As a result, the colonial entities are consumed by their own greed and lack of self-control while the natives are granted mastery over nature according to divine justice.

4.4.3 Perspective and the Manipulation of Point-of-view

In both novels, as we have seen, point-of-view and limited perspective is used toward establishing contrasting approaches to, and valuations of, the colonial environment. And it is also via changes in point-of-view that different subject positions are placed side by side to be judged by the reader on the levelling arena created by the writers. Magical realism here – and both Carpentier’s unique brand and Ishak Haji Muhammad’s suspect version – works to provide this literary arena where different systems or regimes of value may be compared and evaluated in action and in tandem. Thus, this literary strategy provides the ideological force of the novels.

4.5 Crucial use of the Native

Just as in the epigraph from Michael Dash’s introduction to Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation*, “Land is central to the process of self-possession,” Carpentier’s Haitians try to establish themselves on the island via an act of voluntary spiritual possession, that is Vodou, for the purpose of self-possession – establishing themselves as an autonomous being and people.

The flip side is also present in Ishak Haji Muhammad’s novella. Mr. Robert loses himself and dies in a frantic act of trying to re-gain self-possession. He believes that only by satisfying this strange desire for the indigenous girl can he return to normalcy; he wants to control his lustful faculties by satiating them. Both of these acts of

self-possession, however, depend on the figure of the native and the native's claim to the land.

One problematic irony of early twentieth century primitivist and indigenist works (a category under which both Carpentier's and Ishak's work might fall) is that they often work to promote national consolidation "at the expense of those very peoples and places on the margins that their fiction sought to rescue" (Handley "Postcolonial Ecology" 117). That is, appeals to the indigenous, the primitive, and to the natural are often made by elites who then exploit the moral and political advantage this provides to articulate a national subject which occludes the legitimate subject positions of those in the margins it has essentialised and consolidated.

As George Handley notes, this project of national consolidation also involves tropical nature (his example is in Latin America): "the desire for the voice of the primitive marks early attempts to give voice also to nature [...] since the primitive non-Western figure – either indigenous or black, and not infrequently female – was often conflated with the space of wilderness and the jungle" (118). On one level, near the surface, Ishak's work of anti-colonial satire works to ridicule and expose colonial desire for pristine nature as a function of misguided imperialist greed. But on another level, his narrative also displays a desire for the aura of authenticity and counter-colonial legitimacy that comes with appeals to nature and the natural. But any claim for natural authority is articulated from a specific subject-position that includes race, class, and gender among other things. Thus, Carpentier, who is a white, male, lettered elite, can discourse on the primitive, but he does so uncomfortably. And Ishak Haji Muhammad can discourse on indigenous concerns as a Malay, male, native elite but he does so covering up alternative perspectives originating from *Orang Asli* (or *Sakai*) subject-positions, under the sign of the native.

This is an uncomfortable situation (for postcolonialists): there exists a postcolonial desire for the aura of authenticity and counter-colonial legitimacy that both nature (when nationalised) and the primitive native (when co-opted by the state or the writer) bring to the postcolonial writer and the state. But this desire and the rhetorical manoeuvres necessary to satisfy it sit uncomfortably for these postcolonialists and/or “proto-postcolonialists” with their race, class, language, and gender.

It may seem that I am here using claims that are true when situated in the context of Latin America but what happens when they are abstracted and reinserted into a Southeast Asian contextual matrix? This is precisely where reading in tandem is crucial. It is not possible to unproblematically import analysis from one region’s literary and cultural history and apply it to another’s, however – via the methodology employed in this thesis – my aim is to explore the sites of incongruity that are inevitably highlighted. More succinctly, when superimposed, the two regions’ discourses of nature, indigeneity, and national culture become blurry, but important points of incongruence are highlighted. It is my argument in this thesis that ecocriticism provides a useful perspective to consider these points of instructive incongruence.

In the situation highlighted by Handley in “The Postcolonial Ecology of the New World Baroque,” we have national writers problematically wielding and drawing on a native authenticity for aesthetic and political legitimacy. In the case of Ishak Haji Muhammad, we have a “native” writer wielding a non-European language in service of an anti-colonial agenda that is no less problematic or uncomfortable in that it also makes use of similar tropes of indigenous authenticity and legitimacy to deploy colonial critique.

But there are alternative ways of appealing to natural or native authority that do not assume so much representational power. Erik Camayd-Freixas in “Primitivism and Identity in Latin America,” considers what might be termed, critical self-

representational primitivism. George Handley draws on Camayd-Freixas's argument to reveal the power of non-ahistorical appeals to the figure of the marginalised. These are ironic and self-reflexive strategies that reveal the contingency and syncretic elements of the primitive itself (Handley 118). According to Handley, these function by "laying bare the gaps" between apparently intact subjectivities such as that between "the city and the country, between white and nonwhite populations, and between gendered social positions" ("Postcolonial Ecology" 118).

Ishak Haji Muhammad provides information as a naturalist (in a literal sense of the term) about local flora and fauna that serves to locate the environment and the social dimension of the novel. He reveals the relationship Malays had with the natural landscape, thus cementing the relationship between the two as a harmoniously reciprocal one. In *Putera Gunung Tahan*, the British are figured as disrupters of the natural moral fabric of the society just as they are disrupters of the natural environment (50).

In the same way in Carpentier, the colonial plantation system is figured as an ecological aberration and affront to nature that provokes rebellion by the very land itself. The natural world itself conspires with the black slaves and former slaves on the margins of society to overthrow the colonial regime, which enslaves and unequally yokes man and nature.

Ishak Haji Muhammad too has the native, harmoniously in sync with land and nature, outsmart and out-manoeuvre the agents of colonial desire. In Ishak's novella, this desire is unsustainable and self-consuming. The British agent dies at his own hands. In Carpentier's novel, Makandal is the agent who enlists his knowledge of flora and fungal vectors of nature to unleash a poison campaign figured in Carpentier's novel from the "ecophobic perspective of the colonists" as a revolt by the land itself.

Ishak's story is said to happen in Bunian – a fairyland – with its special magical reality in that its location, atop Gunung Tahan is referred to by the Malays he interpellates in the novella as the “loyal guardian of everything to be found in this rich tract of land” (*Prince of Mount Tahan* 5).

In this chapter I have used postcolonial ecocriticism as vector for a re-reading of two works from different archipelagos. In doing so, I attempt to address three claims: that traditional or conventional postcolonial readings which contest colonial claims are no longer sufficient rubrics by which to analyse the literature in question for contemporary concerns unless the material reality and context is invoked. Second, I suggest that overly-particular assessments of such literature overlook important elements that are only revealed when examined in tandem or in comparison. And third, I insist that, when comparing, overarching methodologies can blind us to relevant concerns available only in historically situated readings; wide comparative frameworks often make special assumptions on the national boundedness of the texts that come with a national qualifier. Thus, while it is dangerous to consider the novel an epiphenomenon of the nation and its particular history, it is also dangerous to tactlessly extract the novel from its material coordinates in a wider comparative reading on the “place-less sea” of other methodological abstractions.

In order to accomplish these objectives I have laboured to avoid simplistic labelling of the works as magical realist. Interrogating the implications of such pigeonholing and investigating the theory also enables a useful exploration of the texts.

CHAPTER 5: INDIGENOUS PRESCRIPTION IN LLOYD FERNANDO'S *SCORPION ORCHID* (1976), WILSON HARRIS'S *PALACE OF THE PEACOCK* (1960), AND ZEE EDGELL'S *BEKA LAMB* (1982)

[T]he richness of our inscapes is a preliminary to a good management of our landscapes.

– Pierre Dansereau, *Inscape and Landscape* (29)

In this chapter I will again juxtapose some major texts of my focus areas: Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* (1976), Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), and Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* (1982). These particular texts share that experience of being positioned on the receiving end of a critical tradition that reduces the respective authors' fictional narratives to the logic of national social prescription. As I will show – drawing on critical resources devoted to each work – the novels seem to prescribe a kind of ethnic sublimation to accommodate an indigenous other. In this chapter, though, I will contest the postcolonialist proclivity that reads the novels thusly, by problematising the appeals to indigeneity and nature that ground its logic. I offer an intervention into, and problematisation of, this tradition through examination of the central female figures in the works. I claim that highlighting the role of the central female character in these narratives is crucial for interrogating the way the authors attempt to resolve the problem of historical socio-racial national integration. These novels figure importantly in both the literary history of the authors' respective nations and in their respective oeuvres and yet both remain problematic in their employment of the woman-as-land metaphor so common in colonial discourse. The problem, to be precise, is that figuring woman as symbol of nation exalts woman as object of national significance while simultaneously denying her agency in both fictional and historical national struggles for self-determination. Moreover, these nationalist figurations then provide symbolic capital under a postcolonial rubric for subsequent claims to indigeneity and sovereignty over the physical and social landscape. If *Beka Lamb* is a woman's text that begins to address

the first charge in that its female protagonist does have some agency, it yet fails to escape the second.

And yet, despite the claims made as to the similarity of the novels' work in postcolonial discourse, in some ways they present very different, nearly antithetical artistic projects. For instance, Lloyd Fernando embraces precisely the type of social-realist, moralistic literature that Wilson Harris seeks to avoid in his highly universalistic and imaginative offerings.¹³¹ Despite this major difference in project, however, Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*, and Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* have implications and present prescriptions for the postcolonial multi-ethnicity that characterizes their national realities. Despite the differences in form and style, then, these works have provided relevant material for mimetic readings of the societies they depict. In this chapter, I focus on to these postcolonial novels of Belize, Guyana, and Malaya – linked together via British colonialism to be sure,¹³² but also in concerns of theme, and form. These concerns of gender are not limited to the national projects of British colonial possessions, however. Many postcolonial projects of national self-determination were presented in terms of male action.

5.1 Her National Function? The Object of Desire in Allegories of Nation

Consider the former Dutch (and Japanese) colonies, in Indonesian writer Mochtar Lubis's book *A Road without End* (1968), a late translation from the Indonesian, *Jalan tak ada Ujung* (1952):

He Longed for [her] to come to him, or to go to her and then [...] to bury every anxiety and uncertainty [...] And not to think, not to think – not to remember, not to remember ... He knew it was not possible. It could never be until something changed. (63)

¹³¹ Harris has famously shunned the conventional realist novel for the sort of mythic re-imaginings he desires.

¹³² Consider they were British Honduras, British Guiana, and British Malaya.

When read allegorically, this excerpt, which features the protagonist Isa's frustrated attempts to connect with his wife Fatima, is the separation of the Indonesian from a homeland governed by the Dutch, overrun by the Japanese, but "naturally" ordained or destined for native Indonesians. Attendant on this national allegory is all the anxiety of mythologisation.

The reading of Isa as Indonesia, that is, of protagonist as metonymy of third-world nation, is a conventional conceit, less controversial now, than at the time of Aijaz Ahmad's debate in the pages of *Social Text* with Frederic Jameson and the latter's blanket statement: "All third-world texts are necessarily [...] allegorical, and in a very specific way: they are to be read as [...] national allegories" (69). Anthony Johns, Professor of Arabic, and Malay (Indonesian) Literature, employs this convention in his introduction to Lubis's book. Johns writes:

since fear is at the root of his impotence, the road also represents his psychological journey to the recovery of his virility. In this Isa is not just Isa the man, but a symbol of Indonesia, unable to mobilise its energies, unable to activate the social and moral strength of the thousands of meek, little folk such as himself to build a society. (8)

Johns's is perhaps tantamount to a paternalistic first reading, perhaps somewhat guilty of male bias. What such a first reading ignores is the symbolic value of Fatima, Isa's wife. The only way for the allegory of male-protagonist as nation to work in this instance is if the role of the protagonist's wife is ignored.

If Fatima is the object of Isa's desire and if Isa is to be read as Indonesia the nation, how does Fatima figure? John's reading unravels with the entrance of Fatima. Interrogating the allegory through her cross-examination might reveal Fatima – and not Isa – as so-called symbol of Indonesia. Isa's connection to the nation is one of symbiosis but his attempts to thrive are frustrated, the natural rhythms of creature to earth are severed with an intruder occupying his rightful place in the family. In yet another (post)colonial metaphoric conceit, Fatima features as symbol of Indonesia itself

– the physical land *and* imagined ideal. This particular conceit (in)famously bears a colonial genealogy.

While Fatima may be the more interesting character towards an interpretation of the book according to national allegory, her symbolic deployment in the novel is no less problematic. Johns's "first reading" ignores this. On the level of a first reading, Lubis's presentation of Fatima is no liberation from the allegorical conceit. Isa is unable to maintain a sexual relationship with his wife, Fatima; on the allegorical level of a first reading his impotence then symbolises Indonesian inaction. Moreover, the consummation of their marriage translates to solidification of Indonesian attachment to land and nation. And thus, yet another convention in literature is invoked as a consequence: that of the nation as mother-land.¹³³

The protagonist, Isa, only comes to terms with his identity while in jail and after being doubly tortured – physically tormented by his jailors, and mentally tortured with the knowledge of his wife's infidelity. It is easy to read this as the necessity for shared struggle for true selfhood. A reading like this confirms Fanon's warning on the difference between struggling for one's independence and simply receiving it. For Fanon, it is through the former, the struggle, that the national consciousness is reified. If we accept this reading, the allegory is upheld.

Like women in many dramas of national tropes who are treated as object or recipient of national definition – never as originator (Boehmer 29), when we consider Fatima's contribution, we cannot fail to note how it is not she who acts to achieve real selfhood. In Lubis's narrative, Fatima becomes the object of love and desire who will yield to other lovers if her once-destined cannot perform. Following the national

¹³³ This has been well documented in postcolonial literature, especially by feminist scholars attempting to reveal the gendering of the nation and the purposes such gendering serves. In *Writing for Resistance: Nationalism and Narratives of Liberation*, for instance, Allison Donnell has written of the "trope of the mother as caring custodian" arguing that it "works in nationalist terms to signal (or appeal to) the nature of the motherland as guardian, a gendered construction which demands loyalty and attachment as well as offering security and recognition" (32). See Anyaa Anim-Addo's *Framing the Word: Gender and Genre in Caribbean Women's Writing* (32).

allegory, Indonesia will submit to other powers in the absence of a collectivity capable of anti-colonial resistance.

I conjure forth a reading of Lubis's (Indonesian) work to suggest that in many anti-colonial and early postcolonial works and societies, the act of self-determination is presented as one of male action. But are there other gendered metaphors available at this time to figure such an attainment of national selfhood? To answer this, I first go back in time and recall some famous examples of the symbolisation of the nation by gender to establish the premise that the strategic invocation of gender has historically been used to further a national ideology or objective.

Consider what is perhaps an archetypal instance of this invocation in English Literature: Sir Walter Raleigh's text, *The Discoverie of Guiana*, which he wrote in 1595 for Elizabeth, his Queen. The text constitutes Raleigh's thoughts and observations regarding his travels to Trinidad and into the mainland of South America through Amazonian estuaries. In it, Raleigh relates the best methods of *entering* the mainland. Previously he offered a textual *anatomization* of the land. He writes to Elizabeth,

I haue written a particuler treatise of the west Indies, [...] I haue anatomized the rest of the sea townes as well of Nicaragna, Iucata, Nueua Espanna, and the Ilands, as those of the Inland, and by what meanes they may be beste inuaded. (9)

It is in this letter that he famously describes Guiana as "a cuntrey that hath yet her Maydenhead" (210). By this, he means that it was "never sackt, turnd, nor wrought, [...] never been entred [...] never conquerd or possest [...]" (210).¹³⁴ Raleigh's concern is to prevent the Spanish from entering Guiana and despoiling her first – and thereby securing economic and military domination. To this end he is convinced that "were but a small army afoot in Guiana, [...] It] would yield to her Majesty by composition [...] many hundred thousand pounds yearly" (211). Raleigh is unconcerned for the current

¹³⁴ In a neocolonial update of this sort of description exists even today when we use the word "virgin" – now understood as the cognate of "maydenhead" – to describe pieces of land over which developers haven't built condominiums.

inhabitants of the land because he is also convinced that the indigenous rulers there can easily “be brought to tribute with great gladnes” (219). Even if they were to resist, however, this is of no import for Raleigh; he writes how they “ha[ve] neyther shotte nor Iron weapon in all [their] Empyre, and therefore may easely be conquered” (219).

Raleigh is effusive in his supplications; he instils a sense of urgency, citing inevitable Spanish interest in the area; he declares how very perfect the bays would be for defending; he relates how predisposed the local populace is already to Elizabethan rule; he even cites a most fortuitous, local, pre-Columbian prophecy that apparently predicts England’s successful conquest of the region. In short, Raleigh’s subtext is that this possession of the land is destiny; the country is asking – even begging – for it and whoever takes Guiana will have gold beyond their wildest dreams.

To summarise, Raleigh has spied the virgin land, sized up her parts, and fantasized about the best ways to penetrate and possess her. He declares how this land is an “answere [to] euery mans longing”; that is, “a better Indies for her maiestie then the king of Spaine hath any” (9). In Chapter Three of this thesis we already considered the usage of the word “Indies,” which signifies, in this sense, “a region or place yielding great wealth or to which profitable voyages may be made” (OED). Thus, within the logic of the colonial imaginary, whole geographical regions are gendered female and co-opted to signify wealth and profit.

One last example of the conflation of land and woman familiar to those concerned with feminist and postcolonialist approaches to Literature is Jan van der Straet’s now famous engraving of Theodor Galle’s late 16th Century drawing, featuring Vespucci and the “naked, reclining female America” (Brookes 227). Held by many scholars of the “New World” to be a representative image of the civilizational relationship, it is featured as frontispiece to Peter Hulme’s book *Colonial Encounters*. The engraving features the European explorer, in full explorer garb with all the

accoutrements of his office standing over what appears to be a surprised, naked indigenous woman. Recall that it is after Amerigo Vespucci that the continent is named. The image indicates how masculinist and exploitative technology, science and industry, all preside over a degraded female nature.

At this point I want to return to Raleigh's phrase, "a country that hath yet her maydenhead" and this word "maydenhead" in particular, which is used of places like Malaya and Guyana before the coloniser gets there. The adventurers in the age of exploration struggled to capture the attention of the public and the aristocracy in order to fund their voyages. As such, great importance was placed on the preparation of the voyage report. It was by this device that one convinced others to go, and the aristocracy to support exploratory voyages (Lorimer xvii). Skilled writers, like Raleigh, drew on tropes and metaphors designed to capture that domestic audience. The history of this usage in English Literature goes back further than the Elizabethan period. This conflation appears as far back as Chaucer in his *Legend of Good Women*: "Maydenes [...] ykept, for jelosye, / Ful streyte, lest they diden som folye" (722-3).

Catherine S. Cox, in her *Gender and language in Chaucer* gives an interpretation, "[...] a virginal maiden, she is too valuable a commodity to risk and is therefore confined by the stone wall for her own good" (54). It is a mere two hundred years later, that Raleigh, with this concept of woman continuing in much the same way, describes the land he encounters as a virginal land, and asserts rights through defining its borders, confining the commodity of land just as Chaucer reveals medieval men would a virgin maid. And so, the term "virgin," or *maydenhead* as Raleigh uses it, is not a neologism used poetically, as a metaphor of the unspoilt paradise, like contemporary tourist brochures of tropical regions, but is implicitly linked to ideas of imprisonment, conservation and profit. Raleigh here is the exemplum *par excellence* of Césaire's "adventurer and [...] pirate" (*Discourse*).

Pushing this analysis further reveals some of Chaucer's unique genius. While Raleigh stops there, so exemplifying the ultimate colonial motive, namely, profit seeking, Chaucer reveals the violence of this kind of ownership and definition by taking the relationship to its absurd limits. Chaucer's, "Physician's Tale," for example, is the story of a noble man, Virginius, whose virgin daughter, is jealously sought after by Appius, an evil judge who has designs on her. The "noble" Virginius argues in a rigged court on behalf of his daughter but when he realises he cannot win against the corrupt judge and the false witness of his churlish lackeys, he gives his daughter a choice – either decapitation or submission to the lascivious fiend – Virginia chooses beheading over "loss of virtue" and her father beheads her – literally bringing his daughter's bloody head to the courtroom; the pun, being, of course, that he has brought her maidenhead.

What rescues Chaucer's tale from failure – the ubiquitous female death for masculine honour – is the absurd misreading the Host provides in the tale's epilogue: "Algate this sely mayde is slayn, allas! / Allas, to deere boughte she beautee! / [...] / Hire beauty was hire deth, I dar wel sayn. / Allas, so pitously as she was slayn!" (VI. 292-298). That is, while the tale demonstrates a whole set of forces that curtail the girl's agency, the host offers what Catherine Cox describes as the "blame-the-victim interpretation": the host is saying, in effect, that "Virginia's death is the price she has paid to purchase beauty" (63).¹³⁵

And so, if the first argument is that gender is conflated with land to buttress discourses of power, Chaucer provides the second argument: that through the lens of gender is revealed the absurd dimensions of this power and the resolution to an otherwise intractable plot.

¹³⁵ Incredibly, and horribly, we are still dealing with this today, when a girl is held responsible for her own rape because of the way she dresses. I need not cite newspaper articles, but the same actually occurs literarily in, for instance Shahnnon Ahmad's *Iagu* (1971) and *Tivi* (1995). See Khoo Gaik Cheng's *Reclaiming Adat* (147) for a discussion of this violence in these works.

I want to foreground in the preceding examples, the literary function of the woman, and sexual politics in general, in the resolution of plot in literature. Concentrating on this particular resolving function in postcolonial literature of the two regions – especially in independence-era texts dealing with issues of belonging, ownership and rootedness – suggests that these strategies have a very long history that extends through the colonial period. The writers of the archipelagic Indies then, in borrowing from this problematic trope, then continue to traffic in an essentially colonial discourse.

It is hard to argue that early writers were very sensitive to these deployments. The early national literature of decolonisation, intent on owning and signalling entitlement to the land, saw the utility in saddling woman with all the mythologisation of the nation erasing her unique “I” (Carter 6). With this background into the colonial trope, I now move into a discussion of the novels in question and I will begin with a novel set in the same territory Raleigh penetrated geographically and literarily.

5.2 The Call for National Representation

Palace of the Peacock is Wilson Harris’s first novel but his literary credentials did not begin with this first foray into what would be a prolific output. Neither does Harris’s novel stand alone in most considerations of it; rather, apart from the earliest assessments of his work, *Palace of the Peacock* is overwhelmingly approached as the first of the four novels comprising his *Guyana Quartet*. While it may be a point of contention for some, I will treat Harris’s novel *Palace of the Peacock*, for the most part, independently of his other works in the *Quartet*. I do so because the novel can and does “stand alone” given the unique characters, setting, and plot. The characters it features bear resemblance to others in later novels but are not completely commensurable with them. As I will argue, important cultural arguments and suggestions are made in the first novel that are changed and furthered in later novels but these are done in

supplementary fashion. Just as Harris's own stylistic proclivity of concatenating images with the use of conjunctions, so too does he introduce new ideas in later novels in agglutinous fashion. Thus, to focus on the *Quartet* as a single unit (which is, in part, to reconstitute its constituent novels in retrospect as such) is to account for putative failings and felicities in the first novel (for example, in its appropriative use of indigenous Amerindian symbolism, which I will discuss later) by referencing representations and differences in outlook later in Harris's career. The implications of this choice are then that my reading and interpretative strategy, when viewed from the "holistic" perspective of the *Quartet*, are thus somewhat impoverishing: it does not admit specific intertextual complexities that arise only when it is taken as a member of the *Quartet*. The rather more positive implication though, is that it gains a unique, no less accurate, perspective in its historical (or chronologically discrete) assessment of the novel as a result of this loss. To treat the novel thusly is to treat Harris's art as a complex and evolving one rather than an ideologically static one, even if his oeuvre is marked by shared motifs. Following the rubric of analogous structures then, I wish to situate the novel within a specific geo-cultural matrix in order to bring it into relation with other texts, thereby to identify comparative isomorphisms.

Harris's first major work appeared in the seminal journal of Guyanese literary culture, *Kyk-over-al* which had, from issue one, as its *raison d'être*, the need to offer a national art, or an art that would serve the needs of the nascent Guyanese nation. These perceived needs, as discerned from the editor's preamble to the journal, include significantly a means of national socio-racial integration in the post-colonial period. Wilson Harris participated in the project of that magazine during his early years as a writer and leading up to the publication of his novel. The themes he explores in his novel can be seen in the short stories and poems he publishes there.

In comparison, Lloyd Fernando's case is very clearly that he felt the need to offer some sort of mythic reworking that might re-imagine the nation in more ethnically liberal terms. The specific phenomenon that sparked his novels, or around which his novels seem to be responding, is the racial riot. In fact, as Andrew Ng observes, even though in *Scorpion Orchid* Fernando sets his novel in the moments leading up to the racial riots of 1950s Singapore, the novel also – and perhaps more properly – speaks to the more recent and still contentious social wound of the Thirteenth May incident (responsibility for which the ruling regime has disavowed) (Ng "Vision of Hospitality").¹³⁶ Evidence for this is seen in the "anachronistic allusion" Fernando uses as backdrop to the novel. As Andrew Ng describes it, "*Scorpion Orchid* is a kind of futuristic novel written in hindsight that superimposes one historical moment onto another to create contextual parallelism and an allusive effect" ("Vision of Hospitality" 172). Thus, Fernando wields his art for ethical political purpose, to examine and articulate the officially proscribed and disavowed traumatic event and to propose for his readership a necessary socio-relational alternative through realist literary depiction, or mimesis.

Fernando draws into his work direct quotations from the founding scriptures of the nation of Malaya – the *hikayat* that are part of Malay and Malaysian identity (through colonial roots). This intertextual strategy grants a deeper sense of political import and national mythos to the text. Moreover he chooses to set the action of his novel in the urban centre of Singapore, drawing on the mythical resonance of the hinterland when he needs a location from which an "indigenous" spirituality will emerge. But, as I will argue later, his appeal to indigeneity is problematically mediated

¹³⁶ Fernando's other celebrated novel *Green is the Colour* also deals in its own way with the aftermath of the racial violence of the 13th May 1969 incident. See David Lim's article "Unity lost? Reframing ethnic relations in Lloyd Fernando's *Green is the Colour*" *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 46(2), 2010: 138-150. In a happy coincidence, Wilson Harris uses this title for an early poem in *Kyk-over-al*, "Green is the Colour."

through the colonial trope of exploited woman, and furthermore, ignores claims to indigeneity among the most marginalised in the society.

What Lloyd Fernando and Wilson Harris both ostensibly engender then, is a novel of socio-racial prescription.¹³⁷ In Chapter Six, I consider José Rizal's novel of social diagnosis in which Rizal represents the national scene and exposes the wound in order that society provide its own solutions and cures. Fernando and Harris, by contrast, operate outside of satire; they press immediately toward prescription. Grounding their work in myth and religion, they offer a vision and cure.

In a counter of sorts to the male-author bias in the first part, I also examine Zee Edgell's very relevant contribution to this discourse through her bildungsroman, *Beka Lamb* (1982). The bildungsroman is a genre favoured by many Caribbean writers at the nation's independence; because it encourages the specific type of allegorical reading famously theorised by Frederic Jameson as the "national allegory," it is often seen as conventional, even "obligatory" (Lima). Authors in this mode tend to highlight their desire for straightforward mimesis in their fictional representations. Edgell's project is no different here; she admits this much explicitly in interviews, and implicitly in her representation. As a consequence, she supports a particular kind of nationalism. Reading her work in tandem and in counterpoint to the others with specific focus on the indigenous trope as it is deployed in her novel reveals isomorphisms in trope, theme, and form despite differences in genre, style, and context. Like the other texts, *Beka Lamb* prescribes a nationalist universal that similarly strives to contain indigenous difference and concomitant appeals to nature.

¹³⁷ Interestingly Paul Sharrad, in his MA thesis, does not see the basis for political mythos in Harris. But Shona Jackson's more recent re-appraisal reveals this basis imputed and instated in ways that Harris did not intend. As Jackson writes "Harris's work has become part of the discourse of a new nationalism, and it is this nationalism that haunts his fictional intervention." (Jackson, in DeLoughrey et al., 2005: 90). What this reveals however, is the felt need or draw for this kind of literature for this kind of political purpose. Sharrad registers a predicted disappointment for those who would read the novel for these reasons. Perhaps this is why Harris has been coopted and conscripted for political purpose (Jackson).

Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* describes the life of a nation at a time just prior to Independence. Although she tells the story from a single perspective rather than a plural point of view drawn along conventional or officially normative ethnic divisions, Edgell does foreground ethnic relations among the dominant racial groupings and several significant minority positions within the nation as well.

5.3 Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock and the Hinterland*

Palace of the Peacock is structured into four parts, called books. The novel opens with a scene in which Donne – a white creole rancher – is shot and dies. Immediately after, the narrator is startled to see the dead man enter a house in the savannahs somewhere in the Guyanese and Brazilian hinterland. Two immediate temptations to read the novel as national allegory come to us before we even receive the book. Firstly, from its place of publication – Jameson's so-called Third World – and secondly, from the mere fact of its date of publication around Guyana's independence in 1966. Ignoring this pre-textual framing though, consider the plot on the simplest level: A ruthless white rancher named Donne assembles an ethnically-diverse crew to enter the Guyanese hinterland in an open boat to re-capture the Amerindian [i.e. indigenous] workforce escaped from Donne's exploitation – exploitation including the rape of a young Amerindian servant girl whom he had "governed and ruled like a fowl" (15). The indigenous folk flee to a mission in the forest named, just as the servant girl, "Mariella." One by one the crew fall to their deaths in their attempts at capturing the elusive folk and the novel concludes in a highly mystical transformation in which the characters resurrect spiritually, and repair their troubled psyche through participation in a sacred sacrament and embracing a shared muse.

I felt the faces before me begin to fade and part company from me and from themselves as if our need of one another was now fulfilled, and our distance from each other was the distance of a sacrament, the sacrament and embrace we know in one muse and one undying soul.

Each of us now at last in his arms what he had been for ever seeking and what he had eternally possessed. (152)

As Michael Gilkes astutely notes, all “the crew are metaphorically (and actually) in the same boat,” representing the various races of Guyana (*Caribbean Novel*, 24). They struggle to capture the indigenous folk [...] an allegorical search for roots. They are, each one of them, trapped in a “besieging game [...] driven to seek themselves.”

The Amerindians, possessing a connection to the land are sought; it is the force of that connection that the explorers seek, the resonance of it. In the case of Guyana, this resonance is profound. It is an updated echo of the El Dorado myth, appropriated by Harris, in an intervention into postcolonial national discourses themselves taking it as foundational. In other words, Harris takes “the myth of El Dorado from Western Imperial and colonial narratives of exploration and belonging to challenge prevailing ideas of Guyana’s interior landscape” (Jackson “Subjection and Resistance” 91). And in Harris’s postcolonial rewriting borrows from the discourses of gendered and spatial othering characteristic of the colonial narrative.

As noted earlier, *Palace of the Peacock* opens with a dream in which an archetypal colonial adventurer named Donne is shot. In an allegorical sense this opening is also the inauguration of the post-colonial period. But, far from the simple (premature) post-colonial celebration, Harris foregrounds the logic of neo-colonialism, the acknowledgement that the exploitation of the land and people commonly ascribed to the colonial period can and often does continue in the postcolonial period. And, as Robert Carr has noted in his essay “New Man in the Jungle,” Harris acknowledges this tendency through his depiction of the jungle:

written on the eve of Independence, [*Guyana Quartet*] thus becomes a vast project of reconceptualizing the coming transformation of the state and its nationality through the terrain of the jungle, the jungle becoming the metaphor for that which has always been unyielding to the

interests of the colonial state and which the new state must confront, that which, in the mind of government surveyor Wilson Harris, must be taken into account and is at odds with the new conceptual foundations of the state. (143-44)

In *Palace of the Peacock*, the shared naming of Mariella – as mission settlement and indigenous servant girl – is an instance of masculine governance over land-as-female in at least two major dimensions. As I explored in the opening section of this chapter, the colonial narrative of exploration often figured this work in gendered terms. But the postcolonial appropriation of colonial administrative and developmental goals often furthered the colonial project, inheriting and furthering the same problematic tropes.

Harris resolves his plot into a kind of social prescription with a mystical and gendered conclusion: after dying, each character suffers a symbolic resurrection, and Donne encounters a slender woman clothed only in her own ethereal-like hair – representing the muse or undying soul of the world. But she seems to mirror Mariella, the raped servant-girl; so when Harris speaks abstractly of liberation from rumour and superstition, freedom from the endless logic of besiegement and the erasure of difference through the sacrament and *shared embrace* of a universal muse, it sits uncomfortably with the knowledge of the abuse of Mariella. Why is it another symbolic female that provides this release? Indeed, as Shona Jackson notes, much critical attention has been focused on a passage that registers a desire and attraction of the crew for the Amerindian character Mariella presented in conflated terms of land and woman (“Subjection and Resistance” 92): “her crumpled bosom and river grew agitated with desire, bottling and shaking every fear and inhibition and outcry. The ruffles in the water were her dress rolling and rising to embrace the crew” (Harris 73). But in this and other references to Mariella, she functions as an ambiguous “narrative sign of desire, difference, and belonging” (92). We therefore “have no sense of her own subjectivity

because, as a sign, she is mediated by a series of oppositional relationships and naturalizing gestures” (93).

Guyana’s hinterland has historically been ideologically associated with the indigenous Amerindian population – through British and Dutch iterations on through to the postcolonial. The robustness of this association in the cultural imaginary is such that it has prompted critics like Shona Jackson to declare that “any attempt to engage discourse surrounding the “hinterland” must also deal with the dual and uneven subjection of the land and people in both discourses” (“Subjection and Resistance in the Transformation of Guyana’s Mytho-Colonial Landscape” 96)

The Guyanese interior was administered in Dutch colonialism in territorial swathes known as “patroons” (Carr 134). In classic neocolonial fashion, these patroons would then change hands so that resources might be secured according to the logic of global capital, from Raleigh (1595) to present-day exploitations (Carr 134). In fact, as Robert Carr reminds, the British suppressed activity in the hinterland by blocking economic and political interests from speculating or operating there; this was done to prevent “competition with the coast and the colonial regime” (Carr 134).

Robert Carr sees the clash between metropolitan lackey-seekers and the indigenous folk as a violent but fertile matrix from which the new nation would be born. In his provocative description it is “from the margins of the nation-state, the pregnant refuse of the process of development and expansion,” that “the fountainhead of a new national horizon” comes (135). Crucial to this process is the interchangeability of actors. The postcolonial elites can and do perform in ways indistinguishable from the rapacious colonial explorers. In Harris’s literary offering, this indistinguishability is rendered literal in the physical transformation and melding of colonial and post-colonial actors one into the other. This interpenetration of character is perhaps most perceptible in the narrator’s dream-like co-inherence in his “brother” Donne.

Harris's very style exemplifies this colonial/postcolonial superimposition. Harris's writing in *Palace of the Peacock* is characterized by the use of plural direct objects that he uses to modify the subjects:

Someone rapped on the door of my cell and room. I started on seeing the dream-horseman, tall and spare and hard-looking as ever. "Good morning," he growled slapping a dead leg and limb. I greeted him as one greeting one's gaoler and ruler. And we looked through the window of the room together as though through his dead seeing material eye, rather than my living closed spiritual eye, upon the primitive road and the savannahs dotted with sentinel trees and slowly moving animals. (14)

The concatenated nouns that frequently end his phrases permit, like poetry, striking alternative meanings for the modified subject; they preserve and extend ambiguity. Individual objects, persons, landscapes, names, and other things take on additional, multiple and simultaneous new meanings in an evocative superimposition.

This stylistic aspect of Harris's writing lends itself to allegory. Chief among the reasons for this allegorical resonance is perhaps the fact that the names Harris chooses are highly suggestive, evocative, allusive, and symbolic. The narrator's brother is named Donne, a name the narrator describes as possessing a "cruel glory" (14). Indeed, the colonial Englishness and "canonicity" of the name is revealed in the narrator's admission that "[Donne's] wild exploits had governed [the narrator's] imagination from childhood" (14). In much the same way, the Caribbean colonial subject has his or her imagination governed by the colonialisied social fabric woven through their imported education. In the novel, Donne calls himself "the last landlord" (17). "I tell you," he says,

"I fight everything in nature, flood, drought, chicken hawk, rat, beast and woman. I'm everything. Midwife, yes, doctor, yes, gaoler, judge, hangman, every blasted thing to the laboring people. Look man, look outside again. Primitive. Every boundary line is a myth. No-man's land, understand?" (17).

The narrator's relationship with Donne is troubled. They are brothers but Donne's vision and sight is slowly but surely taking over the narrator's. "Nothing kills your sight,' I added with musing envy. 'And your vision becomes,' I hastened to complete my story, 'your vision becomes the only remaining window on the world for me.'" (18)

"Rule the land while you still have a ghost of a chance." Donne declares (19). He issues commands with "demonic authority," his voice full of "aristocratic fury" (98).

The name "Donne" evokes much more than a vague colonial-ness, however. In *Palace of the Peacock*, Harris uses lines from John Donne's poem "Hymn to God, my God, in my Sickness" as an epigraph to Book III. The quotation is striking and apt, as this section is titled "The Second Death" and the John Donne poem Harris uses is written as on a deathbed. In this similarity in theme, it is clear that Harris too wishes to invoke the idea of life and death being twin states that might be superimposed as one. Lines 13-15 of Donne's poem read, "... As west and east / In all flat maps – and I am one – are one, / So death doth touch the resurrection." John Donne neatly references the sixteenth century Mercator projection which flattens the globe so that the eastern boundary is also the western. Harris's riff on this idea is to feature characters and their "dreaming selves" simultaneously occupying space in his novel.

Another felicitous affinity Harris bears for John Donne's poem is that it employs spatial and cartographic metaphors in its talk of death. The second stanza of the poem works with the metaphorical conceit of body-as-map and speaks of the "south-west discovery" – a reference to the Straits of Magellan – that route that required one to sail around the Southern tip of South America in order to reach the riches of the Orient. But John Donne, likens this passage to the way he goes to die, that is "*per fretum febris*" (by way of fever). No doubt, Donne plays with the fact that Magellan died en route to circumventing the globe (and he was killed in Southeast Asia).

And no doubt Harris, in selecting this particular poem of John Donne's and using the name Donne for his character, who then dies and resurrects, plays with these multiple allusions and meanings. These sorts of affinities reveal the colonial enterprise in postcolonial identity formation. The impetus of the (colonial) past infiltrates the motives of the (postcolonial) present. As Harris reveals in the new critical introduction to the novel, "My own expeditions as a land and hydrographic surveyor in the 1940s and 50s led me to intuit rhythms to riverscapes, landscapes, skyscapes which exposed an apparition and magical palace within changed and changing bridges of time" (Bundy, "New Preface to Palace": 55).

Again, according to Robert Carr,

Harris's agenda in the *Quartet* is a survey of the diverse groups constituting the nation written with an eye to rethinking the world and problems of knowledge and nationhood from the perspective of Guyana's constituencies and terrain. [... it] is an opus of Guyanese territorialization. (136)

Harris refuses to accept simple colonial or anti-colonial solutions to the problems of national social integration. Like the dialectical manoeuvre that Glissant presents, he sees an equivalently imperial gesture in the anti-imperial.

While Harris's solutions then seem thoroughly complicated and grounded in failure, it is in his idealistic depiction of women that his solution is presented and found to be most problematic. Carr describes Harris's use of "women as metaphors" who "find themselves in an explosive process of transformation, like a zygote, a multiplying egg" (136). The actual, physical women portrayed in Harris's first novel (and disproportionately in the rest of his *Quartet*), "find their bodies the locus of super-overdetermined violence" (136). Carr sees in this representation an acknowledgement again, of the way the postcolonial state repurposes exploitation. It repeats

the exploitative practices and imperial paradigms that have marked the colonial period about to come to an end, and it is in the minds of the intelligence – gatherers from

the coast confronting the inhabitants of the jungle, as much as in the strategic implementation of bodies, land and technology, that the transformation from the old to the new must occur. (Carr 144)

In the same way, in *Palace of the Peacock* the narrator discerns the lust in Donne for the mission and for Mariella. But the narrator then realises that he is “reliving Donne’s first innocent voyage and excursion into the interior” (24). Later the narrator notes, “the mysterious youthful longing which the whole crew possessed for Mariella” (33). Thus Harris identifies the same violence of possession for the land in the postcolonial period which he tries to resolve by having his characters die and their spirits participate in a sacred shared embrace of a shared muse of indigenous and territorial resonance in a highly symbolic and mystical final sequence.

While realism and the realist novel that Lloyd Fernando embraces is overwhelmingly associated with nationalist art, denying the national concerns of Harris’s experimental writing style would be syllogistic and wrong. Many passages in Harris’s distinctive abstract style lend themselves to allegorical readings. The symbolic language partially derived from Jung, that Harris uses, easily submits to interpretations that combine the artistic creation of archetypes with historical and postcolonial contextual realities to permit this type of reading.

5.3.1 Inscape and Landscape in *Palace of the Peacock*

Harris himself would articulate the impact of this association on his own psyche and the formation of his artistic vision so that the link between colonialism and environmental destruction would be made explicit. Harris is cognisant of the environmental destruction characteristic of the “Anthropocene.” In the late twentieth century he reveals concern with the implications of pollution: apart from the “object lesson” of conservation, he says, the long distance action of anthropogenic pollution on the natural world brought home to him the interlinking mesh of society and nature (Adler xv). It is this realisation that distinguishes Harris from other early West Indian writers.

For though Guyana has a vast hinterland and a large expanse of territory (which would seem to suggest a profound dissimilarity with other island nations of the Caribbean), the settlement was really positioned in between sea and forest, so that, as Paul Sharrad has remarked, the *Palace of the Peacock* really evokes the “claustrophobic atmosphere of a small settlement” in that it exists on the edge of opposing natural voids – the “jungle is changeable, circumscribing, and complex as the ocean.”

In *Palace of the Peacock* (1960) Wilson Harris takes up the themes he worked with in short stories and poetry and re-works them into a novel of experimental feel. His style is experimental in that it is newly crafted for the purpose of conveying and presenting the raw material of his previous literary offerings. In Harris’s poetry and prose in the journal *Kyk-over-al* he has already introduced themes of ecology, and postcolonial environmentalism, indigenous land-rights, and issues of development (Sharrad 503). Similarly, his early poetry explores the analogies between landscapes of the natural, physical world and what Pierre Dansereau calls “inscapes,” or the metaphorical landscapes of the human psyche (ii).

Inscape is a useful term for describing the work of Harris’s novel. Dansereau explains his use of the term in *Inscape and Landscape: The Human Perception of Environment*. Dansereau is keen to link the “human perception of the environment” with “man’s impact on nature” (ii). Human beings, he writes, have “had a selective perception of the world about [them] and in turn a highly discriminating way of modelling the landscape to match [their] inner vision” (ii). While his idea is not in any real way a novel one at this point, Dansereau’s phraseology is unique in its coincidental invocation of Harrisian terminology and provenance. Consider the scene in Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock* when the Dreamer is blind and has only Donne’s vision available for him – Donne a clear cipher for the colonial vision of rapacity and rule over man, beast, fowl and woman (15). Dansereau’s phraseology also usefully makes the link

between colonialism and the environment in that the colonizer's "vision" here is implicated in the colonial transformation of landscape, for strategic, economic and administrative reasons.

Moreover, both Harris and Dansereau reference the same canonical poet in the elaboration of their themes. As Dansereau elucidates his term,

Inscape [...] was coined by a poet, not an ecologist or a geographer. Gerard Manley Hopkins recorded his contemplations of nature in diaries, letters, poems, drawings, and even music. This filtering inward from nature to man, upward from the subconscious to the conscious, and from perception to design and implementation, is indeed what happens to the agriculturalist, the forester, the engineer, the town planner. The pathway of sensorial impression to material interference is strewn with an imagery that makes the inscape a template for the reshaping of the landscape. (ii-iii)

Hopkins is also quoted by Harris in *Palace of the Peacock* as epigraph to Book II "The Mission of Mariella." From Hopkins's "The Wreck of the Deutschland," Harris selects the following quote: "... the widow-making unchilding unfathering deeps." (35). With this quotation he alludes to the shipwreck and death – present in the Hopkins's poem – to invoke the idea of shattering one's connection to the material plane and effecting salvational release of spirit crucial for a rehabilitation of the Caribbean psyche. In Hopkins's poem the tragic occasion of a shipwreck – the journey for which was mandated by political repression – inspires a recuperative meditation on the Christological actions of the five nun passengers, who appear to incarnate the stigmata (Sobolev 312).

Hopkins's poem reads the historical event with a theological perspective, offering typological and Christological interpretations in the shipwreck through his poetry. Harris too desires a deeper spiritual reading to his literary depiction of a journey to the interior. Throughout *Palace of the Peacock*, the reader identifies the narrator as a conflated subject-position: the narrator represents both Donne and Donne's brother but

at the end of the novel, the narrator ceases to imitate the points-of-view of either subject-position and rises above these to an omniscient perspective generally understood as a recuperated and transcendent identity (Tindall 9). In Dylan Tindall's estimation, for instance, "the narration forms a structural representation of the transcendent signified, not as God specifically, but as a timeless and dynamic state of transcendence of ego" (9).

Perhaps a negative consequence of this abstraction, though, is that, just as Harris's *inscapes* are figured in grand universalistic and abstract language, so too are his representations of the natural world. The Guyanese interior and hinterland are described in language strangely devoid of political, toponymic, botanic, or ecological specificity. For instance, the nation-names "Brazil" and "Guyana" are mentioned specifically only a few times in the novel and even when used they are either treated like evocative abstractions (in the manner Siberia is evoked to signal the epic pre-historical event of the Bering Straits passage, for instance) or dismissed as "colonial conventions" (20). The narrator and Donne refer only to "the savannahs," and only at the opening of the novel does the narrator ever refer to its general location "near the Brazil frontier and border country" (14). While the racial make up of the entire crew is exposed in one section of the novel, and a major Amerindian character is mentioned as being Arawak, the rest of the indigenous population is referred to periodically with the collective noun "the folk," which is, of course, a generic description for local peoples of any geographical location. While water-metaphors feature heavily in the novel, and can even be taken as "the primary symbol" (Sharrad 488) of the work, the actual physical rivers and streams that the party travel, ford, and in which they drown are never named. This refusal to name the features of the landscape, or provide more precise geo-historical coordinates is a striking strategy. It is one that seems to be crucial in any consideration of Harris's style of postcolonial environmental writing.

Harris acknowledges the formative power of the hinterland on the psyche of the coastal settlements characterising (post)colonial Guyana:

[T]he life of great rivers – such as the Demerara, the Essequibo, the Berbice in the Guyanas – [...] have their rushing headwaters in untamed and peculiar regions. A frame of settlement and reservoir on the Atlantic coast – however remote it appears from such headwaters, however fortified to serve its own ends – may become a trigger of environmental crisis within a system of intricate forces and dimensions extending into the body of a continent. (Adler xv)

Harris goes on to muse the effects on the psyche had that continent been fully despoiled. His point is that the experience of South America did not allow him to take “for granted whatever gloss or lustre or privileged status of persuasion was placed upon them” (Adler xv). Harris is thus uniquely placed, by virtue of the ecological inheritance gifted his psyche from his time living and working in the tropical hinterland. His representations acknowledge indigenous presence within the picturesque vista presented by the landscape and view, with suspicion, articulations of monocultural origins to the nation.

All of these reasons simply position Harris as an excellent author to consider in relation to postcolonial ecocriticism. In fact, Harris’s background and inspiration go some ways in establishing his credentials as an early postcolonial nature writer. Harris’s contemporary, Caribbean novelist Jan Carew, believes that Harris’s work and style is born directly from his working as a surveyor for nearly seventeen years in the Guyanese hinterland:

The surveyors were an interesting breed [...] complete isolation without the kind of intellectual exchange that would go on in the normal course of things. Wilson lived with this for about seventeen years. It explained some of the writing in *Palace of the Peacock*. That is the writing of someone accustomed to talking to himself in the Guyana bush for seventeen years! (Birbalsingh 44)

Critical readers of Harris's novel, note his drawing on the "phenomenological density of the tropical natural world" (Tindall) and his "wrestling with something immensely authentic" (quoted in Tindall). Paul Sharrad also notes Harris's reliance on metaphors of nature: his focus on waterways, his use of the "fluid element," his deployment of the geographical escarpment to figure symbolic ascension. While Sharrad skilfully uses these elements of Harris's art –the rootedness in landscape, the concrete reminders of the indigenous, the acknowledgement in the novels of man's fragility in an alien environment – to compare literatures, he cannot suggest more than "correspondences" between the regions he compares. This is because Sharrad chooses authors and nations from within the set of postcolonial candidates (Commonwealth literature). Sharrad investigates "correspondences" between Australia and Guyana, but not direct contacts; he identifies then a similarity in artistic and thematic preoccupations born of a postcolonial logic of metropolitan-provincial tension (491). As Sharrad writes,

[T]he different backgrounds of Australia and Guyana function within *similar overall dynamics of colonial experience* so that the two writers deal with the same themes, and trace similar patterns, both working towards a literary vision of authentic post-colonial cultural identity. (492, *my emphasis*)

Paul Sharrad's thesis still relies on a colonial logic, what he calls "similar overall dynamics of colonial experience," that then becomes the uniting category under which two very different works are brought together for comparison. But such an apprehension, as I have argued in the introduction, suffers from the tendency to locate and equate instances of resistance in the work without invoking more direct historical, material, and ideological connections between the two specific regions.¹³⁸ If all the world and every continent is implicated by colonial processes, then this opens up Sharrad's postcolonial analysis to Suleri's charge that "postcolonialism [...] must read

¹³⁸ Sharrad's analysis actually compares writers from three different regions of the postcolonial world: South America/Caribbean, Oceania, and India.

as a free-floating metaphor of cultural embattlement” (759) or Sohat, who cautions – like other critics of “post-colonialism” in the pages of *Social Text* in the early 90s – against turning it, like its ascendant subsidiary term, “hybridity,” into a generalised opposition, “a descriptive catch-all term” for resistance (110). This is not to dismiss the utility of Sharrad’s type of analysis, but to complicate and problematise the implications of its continued use.

Harris’s work is very useful for interrogating dead Sisyphean ethnic ritual characteristic of postcolonial scrambles to consolidate a national cultural imagination. And his work is especially useful for examining the early colonial, or conquistadorial bases to postcolonial legacies. By asserting a homogenous cultural norm, neocolonial elites enable a violent suppression of alternative cultural nationalisms. And this homogenous norm has tried to co-opt Harris’s success especially because Harris’s art involves an act of cultural creation that derives its symbolic power from the natural world and appropriations of the indigenous peoples who are sometimes positioned as being part of it.

Wilson Harris’s own work as surveyor of the interior is participant in the creation of community and he uses his experience in terms of the pioneer, the charter, and the environmental imaginative possibilities that the jungle growth and nature presents. In *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* Selwyn Cudjoe identifies Wilson Harris’s task in his early novels as that of “working out a new relationship in more cosmic and universal terms” and central to that universality is a gesture to nature, to the jungle, to primordial life forms. In *Palace of the Peacock* that gesture is articulated in his use of highly symbolic language that would “transcend the legacy of a ‘conquest-ridden society’ and restructure a new dialogue which has validity not only for Caribbean man but for all men” (Cudjoe 244).

But Harris's writing style choice has a trade-off. The effect of his stylistic abstraction is to demand much of the reader in terms of supplying cultural, geographical, even spatial contextual information. While such historical and cultural context is often seen as crucial to interpretations of postcolonial writing, one possible advantage of this strategy is that the novel then makes a broad appeal to human existence, in general, and refuses being pigeonholed and set aside as irrelevant to non-Caribbean experience. In other words, the novel, responds to the West Indian experience specifically but not exclusively.

However, as Kerstin Oloff has argued, when Harris's work is considered from a postcolonial perspective from without the political context of 1960s Guyana, or outside the more strictly formalist debate of comparative literary realisms, "it loses much of its radical nature because of its tendency towards abstraction" (237). Furthermore, postcolonial readings that do inject the "necessary" contextual information into the reading may result in determining the work an overall failure (for example, see Oloff). Shona Jackson too argues that Harris has been too easily conscripted for nationalist ends in the Guyanese political milieu – an appropriation he would no doubt seek to resist.

In "Wilson Harris, Regionalism, and Postcolonial Studies" Oloff argues for reading the novel with increased contextualisation (a common tactic among postcolonialists) despite noting that such a tactic results in the text undermining its own project. This is due again, to Harris's abstraction. Oloff argues that "Harris's tendency to map his philosophy of the Caribbean psyche onto material reality severely limits his exploration of the nation and the role of particular ethnic groups within it" (237). Oloff's criticisms come in striking opposition to earlier critics, like Joyce Sparer Adler, who praise precisely that post-racial element of Harris's art. In *Exploring the Palace of the Peacock* Adler opens her first essay by proudly asserting the *impossibility* of even "conceiv[ing] of a writer more free of racial exclusiveness, and more dedicated to its

reverse, than Wilson Harris” (1). In Harris’s work, she continues, “there is no ‘we’ and no ‘they’” (1). In her dissertation on *The Art of Wilson Harris*, Marion C. Gilliland, also approaches Harris’s work with the understanding that he “is increasingly recognized as a writer who creates new forms in the novel while advocating a reconciliation among races and nations” (1). Gilliland bases her study on this racial inclusivity of Harris’s work.

The universality or strived-for unity in Harris’s work perhaps accounts for these contradictory opinions. Even as Harris claims to be universal so he must erase difference to maintain that universality. But instead of some facile subterfuge of ethnic violence or naïve celebration of *créolité*, Harris’s attempt to overcome difference lies in his representation of the characters’ deaths. As Harris depicts each character finally achieving their desired self-knowledge and self-identity in the end through the killing of their identitarian egos: “Each of us now held at last in his arms what he had been forever seeking and what he had eternally possessed” (117).

Harris’s attempt here is to identify and extrapolate a shared Caribbean identity, a universal culture, by abolishing the urge to assert a more narrow ethnic absolutism or cultural nationalism. Still, this symbolic work cannot shake the shackles of a mimetic politics of representation; Oloff implicates Harris’s “metaphorical use of particular ethnic groups” (239) and also his “archetypal conception of the individual” (239) to achieve this purpose. Oloff faults Harris’s “exclusive focus on the ‘hybridized’” forms of Caribbean identity – something that Adler celebrates, in her introduction to his work, as Harris’s assertion that “the real identity of a Guyanese, of any origin, is to be found in Guyana itself and its particular history” not in a futile ethnic genealogical tracing in the manner of colonial pseudo-scientists and phrenologists. Adler identifies in Harris, an “affirmation of belonging, not to any one group in the country but to the complete mixture of ‘every race under the sun’” (3).

The danger of Harris's strategy, for Oloff, is that in its celebration of "transcultured spaces in colonial discourse" Harris's discourse can "blind us to exploring the historical intricacies of the class/cultural alliances between different social groups" (243). While this reading of hybridity may be guilty of dismissing the potential of hybrid models to yet refer to the cultures and ethnicities which constitute their hybridity, it still seems crucial to assert the latent politics of representation in the novel despite the celebratory quagmire of hybrid forms.

5.4 Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* and the Urban Environment

Oloff believes that a more specific contextualisation of Harris's work is necessary to recuperate Harris's work from the failures generated by its abstraction. But it is at this point that I want to detour from Oloff's call for increased contextualisation and instead turn to comparison, to relation, and invoke Harris's Southeast Asian contemporary in English letters, Lloyd Fernando. There are two contrasting elements of Fernando's work in particular that bear mentioning in relation to the points just articulated.

First, in *Scorpion Orchid* Fernando chooses to figure clearly representative protagonists of unambiguous (that is clearly articulated) racial origin. While one of Fernando's main male characters, Peter, is of mixed ancestry (Portuguese and British alongside Malay), this identity is interpellated under the appellation "Eurasian." Effectively considered, in the Malayan context as a separate identity on the same plane as the normative divisions Malay, Indian, Chinese.

More interestingly, Fernando also depicts a character that is truly racially ambiguous, in contrast to Harris's characters that display a "hopelessly-jumbled" racial stock. These contrasts are interesting to pit against each other to see what results from their narrative representations. And thus, second, Fernando does have his mixed-race character attempt a racial quantification which the narrative implicitly ridicules as

absurd despite the character's "success" at determining a fifty-one per cent stake in Caucasoid racial stock.

Both these strategic depictions suggest grounds for a comparative engagement and the potential for revelation and insight in each author's ideological or prescriptive artistic projects. And this despite Harris's anti-realism, and Fernando's realist tendencies. After comparing these two works I will attempt a further juxtaposition with the bildungsroman of a Caribbean woman writer with ties to the continental Caribbean (which displays clearer affinities to Indigenous elements), in order to tease niggling issues of gender representation in the former juxtaposition.

First and foremost, Fernando embraces precisely the type of social-realist, moralistic literature that Harris seeks to avoid in his highly universalistic and imaginative offering. Secondly, Fernando takes as his primary setting, the urban environment of Singapore, rather than situating his story in the hinterland of the Malayan peninsula (despite critics interpreting Fernando's depiction of Singapore as a cipher of postcolonial Malaysia, that is, as a creative account of the struggles attendant on Malaysia's emergent nationhood).

Like Harris's representative group of characters, Fernando's novel follows the lives of four university students—Sabran, Guan Kheng, Santinathan, and Peter—during events leading up to a time of social upheaval. In addition to the stories of these main characters, important supplementary perspectives on the events and struggles of this discrete slice of time through other characters the five interact with. Most interesting of the minor characters crucial to the novel's work are the figures of Sally, prostitute whose race is purposely obscured, and a mythical religious figure, Tok Said. The novel opens with a scene of return: Santinathan's uncle, Rasu in a straightforward display of national feeling and attachment is returning to India, despite having lived in Singapore over twenty years. Rasu simply assumes that both Santinathan, and his sister Neela will

follow suit after their the conclusion of their studies. In fact, in the course of the novel, neither will. Neela, impregnated out of wedlock by a British English lecturer, decides to seek her fortune single-handedly. The British English lecturer Ellman, alongside Ethel Turner, lecturer of Philosophy, provide shades of nuance to metropolitan perspectives on the nation in their disagreements and presumptions. Other minor characters, who nonetheless play significant roles include, a dockyard labourer named Arokiam, Inspector Adnan, and Peter's fiancé Patricia Chen. But Fernando's novel also includes intertextual elements in the form of interludes drawn from historical documents, and evocative fictional fragments. Within these sections we obtain snippets of disparate subject-positions: that of Peter D'Almeida's uncle, for instance, who was tortured by Japanese soldiers during the Occupation. But mythical and also real figures from Malaya's colonial past make an appearance: Col. Farquhar, Datok Bendahari, and Kapitan Cina.

Through his characters' internal struggles, Fernando's novel explores the theme of fragmented national self-hood. In *Scorpion Orchid* his characters ask abstract philosophical questions, "What were their real selves? Who were they?" (136). Fernando's contribution is to complicate racially derived understandings of social conflict in Malayan society through fictional representation. As his character Sabran meditates, "[t]he frenzy which had convulsed them brief months ago answered these questions in racial terms, but that was too paltry a conclusion after the glimpse the four had had in their own lives together of an affinity more inclusive than race" (136).

The novel ridicules attempts at defining belonging along racial terms – in especially Peter's attempt to quantify his "whiteness" to a percentage of at least 51% (137) – only to suggest that a shared work in the urban environment sublates their hinterland referents to emerging cultures.

The action of Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* takes place in an urban environment that seems at first radically opposed to Harris's depiction of the inscrutable hinterland. *Scorpion Orchid's* Singapore is dotted with references to streets, buildings, products, and people because Fernando is keen to highlight the cultural and human geography of the place. In doing so, Fernando cements his narrative onto the locality to foreground its representative or mimetic function. Interspersing the sections of his book are historical excerpts and imaginative interludes of near-mythical resonance. Again, these sections serve to reinforce the link between the novel and nation with cultural and historical sutures.

Lloyd Fernando makes the shared embrace explicit through use of the character "Sally" a prostitute of indeterminate race or religion who "gives rest" to the four male main characters of his novel *Scorpion Orchid* – the four boys who represent the *main* ethnic groups in Singapore. Again, in a kind of prescriptive national allegory, Fernando seems to present two methods of attaining that elusive objective ideal of the nation – Tok Said a mystic of undetermined religious persuasion and the hawker, prostitute and boys' some-time friend, Sally. Attempts to reach Tok Said eventually result in failure and insubstantial myth; but, in the boys' sexual union with the shared prostitute Sally, it seems, Fernando presents proof of the enactment of shared destiny. When she is abandoned, by the boys, in their preoccupation with their own personal struggles however, she is lost to them.

Read allegorically then, the enactment of this shared sense of belonging is only accomplished through the use of this fetishized female. In stating this, I want to point out how Fernando plays with tropes Harris similarly invokes. Like Harris, Fernando locates the imagined national culture in the figure of the woman. For Harris, the rape of Mariella and land "mimics the relationships of woman and land in male-centred nationalist discourse" (Jackson 94) in a way that alludes to the specific colonial

discourse of Raleigh's journey and the myth of El Dorado. In Fernando's case, the cultural imaginary is similarly located in the woman, and her multi-racial gang rape. In Lloyd Fernando's depiction of the urban environment and in his characters' shared embrace of Sally, the "originary" race-spaces constructed particular to each ethnicity are dissolved or transcended. Like the racially ambiguous Sally/Salmah, urban Singapore resists racial delimitation, being open to (abuse by) all. The city suffers racially-motivated riots as Sally/Salmah suffers her multi-racial gang-rape. What Lloyd Fernando suggests then is the sublimation of these differences in the mystical sense of belonging to the land allegorised as woman. The allegory, however, makes Sally's depiction as the locus of super-overdetermined violence no less problematic.

In both Fernando and Harris then, asserting belonging to land and nation is a decidedly violent act of (ethnically-diverse) male action. But as is obvious from this trauma and scandal of the metaphor, neither writer conceives, in their first novels, an alternative avenue that recuperates the gendered symbolism in a way that figures female agency in national cultural imagination.

Major differences between the authors analysed in this chapter include, style, setting (geographically in terms of country and nation, but also environmentally, in terms of urban and hinterland). Both novels have attracted a particular type of mimetic reading, one that might be termed postcolonial national prescription. At a higher level of theoretical abstraction this type of project is identified more simply as social and political concern. But, especially in their depiction of female characters, a troubling tendency to abstraction and violence persists and is shared by both authors in terms of representational capacity. More consciously sensitive to the role of females in the project of building and representing the cultural imagination of the nation, Caribbean woman writers set out, especially in the eighties, to redress these failures of representation.

5.5 Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* and the City-swamp

In a kind of counter to the male-authored bias in the first part, then, I now examine Zee Edgell's bildungsroman, *Beka Lamb* (1982). A genre favoured by many Caribbean writers at the nation's Independence but one which encourages a reading according to Jameson's "national allegory". And as fictional representation is the author's explicit, stated objective, she necessarily supports a particular kind of nationalism. The binary for the critical reception of Edgell's novel is then between authentic representation and reductive/artificial cultural translation. Investigating the "indigenous trope" shows how *Beka Lamb* prescribes a nationalist universal that strives to contain indigenous difference.

Like Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid*, Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* describes the life of a nation at a time just prior to Independence. Although she tells the story from a single perspective rather than a plural point of view drawn along conventional ethnic divisions, Edgell does foreground ethnic relations among the dominant racial groupings and several significant minority positions within the nation as well.¹³⁹ Edgell represents the cultural conflict between Creoles and "Caribs." That is she depicts relations between Afro-Caribbean descendants of slaves and the miscegenated Afro-Amerindian Garifuna (called "kerub" in Belizean Creole in derogatory parlance, Edgell's "Carib" wording is a somewhat misleading Anglicisation as Caribs are indigenous Caribbean Amerindians but the Garifuna are not descendent from them but the Arawaks). The middle-class Creole family in the novel register with disapproval Beka's mixing with the Garifuna – her mother figures this disapproval in terms of civilizational upliftment – where the indigenous ethnic group represents "superstition" (*Beka Lamb* 67) and the past (much as Ishak's Old Malay Woman characterised the "Sakai" in that novel).

¹³⁹ *Beka Lamb* is not just the story of one girl. It features counterpointing exempla, that of Beka Lamb the titular character, and Toycie, whose trajectory results in a tragic exemplum (perhaps indicated in her failure to appear as titular character).

The resentment within the family unit around Beka's intransigence on this matter precipitates a quarrel at the wake of Beka's Greatgran Straker. Beka's aunt, Miss Ivy (who represents the position sympathetic to the cultural customs of the indigenous past in that she defends the "old ways" and the cultural value of the wake (66) is drawn into an argument with the "modernising" and Euro-centric Lilla (Beka's mother), who is critical of adopting cultural performances with references to non-Western epistemologies. Beka intervenes, drawing on anecdotal experience provided by her Garifuna school teacher that she acquired at school. Lilla protests against both Miss Ivy's and Beka's associations with the "Caribs" (Garífuna). Interrupting their quarrel, Beka shouts: "When I grow up I am going to marry a Carib!" (68). Outraged at her insolence but also perhaps the suggestion of ethnic transgression, Beka's mother Lilla slaps her across the face.

In an article in *Belizean Studies* I have discussed how the tension, ethnic content, and emotional resonance of this passage, prompts literary critic Richard F. Patteson to describe its relevance to the "symbolic heart" of the novel:

The Caribs, though they are mentioned only a few times in *Beka Lamb*, constitute the novel's symbolic heart. The Caribs through their name and their ancestry, are an indivisible link between Belize and the Caribbean past, including its pre-colonial history. One of the most marginalised peoples on earth, the black Caribs trace their ancestry back to Amerindians... (63)

After this anthropological background Patteson more problematically states that "the story of the Caribs is the story of Belize in microcosm" and that the Caribs "are in a sense the truest creoles" (64). In an article in *Belizean Studies*, I have noted the "slippage" here between "indigenous marginality, Creole subjectivity, and the unitary nation" that tends toward an equation of marginalisation and with anti-colonial nativehood (De Shield "Writer, Nation, Text" 25). To reiterate one of the claims of that article, the marginalised in postcolonial discourse tend to be celebrated as naturally anti-

colonial in postcolonial discursive gestures despite the similarly fraught nature of claims to indigeneity made among those marginalised groups. Patteson's discussion exemplifies this in that he highlights the exploitation, manipulation, and brutalisation of Amerindians and Africans in the Caribbean but refuses to comment on the relations *between* native peoples in the postcolonial state, or how these peoples differently figure or contest claims to indigeneity.

The inspiration or impetus for *Beka Lamb* comes from Edgell's stated desire to "explore and show some of the reasons" for Creole inability "to act as a cohesive group working to better themselves economically in Belize" ("Encuentros" 7). In fact, Edgell's novel features two major characters that take on ethno-representational capacity by extrapolation in postcolonial readings. Edgell constructs a national narrative whose "weight [...] is thrown] heavily in the favour of Belize creoles" (Campbell 72). Edgell names her text after Beka and presents Toycie's case in a masculine vein by her exemplifying a woman driven mad by transgressing sexual taboos. Edgell crafts a national allegory in the novel, which she would complicate, much as Wilson Harris does, by featuring different, more marginalised ethnicities as protagonist. Both Harris and Edgell then realise the tendency to read early postcolonial works as national allegory, and the subsequent pressure to offer problematic readings anchored on the representational ethnicity of the protagonist. Richard Patteson deals with this dilemma of representation and reading by appealing to Edgell's Caribbean "creolisation," arguing that difference is not erased violently as in other regions, because of a voluntary sublation of identity present in creolisation.

In Fernando's presentation of ethnic conflict in Singapore the British colonial history is heuristically positioned as an element of common enmity that affords disparate races and classes a solidarity. Characters in the novel that are sympathetic to the work of ordering that the British colonial project unfolded — despite its colonial

extravagances and hypocrisies (that is, “the white man’s burden”) — despair at the prospect of intra-ethnic violence that might erupt within the nation. But the four boys too, in a “collective bildungsroman” gradually realise their easy friendship has slipped away after their post-university induction into real-world politics. Much as their ragging of underclassmen at the university, the induction into the larger society comes with certain artificially instituted pains and sacrifices of dignity. In this sense, the novel seen in retrospect, becomes “a work of mourning for a multiculturalism that sought its own destruction through the evolution of a common Malaysian culture” (Holden 166). The camaraderie that the friends possessed in their university days within the English-medium University of Malaya, now appears a nostalgic gesture.

In Zee Edgell’s text this anti-colonial enmity is similarly queried. As Beka’s father, Bill Lamb, opines, ““Hatred of British colonialism unites us now. There are so many races here I wonder what will keep us together once they leave”” (*Beka Lamb* 96). But Zee Edgell does not problematise the subsumption of ethnic origins within the anticolonial gesture. In one exemplary scene, Toycie shows Beka a Spanish guitar she received from an Englishwoman, Mrs. Leigh (*Beka Lamb* 35). After discovering that guitar is made in Spain, Beka scratches the name “España” from off the guitar in order to etch in “Belize” in a palimpsestic act of censure. Patteson describes this deed as a “token of creative potential” (Patteson 60); Beka’s appropriation of the colonial gift in the form of the Spanish guitar can also be interpreted in symbolic terms as an appropriation of a customary device for national self-expression by the postcolonial citizen. Frederic Jameson’s paraphrase of Frantz Fanon – “to receive independence is not the same as to take it, since it is in the revolutionary struggle itself that new social relationships and a new consciousness is developed” (81) – would seem to be

appropriate theoretical interpretation.¹⁴⁰ In this act, a multi-level appropriation occurs: Beka Lamb the protagonist takes colonial gift and inscribes postcolonial nation; Zee Edgell the author takes and deploys a European genre and form to represent a non-European cultural narrative; and Edgell, as postcolonial subject takes the colonial language and creolises it (De Shield).

Lloyd Fernando too has British lecturer Ethel Turner in Malaya issue a similar sentiment of colonial paternalism (ensconced in a expatriate bubble) “Thank God the British are here” (88) she says to the newly arrived lecturer Ellman:

they have nothing in common. If we left tomorrow, there'd be such a lovely bit of mayhem that we'd have to come back and keep the peace. No, I'm afraid we have to grin and bear it – the white man's burden, I mean,' she added lightly. (89)

What distinguishes these shared sentiments? In both cases a similar colonial articulation of ethnic distrust and inevitable post-colonial chaos is issued despite the discreteness and unique cultural context of the postcolonial societies being described. The colonial prediction of post-independence chaos is a colonial comparative gesture of sameness.

To distinguish between the two gestures one must take into account the distinct cultural presence of indigenous groups in either region. When turning to theorists of literature produced in the Caribbean region, it is common to encounter a neo-colonial myth: indigenous erasure. Caribbean literary theorist J. Michael Dash, for instance, in contesting colonial and postcolonial discourses of Caribbean remoteness and irreducible difference, and in denouncing exoticist projects of blank-slate descriptions of the Caribbean environment, still writes of “the “extermination” of indigenous peoples” (13) as if their presence was in fact entirely obliterated.

¹⁴⁰ It is important to note here though that Belize never has experienced anything like the political revolutions of its neighbouring countries in Latin America.

Caribbean literary scholar Allison Donnell similarly suggests the utter annihilation of indigenous cultures, in her *Writing for Resistance: Nationalism and Narratives of Liberation*. Arguing that Caribbean societies lacked “pre-colonial or established indigenous culture which could be revived and re-valued in order to resist the colonising culture” (32), Donnell omits mention of processes of indigenous racial and cultural transculturation and miscegenation occurring there. As recent work in anthropology shows, the reciprocity in cultural and ethnic relations is routinely ignored in the colonial literature and in early official records of the island Caribbean especially, probably due to the assumptions of cultural superiority (a dominant culture supplants elements of another in a process of “purification”). The presence of indigenous cultures potentially undermines cultural nationalisms of the politically dominant native discourses. Fernando, Harris and Edgell then negotiate, contest, or rework contentious discourses of nationalism. In the processes they necessarily assume and speak-for the different and often marginalised human and non-human denizens of their nation-regions. Perhaps, then, like many different regions of the island Caribbean, authors of postcolonial Singapore present narratives that attempt to offer a grounding to the nation in an absence of discourses of indigenous presence.

An indigenous presence is discerned in the margins of Edgell’s narrative in *Beka Lamb*. Edgell works to intertwine the indigenous presence in her narrative by a strategic marriage between “Maya cultural narrative” and “the nationalist teleology of the emergent bourgeois Creole class” (De Shield “Writer, Nation, Text” 27). Within the novel there are several instances of this union. In an essay contest the protagonist Beka enters, it is a Maya classmate who passes her an encouraging note, the symbolic inference being that this is an instance of “minority or marginal” discourse, issued from an indigenous subject-position in support of a native project. In other words, Edgell not only prescribes “a strategic alliance between races that in its very suggestion is

subversive of colonialism” but this support is issued from the space of indigeneity (De Shield 28).

In another scene depicting an appeal to indigeneity, an exasperated Bill Lamb issues a complaint: ““Do you see any Maya pyramids in this swamp?”” (97). His complaint reveals the founding frustration of the settler. Bill Lamb assesses the very land a failure and his test or benchmark is derived from indigenous praxis. More problematically, the native Bill Lamb’s description of the land’s potential shortcomings mirrors the colonial assessments of the land, such as that of Raleigh, which catalogues it according to a list of desired attributes. Likewise, in *Fernando*, the urban environment of Singapore is figured as an artificial construct; without the pacifying British presence in the island, the discourse goes, the ethnic elements are poised to fracture it. Both narratives mirror a Naipaul-like mentality that blames the very geography for its postcolonial predicaments. The only solution in this case is to adopt indigenous strategies of belonging to the land (a solution Naipaul deems unavailable for diasporic Caribbeans).

In a final significant scene, Beka Lamb betrays native desire for indigeneity, significantly in a dream or daytime reverie. While visiting St. George’s Caye (the former colony capital), a daytime reverie is triggered after she witnesses a Maya Indian servant-girl minding the wealthy Blanco family’s children. In the dream, Beka reveals Mr. Blanco’s position as native elite:

Beka tried to imagine their life from the little she could see [...] an existence where one’s father had achieved a status not unlike a Maya deity – raining blessings upon his employees as long as the rituals were ceremoniously enacted, the sacrifices offered, and the commandments obeyed. He was the kind of man that inspired the devotion of people like her Dad who looked on him as a model of what a man could do through hard work, using the opportunities available in a land where, at that time, black models in the commercial sphere were hard to find. (51)

The only infelicity in this passage in terms of form is the inclusion of the words “at that time.” This innocuous statement conflates Beka Lamb the character whose daydream this is, with the omniscient narrator who comments from the point of view of a contemporary native. That is, it is improbable that as a fictional teen she casts her real-time observations in a fictional temporality of the future – imagining herself talking from an uncannily accurate temporality years hence. This scene might be understood as a critique of neo-colonialism in that the wealthy family – symbolically labelled “The Blancos” – inherits colonial hierarchy and social structure but what is more significant here is how “the object of Beka’s desire – Blanco’s respected authority – is figured as indigenous godhood” (De Shield 28-29).

Beka’s mother Lilla, declares her preference with a national move toward federation (with other Caribbean nations).¹⁴¹ She argues that it “would give us all a chance to rise, and it must be better than a Guatemalan takeover. The Indians over the border have a bad time. Think what they’d do to us!” (55). Lilla here presents another slippage, she suggests an implicit parallelism: indigenous Maya of Guatemala occupying the same socio-political place as the native. Once again, the native, the creole subject, slips into the indigenous frame under a national rubric and acquires an equivalent indigeneity.

Edgell then, despite offering a laudable narrative that models a female agent of national action, still deploys an indigenous other that must be “won over – by violence and suppression, by exclusion and ignorance, or by welcoming and creolisation – for symbolic power” (De Shield 29).

5.6 Conclusion: Indigenous Solute

In the context of a romantic primordialism, the colonized, especially women, have been repeatedly naturalised as objects of heritage to be owned preserved, or patronized rather than as the subjects of their own land and legacies.

– Rob Nixon, “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism” (235)

¹⁴¹ This would end up in failure, as an aborted desire.

At the simplest level, Harris employs the metaphor of the boat (containing a representative mix of races of Guyana) and conjures an Amerindian woman, Mariella as sought object or signifier of nation-work. Fernando and Edgell both employ the, now clichéd metaphor of the colonial school to signify the multi-racial space of nation. Strikingly, all novels depict at the centre of their conflict a sexual transgression around which the national maturity coalesces.

As such, all three novels are apprehended as postcolonial bildungsromane. These tropes, it should be noted, are of course not unique to these authors. In Singapore and Malaysia respectively, Goh Poh Seng's *If We Dream too Long*, and A Samad Said's *Salina* also figure a prostitute in their earliest realist offerings. The early postcolonial bildungsromane compared and discussed in this chapter, consist of two early male-authored novels of national representation of cultural memory. In the Southeast Asian context, I focused primarily on Lloyd Fernando's *Scorpion Orchid* that draws on realisms of Singapore-Malaya. In the continental context of Guyana, Wilson Harris's *Palace of the Peacock* provided the Caribbean juxtaposition. In this comparison an analogy (and implicit solution) to racial antagonisms of entitlement and belonging emerged in the figure of the abused woman. Both authors deracinate their female character in a symbolic invocation of universality: Harris, by rendering an indigenous Amerindian into a ambiguous symbol, Fernando by purposely obscuring the racial origins of the prostitute Sally/Salmah. Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb* emerges as a counterpoint to the tendency toward foregrounding nationalist articulation as one of male action. In her offering, a female agent is conceived of in the allegorical terms of nation but she yet has agency. While this laudable intervention in masculinist discourse is presented in contradistinction to the former male-authored novels, *Beka Lamb* still shares with the others a symbolic appropriation of the idea of the indigenous, and of

nature. The indigenous, and the non-human world possess resonances of meaning that evoke ancient loyalties that sometimes fail to complement those of the nation, and which exist as unruly or potentially transgressive forms of identification and national attachment (Franco 37). All three authors effect – in the allegorical deployment of woman-as-nation – a nation-building *wake*. They appropriate the colonial trope in attempts at postcolonial recuperation of it. But, in so doing, they inevitably disguise the strategic appropriations of the resonances both nature and indigeneity provide, to augment claims and prescriptions of national culture.

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CHAPTER 6: CREOLE NATIVISATION IN JOSÉ RIZAL'S *NOLI ME TANGERE* (1887)

AND JEAN RHYS'S *WIDE SARGASSO SEA* (1966)

The "national idea," in other words, flourished in the soil of foreign conquest
– Timothy Brennan, "The national longing for Form" (59)

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I introduced a writer (Ishak Haji Muhammad) little known outside of his Southeast Asian context and juxtaposed his work with that of a famous Caribbean novelist (Alejo Carpentier). In this chapter, I situate two writers together whose canonicities do extend beyond their own respective regions. The writers in question here are Jean Rhys – considering specifically her famous novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) – and José Rizal – inquiring into his important work *Noli Me Tangere* (1887). Despite the apparent differences in time and provenance, both writers, in their own ways, deal with the specific problem of creole entitlement and belonging to the land.

In an effort to move beyond thematic comparison alone, this chapter also compares the writers and the works in question in terms of structure and orientation to subject.¹⁴² That is, a comparative investigation into their work, cognisant of particularities of either context while still travelling between them, yields insight into their respective invocations of indigeneity and belonging throughout the texts. It also considers configuration as a potential mode of comparison.

As far as the works' thematic invocations of indigeneity are concerned, both novels are notable for the similarity in rhetoric and response to the particular social dynamics they explore. In Jean Rhys's case, the socio-racial alienation of the white creole from both native land and ethnic culture by forces of colonial socialisation bears conceptual resemblance to that figured by José Rizal, whose creole protagonist's

¹⁴² Ato Quayson has remarked that thematic comparison is necessarily distortive. Quayson is quoted in Elizabeth DeLoughrey's article "Island Writing, Creole Cultures" in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

attempts to connect with land and people are repeatedly frustrated from multiple quarters of colonial society.

My focus here is to choose a resemblance or comparison that is not simply a shared strategy of imitation of European romances for postcolonial new-national ends. Rather than simply highlight similarities in project or prominence, one might ask what heretofore-concealed connections are revealed – and what theoretical perspectives are illuminated – when placing the two writers in concomitance.

An immediate connection between the works concerns the historical context of agricultural economic exploitation in both national settings. The economic oppression inherent to the agricultural exploitation of land-systems in the Eastern Caribbean and the Philippine contexts comprises the extra-literary material reality surrounding the novels. But this material reality is also manifest in the novels' formal elements – present in, for example, their plots: the dramatic event of revolt that occurs in each novel (in part one of *Wide Sargasso Sea* and toward the end of *Noli Me Tangere*). In other words, both novels offer representations of “native” revolt against the agents of colonial exploitation through the destruction of symbols of those exploitative agricultural systems. The plantocracies of the Caribbean islands are symbolically rejected in the burning of the estate at Coulibri just as Ibarra's family estate is burned after his ancestor's excesses and immoral profiteering are revealed. Both Rhys and Rizal offer implicit critiques of these exploitative agri-economic systems (friar-controlled haciendas and colonial cash-crop plantations) by referencing them in their fictions as crucial context.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ In his *A Past Revisited* (Vol. 1), Renato Constantino quotes from the memoirs of Isabelo de los Reyes to describe the “exploitative practices of the friar estate managers”:

It is reported of the friar hacenderos of Cavite that in cases where the ground rent is payable in money they assess it on the basis of an arbitrary price for paddy or hulled rice which they fix themselves; and if a tenant refused to agree to this they take back the land which he has under lease, land which he had been developing all this time at his own expense. (163)

But before launching into the work of comparison, I begin this chapter by first citing some theory complicating the key term that animates it: hybridity. I offer this brief review of relevant theory on hybridity to preface the subsequent work of comparison between the authors.

6.1 On Hybridity

It is hard to deny that both novels under consideration here revolve in many ways around the idea of hybridity and its variously-named avatars (*créolité*, *mestizaje*, etc.), which have formed the subject for some foundational and influential postcolonial theorists (Hall, Gilroy, Bhabha, Spivak, Glissant, Lionnet, etc.). Hybridity is one of the more significant concepts to orient these works into a postcolonial orbit, and thence into mutual relation. As a variously racial, socio-cultural, and literary term, hybridity becomes the locus for a series of intersecting issues crucial for considerations of the two authors' works. In this way, by focusing more specifically on the "creole," both works are brought into relation and comparison – and this despite both works scrupulously avoiding actually using the term. But rather than simply employ the creole as a shared thematic (a comparative strategy that immediately opens itself up to postcolonial complaint of erasing contextual specificities) this chapter highlights those usages of the term that view "creoleness" as a dynamic process of belonging, or, in other words, *naturalisation*. By considering the works and their representations of the creole under the rubric of analogous structures – in the sense defined in this thesis – this analysis facilitates comparison while still respecting the specific and unique significance the term "creole" or "hybrid" possesses in their respective contexts.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite develops a definition of the creole based on the Caribbean experience in his *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820*. In it, he defines the creole as a hispanophone amalgamate of "*criar* (to create, to imagine, to establish, to found, to settle) and *colono* (a colonist, a founder, a settler) into

criollo: a committed settler, one identified with the area of settlement, one native to the settlement though not ancestrally indigenous to it” (xiv–xv). As we can see from this definition, immediately issues of indigeneity and naturalisation – crucial to articulations of environmentalism – meet politics and colonisation, which are also crucial concerns for postcolonial literary analysis.

Jack Forbes, though he does not analyse the term “creole” to any great extent, does look exhaustively into the origins of related terms such as *pardo*, *loro*, *zambo*, and especially, the etymologically contested terms, *mulatto*, and *mestizaje*. Forbes concludes that these terms “were utilised largely *to exclude*”; many civic rights “were *denied* to persons categorized as negroes, mulattoes, blacks, mustees, mestizos” as a result of the social reality of colonial exploitation (269). Forbes highlights how racial terms are gradually complicated and loaded with additional meanings, not always simply stereotypical, which both supplement and supplant their strictly descriptive etymologies. Colonial administrative processes are implicated in these processes.

Hybridity, then, is not a universally employed – or celebrated – thematic. Within some ecocritical discourse, hybridity has been cited as a potentially uncongenial characteristic. Rob Nixon has presented a simplified summary of ecocritical objections to celebrating hybridity in his essay “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism,” arguing that environmental discourse privileges notions of origin and purity over transplantation, exoticisation, mixture, and miscegenation.

However, rather than take sides, postcolonial ecocriticism can play with the apparent tension between discourses. The (hybrid) dialectical manoeuvre postcolonial ecocriticism presents is useful for challenging naïve celebrations of *créolité* without subscribing to a romanticism of the indigenous. At the same time, a more cognisant critique of processes of nativisation prevent the subordination and dismissal of more nuanced assessments of indigeneity. The virtue of this approach is that it refuses to

disavow challenges to the hybridity model or dismiss legitimate claims to indigeneity. We can admit these challenges to the term and still note, however, that it is a conspicuous term in the set of thematics shared by both regions. Moreover, as “creoles” themselves, the authors Jean Rhys and José Rizal are also brought into relation via articulations of their own hybrid identities. But the shared terminology belies vast theoretical and cultural difference.

As mentioned in Part One of this thesis, I take the incongruence or distortion that results from this superimposition of theme as instructive – not only for developing a more nuanced understanding of the individual societies but also to assess the relevance alternative discourses and social strategies might have for these societies and regions and literatures.

Jahan Ramazani’s work is useful for its discussion of the relevance of hybridity as a theoretical model for analysing literature. Ramazani’s focus is specifically on postcolonial poetry (he adopts this focus as an interventionist strategy because of the disproportionate focus on the novel within postcolonial studies). Most usefully, Ramazani interrogates the term by raising and addressing three charges against the hybridity model he uses in his analysis of postcolonial poetry. First is the accusation that it “creates a false impression of symmetry between unequal terms, cultures, or nations” (180); second is that the concept of hybridity “*replicates* the binaries it is really meant to supersede” (181); and third, that “all cultures are hybrid and therefore none can claim homogeneity, so the biological trope depends on the false norm of purity” (181). Ramazani takes up these challenges in his deployment of the term, coherently refuting some premature rejections, to explain how the concept of hybridity can still be useful despite the challenges these charges seem to present.

The first of the general charges against the hybridity paradigm Ramazani engages states that the hybridity model “creates a false impression of symmetry

between unequal terms, cultures, or nations” (180). The suggestion of cultural or racial symmetry is certainly not an inference that can be drawn from any real engagement with Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* or José Rizal’s *Noli Me Tangere* both of which specifically highlight blatant issues of racial inequality. And yet, hybridity is very much an aspect of both of these texts. But Ramazani does not declare that the hybridity model is immune to abuse in his defence of it. Ramazani suggests that if a distortion or dilution of the political struggles that underlie the racial representations in the novels does occur, this is squarely the fault of the postcolonial critic who fails to properly identify the right contextual information within which the representation of social miseries in the novel is situated. He argues that the potential problem of suggested cultural or national symmetry is regulated by “continually referring back to the colonial postcolonial matrices of violence, inequality, and oppression, even as [...] cultural interchange [is revealed] across the colonial divide” (180). In other words, the hybridity model needs to be properly politically and historically contextualised in each instance.

With this proposed remedy, Ramazani issues what is now a standard appeal in postcolonial criticism: increased social and political contextualisation. But – as argued in the introduction to this thesis – the call for increasing literary contextualisation reinforces the suggestion of cultural particularity or singularity that would seem to forestall any comparison along the lines of paradigms such as the hybrid.

Ramazani’s appeal to contextualisation also forms the remedy for the second charge against the hybridity model: that it hardens the divisions between cultures, races, nations rather than, more properly postcolonially, going beyond them. With the proper contextualisation and recognition of the processes and structures of colonial domination, Ramazani seems to argue, the hybridity model can “create a third space of cultural convergence” all the while acknowledging that the real effects of the colonial division have not simply disappeared (181).

But it is responding to his summary of the last charge against the hybridity model, where Ramazani articulates something useful for the goals of a responsible literary comparison. The third charge extends hybridity to “all cultures” and switches tables to show that no one culture can declare itself homogenous. According to Ramazani, this reveals the biological trope’s “false norm of purity” (181). Ramazani, in this instance, acknowledges the validity of this claim, but, he suggests, we can still use the hybridity model nonetheless (182). According to Ramazani, even if all the world’s cultures are “always already hybridized” (as terms such as “Anglo-Saxon” indicate) this does not mean that all cultures are *equally* hybrid or understood to be hybrid in the same way (182). How do we account for important nuances in hybridity if not with recourse to the hybridity model? The argument I take from Ramazani is that the hybridity model can bring out more nuanced understandings. According to Jahan Ramazani “we should be able to postulate that all cultures are hybrid, while also allowing that some are more vividly and inorganically hybrid than others” (182).

Rob Nixon’s discussion of the apparent incompatibilities between environmentalism and postcolonialism is a case in point (Nixon 2005). Subsequent discussions of the union of the postcolonial and the environmental attempt to address this perception. For instance, Huggan and Tiffin identify a shared advocacy role in both ecocritical and postcolonial literature.

Regarding the term’s theoretical genealogy, Dominique Chancé offers a definition and critique of creolisation (translated from the French by Julin Everett) in a short overview of the concept’s use in academia (Chancé, 2011). Chancé reveals that the term “creolization” was borrowed from linguistics and “progressively” and gradually extended to the diverse work of cultural studies. Chancé’s critique hinges on uncritical uses of the term that fail to acknowledge “the specificities brought to light by

linguists” (262). Chancé also criticises Glissant’s deliberate generalisation of the term, which makes it “more open but also much vaguer” (265).

Glissant’s writings in particular have nevertheless been central to the important work of reconstituting terms like “creole”. Through Glissant’s work, these divisive terms are recuperated into concepts that instead *celebrate* the diversity and creativity of the subjectivities they formerly excluded. This is one significant positive legacy of postcolonialism. As such, the figure of the creole has been central to many debates on anti-colonial and postcolonial nationalism. However, the flipside of this celebration of hybrid identities is a potential delegitimation or disregard of claims to indigeneity. Glissant is careful in his articulations of creoleness, not to seek and establish a static third category.

Creolisation as a concept figures heavily in Glissant’s *Poetics of relation*, a work that has provided theoretical grounding for postcolonial comparison. Glissant’s insistence on Creole *becoming* (an idea also central to the work of Stuart Hall) resembles in its own way Brathwaite’s definition in that it highlights the infinitive “to found” and the function of establishment that constitutes the work of the creole.

Drawing on Brathwaite and Glissant, it might be posited that the creole’s very act of founding and establishing identity is itself constitutional of its identity. Glissant takes this realisation to an extreme in suggesting that creolisation then is always a “becoming”.

If we posit *métissage* as, generally speaking, the meeting and synthesis of two differences, creolization seems to be a limitless *métissage*, its elements diffracted and its consequences unforeseeable. Creolization diffracts [...] Its most obvious symbol is in the Creole language, whose genius consists in always being open, that is, perhaps, never becoming fixed [...]. (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*: 34)

And in *Caribbean Discourse* (1989) Glissant writes that just as “Sameness requires fixed Being, Diversity establishes Becoming” (98).

Lorna Burns is right to highlight the contradistinction in the theorists of *créolité* who attempt to solidify the concept into a stable, foundational, third category (Burns, 2009). Burns understands creolisation as “a process of Relation that neither reduces the other to the same, nor resolves itself in a reified, unchanging form” (110). While the *créolité* theorists rightly draw inspiration from Glissant’s work, and hail it as the root of their own, their attempts are, in some ways, a regression rather than a superseding or building up of his theories. Glissant’s insistence on the instability of the creole is part of its virtue, and coalescing the ambivalence of the creole into a stable term then necessarily gains theoretical and foundational stability at the greater cost of losing creative polyvalence and power.¹⁴⁴

It is important not to neglect Glissant’s crucial qualification and tempering of the merits of the term. In *Caribbean Discourse* Glissant writes,

[c]reolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify “unique” origins that the race safeguards and prolongs. In Western tradition, genealogical descent guarantees racial exclusivity ... To assert peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct in this way the category of “creolized” that is considered as halfway between two “pure” extremes. (140)

Creolisation in Glissant’s work might be defined as an “*attribute* of Relation” (Burns 110). Lorna Burns describes its significance for Glissant’s poetics “as the force that brings human cultures into relation with one another, according to the laws of Relation” (110).

And with this invocation of relationality I now move on to orient the two works and authors in relation under the sign of the creole before considering relation in form and theme.

¹⁴⁴ Though Chamoiseau contests the idea that the Creolité movement was interested in creating new “identity-based essences” (in Chancé 2000 qtd in Chancé 2011)

6.2 Problems of Placement

What does it mean to bring Rhys into dialogue with Rizal under the sign of the creole? Rhys has been jostled about in an attempt to place or pigeonhole her into distinct or autonomous traditions: as a writer of British modernism, or as a West Indian writer of postcolonial persuasion. Several memorable debates have occurred regarding Jean Rhys's status and position in the geo-literary firmament.¹⁴⁵ It may therefore seem odd to pair Rhys with such a *placed* and nationally renowned figure as José Rizal who has been called the "Father of Filipino Nationalism"; his novel *Noli Me Tangere* is commonly regarded as "the greatest achievement of modern Filipino literature" (Anderson 26). Consider the relative absurdity that would result had equivalent claims been bestowed upon Jean Rhys – Mother of Dominican or Caribbean nationalism? The *greatest* achievement of Caribbean literature? – instead of what actually occurred: the rather banal scandal of Rhys's status as a Caribbean writer being challenged.¹⁴⁶ That her work is celebrated and institutionalised in Caribbean curricula (*Wide Sargasso Sea* is read in secondary and tertiary academic institutions in CARICOM countries) perhaps indicates that Brathwaitean epithet: "the Helen of Our Wars" is old hat. The battles have been fought.

Rhys scholar Elaine Savory is adamant in her consideration of Rhys as a *Caribbean* writer because this is the "one identity [that] can hold all of these contradictory facets" (2004: x). Rhys is read as "Caribbean, English, European; feminist and anti-feminist; elite, working class, marginal; white and white Creole; outsider and insider; ageless and of her time" (x). Savory displaces Rhys's ambiguity onto the

¹⁴⁵ Elaine Savory writes that these debates, in which Rhys figured centrally, were culture wars fought to determine future directions in Caribbean studies (2004: xi).

¹⁴⁶ See the debate in the pages of *Wasafiri* between especially Hulme and Brathwaite. Peter Hulme opens the debate by questioning Brathwaite's discussion of the impossibility of any lasting friendship between the children Tia and Antoinette in Hulme, Peter. "The Place of Wide Sargasso Sea", *Wasafiri* no. 20 (Autumn), 1994: 5–11. Brathwaite responds by admitting that they were friends as young girls, but crucially qualifying this was always a doomed friendship, a "figment", see Brathwaite, Kamau. "A Post-Cautionary Tale of the Helen of Our Wars", *Wasafiri* no. 22 (Autumn), 1995: 69–81. And Peter Hulme rounds the debate off with counter observations in Hulme, Peter. "A Response to Kamau Brathwaite", *Wasafiri* no. 23 (Spring), 1995: 49–50.

similarly ambiguous term Caribbean, and neatly transcends the debate over the normative bases to Caribbean culture. Brathwaite's contention after all was that any writer from the Caribbean must be intimate with the region's Afro-Caribbean culture. And this intimacy he, perhaps unfairly, refuses to see in Rhys. Subsequent scholarship has pointed out Afro-Caribbean bias that neglects other cultural identities just as relevant for composite Caribbean culture: Indo-Caribbean and Indigenous ones, for example (Dabydeen and Samaroo 10). George Handley has registered the difficulty in placing Rhys within academic disciplinary structures (*Postslavery Literature* 146). Among the various usual candidate categories (Feminism, Caribbean Literature, Literature of the Americas) he asks if one could "conceivably argue for the inclusion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in a course on the African Diaspora?" (146). In any case, this debate still indicates Rhys's potential ambiguity or even suitability as a Caribbean writer for those interested in such categorisations and institutionalisations.

This might provoke the question as to why compare Rizal then to a Caribbean author's twentieth century publication rather than a Latin American one of more obviously similar historical period and celebrated position? Given the history and geographies of Spanish colonialism, it might seem more appropriate to undertake a comparative study between the Southeast Asian José Rizal and his cultural accomplishments and those of an ostensibly equivalent national poet indigenous to the Caribbean – perhaps the Cuban José Martí, for example (and, obviously, for reasons beyond the trivial virtue of shared given-names). In fact, because the Philippine experience appeared to mirror, in some crucial ways, Latin American experience, Rizal could have been heralding an American style Creole engagement with the Peninsulars, or predicting it as such (Joaquin 366).

That sort of scholarly project, however, would not achieve the kind of constructive incongruence that I desire in this thesis, one that would shirk the shackles

of a European intermediary for transoceanic literary comparison. To be sure, valuable scholarship could be unearthed in the attempt to discern general implications regarding national romances of the colonies. Not least of these is embodied in Doris Sommer's work on the link between political passion and romantic – even erotic – national literature in Latin America. However, such a project, though providing valuable theory and description of the way this literature works, still assumes that the ultimate inspiration for this type of literature derives from originary European genres and styles; and so, what is figured as native literature forged out of indigenous concerns is revealed to be banal imitation.¹⁴⁷

To rephrase the opening assertion of this chapter, it is conventional when applying a comparative approach to do so on thematic grounds (and this is not to categorically decry such approaches, if for the simple reason that in many ways this thesis still relies on them). Recent studies that establish thematic links between these works of the sort I am comparing usually involve generic tropes such as that of the “creole romance.”¹⁴⁸ This is in contrast to earlier postcolonial attempts to deal with *Wide Sargasso Sea*, such as Peter Hulme's influential reading in “The Locked Heart” that conjures up the historical specificity of the Caribbean creole to offer informed local readings of the text. Hulme's reading takes the term creole as if it really were uniquely Caribbean. Regardless, in this manner of reading, comparative readings pair well with ecocritical readings that are themselves “heavily thematic.”¹⁴⁹

But a comparison on thematic grounds alone is not what this chapter aims to accomplish. Instead this chapter asks the question: what would it really mean to bring

¹⁴⁷ In Doris Sommer's formulation “The resemblances may be symptomatic of nationalism's general paradox; that is, cultural features that seem unique and worthy of patriotic (self)-celebration are often typical of other nations too and even patterned after foreign models” (*Foundational Fictions* 31).

¹⁴⁸ One such reading with comparative dimensions is Christopher Lloyd GoGwilt's book *The Passage of Literature* (2011) which considers Pramoedya Ananta Toer's *Buru Quartet* for its depiction of a Southeast Asian creole romance.

¹⁴⁹ See Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics*. Morton writes, “[c]onventional ecocriticism is heavily thematic. It discusses ecological writers. It explores elements of ecology, such as animals, plants, or the weather. It investigates varieties of ecological, and ecocritical, language” (2). Morton goes on to write that his study explores fundamental problems regarding the thinking about environmental art that are above, or are unconstrained by any one particular theme (3).

Rhys into dialogue with Rizal? Beyond simply enumerating alternative or concomitant modernisms (whose bases are nearly always Eurocentric),¹⁵⁰ it enlarges the critical and theoretical frame for crucial terms like *creolisation* – crucial and critical for a discourse such as postcolonial ecocriticism. It also injects some leavening clarity to stale debates over the provenance and exclusivity of terms that some have claimed belong more properly to regional criticism.¹⁵¹ Furthermore, with the methodological strategy of analogous structures employed in this thesis as a whole, we can acknowledge the specificity of certain regional and national uses of the term, while considering wider usages.

But what about the odd pairing? Why Rizal with Rhys?¹⁵² Despite the initial seeming dissimilarity of their projects and provenance, both writers lay a societal problem to bear, with racial, classist, gendered but also *spatial* dimensions.¹⁵³ In both, the periphery-centre dynamic bias is revealed in their biographical experience and their literary portrayals. In both, the work is highly personal and, often autobiographical. In both, the concept of the creole complicates articulations of national indigeneity, and in both hybrid identities problematise any easy gesture to a pre-colonial *national* culture.

6.2.1 Problem of Placement: Jean Rhys, “The Helen of our Wars”

Rhys’s novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* is one of the Caribbean’s most famous works that “write back” to reveal colonial assumptions, revise colonial narratives, and fill

¹⁵⁰ See Christopher Lloyd GoGwilt’s book *Passages of Literature* in which he situates Rhys in a literary period he dubs Creole Modernism that occurs from the 1930s – but especially the 1950s boom – in the Francophone, Anglophone and Hispanophone Caribbean.

¹⁵¹ Witness Torres-Saillant’s argument in *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean*: terms of Caribbean provenance have now been coopted and mutated so to have lost their original specificity with the prominence of postcolonial studies: “The surrender to the epistemological might of the postcolonists by some Caribbeanists illustrates the erosion of the region’s intellectual self-confidence [... reducing] the human experience in the Caribbean to mere fodder to feed the voracity of Western critical theory ...” (43-44).

¹⁵² The two writers are easily brought together under the sign of modernism. Christopher GoGwilt makes a similar comparison under this sign in his book *Passages of Literature*, which brings Pramodya Ananta Toer into relation with Jean Rhys (and Joseph Conrad). GoGwilt analyses the role language plays in comparative modernisms. In this chapter I am interested in how the concept of the creole in both archipelagos complicates articulations of national indigeneity and how a hybrid identity problematises any easy gesture to a pre-colonial national culture.

¹⁵³ George Handley remarks of post-slavery writers like Rhys, that “[they] demonstrate that place is never entirely equal to geographical location ... where one speaks is as much conditioned by geography as it is by class, color, and gender” (145).

colonial lacunae.¹⁵⁴ In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the first such revision that merits attention is that of Rhys's appropriation of Charlotte Brontë's character, Bertha Rochester, the madwoman in the attic. Rhys provides Antoinette's narrative history in an intertextual manoeuvre that provides agency to the transatlantic Caribbean subject and becomes a celebrated postcolonial literary strategy. Obviously, as Thomas Staley intones, it is important to avoid exploring Rhys's novel as though it represents only a "treatment of the early lives of Brontë's characters" (100). And yet, some cognisance of *Wide Sargasso Sea's* relationship with Brontë's text is also profitable if properly considered. One such strategy for treating the text on its own terms while also taking into account the earlier engendering text is to consider its palimpsestic character, as in Lene Johannessen's essay, "palimpsest and hybridity in postcolonial writing" which appears in *The Cambridge History of Postcolonial Literature*. Johannessen describes Rhys's tactic:

a palimpsesting on genre, on narrative, on history: it posits the madwoman in *Jane Eyre's* attic as the main character in a layer of scripting that is barely detectable in the "original" parchment. Rhys's novel takes a detail from the existing, monumental narrative canvas and asks of the detail, what is *its* story?" (887)

Johannessen notes the fact that the story already had an end: Rhys's story emerges from within a colonial ur-text or source narrative that over-determines its trajectory, and provides the heroine's telos. Rhys then accepts the telos of the narrative but the radical element of her work is to note that the route or journey toward that set denouement is tractable and malleable. Antoinette is not simply a native Caribbean subject denied agency in a foreign colonial setting. She is a hybrid character that has difficulty adapting to life outside the niche of Creole heiress in the dying, slave-financed, colonial plantation world into which she was born. And as Lene Johannessen

¹⁵⁴ See Ashcroft, Tiffin and Griffiths' seminal, though much criticized, work *The Empire Writes Back*.

reminds, Antoinette is not an English creole at that, but a French one (887). This adds a further cultural distancing and exoticism to her character (from the point-of-view of a Brontëian Rochester).

The problem of Antoinette's placement enters in the very opening sentences: "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (17). The reasons given for the social ostracism of Antoinette and her mother – that she was too pretty, too young, from a foreign Francophone isle – are nearly interchangeable veneers for the prejudice of classification against the constructed other. Some constitutional or ontological change has come over the family in the eyes of these reactionary post-plantation whites. This change is given physical manifestation in Pierre who staggers and cannot speak distinctly (19).

Rochester is ostensibly narrator for the biggest section in the book, yet his name is not mentioned. Jean Rhys makes a conscious effort to mask Rochester's identity and uses his description to take on a third person view of the true character under inspection - Antoinette. Rochester's unnamed presence merely allows the reader a new point-of-view on Antoinette and the Caribbean.

Christophine offers Antoinette and Rochester both solid advice about their relationship's future, going so far as to exercise her skill at obeah to influence it. Christophine offers diagnosis of both Rochester and Antoinette's problems in detail (100-104), and fends Rochester off in argument with him using her own logic and system of belief that parallels Rochester's own. In her flitting between accommodating Christophine's ministrations and Rochester's desires, Antoinette seems to display affinities for two extremes of otherness.

A double affinity is also encapsulated in Annette's description of the situation. For Annette (Antoinette's mother), the heiresses are marooned, without husbands (23). This is an interesting word for Rhys – who was conversant in French – for in the

English this would mean that they are isolated and remote, unreachable and stuck, imprisoned: in Annette's words: "abandoned, lied about, helpless" (21-22). The word is echoed in her very deportment and her unconscious style, it has become an audible affectation of her personality, "'Marooned,' said her straight narrow back, her carefully coiled hair. 'Marooned.'" (26). The Maroon, is of course, the escaped slave, valorised among anti-colonial communities in places like Jamaica, and sometimes denigrated as dangerous criminals in Francophone regions subscribing to the view of the French planters (Rosello 144). Césaire coins *marronner* to signify his "attempt at cultural resistance against assimilation" (Rosello 114). Thus the dilemma or *impasse* for the Creole Antoinette is the difficult situation that is isolation and/or escape.

Christopher GoGwilt admits the difficulty of placing Antoinette (and Rhys by extension) in his description of the book's powerful resonance, "[a]s an evocation of the deracinated, displaced – unplaceable – former "colonial" settler returned to the "mother" country" (148). In GoGwilt's words she is "unplaceable," that is lacking roots, ironically sharing an inverted version of the condition of the forcibly uprooted slaves her family once owned. George Handley also notes how the novel is also an "expression of the postslavery placenessness of the white Creole woman" although it also registers a "concomitant attraction and repulsion toward Afro-Caribbean culture" (151). The logic of the plantation system brings together these rootless agents.

Rhys's novel locates a nearly archetypal Caribbean issue of belonging in the figure of Bertha Rochester. The problem for both Rhys the writer-from-Dominica and Bertha/Antoinette the woman from the Caribbean is one of locating themselves in the cultural landscape of Britain and "within the larger narratives of racialized British domesticity and soil" (DeLoughrey 70). Elizabeth DeLoughrey, offers an implicit interpretation of Rhys's title, by arguing that it delineates "a diasporan aporia, a morass

of uninhabitable space for European, African, and Caribbean transatlantic subjects” (70).

In rehearsing the critical debates surrounding Rhys’s ambiguity and cultural location, especially surrounding her famous novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*, I suggest that the very problem of placing Rhys (and her character) signals her suitability for comparison with Rizal (and his creole protagonists), who despite the massive critical and exegetical work cementing his oeuvre, politics, love with the Philippines, actually displays significant ambivalence as to his own cultural and historical location, as well as to his implied reader and his implicit project and politics. After all, it is only in retrospect that Rizal can technically be called a national writer at all. Indeed, the “productive discomfort as to where to place her” registered by many scholars on Rhys bears resemblance to that vein of Rizal scholarship that exposes or calls into question his suitability as an articulator of Filipino concerns. The patriotism, in other words, has been a point of contention for both figures; both works have been challenged by scholars who seek to dismiss attempts to too neatly categorise the writers’ works in national terms. In addition, both writers’ belonging to the respective proto-national cultures bears relation to the characters and point-of-view they represent in their fiction. The isomorphism of representational proto-national belonging draws them into relation.

6.2.2 The Problem of Placing Rizal: Augenbraum’s Caution

One should be judicious in reading about Rizal, since many books about him are more encomium than history.

– Harold Augenbraum “Introduction” (xxvii)

León Maria Guerrero’s 1963 biography of José Rizal begins with an admission of inadequacy. While it is a good thing to have written a biography of Rizal, he reveals, it is unfortunate that it is written for Filipinos – as most such biographies were at the time – because of the impossibility of writing objectively about a national hero (preface, *The First Filipino*). Despite this admission, Guerrero writes his biography acknowledging his cognisance of the large number of hagiographic descriptions of Rizal

extant, and he implicitly suggests that his own is not hagiography. Caroline Hau counters Guerrero's claims with her observation that Guerrero's biography, though it "differs substantively from the usual hagiographies of the national hero [...] is, in the final analysis, not very different from those against which he wrote" (55).

Hagiography, though more commonly a risk in biography, is no less evident in literary analyses of Rizal's work. Here, two tendencies in literary theory stand out. The first is the tendency to subscribe to various modes of intentionalism that inevitably succumb to the obfuscatory pseudo-explanation that ascribes all aspects of Rizal's writing and plot to his genius.

The second almost oppositional tendency is that which, in the effort to establish the "organic unity" of the work, describes all aspects of Rizal's characterisation in superlative terms. In both cases, it is Rizal's "genius" which prevents the awed critic from examining by evisceration, Rizal's work. I suggest examining the *Noli*'s eviscerate parts to allow a fuller interpretation, one that can more fully explore Rizal's genius (and the seriousness of his critical purpose) such that it is. Moreover exploring his work in a multitude of dimensions – even the ones that do not take him so seriously¹⁵⁵ – shows how those attempts to carefully maintain his genius can often be impoverishing.

Augenbraum's caution is appropriate for biographies, general academic scholarship, and literary analysis alike. It may seem obvious that José Rizal and his great works – *Noli Me Tangere* in particular – are deserving of their Filipino canonicity; after all, it is Rizal's great novel that has the honour of being "the first major artistic manifestation of Asian resistance to European colonialism" (Augenbraum, back matter), an achievement that alone rightly inspires Filipino national pride and suggests Rizal is straightforwardly deserving of the romantic epithet bestowed him by Guerrero: the first

¹⁵⁵ Rizal himself injects humour in the midst of drama and serious purpose. Just as an example, consider the following quote from the text: "The only reason Maria Clara did not faint was because Philippine women still don't know how" (147-8). How is one really to insist on reading Rizal's heroine according to surface plot when quotes such as this puncture the melodrama?

Filipino (492).¹⁵⁶ While the fact that Rizal has attracted much attention from various sources is undeniable, the reasons for his deserving this attention are various and the straightforward belonging to the Philippines is more complicated than meets the eye. In fact, in this section I will suggest that the debate about Rhys's status as a West Indian, though much better known (in Anglophone literary studies and, without a doubt, Caribbean scholarship) shares interesting parallels with the debate over Rizal's Filipino credentials, more specifically his right and capacity for national representation. While Rizal might seem to bear the correct ethnic mantle and thus the authenticity – that critics like Brathwaite tried to deny Rhys in her case – his claim is no less politically fraught. As such, an examination of the problems of indigeneity and representation in a creole like Rizal, as evident in *Noli Me Tangere*, might provide a comparison that would engender an instructive incongruence or an uncanny resemblance helpfully clarifying the problem – by comparison – in each case.

Already noted above is the fact that *Noli Me Tangere* is rightfully celebrated as a major early testament and manifestation of Asian anti-colonialism. Rizal's novel is also indissolubly connected to the Philippine nation and has been linked to its very genesis in a powerful way. In *Noli Me Tangere*, Rizal offers analyses of the “defects of Filipino character.” This strategy of critical analysis resembles that presented by W. E. B. Du Bois, who famously criticised structural and systemic defects within the society preventing Negro – and therefore national – upliftment (*The Souls of Black Folk* 189). For Rizal, like Du Bois, education was central to his strategy for upliftment. But unlike Du Bois – who argued that the Negroes had much to offer their nation, which did not appreciate the human resource it was nevertheless cruelly exploiting – Rizal was also concerned about a lack of national sentiment. More than this, of the two, according to

¹⁵⁶ Leon Ma. Guerrero declares that Rizal is the “first Filipino” because of his accomplishments and because “he is first in the hearts of the Filipinos” (497). In “The Fiction of a Knowable Community” in *Necessary Fictions* Caroline Hau dismisses these claims as mere descriptions pretending in place of real explanations (which she then compellingly attempts to provide).

Rizal, “more deplorable is lack of national sentiment”; the reason being that this lack of national feeling “preserves the ills of colonialism,” and “abets indolence” (Majul 265). Thus, from the outset of his project, Rizal’s work invokes an original nationalism.

Perhaps no more powerful testament to this link can be found in academia than that it is the primary literary case study around which Benedict Anderson first constructs his incredibly influential thesis on “Imagined Communities.”¹⁵⁷ In his seminal text, Anderson uses Rizal’s opening passage in *Noli Me Tangere* to illustrate the way a work of literature linked to nationalist movements “conjures up the imagined community” (27). Anderson notes how Rizal addresses the reader in an intimate tone (as member of the same community) and writes as if all events in that community proceed onward through time simultaneously, from the events in the novel to the events in society. Anderson argues that “with *Noli Me Tangere*, fiction seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that remarkable confidence of community in anonymity, which is the hallmark of modern nations” (36).

This reading of the *Noli*, while serving well Anderson’s influential thesis, is open to several criticisms that need to be explored here. The first is perhaps the question of language. Anderson attempts to dismiss the claim that the colonial language of the work might prohibit its invoking national consciousness. He also dismisses the charge that Rizal’s novel, being a novel (which is a European form) is therefore invoking a nationalism based on a European framework (30). Anderson casually mentions the issue of language in a footnote to the text: “Rizal wrote this novel in the colonial language (Spanish), which was then the lingua franca of the ethnically diverse Eurasian and native elites” (26 n40). Anderson though dismisses the issue rather easily.

It is of course possible for Rizal’s book to invoke a Filipino nationalism against that of the coloniser while still being written in Spanish, such is a classic example of

¹⁵⁷ Caroline Hau calls it “the typecase of Anderson’s analysis of nationalism, which differs from other accounts in its treatment of nationality, or the more multilayered ‘nationness,’ as a ‘cultural artefact’” (Hau 70).

postcolonial “writing back.” However Anderson’s reading then assumes that the novel is written *for* other hispanophone native elites, a claim that does not corroborate Rizal’s stated intention. While Rizal’s (actual or stated) authorial intentions do not necessarily trump textualist, or hypothetical ones (such as the intention of the novel’s social prescription assumed in Anderson’s reading), the choice of language does indicate something as to Rizal’s purpose for the book. By this, the critic can assess the novel’s success in so far as novelistic intentions determine the semantic properties of Rizal’s work.¹⁵⁸ Anderson’s reading, for instance, does not address the problem of intended audience that would seem crucial for any invocation of community. That is, if, as Rizal says, the “*Noli* was written for the Filipinos, and it is necessary that it should be read by the Filipinos” (correspondence with Blumentritt) then, why write in Spanish? And further, to introduce the problem of representation to the works, why do the Eurasian native elites claim authority for this representative function? Does Rizal’s privileged or *elite* status in society allow him to speak for everyone in that society?

Epifanio San Juan boldly states that “[i]t is to Bonifacio (the charismatic name of the mobilized masses) that Rizal is addressing his works”; furthermore, according to San Juan, “they cannot be divorced without suicidal consequences” (22). San Juan’s declaration is itself a solution to the problem Anderson glosses in *Imagined Communities*. It highlights the radical performativity of the text in its desires and mode of operation. Rizal’s text is not simply describing history because he understands that the point is to change it.

6.3 Representation in Rizal and Rhys

In *Noli Me Tangere*, Rizal sets out straightforwardly to analyse his country, diagnose its “social cancer” and invite public prescriptions (3). Throughout the novel various characters issue assessments of the Philippines’ national character in an

¹⁵⁸ Here I draw on Paisley Livingston’s work on intentionalism (Livingston 406).

apparent echo of the author's own sentiment. The putative hero, Crisóstomo Ibarra, for instance, describes the country as "an organism that suffers from a chronic illness" (320). Rizal the writer declares this diagnostic function in his prologue or note "To my country." Rizal claims to "reproduce [the Philippine's] current condition faithfully, without prejudice" for the purpose of divining "a cure" (3). Interestingly, the motivation for this aetiology seems to have been precisely the purpose of comparison. Rizal writes "[h]ow often, in the midst of modern civilisations have I wanted to bring you into the discussion to compare you to other countries" (3).

In this remarkable prologue, Rizal presents his novel before (European) literati just as aristocratic society of the time might present a debutante at a *cotillion ball*. The epigraph to the novel supports this analogy. Rizal chooses an epigraph from the famous German poet, playwright, and philosopher J. C. Friedrich von Schiller (1759-1805):

»Was? Es dürfte kein Cäsar auf euren Bühnen sich zeigen, Kein Achill, kein Orest, keine Andromacha mehr?«

Nichts! Man siehet bei uns nur Pfarrer, Kommerzienräte, Fähndriche, Sekretärs oder Husarenmajors.

»Aber, ich bitte dich, Freund, was kann denn dieser Misere – Großes begegnen, was kann Großes denn durch sie geschehn?«

Rizal translates the passage into Castilian Spanish. Harold Augenbraum includes the following translation (courtesy of John Bowring):

"What? Does no Caesar, does no Achilles appear on your stage now, Not an Andromache e'en, not an Orestes, my friend?"

"No! there is naught to be seen there but parsons, and syndics of commerce, Secretaries perchance, ensigns, and majors of horse."

"But, my good friend, pray tell me, what can such people e'er meet with That can be truly called great? – what that is great can they do?"

In this passage of Schiller's from his *Shakespeare's Ghost* (alternatively translated as "Shakespeare's Shade") a challenge is effectively given, the effect is of a gauntlet being thrown to the floor. Rizal immediately launches into his prologue "To My Country" as if turning briefly to his audience before addressing the worthy foe.¹⁵⁹ And this presents no less than what the *Noli Me Tangere* is: quite simply, Rizal's answer to this challenge. What that is great can [the Filipinos] do? Rizal presents – before hoary old Europe – his masterpiece: evidence of Filipino worth, beauty, culture, manners, in a word, gentility.

In a comparable configuration, Jean Rhys features – in the early part of *Wide Sargasso Sea* – an explicit *cotillion*-like scene: after her honeymoon, Annette dances with Mr Mason on the *glacis*; it is a homecoming, Annette flits among the guests in an advertisement of her (desired) social status. But critics have read no analogy between this cultural exhibition and Rhys's own work of presenting marginalised Caribbean subjectivities (especially that of the white Caribbean creole) to complicate and challenge normative Eurocentric prejudices and discriminatory representations.

The difference here in critical treatment of this subject is that critics read broadly anti-colonial national allegory in Rizal's depiction but simply modernist (or feminist) subject-formation in Rhys. Rhys's deployment of ethnic Caribs in her novels, for example, are routinely identified not as anti-colonial critique of indigenous erasure but "as a metaphor of *her* [own] alienation" (Hawthorne 93). In Rhys's case, her personal issues and her own remarkable story tend to trump or occlude the historical and contextual resonances of her characters and settings.

Similarly and intriguingly for *Noli Me Tangere*, the author's own reading of the book has been extremely influential. Rizal, in contrast to Rhys, openly declares the

¹⁵⁹ Rizal was quite enamoured of the "German spirit" of that day – which in a postcolonial irony, coincides with the advent of the German foray into [African] colonialism, the Berlin conference would be held in 1885. Rizal referred to Germany as his "scientific homeland" (Hau 57).

contextual and historical resonances of his novel. In a March letter in 1887 to his German fan and correspondent Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal writes that the *Noli* “is the first impartial and bold book on the life of the Tagalogs. The Filipinos will find in it the history of the last ten years” (*The Rizal-Blumentritt Correspondence*).¹⁶⁰

Literary criticism today, after the *new criticism*, is perhaps far more suspicious of authorial claims. Ford Madox Ford first declared, as an introduction, that Rhys’s “coming from the Antilles” provided her with “terrifying insight and a terrific – an almost lurid! – passion for stating the case of the underdog . . .” (Savory 198). This comment can be interpreted as a call for liberatory feminist readings that were certainly part of Rhys’s own politics. Readings that privilege the psychologised aspect over and above its colonial overdetermination are famously challenged by Gayatri Spivak. In her “Three Women’s Texts and a critique of Imperialism,” Spivak reveals the failure of feminist critics Gilbert and Gubar to account for the political and colonial underpinnings to Bertha’s madness. Other reviewers of Rhys’s earlier work noted her tendency to take the side of the downtrodden in its various incarnations. Carole Angier, for example, in a review of *Quartet* writes that Rhys takes up the cause of the slaves in the master-slave dialectic (Angier qtd in Savory 199). Indeed, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this tactic is taken up to great effect. As Rhys’s heroine Antoinette counters her husband’s implied accusations in the novel, “There is always the other side, always” (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 116).

The two major critical strands in these early reviews of Rhys’s work: that of the internal, psychologically tormented heroine versus that of the generically downtrodden, might correspond to a heuristic dichotomy between early feminist readings versus postcolonial ones. Of course, such a dichotomy is immediately open to contestation: it is

¹⁶⁰ This English translation of the Rizal-Blumentritt correspondence is taken from the digital archive accessible at www.rizalinfo.net/letters.html.

not at all possible, for example, to completely distinguish “proper” feminist concerns from the postcolonial, or vice-versa. Despite this, it is interesting to read of Rhys’s general concern for the socially disenfranchised being a natural outgrowth of her *antillanité*. It mirrors the more contemporary critical heuristic, epitomised in Jameson’s strategy of foregrounding politics in third-world novels (their being more difficult to abstract from the concrete or material context of their production). It perhaps suffices to say that no doubt Rhys’s formative years in the Caribbean made plain to her social and political aspects undergirding European society of which many in Europe would be wilfully ignorant or blind. And no doubt it would take literature to articulate and reveal these truths.

To widen perspective, consider V.S. Naipaul, a reader of Rhys, who speaks of the horrors of the colonial system *blinding* him to the stark oppression that surrounded his childhood. He reflects on his inability to truly notice the destitute in Port-of-Spain as a boy saying, “I suppose I didn’t know they were destitute – I suppose that idea came much later – and they made no impression on me. This was part of the cruelty of the plantation colony” (*Literary Occasions* 183). Yet, Rhys’s work reveals that literature has the power to reify hard realities submerged for various reasons. The importance of her *antillanité* then, is not so much an essentialist stance as one that provides the conditions of enunciatory possibility – that are importantly not unique to the Caribbean – for such an expression. To be Caribbean, in this case, to be creole, is to inhabit a critical position and perspective.

By contrast, Rizal’s work seems an attempt to conjure into existence a whole modern nation out of centuries of colonial control – not to depict an ephemeral section of society and the social forces attendant on it. Rizal presents a literary project that necessarily performs the function of *representation* of the nation. Rhys does not attempt so large and unwieldy a representative function. Rizal’s representation works on two

levels: there is fictional representation, in that Rizal writes about the nation and depicts its struggles, but there is also an explicitly political dimensions in that Rizal assumes the right to speak *in the name* of the nation (Hau 49). According to Caroline Hau, this strategy indicates that there is not only an artistic imagination at work, but his claim has also ethical and political dimensions in his decision to speak of “the Philippines” and to “fellow Filipinos” (49-50). The difference again is one of scale, Rhys’s work is seen as representing a gendered socio-ethnic minority (post-emancipation white creole class); Rizal’s representation of the (more politically powerful) creole minority (the *ilustrados*) in *Noli Me Tangere*, is commonly extrapolated to the national level.

Caroline Hau’s analysis of Rizal’s work represents one of the more sophisticated attempts to account for both Rizal’s popularity, and representational capacity. One of the most intriguing aspects of Hau’s analysis occurs in the conclusion to the “Power of Fiction” in which she makes the paradoxical argument that it is precisely the inability of the *Noli* to accurately represent the Filipino population that constitutes its representational veracity. That is, the *Noli*’s constant sliding between perspectives and points of view, and the people’s presence indicated as an “excess” of conversations – Rizal’s particular chosen style of eavesdropping narration – “constitutes the novel’s most powerful statement about the complexity of the social terrain” (88). It is of this social and natural terrain that the *Noli* narrator positions himself as guide.

In comparison, we find no parallel form in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Rhys’s early work, short stories in *The Left Bank*, evokes a kind of regret and nostalgia for her exotic island past (Wyndham 12) but in the novel under consideration here, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, any note of nostalgia that remains is thoroughly tempered by a harsh realism of political, economic, and racial turmoil plaguing the region. George Handley argues that the reader’s orientation must be taken into account as well: “[i]f Rhys is read alongside *Jane Eyre*, her postcoloniality will emerge dominant; read in the context of Caribbean

literature, she may seem nostalgic” (151). This taken into consideration, it might then be said that even when Rhys is understood as writing to “present the case for the underdog” and not for any explicit national representation the political, and necessarily, the national emerges – via mimetic readings, in the vein of Frederic Jameson – and questions revolving around the politics of representation factor deeply in the novel.

6.3.1 The Rizalian Reading

The Middle Ages were coming to an end in the Philippines in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

– Leon Ma. Guerrero, *The First Filipino* (73)

Postcolonial critiques of the Philippine frailocracy reveal themselves in the epigraph from Guerrero. Spanish colonialism as practiced in the Philippines in Rizal’s time was an anachronism. Similar sentiments are found in Charles Derbyshire’s introduction to the 1913 translation into English of Rizal’s novel, *The Social Cancer* (x). In both, the idea is articulated that the Philippines lagged behind European modernity by some three hundred years. Implicit in this criticism is the idea that one such trajectory to modernity existed, however fraught, and that that trajectory was European. But this idea does not only stem from modern criticisms of the friar policy, it also came from Rizal himself. Several characters in the novel make reference to this problematic nature of time in the Philippines, and from multiple perspectives on either side of the colonial divide. To illustrate this, consider views on opposing sides over a single symbol of modernity: the Suez Canal.

There are several references to the Suez Canal in the novel, the construction of which had the effect of helping to usher in modernity for the country. These changes are embodied in the novel itself. That is, similarly, in the *Noli*, the novel of Europe enters the local scene. References to this historical contextual event are thus symbolically significant. Close analysis and reading of these references to the Suez Canal, and the effects of its construction, reveal ideological positions of the speakers.

But there are two major opposing views of this event: that of the aristocrats and clerics, as articulated by Fr. Dámaso, and that of the liberal secularists, as articulated by the governor general in conversation with Ibarra. The friars bemoan the situation of the Philippines for reasons completely contrary to those that cause Ibarra's supporters to lament the country's condition.

The *ilustrados*, represented by Ibarra, are welcoming of change and new ideas and they embrace the reforms being issued by Spain through the liberal governor and civil ensign. For them, it must have seemed as if the middle ages were finally coming to an end. But at the same time, it must have been frustrating for these ilustrados (such as Rizal) to have experienced bustling Berlin and all its progress and modernity and then return to a Philippines that seemed lagging behind by a few hundred years. Indeed in Don Filipino's conversation with Tasio, the philosopher, this position is clearly articulated in exactly these temporal terms:

Nowadays, we in the Philippines walk three centuries behind the cart, we have barely emerged from the Middle Ages, which is why the Jesuits, who are so reactionary in Europe, seen from here represent progress. (347)

But Tasio, the philosopher or "madman," also sees the waning of his age of heresy and fear, and the dawning of a new age, born out of imminent struggle and seeded by the increasing immigration and emigration that the Suez Canal represents. As he lectures Don Filipino:

"Don't you feel it?" the old man answered, half lying down on the bed. "Ah, it's because you haven't seen the past, you haven't studied the effects of European immigration, the coming of new books and the flight of our youth to Europe. [...] Look at children these days! Full of enthusiasm at the sight of the widest horizons, they study history, mathematics, geography, literature, the physical sciences, languages, every subject that in our time we hear about with horror, as if they were heresies." (345-46)

The age Tasio speaks of, is the age of the telegraph. This invention mirrors the Suez Canal in its symbolism. News of events is “secretly transmitted” by the telegraph in ways beyond the control of the frailocracy (380). Through its hegemony, the frailocratic censors threaten, augment, correct, and mutilate the information in papers and other semi-official outlets until finally it is twisted into “a thousand versions” (380).

The Friars and the other colonial conservatives and colonial sycophants feel threatened by these potential changes. Rizal highlights this at the very beginning of the novel when he offers his own analogy of Tiago’s house being, like the country: “closed to no one but [...] perhaps a new or daring idea” (5). Ironically, Ibarra is everywhere confronted with what he perceives as backwardness and craves exactly that influx of “new and daring ideas” – precisely the sort to which the country is most resistant towards (5) – which he sees stymied by Dámaso.

The contrasting position is provided in the novel by Fr. Dámaso who cites modern developments such as the construction of the Suez canal and the telegraph cable as the cause for the influx of negative and damaging (for him) ideas. He explicitly lays the blame for the loss of control on the ease of entry to the country that resulted from the canal’s construction. He argues that “the inexpensiveness and brief length of the voyage are all to blame,” which allows the “worst parts of the Peninsula come here” (26).

But Rizal’s presentation is not limited to these two oppositional perspectives. And this is what makes the work so intriguing. Crisóstomo Ibarra is a Creole, and appears to be the cipher for the desires of the modern nation state of the Philippines. But Rizal introduces another character, Elias who, despite the seeming opposition of their social and political perspectives, are actually of the same class; they are both essentially ilustrados: “persecuted and dispossessed heirs of an emergent middle-class.” Thus, it is worth analysing the particular perspective or point-of-view that Ibarra represents in the

work in order to better understand and critique Rizal's own avowed purpose: of exposure (like that of a wound) so that the readers might "propose a remedy" (3). The novel's cloudy dénouement revolves around the protagonist's unresolved fate. And Rizal's own martyrdom, eerily prefigured in his own prognosticatory work, invites critics to employ extra-literary sources and subscribe to the fallacy of authorial intention in order to discern Rizal's purpose and attribute to him a retrospective national tradition. Thus we have declarations like the following: "Though Rizal's novels were written and published on foreign soil, and shaped by impulses of a broad European tradition, they are Filipino in the particularity of motive, subject and intent. Rizal lies within a native, developing tradition..." (Mojares 150).

It is worth rehearsing some of the reasons for being suspicious of Rizal's legacy to better frame his connection to the land and nation.

6.3.2 Ibarra the Creole

Some aspects of Rizal's legacy make him a rather unusual choice for Philippine national hero. In an effort to temper the tendency toward hagiolatry, Renanto Constantino has argued, in *Veneration Without Understanding* (1969), that Rizal's posthumous legacy is in large part a cultural appropriation by forces of US imperialism. According to Constantino, this is because – unlike the nationally celebrated revolutionary leaders and national heroes of other nations – Rizal "repudiated that [1896] revolution" (1). And because Rizal was "safely dead" by the time of the American invasion of the Philippine territories, "no embarrassing anti-American quotations could ever be attributed to him" (6).

In *Veneration without Understanding*, Constantino crafts a list of factors that rendered Rizal a suitably malleable symbol and acceptable choice for the purposes of American imperialism: he was a reformer (and not a separatist), he was an *ilustrado* (the elite native-class poised to administrate the nation under the American imperial gaze),

and although his martyrdom made him a potent symbol and garnered his name posthumous national renown, it also happened under the era of Spanish colonialism thereby allowing the discursive political manoeuvre of deflecting responsibility for current administrative problems and political strife by labelling them remnants of the legacies of the past coloniser (rather than the current American one).

While the question of Rizal's potential malleability as a national symbol is an interesting and useful one, it does not unilaterally determine the interpretive parameters or politics of the novel itself. In fact, Rizal's martyrdom has been co-opted into a larger national narrative being wrested from the colonialists by the people's struggle Rizal represents in *Noli Me Tangere* as the mysteriously articulate figure, Elias. In other words, to argue that imperial forces masterminded a counter-apprehension of his legacy does not invalidate Rizal's potency as a symbol for political change.

This does not mean we can simply dismiss the criticisms of scholars opposed to disproportionate focus on Rizal the writer and national hero. The choices Rizal makes in his selection of hero and heroine in the novel and his artistic decisions regarding style and plot call into question the relevance of the nationalist ideology he espouses for the post-colonial era. Some problems exist that impinge on the relevance and provenance of the novel itself beyond the personality of its author. These include, the fact of Rizal's absence from the local scene, the fact of limited circulation of his novel, and the fact of the larger forces competing for his legacy (touched on previously).

The fact that Rizal as author, spent nine years traveling abroad, had both of his novels published in Europe, and moreover, wrote books very few people in his time could read, no doubt has some bearing or influence on orthodox interpretations of the text's reception and intention. In *Necessary Fictions*, Caroline Hau outlines the usual glosses or excuses given to cover for these irregularities for Rizal: Rizal's *frequent* absence does not equal his *total* absence (the occasional return), that Rizal's persecution

and martyrdom crystallised popular resistance, and even that Rizal was an American-sponsored hero. For Hau, “these explanations occlude rather than illuminate the question of Rizal’s influence” (54). Indeed, if he was not present in the country, how was he so influential within it? Guerrero’s explanations – that Rizal “taught people they could be something else...” (496) and that “Rizal is the first Filipino because of his accomplishments ... because he is first in the hearts of the Filipinos ...” (497) – Hau dismisses as mere romantic mysticism and obfuscation.

The other problem of Rizal’s popularity is that hardly anyone had actually read (or could read) the novel. Copies of it were so few not even Rizal had a copy to gift the governor when he met with Rizal and asked him for one! Caroline Hau’s proposal is that “most people got second-hand access to the novel” they did not read it, but they “acquired its content” via hearsay. Thus, state and clerical proscriptions on the book and their censorship of it had the unintended and paradoxical effect of spreading it. Insightfully, Hau elucidates a particular mediation of the novel, or a “specific form of reading that sidestepped the proscription but permitted, nevertheless, a relaying of the novel’s ‘content’”: rumours (55). Moreover, because these rumours regarding Rizal were spread by “the supposedly reputable newspapers” (55) the newspapers ironically lent credence to them by denouncing them in print. That is, in order to denounce the rumours, colonial newspapers like *La Época* had to reveal them in print and by printing them they unintentionally lent them credence.

Another aspect of Rizal’s strangeness was presented in terms of his foreignness; an avowed Germanophile, it was perhaps only too easy to falsely ascribe to Rizal charges of treason and of sedition. In fact, rumours spread of his being an agent of the Germans by these same newspapers. Further, in a trend of uncanny resemblance to Europe — the problem of the Creole — Rizal’s accusers and followers both saw in his person a melding of European and Indio persons. This image was reinforced at his

death, albeit unintentionally, by the Spanish: dressing Rizal in the European style was a performative strategy designed to alienate Rizal from the native cultural landscape. The plan backfired, in that onlookers only witnessed the possibility of a successful merger between cultures, which granted Rizal additional symbolic capital or power: here was an Indio who could be European.

While these aspects all refer to Rizal the writer, and illustrate his artificial or suggested alienation from the national or political milieu – a critical structural affinity which he shares with Rhys in the early critical literature – this strangeness is not limited to extra-literary sources. In the novel too, we see references to Ibarra as an offshoot of that Spanish stock. In the chapter that introduces Ibarra to the reader, Chapter Two, titled “Crisóstomo Ibarra,” we have the following description:

his commanding height, his features, and his movements gave off that scent of healthy youth in which both the body and the soul have been equally cultivated. One could see in his frank and lively expression, through a handsome brown color, a few traces of Spanish blood, and a bit of pink in his cheeks, perhaps the remnants of time spent in a colder climate. (16)

Ibarra’s mannerisms, appearance, speech, and ideology are all presented as somewhat hybridised and therefore suspect and subversive to his opponents, or overly progressive – and therefore dangerous – for his supporters. And his hybridity is precisely the problematic question Nick Joaquin explores in his essay, “Why was the Rizal Hero a Creole?”

Later in the novel, we learn that at root an evil or negative aspect of Ibarra’s colonial heritage is present. Ibarra is not the only character that bears this mark and counts this aspect as heritage in the novel. The major female character in the novel, Maria Clara, must deal with this aspect of her person. Far from some mere celebration of hybrid elitism, or *ilustrado* Eurocentrism, both characters suffer for their roots despite honourable intentions and hero-status in the novel. The novel is tragic, a tragic

melodrama, but is this tragic element meant to be heightened by the fact of noble characters suffering? Or is Rizal's a parodic presentation, in which the desires of his readership in a mawkish Eurocentrism are dashed by his grounding the work in the failure of this salvational or elite class? Ibarra's ancestry includes a scion that represents a sort of original sin, or sin of the father, that results in his home — that symbol of belonging — being burnt by the people in recompense.

In like manner, Rhys depicts a burning house as visceral recompense for colonial horrors perpetrated against the (now-native) blacks in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The strategy of naturalisation and indigenisation taken up by the oppressed black majority is to disparage the formerly powerful Creole class. The situation is encapsulated in Tia's taunting of Antoinette: "go away white cockroaches....nobody want you" (23). Concomitantly it is the plantation estate, symbol of the past era synonymous with slavery, which is attacked and burned down. In this way too, slavery and exploitation of nature are linked.

In Rhys's representation the island blacks are spoken of collectively so that they become seen in symbolic terms themselves. The burning of the house at Coulibri marks the frenzied passion that ignites the blacks: "Their eyes gleaming, their mouths half-open to shout" (22). They shout taunts at the family coming out of the burning house, "But look a black Englishman. Look the white cockroach, look the white cockroach" (23).

Thus the story foregrounds the doomed grounding and the failure to root of this white Creole class; it also highlights the violence inherent to articulations of entitlement that must erase symbols of the past suggesting antithetical, alternative, or exploitative arrangements. Only in Christophine does the voluntary servant return to pity the former white creole master, and that only perhaps out of a nostalgia and kindred sense of (Francophone) alterity.

6.4 Creoles and the Discourse of Tropical Degeneracy

Influential theorists of nationalism trace the idea of the “people” and the belief in a shared destiny of the “community” to the early pre-romantics, specifically Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Gottfried von Herder’s celebrations of the *Volk* (Anderson, *Imagined Communities*; Brennan, “National Longing”). And thus where the creole might seem to really demonstrate its uncanny nature is in relation to these concepts “whose cohesiveness relied upon forces emanating from the ground up, and which being natural, encompassed all” (Brennan 52-53). The figure of the creole, which is also figure of the hybrid, seems at once suspect in any easy association with the *Volk*, with the community sprung up from the ground because of the creole’s diverse origins. However, it is instructive to note that Rousseau and Herder present arguments toward the thesis that the natural world, including a land’s climate, and its ecology “had a constitutive impact on culture and character” (Anderson 60). This would suggest that despite one’s origins, time spent in a land gradually worked on the constitution to the point of literal naturalisation.¹⁶¹ From its earliest theorisations then a characteristic belonging-as-process (in contrast to given essence) was dialectically present.

Ideas like these spread far and wide, and were employed in several different contexts, from distinguishing Scottish from English blood,¹⁶² to the degeneracy theories being promulgated in Europe (especially by the philosopher-scientists Abbé Reynal¹⁶³ and Georges-Louis Leclerc comte. de Buffon¹⁶⁴) that insisted on the essential difference between a European born in Europe (whether raised in the colonies or not) and one born

¹⁶¹ The early scientist-philosophers John Tuberville Needham and George LeClerc comte de Buffon both developed theories based on “vegetative powers”; both theorists held in common the strong conviction that “nature had a real productive force, and that this force was enough to account for form and growth in the living world” (Pinto-Correia 187).

¹⁶² Consider Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s insult: “I would ask no surer test of a Scotchman’s substratum (for the turf-cover of pretension they all have) than to make him read Donne’s satire’s aloud. If he made manly metre of them and yet strict metre then, – why, then he wasn’t a Scotchman, or his soul was geographically slandered by his body’s first appearing there.” (Smith *John Donne* 265).

¹⁶³ Abbé Raynal’s book, *Histoire philosophique et politique des établissements et du commerce des Européens dans les deux Indes* (1781) argues that “Nature speaks in louder tones than philosophy or self-interest” and predicts a courageous black chief to lead a revolt in the New world “to avenge the rights of nature”. See C. L. R. James. *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. (Penguin UK), 2001: 20. See also: Susan Buck-Morss. “Hegel and Haiti.” *Critical Inquiry*. 26 (4), 2000: 829 (n.25).

¹⁶⁴ Buffon develops the theory of degeneration in his *Histoire naturelle* (1749-67). Buffon, Georges Louis Leclerc comte de, and Charles Sigisbert Sonnini. 1798. *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*. F. Dufart..

in the colonies (and raised in Europe or not).¹⁶⁵ There was something ineluctably set, fixed, for many influential Renaissance thinkers and the French *philosophes* about the place of one's birth and the resulting content of one's character that today we might simply recognise as bigotry.

In Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere*, several characters traffic in modified versions of the degeneracy thesis. These versions range from the idea that women in tropical regions mature and "ripen" more rapidly – "In these southern climes a girl becomes a woman at the age of thirteen or fourteen, a bud by night, a flower by morning" (43) – to the idea that degeneracy results from systemic political corruption and colonial intrigue ("the worst parts of the Peninsula come here" says an old Lieutenant to Ibarra, "and if a good one does arrive, the country quickly corrupts him" (26). Father Dámaso spews forth bigoted views about Indio degeneracy only to provoke Ibarra: "You know what an *indio* is like. The minute he learns one thing he is an expert. Every snot-nose goes to Europe" (229). But native sycophants pathetically uphold the bigoted views too, indicating the pervasiveness of these particular stereotypes. "If someone criticized the mixed-blood Chinese or Spanish merchants, [Captain Tiago] would criticize them as well, because he considered himself pure Iberian" (39). For many characters, however, the prejudice results from more than colonial sycophancy (though Rizal does caricature this aspect too, as in the case of Doña Victorina and her pretentious affected pronunciation of the word "peninsula").

Although the discourse of inferiority of the native pervades the text, which Rizal highlights, much as the early (later) anti-colonial writers Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, there is at root the discourse of tropical degeneracy. As the Governor General reveals to Ibarra in the novel, differentiating between the Peninsula and the islands: on the islands it is "different" (246). Rizal, through Ibarra, constantly challenges these so-

¹⁶⁵ Richard Slotkin gives a useful account of this period in the history of science, in his book *Regeneration through Violence*, 202.

called essential differences by exposing the colonial and frailocratic hypocrisies and errors that generate them.

Rizal inverts the colonial logic of tropical degeneracy in a postcolonial “writing-back”: If the European is degenerated in the tropics, then logically European ways and means will not take root in the Philippines (and thus we must reject them). Crucially supporting this thesis is the fact that Rizal ends the novel in failure. More specifically, it ends in Ibarra’s failure to achieve and institute the European ideals he held so dear. In his rejection of Elias, Rizal seems to indicate, Ibarra seems to have rejected that organic part of his society, of his professed constitution. In the end, his hybrid solution turns up a failure (although hope is not snuffed completely as his end is shrouded in some mystery).

In *El Filibusterismo* Rizal’s apparent sequel to *Noli Me Tangere*, “Ibarra” returns as “Simoun” whose “quest [is] for a pristine origin, the past as the site of bliss and fulfillment born from the unity between man and nature (Rousseau)” (San Juan 24). Epifanio San Juan argues that the *Noli* then “traces the adventure of the returned native to an alienating milieu, becoming a stranger in the process of trying to discover or recognize the truth of his father’s exile from the Christian cemetery” (25). Ibarra’s estrangement from the native terrain is recognised by characters sympathetic to his cause but this reality is also exploited by his enemies. Fr. Dámaso, for example, never hesitates to abuse the natives; he attempts to maintain the social stratification peculiar to the Philippines’ frailocratic colonial experience. “Do I believe?” shouts Fr. Dámaso in an argument at the party near the opening of the novel, “As I believe in the Gospel! Indios are incredibly lazy!” (10). He goes on to list the sins inherent to the Indio in a hyperbolic list of the type analysed by Albert Memmi: “[the colonizer] jokes about [the laziness], he takes up all the usual expressions, perfects them, and invents others. Nothing can describe well enough the extraordinary deficiency of the colonized. He

becomes lyrical about it, in a negative way” (80). Ibarra meanwhile, stands in stark contrast to the Franciscan priest’s claims and, unlike the others, offers a putative challenge to the frailocracy ostensibly on their behalf. As for Ibarra’s admirers, His Excellency the Governor General tries to convince Ibarra to leave for Europe: “Sell everything you own, pack your trunk, and come with me to Europe, where the climate will suit you better” (247-48).

The thesis of hybrid degeneracy also appears in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. And again, the writer (Rhys) refutes and returns the thesis in a kind of postcolonial tropicalitude (echoing Césaire). Rhys was familiar with stories of “mad Creole heiresses in the early nineteenth century” (Wyndham “intro” 12). Francis Wyndham describes these Creole women as “products of an inbred, decadent, expatriate society.” As he describes it, Creole heiresses like Annette and Antoinette “languished uneasily in the oppressive beauty of their tropical surroundings, ripe for exploitation” (12).

Wyndham uses the metaphorical conflation of heiress and native for analogical effect. But his comparison is notable for the vocabulary he uses: the Creole heiress is a product inbred from transplanted stock. His metaphor invokes the degeneracy theories that had effectively remained extant, if somewhat evolved, in the century between the early eighteenth century (pre-romantic period) and the early 1800s, or at least up to Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* (1859). Small clues in the novel alert us to these relevant discursive notions that remain in play. When Mr Mason visits Antoinette as a seventeen-year-old convent-girl, she responds to his query on the nuns’ severity declaring that “the Bishop who visits them every year says they are lax. Very lax” on account of “the climate” (58).

According to Vivian nun Halloran, Rhys’s strategy is to anachronistically implicate twentieth century understandings of the term “creole” (as unaffected by

national identity) with earlier understandings which always implicated race (30).

“According to this logic,” writes Halloran,

a character’s birth in England proper imbues the (white, male) subject with an indelible Englishness that is incorruptible, not affected even by a protracted stay in the tropics. Thus, Antoinette’s British stepfather, Mr. Mason, and her husband, Mr. Rochester, maintain their Englishness untainted throughout *Wide Sargasso Sea* despite the former’s marriage to a Catholic Martinican Creole woman, Annette, and the latter’s poverty and lack of prospects as the second son of an aristocratic father. (99)

But this assessment fails to register the ways in which Rochester is affected and does begin to change. Rochester’s resistance to this change is first figured in sexual terms. It then registers in a disavowal and desire for escape from the place that has become dizzying for him. Halloran is right to point out that Rhys’s description locates the cultural and ethnic marker anachronistically, but she is too limiting in her view of this modulation. Jean Rhys’s description is anachronistic but it extends in both temporal directions, it also fits within a much earlier paradigm whose roots extend backward to the degeneracy theories of the seventeenth century.

Rochester’s social standing, moral rectitude and sense of self-worth decline and desecrate while he lives in the Caribbean. His time is spent in lurid and ubiquitous sexual acts. And he is not only apparently indifferent to his infidelity to Antoinette but cruelly disinterested in the psychological torment he causes her as well.

As the days progress, Rochester becomes an addict to sex in a love-less marriage. When Antoinette, in desperation, turns to the powers of Christophine’s obeah to secure the love of Rochester, her plan backfires, and though he pleasures her physically, his disgust and aversion to her tactics increase, as does his lust. Soon he is involved in an extra-marital intercourse, a thin partition the only cover for his affront to their matrimonial union.

I thought you liked the black people so much, but that's just a lie like everything else. You like the light brown girls better, don't you? You abused the planters and made up stories about them, but you do the same thing. You send the girl away quicker, and with no money or less money, and that's all the difference. (94)

Rochester's matrimonial desecration is a blatant and abominable act, and incites Christophine's wrath, "You bring that worthless girl to play with next door and you talk and laugh and love so that she hear everything. You meant her to hear" (99). Rochester, an English gentleman whose decorum is expected and implied back home, becomes reduced to an enervated, corrupted colonialist while in the Caribbean.

But the real significance on the theoretical level about this passage is that Rhys represents Rochester's degeneracy as a product of his frustrated lust for that which he cannot organically possess. In this sense, Rochester's desire is of a kind that parallels colonial nesomania (desire for islands). Just as desire marked the colonial practice of toponymic alteration of the islands, this desire is an effort to re-name, and own, to make one belong. This desire parallels sentiments expressed by Rhys herself of her own childhood. As Mary-Kay Wilmers writes in a review titled "Narcissism and its Discontents" for the *London Review of Books*,

When she was very young she had wished she was black, would pray for a transformation each night and in the morning 'run to the looking-glass ... to see if the miracle had happened'. Later on, she envied them their lives – 'they had a better time than we did'; and wondered whether, being Catholics, they also had 'a better chance in eternity'. Above all, she envied them because they were 'more a part of the place than we were', and being a part of the place mattered to her a great deal: 'It's strange growing up in a very beautiful place and seeing that it is beautiful... I wanted to identify with it, to lose myself in it. (But it turned its head away, indifferent, and that broke my heart.)'

The place wouldn't have her, and for all her wanting to be one of them, the blacks wouldn't either. (10)

Similar motives lie behind Rochester's desires for land and woman. Rhys plays with tropes of tropical abundance and promiscuity in Rochester's perspective. In *Jane*

Eyre, for instance, Rochester describes how he “was dazzled, stimulated: my senses were excited...” (301). Rochester’s perspective operates along the lines of the discourse of a chronicle of the Indies, a tropical degeneracy and excess. The colours of his new environment are too bright, the lifestyle too vivacious and flamboyant, as if a primitive other to his own normativity. In *Wide Sargasso Sea* his character reveals “[e]verything is too much, I felt as I rode wearily after her. Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near” (42).

But the Caribbean atmosphere and life cannot be dampened or tethered to suit his liking. “Standing on the verandah I breathed the sweetness of the air. Cloves I could smell and cinnamon, roses and orange blossom. And an intoxicating freshness as if all this had never been breathed before” (44). Thus, Rochester’s exoticising gaze quickly moves to denigrate what he longs for and cannot, in the same way, have. Rhys demonstrates this by utilising the conventional trope of female-landscape conflation. But, crucially, this conventional conflated blazon of land and woman is told through Rochester’s point-of-view.

I hated the mountains and the hills, the rivers and the rain.
I hated the sunsets of whatever colour, I hated its beauty
and its magic and the secret I would never know. I hated
its indifference and the cruelty which was part of its
loveliness. Above all I hated her. For she belonged to the
magic and the loveliness. She had left me thirsty and all
my life would be thirst and longing for what I had lost
before I found it. (172)

His meditations slide from explicit condemnation of the beauty and magic of the place to condemnation of the creole woman. To read this conflation of Antoinette with Caribbean island without acknowledging the crucial perspective from which this conflation is made (Rochester’s) is to problematically ascribe a conventional colonial trope to Rhys, denying her the far more nuanced reading that her work deserves.

In one such nuanced reading, which takes into account historical and geographical specificities, Vivian nun Halloran points out that a novel like *Wide*

Sargasso Sea “suggest[s] that social demarcations between English and Creole cultural identities are artificial because they ultimately depend on chance – on the geographical accident of a given person’s or character’s place of birth” (87). And yet they still choose to depict the hierarchical relationship between “pure European” and Creole. This is because the work of the novel is then to show how myths of national identity are wedded to social norms and behaviour as much as they are on ethnicity (Halloran 88).

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette is interpellated not only as other-than-pure-European but also other-than-native-black. Her husband looks at her critically, at her “alien eyes,” and muses “[c]reole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either.” (61). A little girl, and fellow island native follows Antoinette home teasing her in song “white cockroach, go away. Go away. Nobody want you. Go away.” (20). Halloran observes how Antoinette herself never uses the word “Creole,” preferring to enunciate social differences with strictly racial or national terms rather than those artificial constructs purposely designed to exclude (100) (in fact, neither does Rizal in *Noli Me Tangere*, in whose case the word *criollo* [Spanish] had completely different connotative resonances and has a different etymological evolution). Rochester, England-born, cultivates the “imperial cultural economy” to which he subscribes by inserting and using the word into the self-commentary he employs to construct his own meta-narratives. Despite being a social construct, the collectively maintained meta-narrative of European enlightenment and progress is influential, and explains why, despite Rochester’s relative lack of a fortune, rich white Creole Jamaicans, such as Roger Mason, show him deference (Halloran 101).

This understanding of the word’s use is in line with Jack Forbes’s conclusion that such racially-inflected groupings were invented for administrative purposes, and to control diverse, ever-expanding populations being added to colonial empires. In fact, such prejudice approaches epistemic proportions no doubt in part due to considerable

material investment undergirding this line of thinking. The plantocracies of the Caribbean and the frailocracy of the Philippines depended on artificial administrative distinctions of race to maintain their power structures. And, as Césaire angrily chants, the thinking of even the most illustrious philosophers (contemporary and classical) with regard to racial issues is highly compartmentalised.¹⁶⁶

In practice, the creole (using the nineteenth century definition of a European born in the colony), despite hailing from “pure” European stock, was inimitably different having been born there. Any political theory of nationalism that bases its claims for nationhood on an *ethnos*, or an idea of the *Volk* must have a tense relationship with the creoles in its midst, by either eliminating, or ignoring their presence or else assimilating their differences into the same. Thus, early attempts to theorise the nation along ethnic principles are today often greeted as obsolete remnants of colonial and pre-colonial systems. The work of Eric Hobsbawm, and Benedict Anderson, among others, have thoroughly complicated analyses of national origins in terms used by the early nineteenth century theorists of it.¹⁶⁷ And Timothy Brennan has shown how the New World Creoles were really the first nationalists – a point which, while not nullifying any association of a “national idea” arising from a people-group solely by virtue of their *ethnos*, at least tempers it.¹⁶⁸ As Timothy Brennan argues, nationalism was more accurately the product of these new world struggles with the metropole, and thus it is more properly a product of the colonies than a European invention (“National Longing,” 58). This is because arbitrary pronouncements were

¹⁶⁶ See also, Susan Buck-Morss: “The French Enlightenment thinkers [...] idealized indigenous colonial populations with myths of the noble savage (the “Indians” of the “New World”), [but] the economic lifeblood of slave labor was not their concern. Although abolitionist movements did exist at this time, and in France the *Amis des Noirs* (Friends of the Blacks) decried the excesses of slavery, a defense of liberty on the grounds of racial equality was rare indeed” (Buck-Morss 828).

¹⁶⁷ An example of a nineteenth century theorist of nationalism is Ernst Renan, author of such famous works as *What is a Nation* (included in Bhabha’s collection *Nation and Narration*) but also (in)famous works like *La Réforme intellectuelle et morale* which Césaire excoriates in his *Discourse on Colonialism*. Edward Said mentions that Renan was actually regarded by his European contemporaries as a progressive (Said, 2001: 418).

¹⁶⁸ “The nation-state is not only the by-product of the conditions created by European exploration; it was, more or less from the start, forged in acts of separation from the European centers of Madrid and London. If one discounts the civil wars of England and France, the first nationalists are not Frenchmen, Spaniards, or Englishmen, but the creole middle classes of the New World – people like Simon Bolívar, Toussaint L’Ouverture, and Ben Franklin” (Brennan 58).

issued from the metropole that delimited Creole legitimacy; this grated against early articulations of creole agency in the colonies, which then led to the rise of nations in Latin America.

Building upon these notions, Mimi Sheller devotes a portion of her sociological analysis on consumption of the Caribbean exotic to the question of the creole. Sheller considers the changing connotative resonances of the word over time:

In every case though the word carries the connotation of what could be called an achieved indigeneity. That is to say, it refers to a process of being uprooted from one place and regrounded in another such that one's point of origin loses its significance and one's place of arrival becomes "home". The falling away of an old home and the claiming of a new place of belonging. It also carries the connotation of a mobility and mixture of peoples, cultures, languages and cuisines. (182)

The postcolonial resonances of the term are clear. In its straddling the planes of indigeneity and expatria the creole can become a cultural contestant to both coloniser and indigenous groups in wielding the amalgamating political power of a composite national identity. As Mimi Sheller writes,

In this society with its free habits, under the common interest of its contraband trading and separated from the centers of colonial power by distance and by mountain ranges, the people properly called creoles (criollos) and also, significantly, people of the land (gente de la tierra) started to emerge. (182)

Sheller registers the emergence of new political identities born from space and distance between groups of peoples even of similar ethnic constitution through a process of cultural and political differentiation that might be technically called creolisation and which followed colonisation.

What an understanding of these processes provides for the analysis of literary works is more than simple historical context for mimetic readings of postcolonial literature. Points of incongruence emerge when different regional conceptions of

creolisation are approached via literary comparison.¹⁶⁹ In this case, they reveal that categories of nationalism, race, and responses to the environment can be very similar between literary works of two very different regions and yet enjoy completely different status and be ascribed completely different prescriptive power. And while the socio-historical variation of the notion of the creole mirrors that of the linguistic versions that must also be historically situated and geographically and linguistically specific, a superimposition of two versions highlights productive differences in their meaning and significance – productive, that is, in their capacity for shedding light on the different work of shared literary practices and strategies between writers. What emerges from a comparative project of this nature is a method and justification for distinguishing between what otherwise, from the level of theoretical abstraction, might be wrongly comprehended as indiscriminable pairs, or superficially analogous structures.

6.4.1 Creole Women - Maria Clara and Antoinette

The heroine of *Noli Me Tangere* is “a mestiza of shameful conception” (Joaquin 364). More than this, Rizal chooses to saddle her with all the allegorisation and mythologisation of the nation. Again, we have the problem of placement. Like Joaquin asks of Ibarra, we can ask: “why should the hero[ine] of the Great Filipino Novel be, not an Indio Filipin[a], but a Spanish “Filipin[a]”? (364). The answer ostensibly wounds the patriotic sensibilities of the superficial local reader because the novel is satirical and unsparing in its critique of society as a whole. To use Rizal’s analogy, even if the object is to remove a cancerous core, the rest of the organism is left exposed, implicated, and raw.

¹⁶⁹ At an MLA conference in 2008, Ato Quayson described this type of comparison as “necessarily distortive” (qtd. in DeLoughrey, 2011). but rather than dismiss these types of comparisons I argue that the points of incongruence that emerge when comparing literatures across postcolonial contexts work as important signals.

José Ma. Sison offers a most succinct satirical reading of the novel's exploration of first reform and then revolution as political possibilities for colonial Philippines (Sison 401). Sison offers the following reading:

What social system are the enemies of Crisóstomo Ibarra in defense of? A friar-dominated society signified by the weakling and hybrid Maria Clara, the colonial product of a questionable relationship which makes of Capitan Tiago, the symbol of the newly-risen corrupt Filipino bourgeoisie, a cuckold of colonial power. The bastard culture is further signified by Sister Rufa and Sister Pute, whose thinking consists of a systematization of superstition which includes airy stocks of plenary indulgences, bundles of candles and sacks of girdles and scapularies. In clearer secular terms, the social system being defended is one dominated by the curate and alfez, assisted by a docile and stupid *gobnadorcillo* and *principalia*, whose main activities are holding fiestas and by the corrupt trader, contract maker, influence peddler and cuckold Capitan Tiago and by Doña Consolacion, the vicious symbol of the Civil guards' mentality and by Doña Victorina, the paragon of a colonial mentality which always manages to adopt what limps in the alien culture.

Sison's reading imputes the thesis of hybrid degeneracy in Rizal. The major characters all take on representative roles in this allegorical reading, but Maria Clara's is especially notable as she is cast in the role of *Patria*. When read in this vein, Maria Clara is subject to the competing interests of various male agents of power: the educated, creole reformer, Crisóstomo Ibarra, who wishes to wed her to his paternalistic liberal secular agenda; the cuckold of colonial power, Capitán Tiago, whose secretly usurped paternity is nevertheless a fiction carefully maintained by the frailocratic regime; the mediocre colonialist Linares, drawn in to wed Maria Clara through the designs of the colonial sycophants and puppeteers.¹⁷⁰

Memmi's "portrait of the colonizer" (1965), though it nowhere explicitly discusses Rizal's novel, yet offers an apt description of the processes that lead to the

¹⁷⁰ As Albert Memmi analyses, "the promotion of mediocre personnel is not a temporary error but a lasting catastrophe from which the colony never recovers" (50).

selection of someone like Linares for Maria Clara. As such, Memmi's abstract and theoretical contribution to colonial analysis and Rizal's fictional representation of colonial Philippines offer each other independent mutual endorsement as to their authenticity.

Memmi describes an "etiolation [...] by administrative consanguinity" because "[i]t is the mediocre citizens who set the general tone of the colony. They are the true partners of the colonized, for it is the mediocre who are most in need of compensation and of colonial life. It is between them and the colonized that the most typical colonial relationships are created" (50-51). From Memmi it is clear that Linares will hold tightly to his relationship, and the colonial system, to the status quo, because, as directed by Fr. Dámaso, his uncle, his entire colonial existence depends upon it.¹⁷¹ This description certainly fits Doña Victorina's useless "doctor" husband who nevertheless is held in high regard, and can charge outrageous amounts (despite not having any qualifications to speak of) simply because he is from Spain, "a peninsular." Tellingly, Don Tiburcio de Espadaña, takes up this charlatanry because "his prestige did not absolve him of his needs" (*Noli* 279). Lacking skills, his hunger trumps other pretensions; he has nothing in Spain and cannot even afford to leave the islands. Thus, he has "wagered everything, and for keeps, on the colony" (Memmi 51).

Maria Clara's female friends and companions are presented in the novel as being far more organic and natural to the social and environmental landscape than herself. Maria Clara's best friend Sinang, sings and dances, with vivacity, in contrast to the continually pensive and overly decorous Maria Clara. Guerrero-Nakpil goes so far as to attribute to Maria Clara the origin of a whole host of social infelicities that have plagued Philippine women after Rizal's depiction of Maria Clara was somehow taken to be representative of an ideal (Guerrero-Nakpil 88-89). But Maria Clara neither confides in

¹⁷¹ See (Memmi 50) for a postcolonial theorisation of the same.

her family, friends, the convent, or fellows when she discovers her true background as hybrid product of colonial abuse.

In this sense she bears conceptual similarity to Jean Rhys's female protagonist, Antoinette, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In Antoinette's case, not only does she face a kind of incarceration by the male agents of colonial power, she also becomes mad (as the patriarchal convention goes), and her ultimate fate is shrouded in mystery. In *Noli Me Tangere*, Maria Clara's final scene consists of the suggestion of her insanity and death atop the convent roof, on a thunderous, stormy night. For Antoinette, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, her final vision is jumping into the flames at the house in England where she is cloistered.

Both novels suggest a kind of allegorical failure in the part of their hybrid female protagonists as both stories end tragically. A mimetic bias in postcolonial scholarship lends critics of this persuasion to read national significance in this failure (*à la* Frederic Jameson's "national allegory" (1987)). Rizal's novel does seem to encourage and invite such a reading, and his prologue (an invocation of national scrutiny) and his extra-literary documents (which appeal to historical parallel and national prescription) are not necessary to feel the seduction of such a reading – that is, the clear appeals to national allegory are present in the text itself, and are enough for the literary critic to pursue allegorical meaning on a first reading. *Wide Sargasso Sea*, on the other hand, while presenting clear parallels to actual island states in the Caribbean (namely, Dominica, and Jamaica) is not quite so nationally-determined. A kind of regional significance to Rhys's writing has been imputed to her by virtue of the postcolonial national bias where the novel is concerned.

Sisson's reading, despite its powerful allegorical resonance, fails to articulate Ibarra's own troubling hybridity, which throughout the novel is cited as the condition for his success or failure. In fact, Ibarra's hybridity is analysed in the novel by the

Philosopher (or madman) Tasio. In Chapter 25, “At the Philosopher’s House,” Rizal lays out an analysis of the social conditions that surround Ibarra. This social environment is described as one in which Ibarra is “transplanted” (169). Tasio figures Ibarra’s hybridity in terms of a metaphorical transplantation. Tasio sees Ibarra as “a plant transplanted from Europe to this rocky soil” (169); he argues that if Ibarra does not “find support and develop humility” he would remain “alone, highborn, in terrible conditions” (169). Don Filipino and Old Tasio, in a later conversation, invoke a similar metaphor and discern in Ibarra a desire to “sow his seed” but a failure to accept (and submit) to realities, that is the true ground of his transplantation.

Thus, it is on both sides of the colonial divide that Ibarra’s hybridity is acknowledged, and this hybridity bears positive or negative connotations depending on the ideological subject-position of the speaker. Foreign imputation comes from above and below, from the ecclesiastical orders and the peasant masses, and the secular philosophers. Dámaso, for example, in a thinly veiled insult, refers to the “corruption” that has arrived since the opening of the Suez canal (229). Dámaso’s complaint is centred on the recent arrivals, like Ibarra, who threaten his power.

Ibarra’s crucial conversation with Elias, his foil, results in the identification of crucial differences in philosophy and outlook toward the Philippines. Rizal seems to suggest that Ibarra is distanced from the people by virtue of his time in enlightened Europe. Ibarra believes the people need to earn their right, honourably, to independence from Spain, while Elias, like Fanon, believes that Independence must be taken, only then will the conditions be met that would allow the people to become truly independent. This basic difference of political ontology separates the two figures as they represent alternative options for the colonial state.

Both Ibarra and his parallel protagonist, Antoinette, in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, desire and feel a sense of belonging to their homelands, but both are denied this native

objecthood. Though both characters are denigrated as suspect Creole subjects, neither character uses the word “Creole” in any of their passages of self-description.

These ideas are very relevant, not only for Rhys’s rendering of the historical context, but also for her choice in subject matter and protagonist. By the time Rhys was writing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the word “Creole” already evoked “a complex combination of linguistic, literary, and political resonances that would lead to the theories of “creolization” elaborated in the 1970s by Brathwaite and Glissant” (GoGwilt 128). GoGwilt asks why Rhys chooses to portray the trope of the Creole heiress at a time when these linguistic, literary, and political resonances were in play, and when the Creole, multi-racial identity of the Caribbean was beginning to emerge (128).

For GoGwilt, Rhys’s choice seems to resurrect and play an older definition of the term (that of a European born in the colonies) but is actually more complicated than that because the nineteenth century English usage of the term Creole itself is conflicted. The nineteenth century English usage connects “two apparently contradictory definitions: the Creole of pure white descent and the Creole of mixed descent. Both come together in the prestige, and suspicion of the prestige, attached to the family lineage of the white Creole heiress” (GoGwilt 131). GoGwilt seems to celebrate Jean Rhys’s decision to present the Creole’s unifying potential as doomed, and ultimately futile, declaring that Rhys’s Creole perspective is shown to be delusional.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a similar thesis of unbelonging is attributed to Antoinette; crucially, Antoinette never uses the word Creole to describe herself (Halloran 100). As Vivian nun Halloran argues,

Wide Sargasso Sea suggests that racial and ethnic categories are a reflection of both physical differences and cultural assumptions by presenting Antoinette’s and Rochester’s contrasting first-person views of post-emancipation Caribbean society without the editorial interference of an omniscient, third-person narrator. Antoinette describes her society either through racial categories – blacks, whites – or else by making references

to nationalities – “Jamaican,” “Martinique girl.” She never uses the term Creole to describe herself or anyone else in her first-person narrative. In contrast, her English husband often incorporates this same word into his own narrative. Rochester uses it privately, as a constant reminder of the pride of place he occupies within the imperial cultural economy despite his lack of a fortune of his own. Rochester’s status as an Englishman commands respect and envious admiration even from white Creole Jamaicans who have inherited wealth, like Roger Mason. (100-101)

By avoiding usage of the term, the characters attempt to avoid an administrative marginalisation, or stratification which places the characters outside the native economy.

More than this, to refuse the creole label is also an attempt to ignore the colonial sin (of slavery) as part heritage. Both Ibarra and Antoinette have troubling colonial exploitation in their histories, and their refusal to acknowledge this as a constitutive aspect of their identity renders this strategy a type of disavowal. Interestingly, both novelists – Rhys and Rizal – choose to ground their narratives in the failure of this class and character to secure their success off of this colonial history. Thomas Staley writes,

[f]or all her estrangement from the native and black population, Antoinette is a part of the Islands; her attraction to the wild and the exotic confirms her affinity; it ties her irrevocably to this land, in spite of her hostility to it and it to her. (103)

But Antoinette’s husband could just as well satisfy these requirements of belonging, upon a different reading of the word “attraction”; for he too is drawn to the islands, albeit in a separate and exploitative mode.

Gayatri Spivak’s influential discussion of *Wide Sargasso Sea* in “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Colonialism” presents an example of postcolonial misreading and yet presents a useful point of entry into this discussion of belonging. Spivak’s is perhaps the most famous of such (mis)readings, criticised for their problematic demarcation of native subjectivity. The point of contention in Spivak’s postcolonial reading for critics sensitive to the politics of Caribbean indigeneity hinges

on the term “black native” (used only once in the essay) — and yet critical attention, (famously Hulme’s; also Halloran’s) is fixed upon the term. Spivak intones,

Rhys suggests that so intimate a thing as personal and human identity might be determined by the politics of imperialism. Antoinette, as a white Creole child growing up in the time of Emancipation in Jamaica, is caught between the English imperialist and the black native. (250)

Following the thrust of Hulme’s critique, other scholar-critics decry Spivak’s reading for being inadequately historically specific. Critics building on this line of argumentation argue that the corrective to Spivak’s type of reading is simply a more finely calibrated contextualization. Halloran assigns the descriptors “static” and “binaristic” to Spivak’s reading (a rather embarrassing charge for a deconstructionist) and dismisses it as one that “glosses over inter-Caribbean or inter-Creole prejudice within the novel” (102). She contends that the identity of “black native [...] has no currency within the novel” and argues further that Rhys presents a “spectrum of black Creole identities – Jamaican and Martinican – as well as occasional performances of black Englishmen” (102). The fact that “native” is not a term deployed in the novel at all, is then a suggestion of Rhys’s desire to refuse any problematic solution of selective nativisation; although this does not preclude recognition of the term’s implicit inclusion.

Elaine Savory articulates a recurring criticism of postcolonial reading: because it privileges mimetic readings, specifically allegorical ones, that precipitate literary works into its “broad schema,” postcolonial theory tends to offer reductive readings of otherwise complex novels. This claim engages with the criticism of postcolonial theory outlined in the introductory sections of this thesis. Late 20th Century readings of *Wide Sargasso Sea* that subscribed (and pioneered) postcolonial literary methodologies – such as Spivak’s and Tiffin’s – Savory argues, today seem rather reductive. More recent re-readings of the novel consider not just the black subjectivity from the margins, for instance, but also the white othering that occurs within the text. These readings

represent more fully postcolonial interpretations, nuanced in approach to nativity and indigeneity.

This type of nuance and sensitivity is also required for Rizal's novel. It is important to remember just who the Creoles really are. In the Philippines, the historical shift and slippage from Filipino colonial creole identity to Filipino postcolonial national identity is at risk of being elided in any easy assertion of the native. The process of indigenisation and nativisation that occurs in *Wide Sargasso Sea* among the black population is referenced by Antoinette in *Wide Sargasso Sea* in sociological terms. Lorna Burns identifies an oppositional strategy of sociological interpretation between colonial and creole perspectives, arguing that *Wide Sargasso Sea* "consistently undermines stereotypes by illustrating their constructed, sociological basis" (22):

Rochester expresses the coloniser's point of view: the black woman, he infers, is unclean, sexualised and lazy. All colonial stereotypes, yet in each case, Antoinette responds by telling Rochester that each of these traits have a logical explanation: allowing one's dress to get dirty is an expression of affluence, slow movements are about precision. The difference between the two characters' perception of Christophine's actions is that Rochester reads in them a confirmation of colonial stereotypes as inherent or biological truths about black women, whereas Antoinette understands them as sociological points. (22)

But this "sociological" explanation could be read as the process of nativisation or indigenisation, in its sensitivity and development in response to the cultural landscape of the Caribbean in the aftermath of a history of plantation slavery. The isolation and difference Antoinette learns to feel begins in her Dominican youth. Rhys's portrayal of the creole family sheds morbid light on the sustainability of that exploitative colonial culture in a new (post-plantation slavery) environment, or one not artificially created to sustain it. Rhys conjures forth an ethnic chasm which Antoinette and the creoles, who are essentially the fruit of the union between England and the Caribbean, are unable to bridge despite their connections.

The ethnic chasm is represented in the novel in an exchange between the young Antoinette and the daughter of the servant Maillotte, a girl named Tia. While Antoinette does befriend Tia (“Soon Tia became my friend too and I met her nearly every morning at the turn of the road to the river” [21]), the exchange between them (in which they switch clothes symbolic of class or wealth of station) prefigures Antoinette’s later British incommensurability. Zygmunt Bauman’s subtle observation is apposite here. As he writes in *Modernity and Ambivalence*, “it is not the failure to acquire native knowledge which constitutes the outsider as a stranger but the *incongruent existential constitution* of the stranger [...] which makes the native knowledge unassimilable” (76-77). Antoinette is the product of an artificial world, fundamentally dependent on the ill-gotten riches of slavery and plantation capital. While a friendship between the two girls might have resulted if they had in fact engaged each other on the same plane, the inequality that overdetermines their relationship already dooms any true friendship between the two. Antoinette describes herself as if pretending or acting like an English girl, but she cannot simply *be* an English girl or revert to one. But in the same way she cannot be black, soon-to-be “native” because of the history of colonialism in the islands refuses to be erased (without the Creole class’s utter obliteration). The ontological resistance put in place by virtue of the history and legacy of race between them is too great to surmount, no matter Antoinette’s familiarity with local custom, with her apparent naturalisation, with her acquisition of native knowledge.

Because the novel focuses on the particular dilemmas and failure to become naturalised to the Caribbean landscape by the white protagonist, some commentators then contrast Antoinette’s failure to indigenise to either black or white cultures with the black slaves who have a community on the island. But many in the black community too unravel their culture like a carpet on flat ground. And critics fail to recognise the inability to acclimatise on the part of the blacks. In fact there are many doomed

characters in the book; for example, the loyal servant Christophine maintains a spiritual connection to the land from which she arises, which keeps her aloof, distant, and removed from the land she currently inhabits.

What does this indicate? The history of the island is such that wherever Antoinette goes she is interpellated as the white other; her skin colour initiates a cascading sequence of signifiers of historical hurt. As Johannessen notes, “*Wide Sargasso Sea* exposes on the individual psychological level one of the most disturbing rationales behind the colonizing project: the constitution of the other as non-form, the negation of acculturation, and hence, the impossibility of convergence of individual and nation” (892).

This insight is clear when juxtaposing Antoinette’s native wisdom with that of the true foreigner: “Rochester.” Logically the characters most suitable for bridging the chasm between the two main socio-racial worlds in the novel are the half-castes and Creoles. With connections on both sides of the ethnic meridian, Antoinette should be able to serve as the conduit or interstitial fluid through which the racial factions can communicate and understand each other. Jean Rhys chooses instead to portray a doomed character. Antoinette personifies the Creole situation. Belonging nowhere, hurt and hated by virtually every other racial sect, Antoinette goes crazy, the stereotyped outcome for such hybridized persons. “Then soon the madness that is her and in all these white Creoles comes out.” (96).

Other miscegenated figures in the text do not have the same imputed fate. This is the difference between Creole as island-born White – the sense of *Wide Sargasso Sea* – and the modern understanding of creole as “mixed-race” individual of the Caribbean. Alexander Cosway and Antoinette’s other mixed-race relatives are able to position and articulate their position within the island racial economy and are not positioned as outside and other. Nor do they, in Bauman’s terms, imbue themselves with the

existential constitution of the stranger, which is exactly the ideological self-delusion Roger Mason, inculcates in the young Antoinette: “once I would have said “my cousin Sandi” but Mr Mason’s lectures had made me shy about my coloured relatives” (42).

6.5 Critical To/Eponymy

In part two of Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rochester arrives in Jamaica and after a few weeks of illness is promptly wed to a woman engrained in this subtropical society from birth – a Creole. Antoinette’s otherness is immediately invoked from his perspective. “I did not love her. I was thirsty for her, but that is not love. I felt very little tenderness for her, she was a stranger to me, a stranger who did not think or feel as I did” (58).

In this way, Rhys extends the conventional discourses of thirst, greed, avarice, exploitation usually ascribed to colonialism unto Rochester and suggests him as colonial symbol. His love for Antoinette is revealed, through first person point-of-view, as the exploitation Césaire boils down for the coloniser: that of adventurer and the pirate (*Discours*). Indeed the novel consolidates this position as representative of the colonial whites. From the eavesdropping Antoinette we hear the gossip that other people spread about the family. When Annette gets married to Mr Mason, the people question his motives for marrying her – she can dance and is very pretty they say but, “Dance! He didn’t come to the West Indies to dance – he came to make money as they all do” (30).

The conventional flip side then would seem to be a clear allegorisation of the Caribbean in the form of Antoinette. The natural hazards and frustrations of a tropical climate, the fecundity, the fertilisation of decay, beauty and impermanence, would seem to be extended to Antoinette by default. And this is the aspect of the situation that Rhys cleverly problematizes, just as Rizal does – to the frustration of a certain set of his critics – in selecting Creole heroes for his national novel, only to saddle the whole weight of national allegorisation on them.

What Rhys suggests is an allegorical affinity with critical toponymy and colonial nesomania. Rochester, just as his colonizer forebears, exemplifies the flip-side of Benítez-Rojo's concept of the repeating island (*la isla que se repite*). Benítez-Rojo, it will be recalled, famously articulates a postmodern logic of Caribbean culture and performance he calls "the repeating island." For Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean – that marvellous place of "sociocultural fluidity," "ethnological and linguistic clamor," "historiographic turbulence" (these are all terms he uses to describe the Caribbean archipelago), of creolisation, *supersyncretism*, heterogeneity – is *best* thought of in *metaphorical* terms. Benítez-Rojo goes so far as to write that "to persevere in the attempt to refer the culture of the Caribbean to geography – other than to call it a meta-archipelago – is a debilitating and scarcely productive project" (24).

Elizabeth DeLoughrey interestingly tempers this celebration with a reminder, demonstrating how the concept of the repeating island "has ample historical precedence in British imperialism," which is, of course, "an older and more pernicious model of colonial island expansion" (*Routes*, 26). All it takes is a glance at the "long colonial history of mapping island spaces" to recognise a pathology of "nesomania," or "desire for islands" symptomatic of European empires (6).

In direct contrast to Benítez-Rojo's approach, which dismisses attempts to locate an original island, DeLoughrey considers, "the "root" or originary island" of British imperialism: England. As DeLoughrey points out, England can only call itself an island if it suppresses Scotland and Wales. And the United Kingdom exists because of its colonial *expansion* overseas, *first*, into the territory of its immediate neighbours (for e.g. Ireland) and then a rapid, we could say fractal, replication in seemingly random remote locations farther overseas such as Singapore, Jamaica, India, Guyana, Australia, Canada, the Falklands, Belize.

According to colonial logic, nature mandated Europeans to exercise their propensity to rule. Thus, England's relatively small size "justified" its desire for colonies. Writing in the pages of *The Spectator*, nineteenth Century British Colonial Secretary C. B. Adderley offered the view that, the "little island" of Britain "wants not energy, but only territory and basis to extend itself; its sea-girt home would then become the citadel of one of the greatest of the empires" (878).¹⁷²

One way of interpreting Rochester then, who desires territory and the means to wealth, and who apprehends both in the figure of Antoinette, is as a symbol of this repeating colonial logic. Such is the logic that dooms their relationship from the start, forebodingly prefigured in Rhys's description of an Edenic garden at the start of the novel. Rochester, desiring territory and the means to wealth, sees both in the figure of Antoinette and, consequently, their wedding is like an annexation, in which he controls and "repeats" his ordered image on Antoinette.

Colonial "order" is precisely the term that motivates Rochester (and the entire colonial enterprise). The Renaissance is likely best thought of as an enterprise that sought to order the chaotic new worlds that opened up after the "discovery" of the new world. New species had to be admitted and classified, new lands charted, prompting parallel explosions of creativity and scientific activity, and discovery in other fields. But these discoveries were all classified and codified in a Linnéan manner, to cope with the newly-observed and profound fecundity of the world.

In the same way, Rochester grows leery of the apparent explosion of nature he witnesses in the Caribbean, and feels a concomitant need to establish order. This colonial desire, or crisis-response is not unique to the Caribbean and the new world however. In Southeast Asia too, we see the expression of a similar colonial desire in, for

¹⁷² Drawing from a secondary source (Hyam 16), who only uses the surname, DeLoughrey attributes this quote to one "C. S. Adderley." This seems to be an error; the quote, taken from one of Adderley's debates published in the pages of *The Spectator* of August 19, 1854, is signed "C. B. A.," for Charles Bowyer Adderley (no "s" middle initial).

illustrative purposes, Sir Frank Swettenham's *British Malaya: An Account of the Origin and Progress of British Influence in Malaya*. In this work Swettenham declares that while "It is an article of popular belief that Englishmen are born sailors; probably it would be more true to say that they are born administrators" (v). This is because, according to Swettenham, unlike seamanship there are no schools where the British may learn to administrate their colonial holdings, and yet, he goes on, no one but a sailor, "a midshipman ... would have willingly embarked upon a voyage to discover the means of introducing *order* into the Malay States, when that task was *thrust upon the British Government* in 1874" (v, emphasis mine). In Swettenham's account, the colonial enterprise is justified by the colonial logic of the white man's burden.

To use DeLoughrey's phrase, all these cases illustrate how Britain is articulated as an expanding isle that is extended through the work of "transoceanic male agents of history" (*Routes*, 26). We get, with British colonialism, the projection of imperial England's cultural topography onto other spaces in repetitive fashion. DeLoughrey argues that the colonizers repeated what they knew of Europe, so that we get so many Britains. This is also an easy point to illustrate; just think of all the New Englands there are: New York, Little Britain, Nova Scotia, New Albion, New Hebrides, New Ireland, all of the places named after Victoria.

Place names are significant for the postcolonial environment because this practice often involves a politics and power struggle. Bland, or dull colonial names, such as Georgetown (or Bertha), often belie vast epistemological violence. Some placenames actually reflect the violence that established them as landmarks, but most names function as signifiers that float free from the violence, political, cultural, social, or epistemological, unless that history is made known or disseminated. According to critical toponymists, place naming is "a political practice *par excellence* of power over space" (Pinchevski and Torgovnik). As Peter Hulme has

observed, “the gesture of discovery” is also “a ruse of concealment” (*Colonial Encounters*, 1).

Thus, Rochester’s insistence on renaming Antoinette “Bertha” belies the colonial desires he hides behind the ceremony of love and wedding. The scene in which this act of re-naming occurs, is often read as a simple desire to “Anglicize”: “‘Don’t laugh like that, Bertha.’ ‘My name is not Bertha; why do you call me Bertha?’ ‘Because it is a name I’m particularly fond of. I think of you as Bertha.’ ‘It does not matter,’ she said” (86).

The scene has a flipside in Antoinette’s suspicion of Rochester’s laugh. In both, laughter is a sign that disrupts the illusory image and fantasy the narrator casts on the other. For Rochester, Antoinette’s laugh does not fit the image of Bertha he has constructed for her. For Antoinette, Rochester’s laugh reveals the colonial other beneath the fantasy of their racial homogeneity she wanted to believe in. And these colonial fantasies operate both in the psychological and the administrative or political domain.

As Ángel Rama writes of the Spanish conquerors, it was only the lands of the newly conquered and colonised that would provide a “blank space” on which to construct an urban project ideally suited to the reigning social order of the day: colonial administration. In the same way, Rochester’s attempt at re-naming Antoinette is exactly his effort to conceal her otherness. Antoinette and Rochester come together in union according to the logic of colonialism. Without its justification, Rochester has no basis to extend himself there. Thus, with colonization, just as in his relationship with Antoinette, the world is ordered according to an ideal of empire consisting of a palimpsestic new creation. As Joseph Roach states, “the New World ... [was] not so much discovered as truly created there” (4).

And thus, *Wide Sargasso Sea* reveals a crucial qualification that must be applied to DeLoughrey’s otherwise perceptive critique of Benítez-Rojo’s concept. While it is

true that British and Spanish colonial conquerors and “administrators” often merely added the adjective “new” to ordinary European names (New Spain, New Galicia, New Granada) etc. (4), the difference here is that according to Rama, the Spanish colonisers “did not [simply] reproduce” (4, my emphasis). Instead, Rama reveals, they gradually, through trial and error, ... filtered the legacy of the past through the clarifying, rationalising, and systematising experience of colonisation...” according to a logic derived from the imperial enterprise. The key to this logic, for Rama, following Foucault, is the word “order.” Which, as we saw, appears in Southeast Asian colonial-era documents as well. It is a discourse that appears in the colonial archive very frequently.

Rochester’s attempt at renaming is not simply a reproduction of some European antecedent, it is a violent palimpsestic re-organising of Antoinette into a *new* creation according to the rules of his colonial logic. And thus, Rochester controls and administers her while in England. The re-naming presages her insanity. The “madness” that Antoinette experiences is evidence of her natural inability to subscribe to this logic.

As Ángel Rama points out, “even [what is] imagined as a mere transposition of European antecedents, in fact represented the urban dream of a new age” (5). Instead, colonial cities were determined in part by twin colonial processes of erasure and superimposition according to the logic of empire, or colonial administration.

The parallels to *Noli Me Tangere* may not seem as obvious on this issue. But Ibarra also desires a marriage of concerns between Spain and the Philippines. And his work and desires also end in frustration and failure. Just as in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Rizal focuses primarily on the elite classes and their struggles to construct a harmonious existence. Crucially, Rizal reveals how their efforts are continually disrupted by those on the margins.

While Rhys uses “landscape as a frightful, menacing backdrop through her appropriation of Thornfield Hall as a parallel space to the Caribbean plantation house” (Paravisini-Gebert, “Colonial and postcolonial Gothic: The Caribbean” 253), Rizal has Ibarra’s efforts at national consolidation under the sign of the Creole disrupted by an excess and proliferation of subject-positions at the margins of society. Scenes that might be read as national allegory, parties, houses, meetings of representative figures are interspersed with eavesdropping conversations, disruptions by the poor and needy, and other subject positions that continually insist on enlarging this interpretive frame.

In Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* the natural environment is a force that seems to operate on its own volition. The trope of the garden appears early in the novel. The garden is and was tended by slaves – and without this input, this slave labour, the garden goes to bush, wild, unkempt. The garden now lacks the colonial order but the history is there just as in walking through it the smell of dead flowers mixes with the living (19).

Antoinette’s husband himself, feels the “place is [his] enemy and on [her] side” (117). Of course it is inevitable that the landscape and nature would side with the anti-colonial in that the colonial mercantile logic demanded a heavy price from the environment with its plantations – a price subsidised by forced contribution of black bodies and blood. It required vast amounts of energy and capital to transform natural economies of the islands and those who subscribed to this unsustainable lifestyle would view nature’s entropy as a malevolent force. Thus, without the capital and slave-system to support it, nature itself seems to indicate that the time of the Creole plantation owners is past. In works of literature, this idea is represented tropically and archetypally with the image of the ruined house and garden. Antoinette’s description of the overgrown garden and her family’s ruined estate, like the ruins of the Great House in the Walcott poem, point to nature’s alliance with a “native” – that is, counter-colonial – culture.

Rochester himself declares how he feels “very much a stranger” and that the place is “[his] enemy and on [Antoinette’s] side (*Wide Sargasso Sea* 117). As Nicole Matos argues in *Small Axe*, “the landscape of Dominica becom[es] almost an additional character, literally hostile to (the man we assume as) Rochester’s presence” (51). Antoinette’s passion then is more accurately referred to in Harris’s terms, that is “in a sense [...] a phenomenon of place and psyche” (*Selected Essays* 113).

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have emphasised the particular hybridity of the two protagonists and amalgamate cultures in the works in question to demonstrate the frustrated claims to land and national self-hood both characters evince. I compared the respective configurations of author to work and work to nation to reveal key points of incongruence between works. Creolisation is often invoked at the level of extreme abstraction, so that it could refer to far more than the simple, concrete descriptor of ethnic mixture. This comparative work highlights crucial areas of inquiry and unsettles and precludes any easy analogising of the two texts that recourse to *generalising* abstract theory might otherwise imply.

In the Glissantian sense, the Creolisation’s pliability as metaphor is easily deployed to encompass all aspects of relation to the Other. This general applicability renders the term resonant for diverse international situations. But such uses perhaps lead consequently to positions that deny creolisation’s political and economic power, as in Glissant’s own curiously explicit assertion that creolisation “probably has no political or economic power”.¹⁷³ This seems surprising coming from a theorist of Caribbean politics (in the broad sense) but it is the likely result of thought processes that work on the level of grand theory. Glissant’s observation here rings true in the Southeast Asian context

¹⁷³ Édouard Glissant, “Creolization and the Making of the Americas” in *Race, Discourse, and the Origin of the Americas*, ed. Vera Lawrence Hyatt and Rex Nettleford (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), pp. 286–75, p. 269.

where hybrid and creole identities are routinely subsumed under hegemonic racial categories inflected by religion. What power does the hybrid reality really provide?

And yet, theorists continually deploy this and related terms in ways that highlight their radical potential. Take the position of Lionnet and Shih who articulate an echo of “Stuart Hall or Françoise Vergès,” in their introduction to *The Creolization of Theory* (2011): “the strength of the concept [of creolisation] arises directly from its historical specificity” (Lionnet and Shih, 25). Because they take as foundational the Caribbean experience of the plantation economy, Shih and Lionnet subsequently declare that “creolization describes [...] not just any transculturation but “forced transculturation”” (25). These sorts of declarations might seem to lead to potentially aggrandised claims of the interventionist power of theoretical concepts based on identity assertions.

Moreover, if it is really necessary to highlight the originary historical specificity of the term, what use would it have in contexts alien to Caribbean plantation experience, for example, in the Southeast Asian context? Throughout this chapter I acknowledge the concept’s socio-historical moorings in Caribbean plantation slavery. But I also draw on the term’s theoretical cachet and Glissantian resonance, in order to abstract and re-deploy the term in the Southeast Asian context. To do so, I argue, is to highlight in both contexts – despite their historical uniqueness and specificity – how the hybrid constitution of the hegemonic category undermines the classificatory controls of those wielding ethnic homogeneity as a tool for opposing vocal minorities and maintaining political power.¹⁷⁴ Part of the power of the hybrid is thus its uncanny nature. In the limited and artificial racial, cultural, and social demarcations of identity presented by the state, the hybrid figure often presents itself uncannily. Where these racial demarcations are distinguished by political rights, restrictions, and powers, the hybrid

¹⁷⁴ This is the radical potential of such publications as *Found in Malaysia* (2010).

identity is seen as subversive to the state intent on establishing racially inflected myths of national origin. At the same time, however, the concept of the hybrid necessarily takes as partial constituent – a notion of originary belonging, and the idea of the creole highlights the dynamic nature of this notion as process.

A conventional postcolonial reading renders the terrors of the natural world in psychological terms as terrors of the self. But if we consider the conflation of the creeping doom of the natural world on the Creole heiress's lifestyle more literally, we can see that nature has invoked a revenge on the white family, (as in Carpentier, see Chapter Four). Again the gothic mode is invoked to figure the natural threat that coincides with native culture, but it is not completely reducible to that. The authorial harnessing of the natural environment facilitates a moral judgement on society and culture through literature.

In Rizal's *Noli Me Tangere* it is the social environment that is the functional element disrupting interpretative forces of national representation. Where the natural environment is invoked, it is invoked in more symbolic terms (the hills are places of *marronner* for instance). The creole linkage between the two texts is potentially a misleading one. But in examining the ways the concept fails to resemble its usage in the other context, useful readings that consider the contextual information surrounding each text emerge in new ways. A comparison is engendered by this instructive incongruence helpfully clarifying the true theoretical resemblances.

Rizal's and Rhys's work reveals that literature has the power to reify hard realities submerged for various reasons. The importance of Rhys's *antillanité* and Rizal's archipelagicity, is not so much an essentialist stance as one that provides the conditions of enunciatory possibility – to be creole, in this case, is to inhabit a critical position and perspective. It is a perspective that problematises entitlement. Through the

representation of the uncanny creole, the concept complicates articulations of national indigeneity and problematises easy gestures to a pre-colonial national culture.

In Rizal, the Creole class assumes its natural right of national leadership, but the organicity of the social landscape is too much for its inherited desire for colonial-like order. Ibarra anticipates the ascendancy of the Creole class, but his designs, though figured in altruistic terms, still suppose an inherent elitism that is insufficiently supported by the fickle forces struggling for livelihood on the ground. The Creole Romance at the moment of decolonisation renders allegorical, the problems the nation must surmount regarding who or what is acceptably organic to the nation; and the place of the Creole complicates any easy access to indigeneity.

University of Malaya

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

In this thesis I considered pairs of texts from across the ex-Indies. The selection of these particular works was neither a random nor a representative selection but rather strategic and interventionist. Rather than an inevitably failed attempt at a representative selection along national lines, I have selected a smattering of particular works that appeared near their nation's independence from among the archipelagic Caribbean and Southeast Asian territories. This is strategic and interventionist in that the fact of nearness to independence has a powerful effect on scholarship that surrounds the works in question; reading the novels against the grain of social identity-formation works to detour a specific type of conventional postcolonial reading. Put simply, independence is generally viewed as an anthropocentric celebration; works that emerge immediately after or prior to this event then become saddled with a representative function that is made to correspond with the nascent national concerns of the politically-dominant or newly-ascendant class.

But independence had profound implications for the non-human world too. Nature and the more-than-human world were viewed as providing a wealth of potent symbolic and discursive resources for solidifying and reinforcing ideological claims, especially those related to entitlement. I have purposefully read the novels in a way that includes the more-than-human world to demonstrate that strict socio-cultural anthropocentricity is partially a product of interpretation and not solely an aspect that arises naturally from the form and theme of early postcolonial texts. Many of the works, despite inevitably dealing with human social concerns, also crucially consider the place of humans in the natural environment and suggest or deem particular relationships with the land as appropriate.

The temptation to conflate socio-national concerns with environmental entitlement is a writerly and readerly tactic that is both inherited from – and wielded

against – colonial discourses. This conflation is characteristic of texts from both regions that emerge at the independence or “post-colonial” period. While the methodology of literary postcolonialism is cognisant of such issues, foregrounding ecocritical concerns – a practice recognised institutionally as “postcolonial ecocriticism” – can render a more nuanced and ideologically complicated account of this conflation. Moreover, via a specifically South-South comparison, problematic assumptions of indigenous erasure may be highlighted – assumptions historically disserved by postcolonial theory – by virtue of the instructive incongruence that results from reading literatures from these regions in tandem. The writers of both regions can contribute to the theory of each others’ archipelagos. When superimposed, the two regions’ discourses of nature, indigeneity, and national culture become blurry, but important points of incongruence are highlighted with productive implications for regional cultural policy and imaginative or literary significance.

In its desire to explore South-South, or periphery-periphery comparative formations from early “postcolonial” texts, the objective of this thesis corroborates DeLoughrey and Cilano’s observation in “Against Authenticity” that topics and texts within postcolonial studies are disserved when critically positioned as “*new directions in the field of ecocriticism*” (73). To reiterate, choosing works from both regions that appeared around the time of their nations independence works to suggest that ecocritical concerns are present in cultural formations and articulations emerging at the genesis of the properly postcolonial nation. Moreover, these concerns are not simply recent adoptions of first-world ethical proclivities, or a new-fangled trendy off-shoot of the global environmentalism of the North-Atlantic.

That said, what *is* novel about the direction of this study is that, by reading the works of the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia in tandem, I have suggested comparisons that are normally not considered in institutionally proscribed literary

analysis for reasons of academic territoriality as much as the geographical and cultural disparity of the two regions. Indeed, studies that look at both regions are rare in the extreme.¹⁷⁵ The dearth of such comparisons forms, in large part, the impetus for the investigation undertaken in this thesis.

The analytical heuristics that do place the works into mutual orbit are, in the first pair, the identification of a strategic utilisation of primitivism to contest colonial epistemologies (Alejo Carpentier and Ishak Haji Muhammad); the sublation of ethnic difference in the mythically indigenous female (Zee Edgell, Wilson Harris, and Lloyd Fernando); and the uncanny creole, a concept that complicates articulations of national indigeneity by detouring any easy gesture to a pre-colonial national culture (Jean Rhys and José Rizal).

If we take the ecocritical dimension of criticism more seriously within postcolonial studies, we get a complication of any easy reading according to national allegory. A sensitive approach to strategies of representation of landscape and postcolonial motives reveals benefits to postcolonially-inflected mimetic readings that take into account specificities of either region without a procrustean moulding to conventional theoretical frames – in the case of postcolonialism, this convention is the overly hasty or over-drawn search for “resistance” so that an aesthetic of oppugnancy results.

While it may first seem overly laborious to provide so much justification for a comparison of literatures – when the short answer to the question of “can we compare these?” is “yes, of course!” (Though that does not answer the question that asks if we should) – I hope the reviews and deployments of comparative theory, the arguments toward South-South postcolonial ecocritical comparison, and the engagements with

¹⁷⁵ Recall Murray, Boellstorff, and Robinson’s failure to discover models of this sort.

candidate comparative methodologies presented in Part One made their value self-evident.

A long historical legacy of misapprehension belies the novelty that the dearth of contemporary comparative Indies' scholarship suggests. Ancient *geographical* misapprehensions evolved into colonial ideological ones. Resemblances between the Caribbean and Maritime Southeast Asia then began to be realised materially through imperialism. The environment of these regions was designed and ordered according to colonial logic. Anti-colonial resistance, in opposing impositions of sameness, oddly begin to resemble one another so that, in postcolonial literary formations, a counter-discursive equivalence ironically results in a perception of sameness and resemblance of its own. In this way, these regions are thrust into relation and become, as I claim, candidates for comparison.

Presenting this historical and theoretical relation prepares the grounds for comparison. The *comprehensive*, or *apprehensive*, historical and theoretical grounding Part One provides thus demands that the cultural products of the two regions be placed into productive relation.

While the fact of a dearth of scholarship in a subject (in this case comparative Indies' studies) does not automatically presume the existence of lacunae desperately needing attention – because the fact of an absence of scholarship might be due to its irrelevance or insignificance – in this case, given the historical connections in the colonial imaginary and the legacies of that imaginary, I hope I have demonstrated the ideological and material grounds for comparison. While ecocritical studies pretends universality in its category of the earth, it has ben strikingly provincial in its approach and application; thus, postcolonial ecocriticism stands as a potential corrective to its necessary perspective. I hope I have also succeeded in avoiding problems in perspective by consciously questioning the implicit assumption of equivalence in many comparative

literary projects. By strategically highlighting incongruences in comparison, I hope too to have avoided re-inserting these works in a pre-determined or always-already reified grid. This is because the works in question can not be placed in assumed national equivalence when a disproportionality in audience, in translation, and in global literary circulation is clearly in operation.

As I hope is now clear, the value of comparing literary works such as these and in this manner is that ideological and philosophical constructions of their confluences of space and place, belonging, ancestry, and indigeneity are revealed. The literary appeals to these constructed forms are then complicated and compared.

Taking into account the historical specificity of the regions immediately complicates attempts to think about their literary products along the lines of analogous structures. But, as I have shown in Chapter Three, it does not invalidate this approach. Rather, it is precisely because of this ability to reveal incongruences within theoretical concepts that are often employed in an imperial or general way to diverse regions that a more respectful and dialogical reading can occur. The methodology of analogous structures, as presented in this thesis, precludes considerations of the works as necessarily representative *in the same way* of the regions it purports to theorise.

Maria Lima critiques the conventional practice of Comparative Literature which systematises and categorises literature of the postcolonies in order to “compare” them by standards reflecting the norms of the dominant culture (*Teaching* 9). Following Lima, I have laboured to move away from the work of insisting on the importance of such literature and scholarship to the West; instead, I have focused on the relevance of ecocriticism in the postcolonial Global South for *other nations and cultures of the Global South*.

Ecocritical perspectives in postcolonial literary analysis sustain the politically necessary work of mimetic reading while providing a suitably universal theoretical

category that yet protects the works against over-contextualisation, and reductionist forms of allegorical reading. As is obvious, I do not suggest Caribbean and Malayan works and literatures are strictly analogous. Such a claim is only true at the most banal level of generalisation. While I take as premise that the performative strategies between the two resemble one another in especially their appeals to nature, these appeals to nature can often be made at the cost of nature – just as appeals to an anti-colonial spirit can also ironically replicate colonial concerns. The works in question often work to promote national consolidation “at the expense of those very peoples and places on the margins that their fiction sought to rescue” (Handley, *New World Baroque*: 117). That is, appeals to the indigenous, the primitive, and to the natural are often made by elites who then exploit the moral and political advantage this provides to articulate a national subject which occludes the legitimate subject positions of those in the margins it has essentialised and consolidated.

I have used a brand of postcolonially-inflected ecocriticism as vector for a re-reading of works from different archipelagic regions. In doing so, I attempt to address three claims: that traditional or conventional postcolonial readings which contest colonial claims are no longer sufficient rubrics by which to analyse the literature in question for contemporary concerns. Second, I suggest that overly-particular assessments of such literature overlooks important elements that are only revealed when examined in tandem or in comparison. And third, I insist that when comparing overarching methodologies can also blind us to relevant concerns ostensibly available only in historically situated readings, that wider comparative readings alone make special assumptions on the national boundedness of the texts that come with a national qualifier. Thus, while it is dangerous to consider the novel an epiphenomenon of the nation and its particular history, it is also dangerous to tactlessly extract the novel from

its material coordinates in a wider comparative reading on the “place-less sea” of tidalectics or any other methodological abstraction.

What emerges from a comparative project of this nature is a method and justification for distinguishing between what otherwise, from the level of theoretical abstraction, might be wrongly comprehended as indiscriminable pairs, or superficially analogous structures. It is my argument in this thesis that postcolonial ecocriticism provides a most useful perspective to consider these points of instructive incongruence.

University of Malaya

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