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Inter/Transbiotic Memory Traces, Transculturation, and Decolonization in Inter-American Literature

Abstract

By linking ecological and postcolonial issues as a theoretical approach to an analysis of literature, this essay's starting point is that there is an existential link between humans and nature/landscape, outer and inner landscape. Furthermore, one of the principal themes in inter-American literatures is the conquest, exploitation and destruction of nature/landscape as well as its resurrection as *locus amoenus*, an immaculate Edenic sanctuary or El Dorado. Thus, nature in the literatures of the American continent symbolizes a temporal, spatial, and cultural in-betweenness characterized by the brutalization of space and people rooted in the past and disseminated in the present in rhizomic ways. It externalizes the spectral feature of inherent, repressed forms of violence that return in response to disavowal and make their presence felt at the levels of lived experience, imagination and enunciation—forms which together constitute the political, cultural and ecological unconscious of the inter-American experience. The objective of this essay is to analyze the mnemonic process that translates this double brutalization in creative works by Margaret Atwood (Canada), Linda Hogan (United States), Orlando Romero (United States), Toni Morrison (United States), Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique), and Manoel de Barros (Brazil).

Keywords: Transculturalization, Decolonization, Memory, Inter-American Literatures, El Dorado, Nature, Eden, Patrick Chamoiseau, Manoel de Barros, Margaret Atwood, Toni Morrison

1. Of Memory Traces and the Brutalization of Space and People

According to Édouard Glissant (*Discourse* 146), “[t]he landscape has its language.” In “Elegía,” Nicolás Guillén asserts that “*Hay que aprender a recordar / lo que las nubes no pueden olvidar [...]*” (“You have to learn to remember what the clouds cannot forget”). [1] Whereas Glissant’s statement affirms the relationship between human beings and nature—someone observing/describing nature—and the ontological existence of nature-in-itself, Guillén’s lines emphasize the importance and necessity of human beings not only to view, picture, and represent nature, but to understand, decipher, and remember its messages. Wilson Harris formulates the relationship between humans and their surroundings as follows: “There is a dialogue there between one’s internal being, one’s psyche, and the nature of the place, the landscape” (Gilkes 33). If, according to these three thinkers, there is an existential link between man and nature/landscape, outer and inner landscape, it is important not only to reveal its characteristics, but also to examine how writers translate this “dialogue” on the levels of theme, style, and structure: how they express perceptions of living nature in their creative works.

In the Americas, the colonizers, driven by utopian ideas and material greed, landscaped nature from ‘savage’ wilderness to ‘cultivated’ garden, resulting in earthscapes and seascapes imbued with violated bodies, minds and places. In this sense, landscape/seascape/nature (their physical attributes) are symbols of history. Thus, Glissant writes: “Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history” (*Discourse* 11).

One of the principal characteristics of colonization, in the Americas and elsewhere, is dislocation. From autochthonous empires, European colonization, independence and nation building to our digital times, the American continent has been characterized by diverse forms and practices of violent dislocation and disjunctive experience. This experience of transcultural coloniality as an ongoing process of interethnic domination and resistance, which is one of the most important common denominators linking nations in their difference throughout the continent, involves space, time, language, identity, ethos and worldview, that is the entire cultural episteme, class, politics and economics. As such, it has a decisive impact on citizenship and nationhood. In this sense, Antonio Cornejo-Polar (147) argues that nation-spaces in the Americas are “traumáticamente dismembradas” (“traumatically dismembered”) and characterized by “heterogeneidade conflitiva” (“conflictive heterogeneity”). This ethnocultural heterogeneity has its roots in the diverse forms and phases of (neo/post)colonial dislocation with its implicit migratory processes: those who move forcefully or freely do so without leaving behind their ethnocultural mind-set determined by specific belief systems, social values and mores—attitudes that usually differ from those native to the land. Thus, the diverse transcultural crossroads throughout the American continent constitute “*transfrontera* contact zones” (Saldívar 13-14) characterized not only by ethnocultural difference, but also different attitudes to landscape/nature. Both colonizers in the past and tourists in the present, for example, are linked by a perception that imposes attitudes to landscape of the homeland on the place of arrival, or views new landscapes through the epistemic lenses of the homeland.

Furthermore, the Western definition of humanity has always been based on diverse types of otherization: the (non)human as an uncivilized and animalized other. This anthropomorphic and racist idea, which negates the other's independent self, continues to justify processes of neocolonization, invasion, and/or domination. In this sense, inter-American dislocation is deeply rooted in the brutalization of space, human beings and the entire biota. With reference to this dislocation qua in-betweenness, Glissant argues that "[...] the poetics of the American continent" are characterized by "a search for temporal duration" with writers "struggling in the confusion of time [...] this exploded, suffered time [...] linked to 'transferred' space. [...], the 'memory' of which has become stamped on the spatial reality that we all live. [...] Space [...] seems to me open, exploded, rent. There is something violent in this American sense of literary space" (*Discourse* 144-145); a violence that links the past and the present and has a decisive impact on a community's identity. Speaking about the French Caribbean, he argues that the violence of the plantation system did not allow "[o]ur historical consciousness" to "be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment [...]" but came together in the context of shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces" (*Discourse* 61-62). The result is an erasure of "collective memory" rendering "lived history as a steadily advancing neurosis" (*Discourse* 65).

Mapped on the body, soul and mind of human beings and the environment they inhabit, this physical and epistemic violence, I argue, is a foundational sociocultural condition of societies throughout the Americas. Space, time, memory and identity are linked in that identity is shaped by connections to the physical world within a temporal process. Words, through memory, recreate a world of references and it is this world of references that (re)constitutes identity within a historical process: an identity rooted in a culturally specific ethos and worldview and articulated in a specific language. If this equation of subject, language, ethos, and worldview is broken, then identity is dislocated. Mythopoetic articulation is able to reverse this situation through a revision of history and thereby relocate identity within a re-membered cultural episteme that is, the founding categories, processes of naming in a variety of discourses that give meaning to things, events, etc., values through which we know and interpret things and act accordingly. Multi-ethnic inter-American artists play, write, sing, paint, photograph, sculpture and perform sites of memory through the process of remembrance in order to come to terms with a traumatic past and its effects in the present. The importance of this *working through* the events of the past resides precisely in the sedimentation of a traumatically lived experience into present historical consciousness. In the process, a dislocated identity may be relocated not necessarily in one specific place but between places, that is in a diasporic space characterized by overlapping, juxtaposed, or transculturated epistemes.

Since one of the principal themes in inter-American literatures is the conquest, exploitation and destruction of nature/landscape/place as well as its resurrection as *locus amoenus*, an immaculate Edenic sanctuary or El Dorado qua utopia, I contend that nature in inter-American texts symbolizes a temporal, spatial, and cultural in-betweenness characterized by the brutalization of space and people rooted in the past and disseminated in the present in rhizomic ways. It externalizes the spectral nature of inherent, repressed forms of violence that return in response to

disavowal and make their presence felt at the levels of lived experience, imagination and enunciation—forms which together constitute the political, cultural and ecological unconscious of the inter-American experience. In this sense, nature functions as an allegory of human decadence in William Faulkner; human errantry, hope and frustration in Alejo Carpentier; human regeneration in Ernest Hemingway; social exploitation and violation of the natural order (humans = maize) in Miguel Asturias; human *Dasein* in João Guimarães Rosa; or as monuments, memory, and mythopoeic setting in Patrick Chamoiseau, Édouard Glissant, Derek Walcott, and Maryse Condé, to name just a few. From this angle, inter-American creative works constitute mnemonic sites where an unspeakable experience is re-created and thus formed into an object of conscious comprehension through cultural negotiation; a negotiation based on imagination—a key word in this process—that resists the silence of forgetting and distortion by attributing a circular, open meaning to the present in which the past accumulates toward the future.

How do writers establish the link between identity and place that is, between an individual's/group's inner landscape and their surroundings, their outer landscape? I contend that it is through memory and imagination. If according to Paul Ricoeur (539) four types of memory traces can be distinguished—"la trace écrite" ("the written trace") or "trace documentaire" ("documentary trace"); "la trace psychique" ("the psychic trace"); "la trace cérébrale" ("the cerebral trace") and "la trace matérielle" ("the material trace")—and if following Patrick Chamoiseau (*Écrire* 120), memories "irradient dans la Trace, elles *l'habitent* d'une présence-sans-matière offerte à l'émotion. Leurs associations, Traces-mémoires [...] sont jeu des mémoires qui se sont emmêlées. [...] Leurs significations demeurent évolutives" ("radiate in the Trace, they inhabit the trace with a presence-without-matter offered to emotion. Their associations, Trace-memories, [...] are a play of entangled memories. [...] Their significations remain evolutionary") and "me font entendre-voir-toucher-imaginer l'emmêlée des histoires qui ont tissé ma terre" ("make me understand-see-touch-imagine the entanglement of the histories that have woven my land"), then, memory, the complex process of remembering and forgetting, has to be situated in its geographical, social, and cultural context. Toni Morrison resurrects settings, events, and agents of the past by means of four different types of memory nourished by "the act of imagination": "my own recollections [...] the recollection of others", "memories within" as "subsoil", and what she calls "emotional memory" ("Site" 111, 119). Since memory is performatively structured, the act of remembering, argues Huysen, is rather "an act of *recherche* than of recuperation" (85). This means that memory is a function of subjectivity that through its intrinsic mobile nature highlights a sense of loss (*le temp perdu*): feeling/imagination in search of past knowledge. Transferred from the individual, lived experience of the African ancestors to the collective imagination, memory, as Morrison asserts, emphasizes the discontinuity between the lived and remembered past. Afro-diasporic *milieus* and *lieux de mémoire* are constituted by versions of the past generated and sustained by imagined/invented memory.

How do writers translate memory, in itself a dislocation between and within times and spaces inhabiting all elements of the biota, on the level of discourse and plot? When stones talk, butterflies think, clouds remember, plants forget, trees feel and animals rationalize in literary texts, are we

dealing with allegorical imagination, magical realism, *lo real maravilloso*, the fantastic, or is this rather a specific type of memory whose connections to its object or source are mediated less by recollection than by projection and creation?

How do contemporary writers in the Americas come to terms with the legacy of the past, which they have not experienced? How do they transform traumatic memory—the brutalization of space and people and the implicit forms and practices of physical and epistemic violence—into narrative memory? In other words, how do they deal with what Wilson Harris (90) has memorably called the “living fossil of buried cultures” and the narrative voice in Morrison’s *A Mercy* (160) has described as the devastating result of this violent foundational condition, namely “the withering inside that enslaves and opens the door for what is wild”?

The way people inhabit place and space, then, is a key issue in the inter-American context of violent (re)appropriation, mobility and dis/relocations. Here it is important to remember that a sense of place means belonging, being at home in a place as well as longing for a place-as-home. Thus, a sense of place is crucial for a community’s cultural episteme, that is, the interwoven relationship between ethos—an individual’s place in a specific ethnocultural context, especially the way (s)he imagines this subject position—and worldview, that is, how (s)he views space from this place. Since in the Americas the equation of subject, language, ethos, worldview is dislocated because of a forced mobility that has prevented the majority of Americans from owning land—which in itself could be seen as a crucial factor for the masses’ alienation from environmental issues throughout the Americas—it is important to examine how this sense of place is developed with regard to identity. Are we confronted with a text’s colonial or decolonial attitude with regard to the culture-nature divide? How do texts translate the link between human and nonhuman dislocation, their in-between being-in-the-world?

In other words, what type of memory translates the ecological unconscious that imbues the relation between human beings, their environment and the rest of the biota? If for Fredric Jameson (1992) the “political unconscious” is the simultaneously absent and present because desired cultural revolution that would transform an unjust hegemony of the political system into a just democracy, then one could define the ecological unconscious as the simultaneously absent and present because desired ecological transformation that would bring about a change of the hegemonic and exploitative vision with respect to the biota. A change of vision and our attitudes with regard to the plant and animal world—a biotic ethics—is necessarily based on a change of cultural imagination, especially the internalized systems, thought/speech disposition that generate specific social practices, what Bourdieu (1977) in his analysis of the ‘*habitus*’ described as the “cultural unconscious.” According to Lawrence Buell (170) this new ecological ethics is based on a “compromise of reinhabitation” that “implies the extension of a moral and, sometimes, even legal position to the nonhuman world.” In this sense, for Charles Taylor the process of literary rememorization opens as it constitutes a “moral space, a space in which issues are raised concerning what is right and what is wrong, what is worth doing or not, what makes sense and is of importance for one and what is trivial and secondary” (28). In the following, I want to examine the

space of literary memory as moral/social/cultural space—a space constituted by inter/transbiotic mnemonic traces filled with the writer’s emotion and imagination—in select creative works by Margaret Atwood (Canada), Linda Hogan (United States), Orlando Romero (United States), Toni Morrison (United States), Patrick Chamoiseau (Martinique), and Manoel de Barros (Brazil). [2]

2. Into the Wild: Inter/Transbiotic Identity in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing*

Margaret Atwood’s novel *Surfacing* is the story of a young woman who returns to northern Quebec, to the remote island of her childhood with her lover and two friends, to investigate the mysterious disappearance of her father. Throughout the journey that lasts about one week, the protagonist is flooded with memories and realizes that going home means entering not only another place, but other places and times, and accepting the multiple others in one’s inner and outer landscape. In the process, memory condenses diverse places, times and species at a present crossroads where the interior and the city, culture and nature as well as human beings and nonhumans meet in a tension-laden relationship.

The journey into the interior of Quebec is simultaneously a constant imaginary moving back and forth between the present and the protagonist’s childhood and adolescence. It is the journey of an adult woman haunted by the traumatic experience of an abortion and the subsequent breaking off with her parents. In this sense, the journey in search of her father is also an attempt at establishing contact with her dead mother and her own self: an individual memory (Bergson) imbued with what Ricoeur has termed *mémoire des proches* set in collective, social memory (Halbwachs). Similar to Faulkner, but by means of shorter and less convoluted sentences, Margaret Atwood works the temporal flux, the changes of perspective and the focalization of the characters through the narrative voice to graph the unconscious impulses in her protagonist’s mind. In the process, the protagonist’s memory reveals diverse forms and practices of violence that human beings inflict upon each other and the environment within a network of power relations characterized by domination and exploitation. To become conscious of the disavowal of a violence that haunts its *Verleugnung* and to be able to integrate the dislocated and belated traumatic experience as sedimented memory, the protagonist has to:

be more careful about my memories, I have to be sure they’re my own and not the memories of other people telling me what I felt, how I acted, what I said: if the events are wrong the feelings I remember about them will be wrong too, I’ll start inventing them and there will be no way of correcting it, the ones who could help are gone. (72)

This process of conscientization, then, requires the deconstruction of “the memories fraudulent as passports” that fill “a faked album”, this “paper house” (149) she has been living in until the beginning of this journey. Grounded in and propelled by social experience, this mnemonic deconstruction establishes a link between the political, cultural and ecological unconscious of Canadian society: the way Canadian (and, in a broader sense, Western) democracy in the 1970s was a hegemonic system based upon the oppression, subalternization and/or exploitation of all the

others constituting its inner margin in the name of a ruthless capitalistic economic order and its consumer culture.

Atwood emphasizes the destructive effects of this order, the disastrous moral cost in hypocrisy, alienation, and destructiveness that Western civilization entails, in the behavior, actions and thoughts of the protagonist's lover and friends; namely, their complete reification. Furthermore, the text's decolonial attitude lays bare the devastation of the land (fauna, flora, water resources, etc.) by electric companies, lumber business, and tourism in an allegorical way, mirroring human degeneration. At one point in the plot, for example, the protagonist and her three travelling companions come upon a camp of American hunters who had just killed and strung up a heron. This image haunts the protagonist and makes her wonder "what part of them [the hunters] the heron was, that they needed so much to kill it" (123). I argue that the text's decolonial attitude problematizes what the environmental philosopher Deane Curtin (145) has termed "environmental racism": "the connection, in theory and practice, of race and environment so that the oppression of one is connected to, and supported by, the oppression of the other." White Americans hunting game in Canadian woods desecrates the cosmogony and cosmology of First Nation Peoples. It could be seen as an extreme form of what Val Plumwood (*Environmental 4*) has called "hegemonic centrism": the self-privileging view underlying colonialism, racism, and sexism alike, all of which support each other and have historically been used for the purposes of exploiting nature while reducing nonhuman claims to a shared earth. In the process, we should not forget, as Plumwood ("Decolonizing" 53) argues, that the western definition of humanity has always depended on the presence of the not-human: the uncivilized and the animalistic. The justification for invasion and colonization proceeded and continues to proceed from this racist, anthropomorphic basis—one that negates the independent self of nature, or projects abjections upon nonhuman elements of the biota as a license to kill. A physical, psychological, epistemic and ecological violence resumed in the protagonist's question: "How did we get bad?" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 134). [3]

In order to think this question over the protagonist distances herself from her travel companions and moves into the wild—with a lake and the woods functioning as *locus amoenus*—in an attempt at reconstructing her alienated/ fragmented self and way of living and relating to others, human and nonhuman. This immersion into nature—which bears the characteristics of a ritual passage through the *limen* (Gennep)—constitutes a critique of Western civilization in that the protagonist wants to strip herself of all that is artificially induced by the ideological machinery of social normalization. In this sense, she wants to "stop being in the mirror" in order "not to see myself but to see" (186): to see herself through the other and the other in herself based on mutual respect. This implies that she does not hunt animals with a weapon but "with my hands," since "that will be fair" (193). This, then, is an inter/transbiotic identitarian stance expressed as follows: "I lean against a tree, I am a tree leaning" or, "I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (193). The protagonist's relocation of identity substitutes the difference-as-separation that characterizes the relationship between human beings and nonhumans for a diversity-in-relation in which humans and nonhumans coexist in a mutual give-and-take

exchange. Her identitarian reconstruction, then, carries the message that culture as a human product should not be seen in opposition to nature since human culture resides in and is determined by nature. In other words, our human existence and history is inextricably intertwined with those of other species.

3. Into Landscape: Inter/Transbiotic Epistemes and Transculturality in Linda Hogan's *Solar Storms*; Orlando Romero's *Nambé Year One*, and Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*

An inter/transbiotic relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds can also be discerned in Chickasaw poet, novelist and essayist Linda Hogan's novel *Solar Storms*. Other than in Atwood's text, however, the protagonist's identity is constituted by a interbiotic tribal memory—which unlike postmemory (Hirsch) links not only generations inter and intra-ethnically, but also diverse species in their lived experiences. It is through this type of memory that Angela in *Solar Storms* moves from cultural alienation to tribal consciousness. That is to say, she learns that besides Euro-American history and culture, there is a tribal-specific Native American consciousness that emphasizes connections rather than divisions between spiritual and material realms. In her creative and critical texts, Hogan strives to break down the culture/ nature dichotomy and heal the alienation between the human and nonhuman worlds. Echoing Chief Joseph's memorable statement made in early May 1877, at the last council between the Nez Perce Indians and representatives of the United States government before the outbreak of the Nez Perce War—"The earth and myself are of one mind. The measure of the land and the measure of our bodies are the same" (McLuhan 54)—Hogan has stated that "[w]e are all the same world inside different skins, and with different intelligences" (*Intimate* xiv). Thus, for Hogan there is no difference between the genocide of Native American peoples and the ongoing destruction of nature: "what happens to people and what happens to the land is the same thing" (*Dwellings* 89). The explicit sense of this deep link between matter and mind, land and body, expressed by Chief Joseph and Linda Hogan, is that mind is not the special province of human beings. The specific landscape from which a tribe emerges determines their ethos and worldview, providing tribal societies with the founding cultural categories and symbols, the classificatory schemes of sameness and difference, the mythopoetic processes of original naming and informing the language to articulate the underlying order of things and knowledge through which they interpret reality. Therefore, removal from this landscape initiates an alienation not only from many aspects of a tribal way of life, but also from the self as part of the tribe located within the landscape. [4] This explains that the ongoing experience of invasion, genocide, dispossession, colonization, relocation and ethnocide—the darker, bloody side of the American Dream—has disrupted the notion of home/ identity within First Nation cultures. This is also why so many characters in Native American fiction, do not feel at home both in their tribal culture, whose language they do not speak, and in the world of white culture where they occupy the outer margin, hovering as the invisible shadow over the colonizer's guilt-ridden racialized memory. [5] Thus, as Louis Owens (5) argued, "[t]he recovering or rearticulation of an identity, a process dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place as well as community [...] is at the center of American Indian fiction."

In *Solar Storms* Angela summarizes the identity quest as a journey in search of wholeness as follows: "I wanted an unbroken line between me and the past. I wanted not to be fragments and pieces left behind by fur traders, soldiers, priests, and schools" (77). After an odyssey through a series of foster homes, she decides to return to her place of birth, envisioning herself as water flowing back to its source. Set in the 1970s in the Great Lakes region, where scattered members of Cree, Anishinabe, and various other tribes fight against the construction of dams and reservoirs threatening to flood their homelands, the novel describes Angela's "falling into a lake" (26), the fertile waters of her great-grandmother's storytelling. Later, moving in a canoe up north, and surrounded by water, Angela gradually begins to live

inside water. There was no separation between us. I knew in a moment what water was. It was what had been snow. It had passed through old forests, now gone. It was the sweetness of milk and corn and it had journeyed through human lives. It was blood spilled on the ground. Some of it was the blood of my ancestors. [...] In that moment I understood I was part of the same equation as birds and rain (78-79).

Stories, the power of words, trigger Angela's thoughts and dreams, which link her to the world of plants and animals in that specific place. This falling into tribal nature-as-culture, where "everything merged and united" (177), where "the old ones" can be heard "in the songs of wolves" (176)—an act of interior consciousness by means of which life and identity are called into being within a *sacred hoop*—enables Angela to envision an alternative reality without borders: "Maybe the roots of dreaming are in the soil of dailiness, or in the heart, or in another place without words, but when they come together and grow, they are like the seeds of hydrogen and the seeds of oxygen that together create ocean, lake, and ice. In this way, the plants and I joined each other" (171). By joining forces with several other generations of women represented by Agnes, Dora-Rouge, and Bush, assuming responsibility for her younger half-sister, and relocating her self within place-as-space through water tropes, Angela enters and actively shapes tribal history and culture. Angela's reconstruction of identity and her subsequent communal agency, aided by a speaking nature (118) unleashing floodwaters against the roads of the intruders, align the energy of tribal people with the energy of nature through the power of words against the interference of white people living in disharmony with the earth.

Solar Storms, then, is a ceremonial representation of an integrated vision of reality set against sociocultural definitions of the self and the universe that are based on divisions and lead to the destruction of life on earth. The objective of Hogan's creative and critical works is to mend the broken covenant between the human and nonhuman worlds, decolonize mental space ("mental slavery" to use Bob Marley's memorable words), deconstruct artificial borders through the workings of an inter/transbiotic memory and thereby transform our sense of what it means to inhabit the earth: a sense of place as sense of space characterized by biotic harmony and justice.

Written and published in the first decade of the "Chicano Renaissance," Orlando Romero's *Nambé-Year One* (1976), delineates a protagonist, Mateo, in search of his identitarian roots as he tries to understand his past and relate it to his present situation, that of an educated Chicano-Indian

sculptor, the symbol of a mixed cultural heritage composed of Anglo-Saxon, Hispanic and Amerindian traditions:

I am the incarnation of the wild blood, that hybrid solar-maize plant blood. There is Indian in us, of ancient forgotten peoples [...]. The Moor, the Jew, the Arab, Spanish, and Indian blood force us to live by the law of nature and its mystical powers in the valleys of the Sangre de Cristos, not by the law made in the minds of men. (12, 19)

Guided by his grandfather's orally transmitted wisdom and by his own thoughts and imagination that he derives from his creativity of a *santero*, a woodcarver, Mateo becomes immersed in the mythopoetic collective memory of Nambé, a rural community in northern New Mexico, and begins to understand that his artwork is based on the energy he draws from nature. If according to Rudolfo Anaya ("Writer" 46), people "born and raised in the southwest" are always "affected by the land. The landscape changes man, and the man becomes his landscape," then I argue that Mateo becomes a vital part of his landscape. Mateo's consubstantiality with the maize plant conveys a dynamic relationship between humans and nature: "From the maize plant we have secured the nourishment of our physical spirit by eating and drinking it in countless forms" (17). Mateo regards the growing of maize, whose "substance fortifies the body against the evil spirits of sickness" (17), as an integral part of the eternal life-death cycle in which "death is not dying, but coming back again to nourishing living things" (15). This idea, which is similar to the Maya's worship of the maize plant and their equation of a maize plant's developmental stages with those of a human being, [6] expresses Mateo's belief in the mysteries and wonders of life, nature, the earth, and in the interconnectedness of all things. [7]

This inter/transbiotic cyclical perception of self and reality, then, supplements a monolithic rational view of life and reality sanctified by science. In fact, by juggling these cultural elements in a transcultural way, Orlando Romero becomes a *transculturador*, a writer-artist qua "negotiator of the disruptive in-between zone of inter- and intracultural disjunctures and conjunctures — the place where diverse histories, customs, values, beliefs, and cognitive systems are contested and interwoven without their different representations being dissolved into each other" (Walter 363). In the following, let me further elaborate on this link between an inter/transbiotic cultural episteme and transculturation by moving from Chicano literature into the field of African American literature.

In Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby*, a novel that problematizes African American identitarian issues in the Black diaspora, nature is seen through its specific elements rather than as a holistic frame for the characters' actions. Set on a fictitious Caribbean island, the novel juxtaposes the white owners of a winter house and their black servants in contrary complementarity, undermining the clear-cut divisions between the pairs and their roles and thus staging in carnivalesque fashion a neocolonial version of plantation life in the 1980s. Nature, while being ravaged by the dictates of modern capitalism, remembers the past, joining forces with the maroon horsemen who have lived in the woods since their escape from slavery centuries ago. Whether in the scene of the butterflies criticizing Jadine's fetishistic reification (74), or the swamp womens' astonishment at Jadine's

rejection of her blackness, specifically the role of black women in her rural community (157), nature feels, thinks and acts in its own right and is read in symbolic terms to denounce a materialist-imperialist social structure that causes not only Jadine's ethnocultural alienation and fragmentation, but an ecological disaster that since the plantation system to our present times of global tourism/cosmopolitanism has caused terrible havoc. Under the impact of neocolonial imperialism—rich white tycoons building their vacation homes—the island's flora and fauna express and act in the face of their destruction::

[...] clouds and fishes were convinced that the world was over, that the sea-green green of the sea and the sky-blue sky of the sky were no longer permanent. Wild parrots [...] agreed and raised havoc as they flew away to look for yet another refuge. [...] The clouds gathered together, stood still and watched the river scuttle around the forest floor, crash headlong into the haunches of hills with no notion of where it was going [...]. The clouds looked at each other, then broke apart in confusion. [...] When it was over, and houses instead grew in the hills, those trees that had been spared dreamed of their comrades [...]. Then the rain changed and was no longer equal (7-8).

Morrison attributes the power of creation to the elements of nature, which become agents with voices and thoughts rather than victimized objects. Furthermore, the mythomagical maroon horsemen who since having fled the plantation roam the island's hills and rain forest, seeing "with the eye of the mind" (131), contribute to an intercultural ethos and worldview based on a time-space continuum in which all human and nonhuman beings, alive or dead, are connected: a cosmology where African and American elements of culture meet and act in a transcultural contact zone. In order to transmit this dynamic relationship between the world of spirits, humans, animals, plants and trees within a temporal flow between the past, present, and future, Morrison delineates a landscape that acts through the mediation of human perception. It is important to highlight that this mediation is rooted in a perception of the natural order of the universe in which communication and knowledge are not only human attributes, but characteristics which pertain to nonhumans too. If, following Morrison ("Unspeakable" 210) "a void may be empty, but is not a vacuum," I contend that she fills the voids of Western discourse with African spirituality and thereby supplements linear and hierarchical relationships based on separation with circular detours, that is, dynamic relationships between humans and nonhumans, times and space, re-creating the universe as an interconnected organism characterized by a dynamic coexistence of all forms of life. Morrison's roots in African spirituality reside precisely in her use of spirit as vital force and cosmic energy whose fluxes connect spheres of visible and invisible existence. [6] If, as Nada Elia (151) has stated, "Africana women novelists are mediators [...] functioning liminally," then Morrison, located on the interlocking hyphen between African-American, linking and separating two continents and two cultural epistemes, is a transcultural mediator of the tension-laden bonds that hold the two in relationship.

In Hogan, Romero, and Morrison nature and its implicit elements have a life of their own and feature as substances whose energy operates in both the environment and living creatures and whose perception is embedded in specific ethnocultural epistemes. This inter/transbiotic characteristic of culture is set in what Mary Louise Pratt (6-7) has described as "contact zone," that

is, “the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.” What Pratt calls “radically asymmetrical relations of power” that imbued the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized continue to determine intercultural contact in neocolonial contact zones. In other words, all the writers and their works discussed so far include nature in their critique of the (post/neo)colonial machine. In the process, they denounce one of the fundamental aspects of what Anibal Quijano has theorized as *colonialidad del poder*, namely the issue of land: land-as-commodity, land-as-place, land-as-home. This issue was and continues to be a complex one in the Americas. Let me briefly elaborate on this by introducing two texts, one by a Peruvian farmer, the other by a Chicano writer, to emphasize the link between institutionalized landgrabbing and migration.

In *¿Por Qué No Cuidar a Esos Montes Sagrados?* Girvan Tuanama Fasabi, emphasizes the importance of land in the cultural episteme of the Kichwa-Lamistas. The book defends the right of the community *Kawana Ampí Urku las Palmeras* in the department of San Martín, located in the Peruvian Amazon forest, to decide their fate rooted in the collective use of the land they have inhabited for generations against the intrusion of the transnational companies and their interest in the exploitation of natural resources. The unconstitutional appropriation of the community’s land by these companies is tolerated if not actively encouraged by governmental policies and leads to uprootedness and diasporization. The local, regional and national authorities, according to the author, do not “escuchen las voces de las comunidades locales, la posición de las comunidades [...] estamos queriendo el territorio para garantizar que los hijos de nuestros hijos tengan agua, conozcan siquiera un pez [...]” (“listen to the voices of the local communities, the position of the communities [...] we want the territory to guarantee that the sons of our sons will have water, know at least what a fish is [...]”) (18). What is at issue here, as well as in other parts of the Americas and the world, is more than a plea for subsistence farming, but an entire ethnocultural episteme: a cosmogony/cosmology articulated in a specific language, Quechua in this case, that forms the foundation of a being-in-the-world in a specific place at a given time. In this sense, Fasabi asks: “Y me pregunto, pues, cuando deforestamos todo ese monte ¿adónde se irán los espíritus? ¿Por qué no cuidar a esos montes sagrados?” (“And I ask myself, if we deforest the entire hill where will the spirits go? Why not tend these sacred mountains?”) (27).

Fasabi denotes what Hogan, Romero and Morrison connote, namely a crucial common situation that links diverse nations and peoples in their difference: a dichotomy between basically two meanings attributed to land by the military industrial complex, governments, consumer society, and big landowners on the one hand, and, on the other, by indigenous communities. Whereas for the former the land is a means to make a profit, for autochthonous peoples land is the place where their ancestors and sacred beings live, a place giving identity to the community and used for subsistence farming.

In Tomás Rivera’s *...Y no se lo tragó la tierra/ ...And the earth did not part*, the narrative voice articulates what it means to be driven away from the land and thus forcefully pushed into migration:

“When we arrive, when we arrive. At this point, quite frankly, I’m tired of always arriving someplace. Arriving is the same as leaving because as soon as we arrive ... well, quite frankly, I’m tired of always arriving. Maybe I should say when we don’t arrive because that’s the plain truth. We never really arrive anywhere” (115). Dislocation as a result of global and local policies that constitute what Edward Soja has termed a “geographically uneven development” (23) is demystified in the novel as an orchestrated system between nations with the objective to keep these migrants running within a no-man’s-land, a legal and sociocultural *nepantla*; a means that guarantees a cheap exploitable labor pool.

4. Into *Pierre-Monde*: Inter/Transbiotic Memory and Creole Identity in Patrick Chamoiseau’s *L’esclave vieil homme et le molosse*

Like the writers discussed so far, Patrick Chamoiseau uses an inter/transbiotic memory to revise the hegemonic historical discourse from a subaltern perspective and reveal the link between the brutalization of place and people. In the process, Chamoiseau re-creates a universe based on interconnected fluxes and relations constituting “*un organisme ouvert, circulaire et vivant*” (“an open, circular and living organism”) (*Biblique* 471; emphasis in the original). According to Chamoiseau (*Biblique* 309), the role of nature is fundamental in the consciousness-raising process of human beings: “Les plantes [...] ne connaissent pas le bien ou le mal, le juste ou le l’injuste, elles connaissent les équilibres du monde” (“Plants [...] do not know good and evil, justness and injustice; they know the equilibriums of the world”). Since it is impossible to understand these balances in a rational way, human beings should “aiguiser sa conscience et libérer (à force de silence et patience) ce sens animal qui donne leur âme aux autres” (“sharpen their conscience and liberate—through silence and patience—this animal sense that gives the soul to others”) (*Biblique* 300). By respecting and taking in a bit of the vegetal and animal others, in mutual prolongations, a nonhierarchical relation between the human and nonhuman worlds is possible. Other than Atwood, Hogan, Romero, and Morrison, Chamoiseau’s mythopoetic revision of the culture-nature divide imbues human and nonhuman dislocation with an additional meaning. In order to elaborate on this issue, let me take a closer look at his novel *L’esclave vieil homme et le molosse* (1997).

In the book, nature functions as a site of memory for all those who perished during the colonial holocaust in the Caribbean region. Whereas the official hegemonic discourse registers the disappearance of all autochthonous peoples or silences them into oblivion by not registering them at all, Chamoiseau reintegrates them into the present panorama of lived reality: “Les Amérindiens des premiers temps se sont transformés en lianes de douleurs qui étranglent les arbres et ruissellent sur les falaises, tel le sang inapaisé de leur propre génocide” (“The Amerindians of earlier times transformed themselves into lianes of pain that strangle the trees and run over the cliffs like blood agitated by their own genocide”) (21). Thus, their being-in-the-world becomes an integral part of an inter/transbiotic memory, a collective memory linking not only groups of human beings, but humans and nonhumans in proliferative rhizomic ways. By writing them into existence Chamoiseau bestows

an identity on them—an identity rooted in the past-present and in a place as memory site to which they never had legal access.

In contrast to this collective inter/transbiotic memory, the memory of the old slave is repressed. Though unwilling to remember the experience of enslavement and the journey from Africa to the Americas, he has “le goût de la mer sur les lèvres” (“the taste of the ocean on his lips”) and hears “le museau dramatique des requins contre la coque” (“the dramatic muzzle of the sharks against the hull”) (51). Traumatized, he is “catastrophiquement vivant” (“catastrophically alive”) (50), that is, he lives in schizophrenic mental, physical and epistemic in-betweenness. Before his actual escape from the plantation, this traumatic memory manifests itself as “décharge,” a “pulsion vomie d’un endroit oublié” (41). For years, the old slave is able to control these traumatic discharges, this “vomited impulse of a forgotten place” by eating clods of earth and rubbing himself against a wall. Until one day he escapes from the plantation into the nearby forest—this heterotopic ecosystem characterized by an efficient harmonious order under the apparent vegetal disorder. It is in this forest-as-*limen* where life and death dance cheek to cheek, engaging in an interrelated and continuous process of transformative becoming, that the old slave encounters a place to be, an identitarian home, roots in routes. When he comes upon an enormous rock that blocks his way, he leans against it, embraces it, touches the lines of its paintings and begins to communicate with “les peuples réfugiés” (135), those who escaped from the colonial holocaust and left their trace in the rock. This is how Chamoiseau delineates the old slave’s transcultural, inter/transbiotic homecoming:

La Pierre rêve. Elle m’engoue de ses rêves. [...] nos rêves s’entremêlent, une nouée de mers, de savanes, de Grandes-terres et d’îles, d’attentats et de guerres, de cales sombres et d’errances migrantes [...]. Une jonction d’exils et de dieux, d’échecs et de conquêtes, de sujétions et de morts. [...] Tout cela, [...] tourbillonne dans un mouvement de vie — vie en vie sur cette terre. La Terre. Nous sommes toute la Terre. [...] La Pierre ne me parle pas, ses rêves matérialisent dans mon esprit le verbe de ces mourants que j’avais délaissé. La Pierre est des peuples. Des peuples dont il ne reste qu’elle. Leur seule mémoire, enveloppe de mille mémoires. Leur seule parole, grosse de toutes paroles. Cri de leurs cris. L’ultime matière de ces existences. [...] Ces disparus vivent en moi par le biais de la Pierre. Un chaos de millions d’âmes. Elles content, chantent, rient. [...] Le chanté de la Pierre est en moi. Il m’emplit [...] de vie.

The Rock dreams. I am enchanted with its dreams. [...] our dreams blend, oceans, savannas, masses of land and islands, assassinations and wars, somber holds and migrant errandries all knotted together [...]. A junction of exiles and gods, failures and achievements, subserviences and deaths. [...] All that [...] whirls in a movement of life—life within life on earth. The Earth. We are the Earth. [...] The stone does not talk to me, its dreams materialize in my spirit the language of all the dying people I have left behind. The Stone belongs to the people—the people whose only trace is this stone. Their only memory wrapped in a thousand memories. Their only discourse pregnant with all discourses. Scream of their screams. The ultimate matter of their existence. [...] Those who have disappeared live in me through the bias of the Stone. A chaos of a million souls. They talk, chant, laugh. [...] The song of the Stone is within me. It fills me [...] with life. (127-131)

In the plantation settings of the Americas, the forest qua *limen* became a place of resistance; a place where a new beginning (historical, cultural, identitarian) was possible. [9] In Chamoiseau’s text, the forest as “ventre-manman” (105), mother’s womb, becomes the place of the old slave’s

rebirth; a place as catalytic agent of consciousness. The old slave's embrace of the rock, an eternal one since he dies in this position, should be seen as a homecoming, an identitarian reterritorialization that ends his traumatic dismemberment and negation of the self by anchoring it in the island's ethnocultural diversity, relating the enslaved African newcomers with the massacred Amerindian peoples. Both ethnic groups constitute what Chamoiseau, in *Écrire en pays dominé* (281) has called a "*pierre-monde*," a stone-world—a universe of ethnocultural groups linked through a continuous process of *créolisation*. As such, this "*pierre-monde*," similar to Édouard Glissant's "tout-monde," yet based on a less abstract and more material, tangible element, stands for the continuous dynamics that unite the diverse elements of the biota in their difference.

Mnemonic imagination re-creates the violence of the past in order to un-write the official story with its effacements and distortions. Furthermore, and perhaps most important, in that it is imbued with the values, visions and belief systems of those unwritten by the official discourse of History, it incorporates this violence into the present lived experience as a reference. In this sense, words, through memory, recuperate a world of references which contributes to the (re)constitution of identity within a historical process. Through imagination, the projection of the Amerindian peoples' absence-as-presence onto the old slave, Chamoiseau elevates, what he has called in *Un Dimanche au Cachot* (101) this "mémoire impossible au rang de témoignage" ("impossible memory to the level of testimony"). Freeing oneself, then, means to "aller en soi" ("turn one's eyes inward") (*Dimanche* 234) and, in the tradition of the plantation *griots*, to sharpen one's individual imagination through a collective consciousness that includes the entire biota.

This type of performative inter/transbiotic memory as social practice becomes a means of understanding and actively shaping the past within the present pointing towards the future by evoking ideas that serve as stepping-stones to agency. As such, it is a possible site from which to revise history and remap the relationship between the human and nonhuman worlds. In other words, a translation of cultural difference as separation into cultural diversity as relation begins with a process of consciousness-raising and moves outward through imagination. According to Chamoiseau, nature plays a crucial role in this process: a circle links the entire biota of different places, spaces, and cultural contexts, but also differences within the species. Memory in Chamoiseau, then, explodes a linear monocultural episteme into a fractal, transcultural, interbiotic one; an episteme that embraces all elements of the ecosystem in rhizomic ways through displacement, that is, mobility and transformation.

In the light of reality-in-process, the act of writing cannot possibly translate a stable, fixed truth. Therefore, the aim of storytelling is not to explain something but to illuminate and confirm the impossible, incomprehensible, unthinkable and unspeakable. It reveals the other of and within the same through possibilities of never-ending displacements, prolongations and desires. This image of creation as an ongoing search inscribes it in the process of displacement, which explodes systemic limits by working through intercultural fusion and fissure and thereby opening up diverse horizons of free, errant development. Circles of rupture and continuity, thus, constitute the text's decolonial attitude: an investment of the thematic and structural circularity expressing the spiritual knowledge-

as-consciousness with an undecidability that locates identity in a fluid inter/transbiotic time-space continuum.

5. Into Nature: Manoel Barros' Inter/Transbiotic Poetic Vision

The decolonial attitude in Manoel de Barros' poetry and prose differs from that of Chamoiseau's inter/transbiotic ethos and worldview in that its objective is not a mythopoetic resurrection of a specific ethnocultural knowledge. What links Barros and Chamoiseau in their difference is the importance both writers attribute to the power of creative imagination in the process of delineating a critical inter/transbiotic map of the world. The mnemonic process at work in Barros' poetry deconstructs rational scientific thinking with its implicit anthropocentric logic by transfiguring human language through a semantic and syntactic transgression in order to re-create the languages of nature: "Ouço uma frase de araquã: ên-ên? Co-hô! Ahê/ han? hum?/ Não tive preparatório em linguagem de araquã./ [...] Mas pode uma/ Palavra chegar à perfeição de se tornar um/ pássaro?/ Antigamente podia./ As letras aceitavam pássaros (I hear a sentence of an araquã: ên-ên? Co-hô! Ahê/ han? hum?/ I am not well versed in the language of an araquã./ [...] But can a/ Word reach such a state of perfection that it becomes a/ bird? In the past it could./ Letters accepted birds") (*Concerto* 27). This linguistic deconstruction creates an interstitial space where thought and emotion meet and interrelate, where "a palavra não significa mais, mas entoa" ("the word does not signify anymore, but chants") (*Menino* 41). This is how Barros expresses his longed-for inter/transbiotic identity: "[...] eu queria ser chão [...] para que em mim as árvores crescessem. Para que sobre mim as conchas se formassem [...] para que sobre mim os rios corressem" ("[...] I wish I were earth [...] so that trees could grow within me. So that shells could form on me; so that rivers would run over me") (*Memórias* 89). Barros' poetry highlights the inseparable linkage between earth's and human beings' history and being. Thus, it reminds us that we literally carry within us the 'humus' from where we come from and go back to. Furthermore, it points to the various languages of art in nature: "Quando as aves falam com as pedras e as rãs com as águas — é de poesia que estão falando" ("When birds talk with stones and frogs with water—it is poetry they are talking") (*Concerto* 55). In Barros' creative works language becomes a means and space of decolonization—"palavras que fossem de fontes e não de tanques" ("words that would be like fountains rather than tanks") (*Memórias* 97)—emphasizing that we are (a part of) nature and that nature exists in its own right. His poetry, similar to Chamoiseau's texts, suggests that decolonization is an act of conscientization that starts with(in) us: "Conforme a gente recebesse formatos da natureza, as palavras incorporavam as formas da natureza. [...] Se a brisa da manhã despetalasse em nós o amanhecer, as palavras amanheciam" ("Depending on our reception of nature's formats, words would incorporate the forms of nature. [...] If the morning breeze would unfold dawn in us, words would dawn") (*Memórias* 145). In Barros, then, words chant a *concrete green utopia* via an inter/transbiotic memory that evokes (and thus asks us to act according to) a post-rational order characterized by an egalitarian relationship between human beings and the rest of the biota. In the process, this type of memory functions as a counter-memory in that it resurrects the subjugated nature within us and

criticizes our alienation from and exploitation of the biotic others with whom we share life on earth: “Sente-se pois então que árvores, bichos e pessoas têm natureza assumida igual. O homem no longe, alongado quase, e suas referências vegetais, animais. Todos se fundem na natureza intacta” (“One can feel, then, that trees, animals and persons have an assumed equal nature. Man prolonged into his vegetal, animal references. All merged in an intact nature”) (*Livro* 34).

6. Conclusion

By disclosing the link between a political unconscious (the unresolved question of exploitation), a cultural unconscious (the unresolved question of human beings’ alienation via ideological interpellation) and an ecological unconscious (the unresolved question of the exploitation and destruction of nature), the texts discussed in this essay connote that historical, political, economic, cultural and ecological issues are interwoven in the postcolonial debate. Their decolonial attitude resides in the deconstruction of an anthropomorphic attitude toward nature: instead of mastering the land, one should establish a harmonious relationship with it. By representing landscape through its specific elements, these texts propose alternative ways of imagining the relation between people, society and the environment. The interweaving of the characters’ thoughts and actions with those of nature reveals and problematizes that one cannot separate the life of an individual from the life of his/her surroundings, from life on earth.

Culture, then, can be defined as a memory effect produced by the epistemes that give significance to the communities that inhabit specific places and spaces. The inter/transbiotic memory in the texts by Atwood, Hogan, Romero, Morrison, Chamoiseau, and Barros links the inner with the outer landscape, or in the memorable words of Wilson Harris: “Language possesses resources which one has to sense as coming not only from within oneself, but from outside, from the land itself, from the rivers, from the forest. And also from those persons and those cultures that existed in the landscape and have left their trace” (Gilkes 33). In this sense, these texts from different inter-American ethnocultural contexts exemplify Édouard Glissant’s “aesthetics of the earth,” “an aesthetics of disruption [...] intrusion [...] and connection” (*Poetics* 150-151) based on a mnemonic process that involves imagination as it interweaves multidimensional biotic worlds and thereby revises reality and history. As such, this inter/transbiotic memory qua counter-memory constitutes the idea of an other logic, an other way of perceiving and relating to difference; in fact, it frees us human beings into our own nature and that of the many others with which we share life on this planet.

Endnotes

[1] Translations in this essay are mine.

[2] The choice of these multi-ethnic writers and their works is a random one and does not intend to cover and thus be representative of the entire American continent and its peoples.

[3] In “Post-Colonial,” Atwood asks another pertinent question about Canadians and their collective identity vis-à-vis Native Canadians and immigrants: “Who are we, now, inside the *we* corral, the *we* palisade, the *we* fortress, and who are they?” (99-100). In this context, see also Northrop Frye (1995) who argued that Canadians are characterized by a “garrison mentality.”

[4] For an essayistic delineation of this topic, see Silko's *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996). In Silko's novel *Ceremony* (45), Josiah expresses this interbiotic identitarian relationship as follows: “He pointed his chin at the springs and around at the narrow canyon. ‘This is where we come from, see. This sand, this stone, these trees, the vines, all the wildflowers. This earth keeps us going’.”

[5] Abel and Set in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968) and *The Ancient Child* (1989); Tayo and Indigo in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* (1977) and *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999); Ephanie in Paula Gunn Allen's *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983); the nameless narrator and Jim Loney in James Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974) and *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979); Fleur's daughter Lulu in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks* (1988); Willie Begay in Anna Lee Walters's *Ghost Singer* (1988); Omishto in Linda Hogan's *Power* (1998); and Jacob Nashoba in Louis Owen's *Dark River* (1999), to name just a few ailing characters of Native American novels.

[6] See for example, *Popul Vuh. Las antiguas historias del Quiché*.

[7] Similarly, Rudolfo Anaya in *Bless Me, Ultima* uses *la tierra* and nature as a point of departure for his exploration of a dynamic, interconnected perception of reality. In the process, Anaya re-creates a sacred pagan vision of reality—a vision of the sanctity, unity, and wholeness of all life. Anaya and Romero, then, immerse their protagonists in cosmic cycles where, in Ultima's words “all waters are one,” united by “the great cycle that binds us all” (113).

[8] Here I am drawing on Mbiti's analysis of spirituality in traditional African thought: “The invisible world is symbolized or manifested by those visible and concrete phenomena and objects of nature. The invisible world presses hard upon the visible world. The physical and spiritual are but two dimensions of one and the same universe” (57).

[9] In *Landscape and Memory*, Schama points out that in traditional European literature the forest functions as a liminal place, a place of transformation.

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