

STEPPING OUT OF THE CLOAK OF VOICELESS-NESS: A POST COLONIAL
AND
FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE BLACK FEMALE
VOICE IN
THE AFRO-HISPANIC NARRATIVE

by

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A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
In the College of Arts and Sciences
University of Missouri- Columbia

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

STEPPING OUT OF THE CLOAK OF VOICELESS-NESS: A POST COLONIAL
AND FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE BLACK
FEMALE VOICE IN THE AFRO-HISPANIC NARRATIVE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation to my dear mother, Elizabeth McBurnie, who even though she has not been able to see its completion with me, has made an invaluable and profound contribution to its inception and completion. She is definitely my first sheroe, my tower of strength, for her unshakable confidence in me has helped me to always envision great things for myself and to aspire towards realizing them. This is a tribute to the meaningful and positive influence she has had and will always have on me. Her memory will continue to be my inspiration as I continue my journey onwards to greater accomplishments.

I also wish to dedicate my dissertation to the rest of my family for without their support it would have been so much more difficult to realize this important goal in my life. Therefore, I wholeheartedly thank especially, my sister, Alicia for always being my number one cheerleader, as well as, my niece, Allegra, and my nephew, DeJuan for their love and support. I am especially fortunate to have them in my life, and I hope that my work will also inspire them and others, to always aspire towards excellence in order to fulfill their potential.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank all those who have contributed in any way to the development of my dissertation as it evolved from its conception to its conclusion, those who have provided me with the generous guidance that I needed for focusing my theme, the streamlining of my title, or the removal of the decorative dots that I accidentally put onto some of the pages of the document. This undertaking has certainly been a labor of love for me and it has been nourished by my experiences in academic contexts, my scholarly research, and educational training. My field experiences in Central America, the Caribbean and Africa were also very important in helping me to witness and understand the social aspects of my investigation.

Thus, my dissertation is definitely the result of my pursuit of academic excellence. It could not have been brought to fruition without the guidance of the many educators, researchers and cultural workers that I had the opportunity to interact with, either directly or indirectly over the years in my academic career as a student and educator. I am especially grateful to my devoted teachers and professors who have inspired me to set high goals, and to always aspire to go further and be the best that I can be. Their words of encouragement and thoughtful guidance however difficult at times to accept, have been a beacon of inspiration for me on this journey. I wish to thank the chairperson of my dissertation, Dr. Mamadou Badiane for his role in leading and guiding my research to a successful completion. I am also grateful to the other profesors Dr. Michael Ugarte, Dr. Bea Gallimore, Dr. Josef Otabela and Dr. April

angley for serving on my committee, and for sharing unhesitatingly with me their wealth of knowledge, and academic expertise in the classroom and beyond. I would also like to thank the retired professor and Dr. Marvin Lewis and Dr. Flore Zephir for their mentorship and guidance along the way.

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation focuses on the articulation of the black female voice in the literary traditions that have emerged in the Equatoguinean and Afro- Costa Rican socio-cultural contexts in the contemporary period. It interrogates especially the representations of this female minority voice in the narrative works of, *Ekomo* written by, Maria Nsue Angue and *Shadows of your black memory (Tinieblas de tu memoria negra)*, by Donato Ndongu, both writers of Equatorial Guinea. Additionally, this treatment extends to include the Afro-Costa Rican narrative works of *Limón Blues* written by Ana Cristina Rossi and *The four mirrors (Los Cuatro Espejos)* by Quince Duncan.

This treatment therefore, examines the renditions of the black female voice in the her(s)tory, as well as the his(s)tory created by the female and male writers who are situated within the Afro-Hispanic literary traditions of the Post- Colonial period. It attempts to probe and explore the foundational elements in the construction of the female voice, to determine whether the female is able to articulate a voice in the narrative, or whether she is voiceless or silenced. Accordingly, it considers the differences that appear in the constructions of the female voice that appear in the works created by female writers, in comparison with those that are created by the male writers. It further interprets the significance of these representations where firstly, the female subject is considered as articulating a voice of her own, or on the other hand, as being voiceless in the discourse. Finally, it considers how the act of “giving a voice to the voiceless” which is achieved by the female writers under examination, can have implications for the

expansion of the characterizations of the female subject not only in the literary context, but also in the society as a whole. It therefore considers the possibilities for the effective assumption of a voice by the female not only in the literary context, but as well in the context of the communities in which women live.

INTRODUCTION :

And I categorically refuse
To stop speaking
My language, my accent, and my history.
(Y me niego categóricamente
A dejar de hablar
Mi lengua, mi acento y mi historia.)

And I absolutely refuse
To be part of those who are silent,
Those who fear,
Those who cry.
(Y me niego absolutamente
A ser parte de los que callan,
De los que temen,
De los que lloran.)

Rotundamente negra, Shirley Campbell

(Spanish to English translation- Wendy McBurney)

The narratives that comprise the literary corpus of my dissertation represent the Hispanic African, as well as the Afro-Costa Rican literary traditions that have developed over the course of the twentieth century. They include the narrative works of *Ekomo* written by Maria Nsue Angue, and *Shadows of your black memory (Tinieblas de tu memoria negra)* by Donato Ndongo. Additionally, those works which are representative of the Afro-Costa Rican literary tradition include *Limón Blues* written by Ana Cristina Rossi, and *The Four Mirrors (Los Cuatro Espejos)* by Quince Duncan. Although, these narratives represent traditions which emerged separately in Africa and the diaspora, yet still there are elements which illustrate commonalities in certain areas of their thematic and narrative contexts. Thus, they all in some manner enact a journey in search of a metaphorical promised land, whether social, cultural or political. The protagonists of the

four works all seem to be propelled to undertake a journey in the narrative space. In the case of *Ekomo* this journey is first undertaken in order to find a cure for the physical ailment of the both the male and female protagonists, while in the case of *Shadows* it is a search for the secrets of modern day progress and advancement. Furthermore, a similar metaphor of the journey traverses the narrative of *Limón Blues* as the protagonists depart their Caribbean homeland for the Caribbean coast line in Central America in search of greater economic and cultural stability. In a similar manner the journey metaphor also appears in the narrative of *The four mirrors* as the protagonist undertakes a critical journey from San José to Limón, in search of a resolution to the psychological crisis which he undergoes because of the identity which he had assumed in order to be integrated into the dominant mestizo culture of the Costa Rica. In all four novels it can be observed that these journeys of discovery, expansion or the resolution of critical imbalances or conflicts also seem to be centered around a search or an exploration of questions of personal or national identity. Thus, these protagonists of the four novels seem to be situated within complex networks which feature the development of an identity, or the assumption of one, or further the recuperation of a lost identity. As such, while both *Ekomo* and *Shadows* seem to feature the development or evolution of an identity as a central theme in their narratives, in *Limón blues* there also appears the creation and assumption of an identity with all the deliberations and considerations that are required in this process. In *The four mirrors* another aspect of the identity question arises, which is that of the recuperation of the lost identity of the protagonist. These four narratives seem to also reflect a distinct Afro-Realist aesthetic which pervades their narrative spaces. They all incorporate the mythical ancestral manifestations in the belief

systems as well as, the religious systems. (footnote for Afro-Realist aesthetic) There appears the influence of the ancestors, and the interaction between the objective and the subjective worlds within the narratives of the Hispanic African tradition and Afro-Costa Rica. Therefore, these commonalities link these narratives and illustrate a definite connection between the black experience of Africa and the Diaspora in the Post Colonial world. Against this contextual background my dissertation embarks on an exploration of the representations of the minority voice which is represented in these works, with a special emphasis on that of the black female voice.

Thus, the title of my dissertation reflects the theme of my investigation which focuses on the representation of the black female voice in the Hispanic African and the Afro-Hispanic literary traditions of the contemporary period. The figurative descriptor “Stepping out of the cloak of voiceless-ness” appears to signal a movement away from the margins of the discourse where silence prevails and where the female subject is muted and voiceless. It seems to imply that as the female voice approaches a position of greater centrality in the narrative there is an increased likelihood that her voice would be articulated with greater clarity, precision and forcefulness. Therefore, from this central position the female voice can be characterized as being liberated, and thus able to demonstrate a significant presence and influence in the narrative. With regard to this liberation and un-silencing of the female voice which this implies, the critic Gayatri Spivak has indicated that this task of the un-silencing of the subaltern subject requires not just giving the subaltern a voice to speak, but the clearing of the space to allow her to speak. (Spivak in an interview with Leon de Kock, 45) She believes that the centering of

the female voice involves an intentional act by the writer of not only the inclusion of the female subject in the narrative, but also the creation of an adequate space where the conditions are conducive for the female subject to speak and present her message within the literary context. The critic seems to indicate that the authentic representation of the subaltern female voice is not a single task of simple assignment, but one which is challenging and oftentimes difficult to achieve. She also reiterates this view when she contends in the essay, “ Can the subaltern speak?” that, “ If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in the shadow.”(28) While this rhetorical question that the critic articulates seems to question the validity and authenticity with which the female voice can be represented by the artist or the intellectual, there have also emerged contesting viewpoints and perspectives which propose that the opposite is true especially when certain conditions are adhered to. They make the claim that the opposite is possible, and that the subaltern female can and does speak her truth when she is represented following certain patterns and considerations. Therefore, my dissertation while taking its impetus from Spivak’s question, also goes further to consider these contesting viewpoints and theories put forward by various critics, theorists and writers. These viewpoints and ideas consequently when considered together seem to create a dialogue among the different perspectives and theories. The diversity of perspectives presented by these theories create a “multilogue of feminisms” which the critic Johnnetta Cole describes as a dynamic communication in which multiple voices are in conversation with each other. (Conversations, Introduction XIII) Together they set the stage for the interrogation of the black female voice represented in the texts as they come together in conversation with

each other and as Cole contends, "... not only to testify, but to prophesy, too."

(Conversations, 1)

My dissertation, thus undertakes an investigation of the processes by which the female voice is unsilenced or allowed to speak in the literary narratives. As such, it examines how her voice is incorporated into the central spaces where it can be articulated and heard. Hence, it considers how these processes facilitate the un-silencing of black female voice to achieve the liberation from the shackles of voiceless-ness, which characterize the normative representations of the black female voice in the canon. It undertakes an examination of the literary and discursive strategies that the novelists utilize in their representations of the female voice in their literary works. Accordingly, it seeks to determine whether or not these creative strategies that are employed in the characterization of the black female voice effectively, "... work for the subaltern, ... (and) work against subalternity." (Spivak Interview, 46) Or, on the other hand, whether those techniques and devices that are employed by the writers, remain within the realm of the normative frameworks for the representation of the black female voice. Thus perpetuating the distortions, mis-interpretations and ultimately undermining of the un-silencing process, and the liberation of the female voice. With this in view, the ultimate objective of my dissertation is to determine whether the black female voice as represented in the narratives of the Afro-Hispanic traditions, has achieved a critical un-silencing and liberation, or whether her voice remains muffled, and stifled within the cloak of voiceless-ness.

Definition of Voice: According to the definition of voice articulated by Barry Lane in “Writing as a Road to Self-Discovery”, voice is firstly identified as the rhythm and sound of an author’s words. This rhythm and sound comes from the word choice and fluency of the chosen words. Voice is essential in the tone and mood an author is looking to establish. It can also be coupled with the message and viewpoint coming from an author, as well as the author’s ethnic, racial and/or social identification. (Cited in Granfield, 2)

“A postcolonial feminist perspective ... also requires a general critical literacy, that is the capacity to read the world ... with a critical eye, (and also considers) communication ... not only (as) the act of “speaking” but also that of reception, listening and interpretation.” (Bahri, 200) This description which also pertains to the voice reflects on the main functions of voice which is the act of communication also helps to guide the study in terms of providing an insight into the active agency which a voice assumes in the narrative development.

In general, the emblematic works which provide the discursive materials for this dissertation undoubtedly privilege minority voices which have previously been subjected to systematic exclusion and silencing by the dominant literary and cultural discourses of the Western world. Thus, these narrative constructions, as ascertained by Spivak, “... work for the subaltern, ... to bring (them) into speech.” (Spivak Interview, 46) These works of fiction represent the literary traditions which have emerged from two distinct diasporic communities in the Hispanic world. Firstly, from that of Equatorial Guinea in Central Africa and secondly, from the Afro-Costa Rican community in the Caribbean Central American region.

In addition to narrating stories that are situated in their cultural traditions, these writers also seem to have created narratives which reflect seemingly contrasting positions with regard to the representation of the voices of the male and female subjects that comprise the characters of their novels. Firstly, the narratives that are crafted by the female writers seem to demonstrate the creation of her(s)stories where a distinct female presence and perspective are articulated. Meanwhile, in those narratives by the male writers an alternative position seems to be created, since their his(s)stories, emphasize and privilege a distinct male presence and perspective. Nonetheless, when these narratives are considered together they seem to display a portrait of the social and cultural realities and experiences of both Africans and African descendents across the geographical area, extending from Central Africa to the Central American Caribbean region. Undoubtedly, within these fictionalized creations the writers have privileged the experiential stories about the minority subjects and their communities in their Afro-Hispanic Post Colonial narratives.

The poem “*Categorically Black*” written by the Afro-Costa Rican poet Shirley Campbell launches this exploration of the representation of the black female voice which is the main focus of this dissertation. Accordingly, it seems to articulate in its preliminary verses a deliberate and clear un-silencing of the female voice in the poetic space. These verses encompass a declaration of the resistance of the female subject to the attempts at the silencing of her voice, her identity and her history. Through the poetic voice the female ardently and fearlessly proclaims her right to freely express her “language, her accent and her history.” Thus, she expresses an unequivocal refusal to be victimized by the patriarchal forces which perpetuate exclusion and domination of

difference. Conscious of the debilitating effects, as well as the destructiveness of these intentions the female poetic voice asserts her right to exercise her freedom and speak her truth. Hence, the oppression that she vocally resists is not only a physical one, but in fact alludes to a mental, emotional and spiritual one as well.

This verbal resistance which is declared in the poem seems to indicate a refusal to permit or accept the victimization of the human spirit as her reality. The female will not be forced into compliance with the demands that are made by the dominant forces to distort or silence who she is. Under no circumstance does she plan to concede to the status of victimized “other” or to be an accomplice to her own victimization. According to Yadira Fajardo Calvo this phenomena of double victimization of the female subject usually plagues the story of the female in many aspects of human endeavour. “Woman as victim and accomplice.” (*Mujer como víctima y cómplice*) (1993). Similarly, Sheryl Sandberg, the author of the text “Lean In” also comments on this seemingly double subordination of the female in the society which is the main theme of Fajardo Calvo’s critical text on the inequalities that women encounter in the Latin American context. Thus, Sandberg similarly indicates that in addition to the victimization promoted by the patriarchal forces that, “Young women internalize societal cues about what defines “appropriate” behavior and, in turn, silence themselves.” (21) Moreover, this implies a double weakening and silencing of the voice of the female subject, as it effectively facilitates an atrophy of the female self- valuing and agency of which the poetic voice in “Rotundamente negra” so valiantly opposes.

As such, my dissertation has evolved as a result of my interest in the real life conditions and experiences of women in the Post-Colonial societies. I was especially interested in how the lived experiences of women guided the construction of narratives that emerged in both African and Diasporic literary traditions. With that in mind, I therefore sought to examine the spaces where the female voices were situated or appeared in the literary narratives, and to explore the reasons why these voices were being represented according to certain patterns and conventions. Additionally, I wanted to determine whether these artistic representations could in turn have any effect or influence on the social realities of the black female. I desired to identify the limitations and obstacles that women encountered in their respective societies as they sought to live meaningful and productive lives.

Thus, to determine the factors which prevented them from realizing their goals and aspirations, and which eventually caused them to be devalued and considered as second-class citizens in their respective societies. As the critic Johnetta Cole indicates I was very interested in, “... the profusion of heroes in (history, politics), literature and the paucity of sheroes ...” in these areas. In this regard, not too long ago in Columbia, Missouri I had the opportunity to be get a sense of the effect of this conditioning on the consciousness of women. As I spoke to a four year old girl about her heroes she earnestly and enthusiastically revealed that her heroes were, “ Batman, Super man, Dragon Balls Z and Spider Man.” When I asked about her female super heroes she could not respond with the same fervor. After a while she remembered “ Bat girl.” When I asked an eighteen year old female about her female super heroes she could only recollect,

Wonder woman and Spider woman. This inability to immediately articulate a number of heroes even in the popular culture realm seems to emphasize the lack of female leaders and models in critical areas of our society. Even after decades of activism and struggle for more equitable treatment for women yet still girls and young women have very few female super heroes today that they can emulate and look to for direction. Therefore, this question of, “Where are the female voices in history, literature, cultural and artistic expressions?” has always been a significant one for me in my academic career.

I therefore began my investigation by focusing my attention on the oral her(s)stories of women in the diaspora which in many cases reflected a variety of real life experiences which seemed as intensely interesting as they were thought provoking, and touching as well. These highlighted the aspirations of women as they made strides towards what Mary Catherine Bateson describes as the act of “Composing a life.” In the act of making their lives as productive, worthwhile and meaningful as possible she believes that women in general follow the example of the jazz musician who composes his music largely through improvisation. (2-3) In their real life situations that may be plagued by inequalities they still manage to utilize their resources to the maximum.

Many of these stories that were narrated to me by the women that I had the opportunity to speak with clearly revealed the challenges and inequalities that they encountered, despite the advances made by the contemporary feminist movement in Western and Third world countries. Thus, in my view it seems that the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of life of many women today still reflect grave inequities in terms of the opportunities at their disposal and their basic human rights. These limitations seem to

work together to keep women trapped in patriarchal patterns of inequality by which they are assigned the status of “second class” citizen. Bateson therefore focuses on the responses of women to their life challenges in “Composing a Life” (1990) and her main observation is that many women become greatly involved in the creation a life for themselves since, “ ... (the) contemporary world ... is still greatly influenced by patriarchal norms. That is ... (a) set of conventions referred to as patrilocality: men inherit property and status.” (67) Therefore, in the face of many difficult and extenuating cases of gender inequality, many women still demonstrate their unwillingness to allow them to deter their aspirations towards a meaningful and productive life for themselves and their families. She concluded that in many instances women were able to achieve a high level of improvisation in their lives. Thus when the conclusion made by the critic bell hooks in her text “Feminism is for everybody” that the struggle to end sexist oppression is still being waged in our society is taken into consideration it seems to reflect a high degree of truth. (6)

Specifically reflecting on the conditions of life for women of the Third World the critic John R. Warner Jr. in his article, “The Silence of women, the Voices of women” indicates that “... to a large extent the women of the Third World have survived without a voice with which to speak their complaint.” (15) The critic additionally describes the plight of the Third World woman when he explains that they, “Overwhelmingly (they) are the second sex. They have suffered in silence.” (15) This inability of women to express their dissatisfactions so that change can be affected in both the public and private

spheres ultimately results in their experience of conditions of voicelessness, silencing and, invariably powerlessness in their societies.

In his article the critic further discusses the disparities and abuses that women encounter in their lives and asserts that this is mainly due to the definitions imposed on women by the male patriarchs of their societies. As such the male is largely responsible for imposing these definitions which situate women in the position of 'other' since in his view she is "... a liability; ... a commodity; and ... a source of honor and morality."

(15) Therefore, these assumptions serve to effectively determine the treatment of women. Consequently, based on these assumptions the female is many times undervalued in the society, and condemned to serious abuses and inequities in the society. Warner believes that the crimes which are prevalent in various World societies are used to maintain the status quo and may include such practices as, "... son preference, bride burning, illiteracy and domestic violence... female genital mutilation, honor killing and the rape of women in wartime or conflict situations." (15)

It can be noted that even in the American social context where feminist advocacy has been instrumental in bringing about social justice on behalf of women of the world since the 1960s, it is still apparent in contemporary society that the patriarchal system of injustices against women has not been completely eradicated. As such the critic bell hooks indicates that "... on average most women still do not get equal pay for equal work, that we are more likely to make seventy-three cents for every dollar a male makes." (49) In the world of contemporary art it is also apparent that the creative works of female artists receive much less acclaim and monetary value when compared to those

produced by male artists. In a recent survey published by rtve online news it was found that only 16 women made the rank of millionaire artist in comparison to 195 males.

(rtve.es/noticias/20140802 article)

The critic bell hooks therefore, observes that this disparity between the incomes of men and women confirms that the feminist movement still has work to do in today's society due to the persistence of patriarchal injustices. As the anthropologist Johnnetta Cole indicates, the movement still has to uphold the belief that "... men and women are equal as human beings... that women should have decision making power when it comes to their own bodies, and enjoy the opportunity to participate fully in the political life of their communities and nation." (87)

In an article entitled, "The economic impact of racism and sexism on Afro-descendent women of Latin America and the Caribbean" ("*El impacto economico del racismo y el sexismo sobre las mujeres afrodescendientes de America Latina y el Caribe*") the Afro-Costa Rican economist and politician Epsy Campbell describes the general conditions of the African descended female in the region as also leaving much to be desired in terms of disparate conditions and the level of inclusion and visibility that she is accorded in the society. She thus states that, "Racism and (sexism), engenders discrimination that translates to economic marginalization and limited access to the resources, which leads for example to the Afro-descendent female experiencing record levels of disparities, that is characterized by extreme poverty and exclusion, being in every moment not only discriminated against but also invisibilized for their economic contributions." (Instituto de Estudios para América Latina y Africa, 2002) (El racism (y el sexismo), generan

entonces discriminación que se traduce en marginación económica y acceso limitado a los recursos, lo que lleva por ejemplo a las mujeres afrodescendientes a alcanzar índices de pobreza alarmantes, llevando vidas que se caracterizan por la pobreza extrema y la exclusión, siendo en todo momento no solo discriminadas sino también invisibilizadas en su aportes a los procesos económicos.”

Although it is believed that female oppression is a thing of the past, a conflict which has been completely resolved yet still today in the home and the public spheres women still have to deal with the challenges of sexism which devalue them and exacerbate the conditions in which they live. In the 2014 International campaign for equality for women, the United Nations has articulated the slogan, “Justice for women is justice for all, the progress of women is progress for all.” As such by upholding justice and equality for women as critical issues that need to be pursued on both the national and international levels the United Nations is also indicating that there is work to be done to make this goal a global reality.

The critic Johnnetta Cole also reflecting on the conditions of black women in the American context, also laments that black women are still engaged in the struggle against “... the ideology of female inferiority (which) has bred attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that promote the subordination and oppression of women.” (83) The Senegalese writer Mariama Ba of “So Long a Letter” also expresses her support for the movement for greater justice for women. Thus, in the epilogue of her text she reveals that, “My heart rejoices each time a woman emerges from the shadows. I know that the field of our gains is unstable, the retention of conquests difficult: social constraints are ever-present, and

male egoism resists. “(88) Although the author is cognizant of the challenges faced by black women in the African context she also seems to indicate a certain solidarity among women on a global level. In her reference to the condition of the female subaltern she pointedly describes her as, “Instruments for some, baits for others, respected or despised, often muzzled, all women have almost the same fate, which religions or unjust legislation have sealed.” (88) Therefore, in general she indicates that in spite of the differences of race, cultures and nationalities that are inevitable among women, but one thing that is common among all women is the emergence of female vulnerabilities and oppressions in the patriarchal social order.

General overview of the contents:

Chapter 1: This chapter includes the following three sections:

(a) Global perspectives on the voiceless-ness of the black female in social and literary contexts:

This section will feature an overview of the general theoretical frameworks of Post Colonialism and feminism that focus on perspectives on gender identity, inequality and relations. Thus the salient ideas and considerations exemplified by the theories of Post Colonial /Feminism, black feminism, womanism, Africana womanism, as well as Latin American and Caribbean feminisms will be utilized to examine and analyze the treatment of the black female voice in the literary texts. They prepare the reader for the examination of voice and voiceless-ness of the female subject rendered in the literary texts. This section therefore initiates the examination of the reversal of the des-

empowering patterns and processes which constrain the female voice from a multi-layered feminist perspective.

(b) Geographical and historical contexts of the literary narratives of Equatorial Guinea and Costa Rica.

It focuses on the geographical, political and cultural contexts of the countries in which the literary traditions have emerged. The major influences and patterns in the development of the literary traditions. The novelists and literary works included in this study – María Nsue Angue-*Ekomo*, Donato Ndongo- *Shadows of your dark memory* (*Tinieblas de tu memoria negra*) ; Ana Cristina Rossi-*Limón Blues*, Quince Duncan- *The four mirrors* (*Los cuatro espejos*). This chapter concludes with a general overview of the development of the writers and the main characteristics and themes which form part of their works.

© General overview of the four novelists and their literary works.

María Angue Nsue-*Ekomo*, Donato Ndongo- *Shadows of your black memory* (*Tinieblas de tu memoria negra*) ; Ana Cristina Rossi-*Limón Blues*, Quince Duncan- *The four mirrors* (*Los cuatro espejos*). This section features an overview of the influences on the writers and their development. It also includes brief description of their most important works. Mention will also be made of the characteristics and themes that characterize their literary works.

Chapter 2- 5 *Ekomo; Shadows (Tinieblas); Limón Blues; The Four Mirrors (Los Cuatro Espejos)*.

His(s)tory and her(s)tory of voice and voiceless-ness of the black female subject in the Afro-Hispanic literary tradition:

In my analysis of the representation of the black female voice in the narratives included in this dissertation, I firstly focus on the position, structure and role of the female voice in the narratives. Consequently, I examine the position that the black female voice occupies in the narrative, considering whether her voice is situated in a central position, or whether it is effectively displaced to the margins where she is rendered as voiceless or silenced. I also analyze the processes by which the movements which result in the centrality or marginality of the female voice are carried out in the narrative space. Additionally, I consider the literary techniques and strategies that the novelists utilize in the structural compositions of the female voice and how this impacts the expression of the female voice or voiceless-ness in the narrative. I also trace the role and function that the female voice assumes in the development of the narrative in comparison to that of the male voice. As such, I consider the influence that the female voice has on the development of the narrative plot from the beginning of the story to the its conclusion. In doing so, I also focus on the critical perspectives and insights that the female voice introduces and contributes to the thematic content that is being projected in the discourse.

The female voice and Gender Relations:

In my examination of the Male/Female gender relations which are depicted in the literary works included in this dissertation I explore the impact that traditional gender roles which feature gender inequality have on the expression of the female voice. As

such, I consider the effect that stereotyping, gender discord and conflicts between males and females also produce on the expression of the female voice in the discourse.

Additionally, I focus on the incidence of gender complementarity, as well as how mutual collaborations are achieved by both genders as they pursue the common goals of equality, justice and liberation for themselves, their families, as well as their communities.

The conclusion of my dissertation will focus on the discoveries that I have made in the course of the exploration of the various aspects of the argument, in an effort to discern the rationale for the representations, as well as the patterns that seem to be pre-eminent in the literary narratives. It will also include various projections and recommendations with regard to the possible alternatives for achieving significant reform of the normative treatments of the black female voice. Thus instead of perpetuating the traditional voiceless-ness of the female subject in literary works, they would promote an expression and articulation of the female voice which demonstrate patterns which are more congruent with the values of greater equality and liberation of the female voice.

Chapter 1-

(a)Global perspectives on the voiceless-ness of the black female in social and literary contexts

When the woman question is considered on a global scale there still appears to be many challenges and difficulties that women experience globally, due to the sexism that is promoted under the patriarchal system. Thus, undoubtedly the pursuit of feminist ideals and gender equality continue to be as relevant for women in today's society as it was in the past. Women still have to organize and unite to challenge the patriarchal powers that seek to marginalize and silence them. One of the most effective tools in the struggle against patriarchal domination in the artistic field has proven to be the art of storytelling. These oral and written narratives exemplify the experiences of the subjects around which the stories have been created.

Firstly, the oral narratives of black women and women of color promote the voicing of resistance to the injustices and abuses committed against women. The art form itself also allows for the articulation of these experiences which can be instrumental in bringing about collective action to achieve significant changes in inequalities. Therefore, stories are told not for aesthetic reasons only but because they reflect on real life issues which can lead to revolutionary changes in the society as a whole. As Leslie Mormon Silko, a native Indian writer reflects on the value of storytelling in an epigraph at the beginning of her novel *Ceremony* (1977) to indicate: "I will tell you something about stories, /... They

aren't just entertainment. / Don't be fooled. / They are all we have, you see/ all we have to fight off/ illness and death." (Cited in Rosenberg, 228) Just as storytelling has traditionally represented an effective form of defense for the Laguna against the persecution of the white majority it proves that it can be a form of resistance and continuity for other minority groups similarly threatened by silencing and erasure.

Rosenberg also identifies a similar dramatization of this position in the characterization of the black civil rights worker Meridian Hill in Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1976) who in response to violations, "... is to become a storyteller, not a destroyer; she is the artist who cannot kill, but will- like the traditional singer of epic tales and ballads-preserve the lost collective memory of her people."(202) The critic Deepika Bahri also identifies this connection between aesthetics and the social when she asks the question, "... do aesthetic considerations contest the social functions of Post-Colonial literature?" She indicates that she does not believe that the aesthetic should be in opposition to the social. (Native intelligence: Aesthetics, Politics and Post-Colonial Literature (2003) Mary Catherine Bateson similarly makes that connection between the world of art and the lived experience of the society when she states that, "Each model, like each individual work of art, is a comment about the world outside the frame." (17)

Hence, the oral narratives of women, the her(s)stories of their daily experiences in their various societies has made a significant contribution to the expansion of my investigation. My objective has been to understand how these her(s)stories illustrate social situations in which the female voice has been marginalized or silenced to some degree in the private as well as the public spheres. In her criticism of the patriarchal

system under which women's lives have been traditionally circumscribed Adrienne Rich indicates that the abuses and inequalities that women endure are occasioned by, "the power of the fathers: a familial- social, ideological, political system in which men- by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law, and language, customs, etiquette, education and the division of labor, determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male."(qtd in Rosenberg, 4)

The pervasive effects of the ideology of sexism also influences the black female in critical ways. In her case the oppression is even more severe since it is coupled with the ideology of racism. Therefore, as the critic Cole attests, "The blows of racism and sexism have been so severe as to plunge many African American women into a place so far down that, as the saying goes, they have to reach up to touch bottom."(Cole, 111) Accordingly, the lives of black women are damaged on both fronts and because they are so closely intertwined it is difficult to deal with one without simultaneously encountering the other. Cole rightly describes this injury as a double sting which "... having one pain removed without the other is not to be free of pain." (Cole, 49)

I recall that on one of my trips to the Caribbean island of Trinidad a female friend confided one of her(s)stories to me in which her voice seemed to experience a measure of marginalization or silencing in the personal arena. She and her partner were trying to decide on how best to develop their front yard so that it would not pose too much of a problem for care and maintenance, as well as to provide parking space for their cars. Her male partner seemed to have taken the lead in the decision making process and arrived at the conclusion that the best course of action would be to pave the entire area with

concrete, even though his female partner would have preferred that only a part of it be covered, thus leaving some uncovered land where she could cultivate her flowers. He proceeded to carry out the plans for the improvement project in a manner which fulfilled his desires, however her desire for the conservation of a little green space around the house was not met.

The narration of this personal her(s) tory seems to shed light on a case in which the female voice seemed to be minimized by that of the male voice in the personal arena since her wish was not considered seriously in the negotiation process. It therefore demonstrates as the critic Cole explains, “The supposition that women are “less than” men ... in written and unwritten laws that established a daughter as her father’s property and a wife as her husband’s.” (84) The secondary status of the female with regard to the male partner, seems to have been demonstrated in this negotiation for physical space. The wishes of the female were considered to be of secondary importance in comparison with those of the male, and so her voice was under-valued and silenced in a very real way in the personal arena. In this unequal division of space between the male and female partners the female subaltern has had to be content with the marginal award, while the male received the bounty. Thus, while his privileged position has been honored, that of the female was regarded as being of limited value in the decision making process in the family.

Therefore, the personal negotiation that this anecdote demonstrates seems to emulate a power struggle which is a characteristic of patriarchal relational patterns. It usually involves an unequal sharing of power and consequently, results in the unequal

distribution and access to material resources. Thus, this narrative exemplifies the comment made by Rosenberg that, “Although women (maybe) guaranteed equitable treatment in the workplace, they must learn how to free themselves from the gender roles which cannot be legislated away.” (35) In this personal arena it is clearly demonstrated that the male has assumed a dominant role as the leader and the person who has the voice and the power, whereas the female does not share the same privileges and is firmly situated in a secondary position where according to the patriarchal ideology of male dominance she has been effectively silenced and experiences voicelessness.

Consequently, the disproportionate distribution of space along gender lines may at first appear to be a purely natural difference of interests, but as the critic Hartman indicates, “... (these problems) are often common to all women and are shaped by social institutions ... (and) susceptible to political solutions.” (cited in Rosenberg, 34) The dual system of private (domestic) and public patriarchy is also discussed by Walby (1996) in her work *Gender Transformations* where she expands on her argument that in Western nations for the most part private patriarchy has evolved into public patriarchy. (cited in Holmes, 14) Therefore the unequal access to resources which began in the private sphere where the power of the father or the husband prevails is subsequently exacerbated by further inequities in the public arena. Thus the collective decision making of male politicians, administrators and other leaders determine the resources that women have at their disposal. (cited in Holmes, 14) This is therefore indicative of the level of inequities that women confront in the modern society, since they occupy less positions of leadership than men and many times do not share in the negotiation and bargaining

process which affects their lives. Hence, in order to reverse the effects of these disparities Bonenpath and Stoper observe that, “Much feminist thought, . . . , has gone into seeking ways to restructure power relations in both public and private spheres, so that there are more democratic, participatory, and just (recourse).”(cited in Rosenberg, 43)

Additionally, reflecting on the relevance and the valuing of the female voice in an interview on the Hispanic television station in the United States, *Telemundo* the female writer Irene Vilar of *Impossible Motherhood* made an insightful comment on the issue when she asked the question, “What’s the use of having a voice if you do not own that voice?” (Interview with Marie Celeste on *Rojo Vivo*) This question seems to raise critical questions about the issue of agency with respect to the expression of the female voice. By correlating ownership and self-expression the writer seems to be making a case for female agency in order to overcome the silences which might be imposed from without or alternatively it may be imposed from within. The critic Cole also reflects on the importance of self-expression for women when she stated that, “. . . the realization of women’s rights – the most basic of which is the right of self-expression –will be a noisy and messy affair.” (97) As such, this comment refers to the polemical nature of female self-expression which in many cases is denied to women in the social and literary contexts.

In her autobiographical narrative Vilar describes the emotional trauma which she experienced as her reproductive rights were manipulated over a period of time by her partner. She states that she was forced to resort to abortions as a viable method for terminating unwanted pregnancies. She passively accepted this domination of her

reproductive rights and made no attempt to speak up for herself in order to oppose this sadistic control that was being imposed on her by her male partner. The critics Sonia Correa and Rosalind Petchesky in their article "*Reproductive and Sexual Rights: A Feminist Perspective*" are in agreement with the statement that "self-determination and pleasure in sexuality is one of the primary meanings of the idea of 'control over one's body' and a principal reason for access to safe abortion and birth control." (Fabros 1991, cited in Correa and Petchesky, 90) Moreover, by allowing her reproductive rights to be directed and undermined in this way Vilar effectively abdicated her right to choose whether she wanted to be a mother or not to another person.

Her(s) tory thus illustrates another instance in which the female voice was overlooked and silenced in the critical issue of her reproductive rights. This seems to be a distinct case which illustrates as the critic hooks indicates, "... (a) patriarchal assault on women's bodies and sexuality." (86) Simone de Beauvoir also reflects on situations in which the female was considered the "other" and relegated to the position of sexual object when she asserts that, "... she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called "the sex," by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex-absolute sex, no less." (33) Vilar's narrative thus reveals her state of emotional and psychological pain which she consequently experienced as a result of her inability to oppose a violent act which was carried out by a male acting in accordance with patriarchal patterns of subordination of the "other".

I believe that Vilar's her(s)tory also reflects on the positioning of the female voice in secondary spaces where it is marginalized in social and relational situations. This seems

to be indicated by the author's comment about the futility of having a voice that you do not own. She appears to be implying that it is not enough to possess a physical voice, but that one has to also have the ability to utilize it to express oneself completely. As such, her analysis which reflects on the nature of communication for women in the society intersects with that of Cole since she also views self-expression for women as a controversial matter. Her(s)tory exemplifies this dilemma that women face in terms of whether they can speak or should speak their own words to express themselves, and equally important to defend themselves. The resolution of this dilemma seemed to be especially critical for her as she dealt with a situation which severely compromised her quality of her life, both physically and emotionally. After, listening to the narration of her experience and her reflection on it, I would contend, that this writer considers it not just a woman's choice to speak for herself, but that it is imperative that she speaks her truth so that her voice can be heard in spite of the risks and consequences involved in doing so.

Consequently, this important consideration for the articulation of the female voice which has been expressed by this female author seems to be countered by the question which the Post-Colonial Feminist critic Gayatri Spivak poses in her article, "Can the subaltern speak?" This question raises the issue of freedom to speak of the subaltern female subject who is characterized as the marginalized and the silenced victim in many cases. Does she really have the desire and the space to express herself authentically, or is her voice altered and transformed in the speaking process. Is she allowed to speak by those who listen to her? Or is she spoken for through the voices of authority and control

that articulate patriarchal control and inequities? Consequently, these critical considerations seem to arise in the discussion of the representation of the female voice in the literary text. They are therefore essential to the discussion as to whether the voice of the black female subject can be represented with clarity, credibility, authenticity in the narrative discourse.

Additionally, when focusing on the voice of the African descended woman who represents the gendered minority subject one has to be aware of the role that racism plays in the experience of sexism. For it undeniably exacerbates the experience transforming it into a double oppression that women endure. The critic Cole affirms this state of affairs when she states that "... it is difficult to distinguish where racism ends and sexism begins... They converge ..." (95) When both forms of victimization are superimposed on each other they produce a suffering which is profound and present a challenge which is difficult to overcome. Cole indicates that it produces a double "sting" which, is the "... the worst nightmare of all." (85) This comment infers that the experience is especially severe for the African descended female who falls at the base of the hierarchical social ladder which is stratified according to the female question, as well as racial discrimination.

Afro-Hispanic literary traditions

My dissertation focuses on the representation of the black female voice in the fictional works by Afro-Hispanic writers both male and female in the Post-Colonial period. Hence, on examination of the black female voice represented by male writers one observes that their renditions seem to adhere to patterns of exclusion and marginalization

for the female voice that are prevalent in the patriarchal normative traditions. Consequently, in many of these works the female voice reflects an effective exclusion and silencing in the narrative. The female subject is almost always rendered as silent or voiceless even where the minority voice occupies a privileged position in the literary discourse. Alternately, when the works by Afro-Hispanic female writers are examined it seems that the opposite is portrayed. These works seem to display a greater liberation and un-silencing of the black female voices. Their aesthetic renditions reveal patterns which feature a distinct deviation, and alternative to the normative patterns of representation. Silence, distortions of the female voice and stereotypical images are inverted or excluded from the discourse. Therefore, this un-silencing of the female voice that seems to be achieved in many works by women demonstrate alternative techniques and ideologies which instead of excluding or marginalizing the female voice they appear to privilege and promote the liberation of the female voice. Therefore, this dissertation investigates in greater depth the techniques, devices and strategies utilized by the female and male authors of both literary traditions in their representations of the black female voice.

While it is a fact that the male writers of the Afro-Hispanic narratives which includes the pioneers such as Manuel Zapata Olivella, Quince Duncan, Donato Ndongo, Cubena (Carlos Guillermo Wilson), Estupiñan Bass, and Adalberto Ortiz overcame major obstacles in the development of the Afro-Hispanic canon. As the literary critic Richard Jackson contends their corpus of works definitely encompass, “... comprehensive explorations of the Black experience, in-depth insights into the Black psyche, and literary

products that are at times challenging and even historically ambitious.”(2) The objectives of these writers in many instances seem to focus on the privileging of the minority subject in their narratives, however one observes that the rendition of the black female rarely reflects the same level of privileging and development as that of the black male voice. However, it appears that their representation of the black female voice in their narratives in many ways has shown very little divergence from the normative patterns of representation of the female voice of the Western canon. The black female subject is still to a large degree spoken for, or spoken to but very rarely does she speak for herself. She is denied this level of autonomy and must contend with the role of the silent and passive “other” in the discourse. The critic Miriam DeCosta-Willis in *Daughters of the Diaspora* reflects on this characteristic of Afro-Hispanic literature where, “Traditionally, Afro-Hispanic novels recount the adventures of male protagonists ... while female characters- depicted as mothers, wives or lovers, who are relevant primarily in terms of their relationships to men – are invisible or marginal.” (212)

In many instances, the female voice which the male writers construct in their narratives correspond to a pattern which the critic Deepika Bahri describes as, “... other to the dominant discourse (for they) have no voice or say in their portrayal; they are consigned to be spoken for by those who command the authority and means to speak.” (204) The female characters represented in the narratives by male writers therefore tend to be positioned in the marginal spaces of the discourse from which they make no significant contribution to the development of the story line or to the main messages transmitted through the narrative. Thus, the African female writer and critic Ama Ata

Aidoo attributes this literary disempowerment of women to the cumulative effects of “... African patriarchal definitions,” as well as the consideration of the black woman as “... the dark continent to be penetrated and pacified, the notion of conquering her and leaving her borders, the site of obligatory civility meant to be invaded and colonized as expressed by Cixous...” (78)

This may be due to what the critic Ahsan Nandy describes as the discourse of colonial masculinity which he contends, “... was congruent with the existing Western sexual stereotypes and the philosophy of life which they represented. It produced a cultural consensus in which political and socio-economic dominance symbolized the dominance of men and masculinity over women and femininity. (Nandy 1983, 4) The critic Ghandi also reflects a similar view when she indicates that the discourse of colonial masculinity was thoroughly internalized by wide sections of the nationalist movements in Post-Colonial nations. (Ghandi, 100)

Alternatively, as distinct from the male writers many of the Afro-Hispanic female novelists such as Luz Argentina Chiriboga, Dahlma Llanos Figueroa, Mayra Febres Santos and María Angue Nsue in many instances do not seem to follow the example of the male writers but have been more instrumental in rendering a female subject whose voice many times resonates with greater presence and clarity within the narrative space. Therefore, the renditions of the black female voice by the female writers of this literary tradition appear to illustrate a distinct divergence from the normative patriarchal patterns of representation of the female subject as silent and marginalized. As the writer Maryse Condé explains “... the African woman doesn’t direct herself to the world, but to her

frustrated and desperate sisters. When she talks, she does it in the name of those women who do not have a voice, who suffer in the fields and who are only left with the ambiguous vestments of maternity.” (Cited by N’gom in *Daughters of the Diaspora*, 305)

Therefore the female writer appears to adopt as the critic Irene Assebe d’Almeida indicates, “... an alternative platform in a universe where the woman manages to free herself not only from a subordinate condition, but where she can also express her own vision of the world.” (Cited by N’gom in *Daughters of the Diaspora*, 305) Consequently, these critics seem to be in agreement that the female writer in many cases is able to surpass the limiting and stereotypical representations of women which have dominated the literary discourse of the Western canon.

Significance:

In view of the argument that this paper initiates on the representation of the voiceless and unsilenced black female subject in the literature of Equatorial-Guinea and Costa Rica, I propose to extend the discussion with greater depth on this issue. For as the critic Judith Butler contends that even though total representation of the female voice is perhaps not possible due to the restricting forces of patriarchy and imperialism, nevertheless the most important thing is that the project of interrogation of the exclusions continue and that we respond to the call of democratic debate.(53) Therefore, conscious of the influence of these constraints on the complete articulation of the black female voice I will illustrate that there are instances where the black female voice is able to achieve artistic and critical un-silencing in the discourse. I will illustrate that the expression of the female voice is an important goal and achievement for writers. This

can thus be achieved when her voice when constructed along alternate and nontraditional modes can shatter the chains of silence to make valid contributions to the conversations and debates which focus on issues of gender, race and nation which represent critical issues for progress in the Post-Colonial nations. This treatment also features as the critic N'gom asserts in the introduction of "The Middle-Atlantic Writers Association Review," an African and Trans-African perspective. It seeks to create a bridge between the two cultural traditions to make comparisons between the representation of the female voice in the literary traditions of the African and African-descended cultures the Caribbean Central America.

The research design and methodology of this dissertation features a comparative reading and analysis of the representation of the female voice in the narratives of *Ekomo* and *Shadows of your black memory, as well as Limón Blues and The four mirrors (Los cuatro espejos)*. In order to facilitate this interaction with the material the critical theories of Post-Colonial/ Feminism, African and Third World feminisms, as well as the tenets of the Womanist theories will be used to provide the theoretical framework and tools for analyzing and interpreting the renditions of the female voice in the narratives.

I also take into consideration the sociolinguistic conception of the nature of voice and the implications for its expression. In the text *Women's ways of knowing* the researchers Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule made the discovery that voice was more than an academic shorthand for a person's point of view. (18) Through their interviews with women they arrived at the conclusion that, "... it is a metaphor that can apply to many aspects of women's experience and development." (18) They indicated that in describing

their lives, women many times talked about, "... voice and silence: "speaking up," "speaking out," "being silenced," "not being heard," "really listening," "really talking," ... in an endless variety of connotations all having to do with sense of mind, self-worth, and feelings of isolation from or connection with others." (18) Voice therefore seemed to be an active expression and linguistic medium for the revelation of one's feelings, ideas and point of view on personal, as well as public issues and occurrences. It is therefore a noun which has multiple connotations for linguistic and psychological agency, which further manifests as an impetus towards activism and mobilization toward a specific goal or cause. The researchers assert that, "... speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction." (18) I would also add that they also suggest the skill of negotiation across differences which is also critical to the resolution of problems and challenging situations.

My working definition of voice:

Voice is the use of speech as represented by the written text to indicate a verbal interaction between the characters, with the environment or within the character himself or herself. It may therefore include dialogues in which others are involved as well as monologues where only the character is involved. Voice also includes the words which are spoken by the characters in their dialogues within the narrative context, as well as the communication of a message that the reader hears and is able to interpret. Voice can also be considered as the agency and power of the words to reflect ideas and to define change. Therefore, it may be viewed as a medium of advocacy, which clearly articulates a message in order to reveal the truth with regard to a specific cause or in defense of a certain position whether social, political or economic. "Voice" can also be used as a

metaphor to indicate a state of empowerment and purposefulness derived from the freedom to express oneself completely without fear or inhibitions and on the other hand as the assurance that one is being listened to and heard by the audience.

(b) Geographical and historical contexts of the literary narratives of Equatorial Guinea and Costa Rica.

A further introduction to the discussion at hand, also warrants a general survey of the geographical, political and cultural contexts of both Equatorial Guinea and Costa Rica. It unveils some very important aspects of the contextual fabrics into which these narratives have been situated in these literary works. Hence, in order to understand the literary expressions that emerged in these cultural contexts I include a description of the key changes and movements that contributed to the development of these Post-Colonial societies from which these literatures emerged to reflect the Post Colonial realities of the periods.

Firstly, I consider the context of Equatorial Guinea which is situated in the region of Central Africa and is the only Sub-Saharan African country which was colonized by Spain during the second phase of its imperialist expansion. The country came under Spanish dominion from the year 1778 to 1968 when it received its independence. Equatorial Guinea consists of two parts, the insular area and a mainland region. Within the insular area are the islands of Bioko (formerly Fernando Pó) and Anabón, a small volcanic island situated in the Gulf of Guinea. Bioko, the northernmost part of Equatorial Guinea is the site of the country's capital, Malabo. The mainland region, Rio Muni is bordered by Cameroon on the north and Gabon on the south and east.

Bata is the location of Equatorial Guinea's largest city, and Rio Muni also includes several off-shore islands such as, Corisco, Elobey Grande, and Elobey Chico. (

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/EquatorialGuinea>)

When Spain finally granted the colony its independence the withdrawal of their administrative machinery was carried out in a precipitated manner so that the country was immediately plunged into a state of emergency and chaos. Thus the sudden dismantling of the colonial bureaucracy and infrastructure signified the onslaught of massive challenges for the newly independent government. Insufficient time for an adequate period of transition from a state of dependence to independence dealt an almost catastrophic blow to the nation. It was therefore followed by a period of undue hardship in the country which spiraled into political corruption heightened by social and moral decadence. The nationalist government under the leadership of Francisco Macías fought to control this situation and instituted an authoritarian regime modeled after the dictatorship of Francisco Franco of Spain who had kept Spain and its colonies under his tight control for most of the twentieth century.

Donato Ndong mentions in his article "*La literatura moderna hispanofona en Guinea Ecuatorial*" that Macías consequently proceeded to implement his policy of anti-colonialism in the nation. Therefore, the pattern of repression of the freedom of the citizens had not changed, only the agents of repression and exploitation. (Afro-Hispanic Review, 39) The new demagogue further led the country down a path of economic instability, as well as de-culturization and illiteracy. Under his government the country returned to the dominance of the clans and the wanton practice of primitivism. The use of the Spanish language was prohibited and all the remaining bureaucratic and cultural

systems left by the Spaniards were dismantled or left to disintegrate. (Afro-Hispanic Review, 39)

Additionally, the freedom of expression and all forms of communication in the country were censored or curtailed in many instances. Many leaders of the independence movement fell victim to this reign of terror by Macías. One of them was Atanasio Ndongu who was allegedly assassinated by the order of the Macías government. During the period between 1968 and 1978 almost twenty percent of the population of Equatorial Guinea was exterminated by the orders of Macías. (Afro-Hispanic Review, 39) Apart from the killings, the population was also significantly reduced through the migration of Guineans seeking political asylum in neighboring countries such as Gabon and the Cameroon. They also sought refuge in the European countries especially Spain and France.

Therefore, the reversal of colonial exploitation was followed by the implementation of anti-colonial nationalist policies which also took a toll on the country. In addition to affecting the cultural nerve of the country the subsequent tyranny and violations unleashed on the populations severely affected the psychology of the Guinean people. Their physical, social and psychic spaces were ruled by fear and anguish as they were now subjected to a double victimization in their homeland. In the same article from the Afro-Hispanic Review cited previously, Donato Ndongu describes the subsequent effect on the nation as, “ (The) dis-personification and insecurity as dominant features in the Guinean personality, obligated to abandon the inherited European culture and what represents a universality and path to progress and ... deprived of a profound notion of the meaning of the ancestral rites and beliefs, reduced to a simple ecstatic and inhuman

caricature of the manifestations and practices of cannibalism, witchcraft and tribalism.” (Afro-Hispanic Review, 41) Therefore, in his view the abrupt separation from Spain, as well as the assumption of an extreme anti-colonial position did not have a positive influence on the Guinean population, as it further served to demoralize the population, and to destabilize the nation as a whole.

The Afro-Costa Rican community on the other hand, is located on the Caribbean coastal region of Costa Rica in Central America. The community was developed by the labor of contingents of African descended immigrant workers from the Caribbean islands coming mainly from Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Guyana and other Caribbean islands. The flow of immigrants into the region which had Limón as its main city began in the early 1900's when the Northern Railway Company began the construction on the railroad between Port Limón and San José, the capital of Costa Rica. Later the United Fruit Company, another American based company established a stronghold in Limón as they developed the area as a producer of bananas. This increased demand for workers expanded the recruitment of greater numbers of Caribbean workers to provide the labor supply. Therefore, between 1900 and 1913 a contingent of about 20,000 Jamaican workers were brought to Port Limón to work on the recently established banana plantations. These early migrant workers were made up of single men who lived in Company barracks. They were soon followed by their families and by the 1920's Limón had already established a relatively stable population. (Avi Chomsky, 838) The company also recruited large numbers of native Costa Rican natives but they never equaled the number of black Antillian workers.

The researcher Avi Chomsky also indicates that the first Jamaicans who migrated to Costa Rica were usually second-generation ex-slaves since slavery had been abolished in Jamaica in the 1830's. Hence, they seemed to be familiar with a tradition of resistance to labor conditions and life circumstances which they deemed as unfair and unjust. As Chomsky contends, they had already developed "... a language, religion and organized social life... to survive, mitigate or challenge these "slave like" conditions." (838) Therefore, they sought to develop the social and cultural life of their communities so that they would not be entrapped in another plantation system which was similar to the slave society from which they were just emancipated. As such they were able to transfer a strong vision of community, organization and collaboration that they had already developed to the new circumstances they confronted on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica. They were therefore able to vigorously advocate on behalf of workers who were in many cases subjected to unjust and unfair labor practices. Chomsky reflects on the comparable elements between the life of the slaves and the free workers when she states that, "The Jamaicans in Costa Rica, as had the slaves in Jamaica, attempted to in both confrontational and accommodation-ist ways to develop in the shadows of the plantation system (along lines) which satisfied their material and spiritual needs." (838) These immigrant workers were in many cases committed to the improvement of their economic situations, as well as their social lives. They organized to form worker's unions, lodges and other friendly societies through which they could defend and promote the rights of the members of their community as free men. In many instances these groups championed the cause of justice and integrity in their adopted homeland.

The Artisans and laborers' Union developed economic programs to promote the self-sufficiency of the workers outside of the control of the United Fruit Company. Their role was also cultural as they sought to preserve the links between the immigrant population and their Jamaican/African heritage. In one such attempt the union approached the United Fruit Company in order to request that August 1st be declared a public holiday for the workers since it was their Emancipation Day and it was celebrated in Jamaica. The company indignantly refused to grant this request thus indicating their unwillingness to recognize the cultural heritage of the workers. They then proceeded to victimize the workers who insisted on observing this important milestone in their liberation struggle. Subsequently the dispute was taken to the government which also refused to intervene and advocate on behalf of the workers. The union also revealed to the Costa Rican government their complaints of exploitation, mis-treatment and abuse by the American multi-national company to which there was no response. Through these experiences the transnational community began to realize the limited nature of the freedom they exercised in the worker status which they assumed in their Costa Rican adopted homeland. They began to realize that the, "... difference between slavery and "free labor" was really (not) so great." (Chomsky, 841)

The Protestant church also emerged to make a significant contribution to the development of the Caribbean immigrant community in Limón as well. On many occasions they supported the cause of the working classes which were subjected to the unfair practices of the United Fruit Company. However, Protestant Non-conformism as indicated by Chomsky many times articulated an, "... ambiguous role in Costa Rica, just

as they had in Jamaica.” (843) They could support the planter class in promotion of their message of servitude and allegiance to the masters. On the other hand, they could also transmit messages which undermined and challenged the dominant group thus promoting resistance and rebellion. Gradually, their religious practices evolved into a syncretic form referred to as “Black Baptism” and included aspects of the African ancestral culture such as, “... drumming, dancing and spirit possession...” (Chomsky, 843)

The African based religions, such as Obeah and Myalism brought from Jamaica by the immigrant workers also contributed to the creation of an alternative society for the support of the community. They were usually clandestine in practice but they proved to be subversive catalysts for resistance and insurrection against the violations committed against the workers. Many times the ministers, the Obeah men as they were called were feared leaders of the resistance movements. In the labor strikes of 1911 the United Fruit Company identified them as leaders of the striking workers and aggressively sought their deportation from Costa Rica. Leaders such as Charles Ferguson and Washington Sterling were considered as dangerous threats to the company’s control of the workers and the viability of the Costa Rican economy. (Chomsky, 847)

The Afro-Jamaican community in Limón also played an important role in the Pan African movement founded by Marcus Garvey in 1914 in Jamaica. It was while working in Limón as a time-keeper for the United Fruit Company that he first conceptualized the organization for the improvement of African descended peoples in the Americas. It was called the “Universal Negro Improvement Association” whose objectives were exemplified in the motto, “One God, One Aim, One Destiny”. The ideologies of Pan

Africanism and African nationalism which the organization promoted served to transmit relevant messages firstly of unity, and of organization for progress of all African and African descended peoples in the world on a political, social, economic and cultural level.

The chapter of the UNIA which was founded in Limón by some of its core members was an important one since its message touched a critical chord for the Afro-Antillians who lived and worked in the adopted territory. They already understood the importance of collective action for progress and the critic Dorothy Mosby similar to Chomsky also indicates this fact when she states that, “The Afro-West Indians were unified in a common struggle for cultural preservation for the eventual return “home”, even those of the second generation born in Costa Rica.” (Preface, X) In many cases the conditions which they encountered were difficult and challenging since their rights as workers were constantly being compromised and violated due to the practices of the United Fruit Company.

Additionally, as the community continued to expand not so much through new arrivals but due to the births of the offspring of the immigrant workers they were denied citizenship by the Costa Rican government. These offspring born in the Costa Rican territory of the immigrant workers were not recognized as citizens of the new territory and since their links with the home country had grown weaker with the progression of the generations they therefore occupied a position of great uncertainty. Their physical movement between the province of Limón and the capital city, San José was also severely restricted by legal regulations. This region therefore developed as a concentrated center for African descended populations and their cultural traditions and

practices which they maintained as part of their cultural legacy. When later generations were finally granted official recognition as Costa Rican citizens in 1948, as well as the ban on their movement was removed the Province of Limón had by then developed as much more than an enclave for immigrant workers. It had developed into a distinct center for Afro-Caribbean cultures intermingled or fused with Costa Rican cultures. It is through this historical and political process that the Afro-Costa Rican community expanded and developed to become a part of the Costa Rican nation state.

At this point I would also like to include in the discussion of the literature of Equatorial Guinea the phases in its development. I will also focus on the principal authors both male and female as well as emphasize the writers Donato Ndongu and María Nsue Angue who will be featured in this study. Firstly, we can observe that despite the repression and trauma that the Guinean nation suffered the voice of resistance of the people could not be completely extinguished. One of the areas in which it surfaced was in the literary expression which evolved among Guinean writers. The first novel written by a Guinean writer however, marked the definite entry of Guinean writers into modern literature. This writer was Leoncito Evita who in 1953 published “Cuando los combes luchaban” (When the combes were fighting). It was based on a traditional legend of the Ndowé ethnic group to which the author belonged. According to Donato Ndongu this work was important because it was, “... rooted in the African bantú culture, and breaks away from the mere transcription that characterizes his contemporaries’ leaning towards indigenous forms of creation.” (*Afro-Hispanic Review*, 40) (... enraizada en la cultura Africana, bantú, (y) rompe la mera transcripción que caracteriza a sus coetáneos para despegar

hacía formas autóctonas de creación.) Even though this novel is situated within the period of colonialism yet still it represented a significant achievement for the expansion of Guinean literature.

The first initiatives towards the creation of their own written literature was followed by a period of complete silence when all literary voices seemed to be extinguished. It coincided with the political repression that the country experienced during the Post-colonial regime of Francisco Macías Nguema. In the article the “Missing Link: African Hispanism at the dawn of the millennium” M’bare N’gom explains that in 1968 when the new president instituted his politics of “afro-fascista” or the equivalent “nguemista” as denominated by the historian Max Liniger-Goumaz. it lead to the effective censoring of all voices which expressed discontent in the country. (N’gom, 7)

In spite of this, the creative endeavors among some of the exiled writers in the Metropolitan cities of Europe and Africa flourished as they began to aspire towards the production of literary works which articulated their voices and experiences. Their writings began to appear first as pamphlets and in marginal magazines and journals of limited editions. Many of the lyrical productions reflected a distinct political perspective of resistance and protest. For example, the poem by Francisco Zamora Lobo, “Vamos a matar el tirano” (Let’s kill the tyrant) expressed the poet’s direct opposition and frustration with the dictator. (N’gom, 414)

In recent years, from 1981 to the present there has been a renewal of the literary vigor among the writers of Equatorial Guinea which has had a direct influence on the creation of a literary renaissance of Guinean literature. It is characterized by a rebirth of the zeal, as well as a commitment of the writers to reclaim their voices and give expression to their

sufferings and triumphs expressed through the written word. They are embracing the medium of literature for the promotion of their cause for justice. Their social and political motivation is also shared by other African writers, such as Chinua Achebe who contend that the role of the artist in African societies has always had a social impetus at its center. Ashcroft, indicates that when Achebe differentiated between African and European artists he concluded that they, "... privileged the social function of writing over its function as a tool of individual expression. They created their myths and legends, and told their stories for a human purpose ... , and they made their sculptures to serve the needs of their times...." (Achebe, 1963b: 19, Cited in Ashcroft, 125) Thus, this indicates that the artistic manifestations in the African context largely, emerged as a result of a utilitarian purpose in the various societies, and the artist and his work have always occupied an integral part of the society.

Similar to the emphasis made on the developmental phases displayed in the evolution of the literature of Equatorial Guinean, I also focus on this process in the case of the Afro-Costarican literary traditions. Thus, as I begin the inquiry into these phases in the development of this tradition the principal writers that emerge include such writers as Quince Duncan, Eulalia Bernard, Shirley Campbell, Delia McDonald and Ana Cristina Rossi. The first evidence of a literary tradition within the Afro-Costa Rican community first appeared in the form of journalistic writings. As the Costa Rican writer and critic Ana Cristina Rossi indicates, the origins of this literary tradition can be located in the first English newspapers published in Limón during the first half of the 20th century. According to Rossi this was the first written literature of the Afro-Antillian descendants of Costa Rica. The critic further explains that this literature was thus influenced by their

experiences in Costa Rica and their texts have subsequently remained in Costa Rica and therefore should be considered a cultural patrimony of Costa Rica. (477) Included in this corpus of writings were more than a thousand journalistic essays, and various poems. Rossi attributes the flourishing of the literature at this time to the dynamic intermingling of various influences. These included, “... the educational policies of the British Empire in Jamaica, of the activity and the intellectual, social and political agitation of the period in general ... of the Protestant reverends in particular, of the humor and vitality inherited from West Africa and the cultural Victorian influence in interaction with the peculiar reality of Costa Rica and of Limón.” (478) The first forms of literature also consisted of predominantly essays and poems because they were the only forms that were publishable. Rossi also describes these literary expressions as “... transnational, transterritorial, transregional, intertextual.” (478) Samuel Charles Nation, Henry Hylton, Dolores Joseph, J. C. Francis, Can B. Soyés were some of the most outstanding writers of this period.

The first newspapers by and for the Afro-Antillians in Limón, “The Limón Times” a daily newspaper first made its appearance in November 1910 and was maintained up to 1911. (479) It seems that during the first year of publication of this newspaper the textual materials consisted mainly of essays, editorials and articles. The themes of these articles reflected on a variety of topics and interests such as, “... the history- Herodoto, James Cook, the land of Australia- , the territories of the British Empire, the discoveries of Sigmund Freud, The Boers war, the labor movement in Limón, the in-satisfaction of the Afro-Antillians with the United Fruit Company, ... the relations between Jamaica, England and Costa Rica...” (479) Some of the other important newspapers founded

during this period in Limón were *The Atlantic Voice* (1934), and *The Searchlight* (1929) which spanned the period from 1903 to about 1949.

Charles Samuel Nation proved to be one of the foremost essayists of the emergent Afro-Costa Rican literary period. Some of his articles which appeared in *The Atlantic Voice* were, “The Costa Rican Negro’s place in Costa Rica,” 1934; “The colonization of British Guiana” 1935; and “The recent elections” 1936. These journalistic essays of Nation did not only display his literary skills, but also his commitment to use his voice to inform and raise the consciousness of the Afro-Antillian community in Limón about critical events that were important for their progress and wellbeing in the Costa Rican adopted homeland. His essays many times transmitted a vision which according to Rossi was transnational in nature since, “... he speaks from a Jamaican nationality and he stretches it to reach the British nationality, the interests of the Empire, but he also speaks from the point of view of someone who is Central American and who possesses certain national rights to live there.” (482-483) The Afro-Costa Rican writer Quince Duncan also describes the literature of this period as a literature of exile, which resulted from an abundance of articles and commentaries written by the Jamaican immigrants for their local newspapers. He also believes that it represents a literature which, promotes a very high self-esteem and additionally agrees with the Afro-Colombian writer, Candelario Obeso who described the literature as a literature in which the black man proclaims himself the king of himself. (522) Therefore, the literature proclaimed the self-worth of the members of the community, as well as the community itself and served to strengthen the solidarity and unity in their struggle for physical and cultural survival in the adopted homeland.

The Contemporary period:

With the literary foundation already implanted in the Afro-Costa Rican community in Limón, the continuation of this literary tradition in the contemporary period was more or less inevitable. Their writings could now expand beyond the genre of the journalistic articles to include a wider array of forms such as poems, essays, short stories, plays and the novel. In keeping with their historical trajectory their literary writings many times reflect on these critical and formative experiences in the Costa Rican homeland. They also reflect on the present day realities which still pose a challenge to their complete integration and freedom in Costa Rican nation state. As the critic Dorothy Mosby asserts, their works many times deal with, "... the themes of cultural oppression, exile and displacement..." (28) This dislocation she asserts is a special characteristic of the Afro-Costa Rican experience which situates their literature in a special position. This is due to their cultural productions arising firstly out of British colonial, and later on the neocolonial processes of the new trans-national companies operating in Central America.

The literary texts which have been produced in the contemporary period also focus with great clarity on the, "... margin-center tensions of the Post-Colonial experience, though the historic situation is unique because it is neither an indigenous literature ... nor a "settler colony" literature..."(30) It represents a literature which was transplanted from the Afro-Caribbean tradition along with the bearers. Consequently, in response to the Costa Rican geographical, socio-political and linguistic environment it was able to undergo a process of natural growth and expansion to acquire its own distinctive elements. Therefore, it can be said that the literature has acquired a certain vibrancy and

distinctiveness as they initiate and sustain a process of, "... write(ing) back to the cultural hegemony and affirm(ing) its presence in a space where the Afro-Costa Ricans write in their own voices and shape their own images and representations."

(Mosby, 31)

The major proponents of the Afro-Costa Rican literary expressions include writers of formidable creative talent and depth. Included in this group of writers are writers such as Eulalia Bernard, Quince Duncan, Shirley Campbell and Delia McDonald. Eulalia Bernard who is one of the first of the poets of the contemporary period, was the first African descended female poet of the Afro-Costa Rican literature. (De Costa Willis, 117) Her poetry can be described as being heavily derived from traditional forms as she uses humor, irony and dramatic tension to develop them. The thematic material of the poetry focuses on the African cultural heritage, relationships between men and women, and the sociopolitical problems of poor Blacks. (De Costa Willis, 117) Her first collection of poems appeared in 1982, *Ritmohéroe* (Rhythmhero) Her poetry seems to reflect a strong political thrust which she attributes to be in keeping with the activism which she inherited from her parents and grandparents who were maroons from Jamaica and Cuba. (Interview with Shirley Jackson, De Costa Willis, 47) Critics describe Bernard's work as reflecting a commitment to "... Black solidarity, race and gender equality, the deconstruction of racial stereotypes, and the revision of Costa Rican history to reflect the contributions of its indigenous and African-descended people." (De Costa Willis, 118)

Quince Duncan is another one of the major writers of the Afro-Costa Rican tradition of the contemporary period. He is one of the most studied Afro-Hispanic writers today. His versatility as a writer is illustrated by the diversity of genres which he utilizes in his

literary works. These include the short story, folk tale, novel and theoretical articles in which he delineates and deconstructs the theories related to the conditions of life as well as the cultural productions of African descended peoples in Latin American and the Caribbean. Thus, as Dorothy Mosby indicates his prolific literary production seems to situate Duncan within the realm of the "... new novelists..." who has been omitted in the Latin American literary boom. (121)

Shirley Campbell and Delia McDonald represent poets of the fourth generation of Jamaican heritage in Costa Rica. Through their poetry they transmit a distinct cultural identity that honors their heritage. Campbell's poetry features, "... (an) exploration of history and heritage that is focused on Limón as the cultural center and a point to affix her declaration of blackness."(Mosby, 169) Her collections of poetry include *Being Born, 1988 (Naciendo)* and *Absolutely Black, 1994 (Rotundamente negra)*. Dellita Martin-Ogunsola contends that, "Campbell is part of the post-negritude current flowing throughout the Caribbean and Latin America for her works diverge from negritude in significant ways." (DeCosta- Willis, 424) The critic believes that instead of being "... plaintive, strident, and explicit..." they address more personal notions of race, gender aesthetics. (424) Therefore, many of the themes articulated in her poetry are situated in the realms of the "... the Black female historical experience in Costa Rica... (and they) ... explore the emotional landscape of the village in both a private and public sense, ..." (424)

Delia McDonald is another of the contemporary poets of the Afro-Costa Rican tradition and although she was born in Panama but relocated to San José with her family at an early age. The coastal area is also depicted in her poetry as an important cultural

space and a site of memory. (Mosby, 230) Many of her poems are very brief and appear to be “... deceptively simple, but (are) actually quite hermetic.” (209) Similar to her contemporary Shirley Campbell she also privileges the female perspective and her poetry features “... an intergenerational and spiritual continuum of black women; she creates a black female genealogy.” (230) Her collections of poems include *The seventh circle of the obelisk, 1994 (El séptimo círculo del obelisco)*; *Wood Blood, 1995 (Sangre de madera)*; and *The rain is a skin, 1999 (La lluvia es una piel)*.

(C) General overview of the four novelists and their literary works –

María Nsue Angue-*Ekomo*, Donato Ndongo- *Shadows of your dark memory (Tinieblas de tu memoria negra)* ; Ana Cristina Rossi-Limón *Blues*, Quince Duncan- *The four mirrors (Los cuatro espejos)*.

In my dissertation I examine the representation of the black female voice firstly in the narratives of the Ecuatorial Guinean with a focus on the writers María Nsue Angue, and Donato Ndongo. Maria Nsue Angue is the first female novelist to publish a novel in the post-colonial period in the literary history of the country, and her novel entitled “*Ekomo*” was published in 1985. (N’gom, 303) Meanwhile, Ndongo is one of the first male novelists of Equatorial Guinea to publish a novel after the Period of Silence of the Macias regime. He published, “*Shadows of your black memory*” (*Las Tinieblas de tu memoria negra*) in 1987.

María Nsue Angue- *Ekomo and other Works*

This writer represents one of the first female voices to achieve prominence in the Literature of Equatorial Guinea. (De Costa-Willis, 286) She was born in Ebebiyin (The Muni River) in 1951,

although different sources cite her as being born in 1948 and 1945 respectively.

(footnote) At an early age Nsue immigrated to Spain where she grew up and pursued her studies from the primary school to university. She studied for a career in journalism and later accepted a post in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. At the age of twenty-one she returned to Equatorial Guinea where she worked in radio and television. During this period, she immersed herself in the indigenous language, the history and the culture of the fang of which she was a descendent. Even though she writes in Spanish at the narrative level, but it is the culture and the traditions of the Guineans that are featured in the texts.

In her literary writings she allows the people and the Guinean traditions to enrich and inspire her creative work. She incorporates the histories, the stories, proverbs in "...the tales, songs and praise songs and other genres..." which are utilized in the Guinean tradition to educate and impart culture to others. (N'gom, 301) Vicente Granados in the prologue of *Ekomo* also attests to this characteristic of the language utilized by Nsue Angue in the narration of the her(s)tory. He describes it as written in "Guinean Spanish" in which she "... pours out into Spanish the language of the drums." (9)

The "Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia" in Madrid published her first novel *Ekomo* in 1985 which was also published in French ten years later with the title "L'Harmattan". (DeCosta-Willis, 286) According to the critic N'gom Ekomo is the story of a male protagonist of the same name, whose life story is told by his wife, Nnanga. (N'gom, 303) She first met Ekomo as a child and later married him when she was older.

When he became ill she accompanied him on a journey through the countryside in search of a cure for his illness. Despite their efforts they are unable to find a cure and he finally dies leaving her to face to some degree the consequences of widow persecution.

From Madrid María Angue Nsué continues writing for Spanish and Guinean newspapers. She also participates in cultural events giving lectures based on her writings. She has directed theatrical performances such as “La conspiración del cuatro” (The Conspiracy of the Four). She has written more than a hundred short stories and traditional tales, including ‘Paper Mask’, ‘The Eye of the Mountain’, ‘The Solitary Swallow’, and the ‘The War of the Lesser Gods’. Some of these will appear in a collection entitled “Los dioses perdidos”(The lost gods). (De Costa Willis, 287)

The first novel written by María Angue Nsué, *Ekomo* is singular since it privileges the story of the female subject at the center of the narrative. Even though, this treatment of the female subject reflects many aspects of the life of the traditional female, however, at the same time it also proposes a rupture with the traditional patterns of representation of the black female voice in literature. In this case, some of the normative patterns are questioned and subverted so that the female “other” is included at the center of the narrative. The novelist thus seems to defy the traditional representations of the silenced and voiceless female ‘other’ to render a female who seeks self expression in the social context in which she inhabits. She is situated alongside the male protagonist in the narrative, and is assigned the role of the narrator both of his(s)tory, as well as of her(s)tory. In this manner, the female voice is included at the center of the discourse, and her presence is validated, as her voice is elevated to a position where she is able to achieve a significant degree of self-expression and liberation in the text.

Although Nsue's novel, *Ekomo* is centered around the privileging of the female voice and perspective, yet still the author does not completely support the objectives of feminism and believes that it is a 'sickness of the developed countries'. (De Costa Willis, 287) She does however admire the work of female writers such as Toni Morrison, Rosalía de Castro and Carmen Laforet. She also articulates the view held by other writers of the post-colonial tradition that the cross-cultural approach is an important one. She indicates that, "...writers- male and female, African and European- have an important role to play in communicating across cultures, particularly in the struggle against racism, xenophobia, and violence."(De Costa Willis, 287)

Donato Ndongo- "*Shadows of your black memory*" (*Las Tinieblas de tu memoria negra*)

This is another Equatorial Guinean writer, who is also included in my dissertation. In addition to being a writer, he is also a journalist, and is considered as one of the foremost writers of the Guinean literary renaissance. He was born in Niefang, Rio Muni in 1950 and completed his early studies at the college of the missionaries in Niefang. He began his secondary education at the Centro laboral "La Salle" in Bata and in 1965 he left Equatorial Guinea to continue his studies in Spain. With the onset of the dictatorship in Equatorial Guinea in 1968 he was forced to remain in Spain indefinitely. Confronted with the new situation of living in exile he therefore joined the student movement which mounted active protests against the repression and violence that had overtaken their country. Ndongo's commitment as a writer was solidified during this experience of exile and activism on behalf of fellow Guineans who were persecuted or killed under the new administration in his homeland.

Ndongo as a writer has experimented with a variety of literary genres which include the short story, poetry, the essay and the novel. Since the publishing of his first works in 1973 he has continued to write about the Guinean conditions of repression, alienation and primarily the loss of the right to a homeland. He is considered as one of the most prolific writers of the literary tradition. His works include: *Historia y tragedia de Guinea Ecuatorial* (1977); *Antología de la literatura guineana* (1984); *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987), *Los poderes de la tempestad* (1997), *España en Guinea* (1998, co-author) and *África que viene* (1999, co-author); and most recently *El metro* (2007). He has also written numerous historical, political and cultural articles for Spanish, Guinean and African magazines and newspapers. He was recognized for his literary achievement in “Shadows of your black memory” was named as a finalist for the Sésamo prize in Spain.

In his career as a professional journalist in Guinea he was offered the post of acting director of the Hispanic-Guinean Cultural Center of Malabo in 1985. He held this position until 1992 when he resigned. He then occupied the post of correspondent and representative of the Spanish news agency EFE for all of Central Africa. He has served as a writer in residence at the University of Missouri from 2005 to 2008.

In *Shadows (Tinieblas)*, which was published in 1987 one observes the privileging of the his(s)tory, where the male voice is privileged over the female voice in the narrative. The story is situated in Rio Muni during the latter period of the colonial rule. Undeniably it is a tale which reflects on the issues surrounding the process of development of the Guinean nation from a Spanish colony which is on the road to independence. The traditional indigenous culture of the fang is directly contrasted to the dominant culture of

the colonial rulers. The tensions and conflicts between the two distinct systems are made apparent when they intersect at critical moments. This is demonstrated in the narrative plot through the experience of, “The protagonist who is torn between the Catholic and the African (religions and) world views,” (Lewis, 141) especially depicted by his ritualistic initiations in both religions. It is a story that dramatizes the encounter between the imperialist West and the traditional African society.

The novelist therefore underlines the clash which occurs between opposing cosmovisions that was a direct result of this encounter. The text is most insightful when it reflects on the interactions between both groups that are motivated by the contrasting ideologies. It is a story that ultimately features the evolution of the nationalist Guinean voice and consciousness of their right to express their own national identity. One therefore can observe the journey of the Guinean town from indoctrinated and marginalized ‘other’ to the recuperation and expression of a distinct national identity.

Additionally, the interrogation of the representation of the black female voice which occupies the central position of my dissertation, also extends to include the literary tradition of the Afro-Costa Rican community. These narratives include firstly, that of the Costa Rican female writer Ana Cristina Rossi, who wrote “Limón Blues”, as well as the Afro-Costa Rican male writer, Qunice Duncan who wrote “*The four mirrors*” (*Los cuatro espejos*).

Ana Cristina Rossi: *Limón blues* and other works.

Rossi is one of the few female writers that has emerged from a literary tradition dominated by male writers in the twentieth century in Latin America and in Costa Rican

literature. She was born in San José in 1952 where she obtained her education up to the secondary level. She continued her university education in London and Paris, in the areas of dance, theatre and languages. Her first novel, *María de la Noche* was published in 1985 by Editorial Lumen, S.A., in Barcelona. Soon after the novel's publication, she was awarded the Premio Nacional de Novela from Costa Rica. However, the novel received a negative reception from the Costa Rican public. Rossi's second novel *La Loca de la Gandoca* was published in 1994 by EDUCA. This time the public reception in Costa Rica was contrary to what it had been for the first novel. The book immediately sold 40,000 copies in Central America. (Paul Ureña, 42) Publishing information: *Limón Blues* was published in 2002 and is the first of a trilogy that deals with the Afro-Costa Rican culture. In this novel the novelist attempts to break stereotypes and normative bonds to allow the expression of a diversity of voices. Although she writes about the black experience of the peoples of the Costa Rican Caribbean she is not herself a descendent of the community. However, she lived in Limón until she was twelve years old and interacted with the community at a very meaningful level. In spite of not being a member of the community, the vision that her work portrays of the Afro-Costa Rican culture is one that can be considered as relevant and sincere in its attempt to reconstruct the community with its historical foundations and cultural traditions.

In my view, the novel *Limón Blues* therefore makes a valuable contribution to the corpus of Afro-Costa Rican literature. Rossi's narrative *Limón Blues* as Quince Duncan describes in his article, "Corrientes literarias AfroCentroAmericanas" incorporates characteristics which he determines as essential to a positive representation of the black

culture such as, "... true persons, not caricatures, nor stereotypes. There is no ridiculing. There is no presenting of the black as inferior. There are good and bad black characters, better and worse..." (Grinberg Pla y Baldovinos, 521) (verdaderos personajes, no caricaturas, ni estereotipos. No hay burla. No se presenta al negro como inferior. Hay personajes negros Buenos y malos, mejores y peores) Her knowledge and understanding of the community was formed through first hand contact with the culture, as well as relationships with members of the community. She also carried out extensive research of the history and cultural development of the Afro-Costa Rican community in order to reconstruct the life and times of the characters in her narrative.

Her literary work therefore represents a recuperation of the history and culture of the Afro-Antillian descendants from oblivion and invisibility in the contemporary society of Costa Rica. In the epilogue of *Limón Blues* Rossi describes the community when she states that, "In Limón there lived a fascinating group of people who spoke an English that was exquisite, they dressed in a fabulous way they used to sing of extraordinary things and they had secret rituals in places called lodges. (Rossi, 396) (En vivía una gente fascinante que hablaba un inglés exquisite, se vestía de modo espectacular, cantaba cosas extraordinarias y tenía rituales secretos en unos sitios llamados logias.) She indicates that after a period of an absence of 15 years from Costa Rica, on returning she was amazed by how much the community had been transformed. She then asked herself the questions, "Where were those people, what had happened to their splendor? Had it been invented by my childhood imagination? (Rossi, 397) (Dónde estaba aquella gente, aquel splendor? Lo había inventado mi imaginación de niña?) In that regard she began to search for

answers to her questions, and her literary work is an attempt to re-visit the past and to recuperate the roots of this segment of the Costa Rican society. Her work therefore appears to represent a resistance to the movement to maintain the Afro- Costa Rican community as a marginalized and silenced “other” in the discourse of the nation. Her motivations for the creation of this literary work in many ways exemplify the words of Marcus Garvey whom she quotes in the novel, “You all have allowed the most precious thing that human beings possess to be robbed from you. ... Without roots we wither and die.” (Rossi, 317) (Ustedes se han dejado robar lo más precioso que tienen los seres humanos, la memoria. ... Sin raíces nos marchitamos.) Her work in the narrative of “*Limón Blues*” strives to recuperate these roots which were planted on Costa Rican soil by the Antillian community in the post colonial period.

Additionally, *Limón Blues* reflects a degree of historicity since it was constructed from the newspaper archives which presented evidence of the life and times of the Afro-Caribbean community in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The novelist indicated that, “... it was not her imagination. That world was lying there, perfectly documented, in the National Library of Costa Rica, in the newspapers of Limón in English.” (Rossi, 397) (... no era mi imaginación. Ese mundo yacía allí, perfectamente documentado, en la Biblioteca Nacional de Costa Rica, en los periódicos de Limón en inglés.) It was her intention to incorporate the historical data with great authenticity so that the reader would be aware that the Limón of the novel did exist in the past. In this way the Afro-Caribbean community would be able to relate their story in their own voices. (398)

Therefore, the novel narrates the story of the community as it grew and took shape in Limón and represents an effort to recuperate the history that was silenced and forgotten. It is therefore a novelized history which situates its contextual information in the past history of the community, not only as it applies to the life in Limón but as it extends outwards to the Caribbean homeland of Jamaica, on one hand and to San José, the national center of the adopted homeland on the other. The socio-cultural relations with other countries such as the United States and Africa also appear in the narrative. Thus, the novel begins with a flash back to Orlandus's past life in Jamaica where the severe economic and social conditions forced him to migrate to Costa Rica in search of a better future for himself and his family. As the narrative begins to unfold it illustrates the experiences and circumstances of Orlandus's life as he progresses in the society from a subsistence farmer in Cahuita, to a laborer in the banana fields of the United Fruit Company, and later to a bookkeeper for a small business. As the plot further develops he seems to discover his passion for the literary world and begins his incursion in the world of journalism. He begins to write for the *Limón Times*, and this position later leads him into the world of activism. He seems to be captivated by the message of "Advancement for the negro" of Marcus Garvey and became one of the movement's founding members in Limón which later became a critical chapter of the movement. The story line is spun not only around the life of Orlandus, but it expands to include that of Irene, his wife as well as Sam Nation, the editor of the several of the local newspapers and the leader of the United Negro Improvement Association, Marcus Garvey and the other members of the community who made an impact on the social and political life of Limón either directly or indirectly.

Therefore, it seems that it privileges the lives of the ordinary people, as well as that of the important figures in the immigrant society. On one hand, there is the life of the workers, and on the other the narrative paints a picture of the lives of the leaders such as Samuel Charles Nation as well as Marcus Garvey, the leader of the UNIA, who spearheaded the movement for the advancement and progress of the blacks in Africa and the diaspora during the early twentieth century. The readers are able to witness the evolution and development of the community as its members confront innumerable challenges to satisfy their immediate physical needs, as well as the need to conserve their cultural traditions for future generations. *Limón Blues* represents a serious attempt to capture and dramatize the story of the integration process of the Afro- Caribbean community into the fabric of the Costa Rican nation in the Post-Colonial period.

Quince Duncan- *The four mirrors (Los cuatro espejos)*

Quince Duncan is the author of *The four mirrors (Los cuatro espejos)* and this narrative also forms a central part of the corpus of the literary texts for my dissertation. This author is considered as one of the pioneering voices of the Afro-Costa Rican literary traditions. He is a third generation descendant of the Afro-Antillian transplanted population which first arrived as immigrant workers in Costa Rica in the early twentieth century. These itinerant workers with the passage of time were able to establish roots in Limón as their links with Jamaica and the other Caribbean islands became less intense and vital. They therefore introduced their African/Anglophone heritage to the Hispanic culture of Costa Rica that resulted in the creation of a community that reflects what can be termed as a cultural hybridity.

Quince Duncan was born in 1940 and grew up in the town of Estrada in the province of Limón. He completed his secondary education in San José, and his talent as a writer was first apparent during his adolescence. In his work as a writer, educator and activist he has sought to re-vindicate the role of the African descendants in the development of Costa Rica. As such, he indicates that the work of the Afro-descendants has contributed many progressive elements to the Costa Rican society and culture. They contributed to the expansion of the banana production in Costa Rica which resulted in the country becoming one of the largest exporters of banana in the world. He also attributes the development which took place on the Caribbean coast of Costa Rica as a direct result of their activities. The construction of the rail road was another project in which the African descendants contributed their services and which became a medium of change and progress in the economy of Costa Rica. He also denounces the lack of recognition of these valuable contributions of the Afro-Caribbean community, as well as the continued discrimination against African descendants by the central state. Due to the severe implications of racism for the quality of life of the Afro- Costa Ricans Duncan has proposed some critical ideas including a plan to revoke and eliminate racism against Afro-Costa Ricans. His extensive collection of literary works includes essays, short stories and novels. His novels include, *Chastened men, (Hombres curtidos)*1971, *The four mirrors (Los cuatro espejos)* 1973, *Final de la calle* (1980), *Kimbo* (1990), *A song for Rosa. (Una canción para Rosa)* 2007.

The novel *The four mirrors (Los cuatro espejos)* dramatizes the inner conflict of identity which the post-colonial subject experiences as he tries to come to terms with who

he is as an individual and his place in the society. Charles McForbes the male protagonist of Duncan's novel undergoes a process of existential crisis as he tries to come to terms with the truth of his identity as a black Costa Rican. His entire worldview seems to be overturned and dismantled until he confronts himself in the mirror to begin to explore his true identity as a hybridized subject. He represents two selves, a duality which he has to understand and reconcile in order to achieve balance in his life.

The emblematic works of the four writers featured in this dissertation, reflect on the historical and present day life conditions and dilemmas of Africans in a Hispanic context, as well as African descended peoples of the Caribbean in the Hispanic context. They provide the discursive materials on which a comparative treatment of her(s) tory and his(s)tory of the black female voice will be carried out. My dissertation proposes to interrogate the articulation of the black female voice rendered in, Maria Nsue Angue's, *Ekomo* and Donato Ndongo's *Shadows of your black memory*. Additionally, it includes the narratives *Limón Blues* by Ana Cristina Rossi, as well as *The four mirrors* by Quince Duncan.

This dissertation therefore, examines the treatments of the female voice in the literary traditions represented by Afro-Hispanic male and female writers in an attempt to probe and explore the foundational elements used in the construction of the female voice, whether they have been silenced or unsilenced in the discourses. The exploration also seeks to determine the points of interaction as well as divergence of these various constructions of the female voice in the four novels. Additionally, it seeks to interpret the significance, as well as the implications for the articulation of the black female voice, as

opposed to her voiceless-ness or silencing in the literary discourse in the narratives by the male writers.

The research questions that guide this investigation include the following: (1) To what extent is the female voice unsilenced or silenced in the narratives of her(s) tory in comparison with his(s) tory? (2) How is the female voice used in the development of the narrative plot in comparison with that of the male voice? (3) How does the female voice vary in both narratives with regard to its articulation of the issues of gender, cultural identity, race and nationhood? (4) How far do the writers of her(s) tory and his(s) tory overcome the constraints of the norms and traditions of hegemonic discourses to affect a liberation of the female voice?

When the critic M'baré N'gom examines the historical and social conditions of the Guinean women before the imposition of colonialism, he notes that the pre-colonial status of women was much more favorable than under colonialism in several respects. He indicates that the status that women enjoyed was marked by great esteem and valuing based on the roles that she carried out in the community. In spite of the fact that men occupied the principal positions in the Sub-Saharan world, yet still the women were the real axis of the community's organization and survival. The woman also occupied a central role in the area of education as well as in the articulation of traditional oral literature. (De Costa Willis, 301)

The imposition of the colonial system with its alteration of the roles of the woman inevitably resulted in the loss of many of the female's privileges in the pre-colonial society, primarily her political power. The critic N'gom further indicates that through the

new system of capitalism, “Women were, ... systematically eliminated from the institutions of modernization (education, professional training and economics), leaving them powerless and, consequently voiceless.” (302) This voiceless-ness of the female was also reflected in the area of cultural production.

Thus, the female voice was largely rendered as absent, or situated in subordinate and marginal positions with respect to the male voice in the cultural discourse. As Lloyd Brown indicates, “Women writers in Africa are the other voices, the silent voices whose works are rarely discussed and whose works seldom receive space in, often repeated anthologies... Few magazines both literary and professional, in the West as well as in Africa, have dedicated space and time to African women who write.” (Cited in N’gom, 302) The critic Nfah-Abbenyi further comments on the marginalization of the African female by positioning her in the Western literary canon. She describes the representation of the black female as, “... Third World (and African) women have been objects of discourses... Being the Other of man, the Other of the West, the Other of the other...” (31). Sidonie Smith another scholar who has examined the representation of the black female subject also adds her comments to the discussion of the voice or voiceless-ness of the female when she states that:

Since the ideology of gender makes a woman’s life a script a non-story, a silent space, a gap in patriarchal culture, the ideal woman is self-erasing rather than self-promoting and her ‘natural’ story shapes itself not around the public, heroic life, but around the fluid, circumstantial, contingent responsiveness to others that, according to patriarchal ideology, characterizes the life of woman but not autobiography. From that point of view, woman has no ‘autobiographical self’ in the sense that man does, From this point of view woman has no public story to tell. (Cited in N’gom, 304)

Therefore, it seems that when the female author has a profound sense of the nature of her subordination and silencing, she is then able to find other ways to express her true voice. Since she is denied access to the same public forums and spaces as her male counterpart, many times she resorts to speaking through the repression imposed by the normative systems. She then uses different registers and avenues to tell her(s)tory. The story which she tells may not be a public or an official one as that of the male's his(s)tory, but rather an intimate, personal and confidential one which is expressed from the margins. As such, Christine Makward cited by Nina Baym in *The Madwoman and her languages* also explains the characteristics of a typically female aesthetic language which she describes as, "open, non-linear, unfinished, fluid, exploded, fragmented, polysemic, attempting to speak the body ie., the unconscious, involving silence, incorporating the simultaneity of life as opposed to or clearly different from pre-conceived, oriented, masterly or 'didactic' languages." (157)

Therefore, when the critic Igor Cusack indicates in his article, "Hegemonic or dislocated masculinities?" that the representation of men or masculinities is a predominant theme in the novel *Shadows of your black memory* by Donato Ndongo I agree that this is a valid interpretation. I also agree with his assertion that the narrative features a vivid portrayal of, "... the struggle between different notions of what it is to be a man, between different masculinities."(33) On the other hand, I find it more difficult to accept Cusack's conclusion that Nsue, the female author also focuses on the privileging of the male protagonist and therefore masculinity in the narrative of *Ekomo*. I do not

interpret the particular characterization of the female as an attempt to masculinize the female subject.

In my view the empowered female subject that is given a central role in the discourse, and thereby an opportunity to speak and be heard does not evoke a masculine identity. Sidonie Smith's comment which reflects on the challenges faced by female writers, and their strategies for overcoming them can be appropriately applied to N'sue's characterization of the female subject in *Ekomo*. Therefore, far from being a masculinized female I believe that N'sue presents a vision of the female world within the constraints of the socio-cultural realities of the Guinean society. This characterization permits the female subject to speak, but from her position in the Guinean Bantu society. N'dongo also affirms that the role of the female is not recognized to a significant degree according to the Fang cultural norms. In my view, N'sue is challenging the normative patterns of representation of the female subject with the characterization of the female subject in *Ekomo*. The novelist is deliberately inverting the social patterns that situate the female as a silent "other" at the margins of the society and the public sphere. This representation indicates that the novelist similar to other writers like, "De Beauvoir and others, ... (is rejecting) the concept of "woman" as a divinely designated weak "other" or irrational child ..." (Rosenberg, 5)

Therefore, it seems that her characterization of the female responds to the question that Kavita Ramdas poses in her TED Talks lecture, *Radical women, embracing tradition*, "... how can women walk the line between Western-style empowerment and traditional culture?" (TEDIndia, November 2009) The author illustrates a similar

paradox for women of Equatorial Guinea since the male writer N'dongo asserts that an active and participatory role of the female in the public life is not recognized and encouraged under the Fang traditions, and therefore is not an authentic representation of the female in this society. However, Nsue similar to the female leaders that Ramdas highlights in her presentation inverts the oppressive cultural norms that are typical of the culture in order to pose critical questions about the value of the female and her role in the society. She also seems to initiate a conversation about the redefinition of the roles for women, as well as the terms of gender equality in the Equatorial society. Within the frame of the narrative she seems to defy the normative limits in order that the female protagonist would assume the role of narrator of the story of the male protagonist, and as such she unveils her(s)tory. In her fictional narrative it is not the female who remains silent and voiceless for the majority of *Ekomo* but it is the masculine subject who seems to occupy this position. Her(s) tory is connected to his(s) tory and consequently the author achieves a degree of parity between the male and the female subjects.

I therefore, contend that the privileging of the female voice reveals not only a feminist perspective, but also a womanist perspective on the part of the author. Although there is a distinct promotion of the female perspective but the male is not portrayed as an alienated other. In her vision there is a place for the male alongside the female since she promotes a relation of harmony between the two characters. Mary G. Mason attempts to explain the rendition of the female voice when she states that the "... self is validated in linking with another; either husband, community, friend or God," the male in the case of *Ekomo*, but this is a credible space from which the female can achieve self-expression

and disclosure. (Cited in N'gom, 304) It is from this space of alliance with the male subject that the female can also narrate her “public” her(s) tory as Sidonie contends. It may be observed as well that the Senegalese writer Mariama Ba achieves a similar linking between the male and the female subjects in her narrative, *So Long a Letter*. Thus the female voice while unraveling the his(s) tory of the male protagonist also unravels her own. In my treatment of the female voice I will show that the expression of the female voice does not imply the expression of a masculinized identity for the female as Cusack argues but an empowered feminized identity which bridges the gap between the male/female divide to project a vision of inclusiveness and greater gender equality.

The black Female voice in the Latin American and the Caribbean literary context seems to have also experienced a similar fate to the voice of the African female. For the Afro-Caribbean female’s voice has also experienced a similar marginalization and silencing of her voice in the discourse. She too has suffered as a result of the debilitating effects of displacement and repression by the master discourse first of all, and subsequently by the Post- Colonial nationalist discourse. The critic Dellita Martin-Ogunsola observes that although scholars such as Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz has identified a tradition of writing by women in Spanish America that indicates the formation of the female voice as individual and collective subject yet still the voices of women of color, ... particularly those of African descent have been misappropriated, omitted, or silenced.” (Daughters of the Diaspora, 424) Her voice is usually the one that is stigmatized, distorted or muted in the narratives. Therefore, in the narratives of the Afro-Costa Rican

literary traditions I will examine the representation of the female voice in order to determine whether the authors have deviated from the traditional representations.

CHAPTER 2-

EKOMO:

The representation of the the black female voice in the narrative, *Ekomo*.

(1) The Position, Structure and Role of the female voice in the narrative:

Introduction

“Rotundamente Negra”

And I categorically refuse (Me niego rotundamente)

To deny my voice (A negar mi voz)

My blood and my skin (Mi sangre y mi piel)

And I categorically refuse (Y me niego rotundamente)

To stop being myself (A dejar de ser yo)

To stop feeling good (A dejar de sentirme bien)

When I look at my face in the mirror (Cuando miro mi rostro en el espejo)

The possibility of joining the ranks of the silenced or victimized “other” is an option which the poetic voice of the poem “*Rotundamente Negra*” rejects and refuses to accept as a possibility for her life. The valiant poetic voice of Campbell’s poem expresses the need to break silences and this seems to be her impetus for speaking out. One can also say that this poem presents an emphatic voice of female resistance to silencing. Thus she seems to corroborate with a similar idea articulated by the critic Audre Lorde who also asserts that, “... it is not difference which immobilizes us, but silence. And there are so

many silences to be broken.” (qtd. in Cole, p. 93) Johnnetta Cole in her text *Conversations* also reflects on this controversial issue of the expression of the black female when she states that, “... like democracy, the realization of women’s rights- the most basic of which is the right of self-expression- will be a noisy and messy affair.” (97) Therefore the critic seems to be signaling that when women are finally free to speak and express themselves that would have a profound breakthrough for human affairs. It could mean a major upheaval for the guardians of the status quo and the privileged center that are responsible for maintaining the repressive power structure. When women are able to express themselves without fear of censorship or repression then the civilization would experience a fiery Armageddon which would result in a revolutionary toppling of the patriarchal order that have been entrenched in the socio-political systems of the modern world.

Thus, the critic seems to further allude to the fact that since black female self-expression is not largely accepted by the society then it would definitely be achieved through measures which are distinct from the traditional methods that have only functioned to maintain the patterns of dehumanization and disenfranchisement of minority groups. These measures which are not sanctioned by the establishment would be the resources that ensure that change is achieved. Whenever these alternative means are utilized to force the rights of the “other” to be honored and respected then the foundations of the establishment are weakened and destabilized. Therefore, in that sense women’s rights, black women’s right seem to imply the initiation of forceful and sustained action to bring about the liberation of the female voice. Similarly, when the

African American poet Maya Angelou was asked in an interview with Oprah “Why does the caged bird sing?”, she responded with graceful assurance that, “ ... she has to sing in order to survive.”(Own, 6/4/14) There is no other alternative for the black female for she has to speak out clearly and precisely about the injustices and unfairness that she has experienced. This is the most powerful tool that black women have at their disposal to assert their rights and needs. Therefore, to withhold it in anymore for any reason would mean self-erasure and self-annihilation. Additionally, Cole also locates the annihilation of Africans and the deprivation of their rights as first beginning during the horrific Trans-Atlantic trade and journey to an unknown territory. Thus Africa suffered invaluable losses not only from the stand point of the captives themselves, but also the loss which the massive displacement of Africa’s sons and daughters meant for the human resources of Western Africa at the time. On all accounts it signified a massive loss, a massive stripping away of people from their homeland as well as of their dignity and their humanity. Cole characterizes and articulates this process as the stripping away of one’s possessions both material and immaterial and thus states that:

Language, adornment, self-expression:

Stripped! Rituals, relics, worship:

Stripped! Modesty, protection from rape, protection for children:

Stripped! Social status and legal redress:

Stripped! Talents, knowledge, and skills rendered useless. (60)

These verses clearly illustrate the process by which the cultural identities, the voice and power of the African self were systematically dis-membered and destroyed in order to transform the African captives from free men into a chattel class. As the Afro-Costa

Rican female politician and activist Epsy Campbell reflects this loss which describes as immeasurable, irreplaceable and tragic. She also adds that after over two hundred years of this catastrophic event African descendants still have to deal with the aftermath of what was a significant holocaust of humankind in the modern world. (Epsy Campbell,4)

This historical tragedy of immense proportions undoubtedly has left a profound scar on the black psyche, whether male or female in Africa as well as the Diaspora. The critic Cole therefore firmly advocates that the historical tragedy of African slavery in the Americas directly resulted in the creation of an “underclass... devoid of economic and social power...” (61) Consequently, she believes that this immense and far-reaching devastation has to be acknowledged and recognized since effects are cumulative and with time may lead to even worse problems if not repaired. (58)

Therefore, in order to launch the discussion on the voice or voiceless-ness of the black female voice in the narratives of Equatorial Guinea and Afro-Costa Rica a fitting point of departure would be the representation of the black female slave voice since she was a female whose conditions of life epitomized victimization and silencing in the modern world. She more than anyone bore the scars of the system for as the critic Cole insists,

As the brutal system dealt its blow to her by day, the night offered no respite in the most bitter sting of sexism: rape by “the master” and compulsory intercourse with an African man if she were branded a “good breeder.” And because of the ideology of female subordination, sundown also meant another work shift: the burdens of household tasks in the slave cabin and the rearing of the slave children. (61)

The Position of the black female voice in the narrative:

In order to begin the discussion of the representation of the black female voice in the Post-Colonial texts of Equatorial Guinea, and Afro-Costa Rica, my dissertation firstly examines the expression of the female voice in the her(s)tory created by María Nsue Angue in the novel *Ekomo*. This narrative relates the story of a Guinean community where traditionally, “the men speak and the women are silent. As such the narrator begins the story with the description, “ It is a morning in the forest like any other. The men speak, the women are silent, ...” (Nsue Angue, 18) (Es una mañana de la selva como otra cualquiera. Los hombres hablan, las mujeres callan, ...) Moreover, within the dialogic frame of the narrative there also appears to be a pervasive contrast between silence and speech. Therefore, it is within this tension that the voice of Nnanga, emerges as the possessor of the word and in this manner, it can be said that she expresses a voice that is her own. From the very beginning of the novel in the opening scenes her voice is heard as she introduces the reader to the predictions of the fate which is about to transform the life of the tribe as well as her own. These predictions forecast the impending clash between two opposite civilizations, values and forms of thought, and implant a tangible fear within the consciousness of every member of the community.

The image of a tomb stone which is formed in the sky through the interlocking of the clouds and the reflections of the light projects a message of a monumental threat to the survival of the ancestral traditions and cultural mores. The tribal leader and elder of the village explains and interprets the forboding symbols which is formed by the interaction of the natural elements when he states that,

This is a great sign from the past. This is the sign of the old Africa, the tombstone of the powerful. Each time that one witnesses the appearance of this sign in the sky, one must understand that a powerful person is going to die in Africa. His death will be violent, it will be unjust. His death is unavoidable and in protest to this, the skys inform you all of it. ... It is strange, very strange, that it is appearing to us at this time, because for centuries it hasn't appeared in the sky of the Africans, a death that violent has not been announced.” (Nsue Angue, 19) (Esta es la gran señal de los pasados. Esta es la señal del Africa Antigua, la lápida de los poderosos. Cada vez que veáis esta señal dibujada en el cielo, habéis de ender que un poderoso va a morir en Africa. Su muerte será violenta, será injusta. Su muerte es ineludible y en protesta de ello, los cielos os avisan. ... Es extraño, muy extraño, que aparezca hoy entre nosotros, porque hace siglos que, en el cielo de los africanos, no se veía la anunciación de una muerte tan violenta.)

His admonition therefore explains the significance of this critical sign for the African people as a whole and the tribe in particular as well. He is absolutely certain that a powerful warrior is about to meet a violent and tragic end, for according to the age old predictions violations have been committed against the ancestors and the ancestral traditions and so they have to face the consequences. He confirms this when he continues to insist that, “ ... it has been a long time since Africans have abandoned Africa and likewise Africa has abandoned Africans. In Africa there no longer exist any powerful warriors.” (Nsue Angue, 20) (... ya que hace mucho tiempo que los africanos abandonaron a Africa y Africa a los africanos. En Africa no hay poderosos.) His predictions therefore refer to the difficult days that lie ahead in the history of the continent as a whole, and that all would be affected or influenced to some degree by the new realities that they will encounter. Nfumbaha also expresses concern about the struggle in the Congo for freedom under the leadership of Lumumba, and in doing so makes a connection between the prediction and the political challenges facing the African continent as they deal with the threat of external invasion. (20)

Thus Nnanga, the female protagonist in the narrative also presents her perspective on what is taking place among the members of the community. Accordingly, her narration presents a description of the overwhelming sense of fear, anguish and hopelessness that the villagers experience as they try to make sense of the what they are witnessing. She thus reveals that the women are shaken, the children are shocked and the men continue to contemplate the sky. (20) They all try to measure and determine the meaning of the message transmitted through the forces of nature, as well as its implications for the physical, social and political well-being of the African people and their civilization. Although, Nnanga is not part of the main discussion about what is taking place, yet still from the strategic position that she occupies she is also able to contemplate what is taking place.

Thus, she reveals that she is in fact an observer of the occurrences that are taking place in the village and asserts that, “I am nothing more than an outline cut out against the background that surrounds me, that of the jungle. My presence, hardly noticeable, is nothing but a presence-absence whose importance has nothing to do with the normal flow of events.” (20) (Yo no soy más que un perfil recortado contra el contorno que me rodea, que es el de la selva. ... una presencia- ausencia cuya importancia, nada tiene que ver con el proceso normal de los acontecimientos.) This comment implies her recognition of her position as a female who traditionally occupies a marginalized position in the society. This acknowledgement also seems to situate her in a position where she can function as a conscious witness in the story. The observations that she makes, provides essential information about the feared calamity that has disrupted the activities of the village. Her

description of herself as being present, yet absent indicates that she is occupying the position of a conscious observer/ witness as she actively reveals what is taking place in and around her. In this position as observer and objective witness she is thus a channel for the transmission of an alternative perspective in the narration of the story.

While her presence goes unperceived by many, yet still her observations of the events and of the reactions of the people situates her in an opportune position for relating the story of what she terms as the end of one age and the beginning of another in the African milieu. Another sign which definitely forecasts the passing of a great leader, that of the falling of the crest of the sacred oak also indicates that a young man will also suffer a similar fate as the ancestral leader. Her voice narrates, “ The crest of the oak was uprooted and in the fall a strong and robust branch broke off. The village was shocked and the men looked to the elder for answers.” (26) (Se arrancó la cresta de la ceiba y en cu caída arrastró consigo una rama joven y robusta. ... El pueblo está asustado y los hombres miran al viejo para saber.” Even when she eventually witnesses the ritual for the passing of the elder of the tribe whom she herself now recognizes as the last great leader of the African, “ that Lion of Acecho.” (41) (... aquel León de Acecho) from the physical world her voice is also instrumental in relating to the readers with a great degree of clarity and objectivity the process by which this transition takes place in the foreground of the life of the village. This historic event begins with the arrival of the unknown healer and warrior who will be responsible for fulfilling the prophesy of the violent and courageous death of the elder according to the ancestral traditions in keeping with his stature. Hence, she seems to be performing the function of intermediary

between the action of the narrative and the reader as she unveils the image and final actions of the dying ancestor. Thus, through this mechanism in the story the voice of the female character is privileged as she presents her observations, commentaries and interpretations of the events and their significance in the cultural context of the village. With precision and clarity she describes the apocalyptic death of the warrior who after he pronounces his final wishes, instructions for his burial, as well as the passing of the leadership to Ndong Akele is ready to die. (36-37) In spite of his preparation he is unable to die a peaceful death in the trunk of a tree on the other side of the forest. As such the narrator emphasizes that as she describes and, “ The man of a violent death. The man of War knows that he must not die in bed. Death at the lance awaits him. ... He knows that he must not die except through the spilling of his blood.” (37) *Hombre de muerte violenta. El hombre de Guerra sabe que no ha de morir en la cama. La muerte de lanzas le aguarda ... El abuelo sabe bien que no ha de morir si no es vertiendo sangre.*” Through the careful chronicling of the path towards his ultimate fate, the voice of the female illustrates the reaction of the village itself as it shared in this unforgettable experience and moment in their history.

Effectively, the voice of the female narrator predominates in the narrative as she articulates the impact that this death has had on every member of the tribe. As such, the reader becomes aware that the female voice is a channel through which the details of the story have been transmitted to the reader. Thus, from the position that she occupies in the society she is able to narrate the story and give it credibility in the history of the village as more than a mythical tale.

This characterization of the female voice by María Nsue Angue therefore defies and challenges the normative patterns for the representation of the female which usually situate the male voice at the center of the discourse where he exercises control and power over the word. In effect, in *Ekomo*, one can see that the opposite pattern is being demonstrated. The female voice from the very beginning of the novel has resisted the silencing and exclusion which is usually accorded to the female subject in the narrative. She is usually represented as the muted 'other' and in many cases her voice is non-existent even if she appears in the narrative. However, in this narrative instead of being marginalized or excluded from the central position in the discourse the female voice is allowed to come forward and in many instances her voice is situated at the center of the narratorial discourse.

This seems to be the case in the first of the critical tensions which propels the narrative plot. Her voice is used to describe how after the violent premonition which shudders the very base of their cultural traditions, the villagers begin to seriously consider that they are experiencing changes which will have far-reaching consequences for them, and that the foreign influences and currents that are now present in their geographical and societal spaces will pose a real threat to the survival of their culture. Thus, the female narrator thus wonders, "Perhaps only the old man, who had provoked that with the sound of the drums, knew that the "man," god, that hero, marked with his death the end of an African era, and was giving rise to the beginning of another. Perhaps only the old one of the tam-tam knew that from that moment onward there would no longer be any more tam-tam of the war for anyone." (42) (Quizá solamente el viejo, que había provocado aquello con el sonido de los tam-tam, sabía que "el hombre," dios, aquel

héroe, marcaba con su muerte el fin de un Africa y daba comienzo a otra. Quizá sólo el Viejo de los tam -tam sabía que a partir de aquel momento ya no habría más tam-tam de guerra para nadie.)

The rupture in the literary tradition which this rendition of the female voice illustrates is explained by the critic, María Zielina Limonta who states that, “Ekomo is a transgressive novel, and like many other African novels it is mimetic; its aim is to teach, to document ...” (De Costa Willis, 287) She is therefore referring to the aspect of the novel in which the female voice seems to cross the boundaries of silence to enter spaces where she has traditionally been prohibited entry. Thus she does not conform to the traditional silencing of the black female voice which usually predominates in the literary discourse. (The elder ordered that At my death the Women and children must not cry, conversely it is the women and children who did not cry as was expected, but the males who shook the land with their tears of sorrow.) (42)

As such, Nsue Angue not only defies the traditional norms for representing the female ‘other’ by casting her as the narrator of the her(s)tory. She further moves the female subject from the occupying the traditional marginal position of the narrative to the center, and consequently she can occupy the position of a narrator/protagonist in the story. By functioning as both narrator and protagonist the female voice relates not only the story of the male protagonist, who is her husband, but she also gives precedence to her(s)tory in the narrative as well. While she narrates the story of the male protagonist, she also connects her(s)tory of her experiences, triumphs and struggles with clarity and precision at the center of the discourse. In this manner the novelist establishes a vital connection between the male and female characters which is referred to in the comment made by

Nnanga where she indicates that, “ In one day we had travelled the distance for two.” (105) (Habíamos hecho en un día el camino de dos.) Nnanga further makes reference to the story-telling aspect of her life, or rather its eventful characteristic when she states that her life with Ekomo has been marked by a series of new events. (114) Thus as Limonta contends, “... the transgressive elements (of the characterization of the female subject) are apparent in the description and development of the female narrator, who makes the male characters aware that women are an important creative force in their culture.” (De Costa Willis, 287) Thus, the privileging of the female voice at the center of the discourse, as first of all an observer and a witness of critical events, and ultimately the narrator and protagonist of the the story, is indicative of the achievement of a groundbreaking unsilencing of the female voice in the discourse. In effect this implies the representation of a critical liberation of the black female from a repressive voiceless-ness that the critic agrees is very rarely achieved in the literary narrative.

The protagonism of Nnanga throughout the narrative demonstrates the importance of the representation of the female voice in *Ekomo*. It is her voice which presents and introduces the action, descriptions and reflective commentaries about various conflicts, issues and traditions that are featured in the story. Even though the narrative focuses on the story of a nation that is on the crossroads of change, as well as that of the male protagonist, Ekomo yet still it is the female voice which is utilized by the writer to relate and communicate these stories to the reader.

Thus the overriding prediction that an elder is about to die and a young man will also follow him, gives unity to the narrative and establishes the connection between the stories

of the nation and the individuals featured in the story. As such it can be seen that the female voice is also being utilized to make the connections between all these intersecting stories as they combine together to form one story of the African experience on the cusp of modernity.

It is through the vision of the female protagonist, which is further invoked and transmitted through her narration that the image of Ekomo as both child and adult is delivered to the reader. Through her voice we can get a sense of the original strength and vitality of the male protagonist whom she describes as being an, “... antagonist of death. Ekomo was one of those that, if death was a human being and it was possible to see her coming, one ran to hide behind him ... Ekomo, youthful, arrogant, strong, defiant and insolent, he was not the type that, if one were to make associations that would not occur to them.” (62) (... el antagonista de la muerte. Ekomo era uno de esos que, si la muerte fuera un ser humano y fuera posible verla acercarse, una huía a esconderse detrás de él. ... Ekomo, joven, arrogante, fuerte, desafiador e insolente, no era el tipo con el que, si se hacían asociaciones de ideas podía ocurrírsele a uno.)

Therefore, as the narrative develops it illustrates the gradual change in this image of strength and youthful vitality of the male protagonist as he is ravaged by the effects of a debilitating and unknown physical illness. In addition to narrating the story of his illness and their struggle to find a cure for Ekomo, at the same time the female voice also relates her own story in tandem with his. The interconnectedness between both protagonists is demonstrated in the narrative especially, since as his partner she is also affected to a great degree by the physical dysfunctions that he is experiencing. While he suffers from a leg

that seems to swelling and becoming increasingly malignant, she on the other hand, she seems to be unable to conceive a child and it is inconclusive what could be cause for her infertility. This is an additional challenge that they both confront and struggle together to find an answer to. When his illness takes on critical proportions, she reports that she too reflects similar symptoms as he does even though she is not physically ill. Thus, she indicates that, “ Ekomo lost his color, he lost his joy. His eyes stopped glowing and they became darkened and I, like a plant from nature that depends for their existence from the warmth of the sun, lost my color, because I was no longer his warmth and I lost my joy ...” (167) (Ekomo perdió color, perdió alegría. Sus ojos dejaron de brillar y ensombrecieron y yo, como una planta de la naturaleza que depende para su existencia del calor del sol, perdí el color, porque ya no me llegaba su calor y perdí alegría ...)

Consequently, this privileging of the female voice in the narration and the evolution of the story at every phase in its development definitely features an inversion of the traditional patterns for the representation of the female voice. Instead of being identified with silence and distortions of her expressions the female subject expresses a voice and control of her reactions. As such this reformed characterization of the female is referred to in the reaction of the female villagers, as compared to the males when the León del Acecho finally dies. With the alarm emitted by the drums the men begin to weep uncontrollably, while the women and the children who were supposed to react in this way do not. On witnessing the scene in which she states that hundreds of men were crying the narrator states that her response was, “ That is, yes I was crying but it was within with a scream much deeper and lasting.” (42) (Es decir, si lloraba pero por dentro con un llanto

mucho más pesado y duradero.) This inversion of the expected responses among the men and women, seem to indicate an intentional reversal of patterns by the novelist in the narrative. The narrator also indicated that she did not know how to interpret this change in the behavior of the males, when she reveals that, “ I therefore, felt, disturbed and without knowing what I should do or how I should react.” (42) (Yo me sentía, por lo tanto, aturdida y sin saber qué debía hacer o cómo debía reaccionar.) This uncertainty which the narrator expresses seems to be the consequence of her social conditioning to believe that men do not act in this way, only women are emotional and express their grief and sadness in this manner.

Thus the inversions and reversals that are being demonstrated in the narrative seem to indicate and propose a definite rupture of the normative rules and patterns for the positioning of the black female voice in the literature. With regard to this challenge to the traditions posed by this distinct representation of the female voice, the essayist Gayatri Spivak, in her essay “Can the subaltern speak?” expresses her speculation about whether the female voice can be articulated and heard in the literary context. She seems to believe that in spite of the claims of being able to do so, it is still not possible to achieve an effective un-silencing of the female voice, since the voice is still represented in an environment that is heavily constrained by patriarchal patterns in the society. She is doubtful as to whether these far-reaching constraints can be effectively overcome, and that sufficient change can occur given the interests at stake for allowing an authentic female expression in the discourse.

On the contrary, some writers still believe that authentic female self-expression can be achieved with the un-silencing of the female voice in the literary discourse. Although the female critic Nfah-Abbenyi recognizes the literary marginalization of the African female in the Western canon she also contends that, “If Spivak’s subaltern woman is historically muted, I contend the reverse, which is that she has always spoken, she has spoken in alternative ways that have challenged and continue to challenge...” (31). She seems to be emphasizing that although the African female and by extension the black female voice have been excluded, marginalized or distorted in the dominant discourses yet still in many instances there arise alternative patterns in which she speaks and her voice is heard. Irene Assebe d’Almeida, another critic also sheds light on this issue when she refers to the alternative opportunities for female expression.

She therefore, explains that there are alternative platforms, “... where the woman manages to free herself not only from a subordinate condition, but where she can also express her own vision of the world. So the ‘I’ frames itself within a process of revealing the feminine experience in Africa.” (cited in N’gom in *Daughters of the Diaspora*, 305) This portrayal of the female ‘I’ which Nsue presents in her fiction seems to privilege a feminist perspective and vision while at the same time it can be said that the vision is also influenced by a womanist perspective as well. For while proclaiming a strong female individual self she seems to imply a complementarity between the female and the male and not a separation or disassociation of one from the other. Their voices are intermingled although it is the female voice that seems to take precedence over the male’s voice in the narrative of *Ekomo*.

The female voice also seems to express her consciousness of her ambiguous position in the microcosm of the society which is dominated by the patriarchal normative dictates. She reflects on this when she makes the comments about the significance of her life from her perspective in the society. She states that, "... I live and breathe with the consciousness of my own impotence ... since without him I am nothing, nor can I be anything..." (21) (... vivo y respiro con la consciencia de mi propia impotencia... puesto que sin él nada soy, ni nada puedo ser...) Therefore, this revelation indicates the recognition and acknowledgement of the female character of the position that she occupies in the society. She is aware of the inequality and under-valuing of the female as compared with the male in the society, and consequently she derives her value in the society in relation to him. Therefore, it seems that the author has deliberately made a decision to utilize this awareness of the female subject to explore and probe the dimensions of the female existence. She is able to pose pertinent questions in her exploration of who she is and her place in the society as she determines what value her life holds. This intense self-awareness which the female voice expresses through a measure of reflexivity can also be considered as a centering device which is utilized extensively in the discourse to un-silence the female voice.

She demonstrates an acute awareness of the national context in which she lives, as well as, the pressures and tensions of the life of her partner and herself.

Structure of the female narrative voice-

The voice of the narrator which is provided by the female protagonist, Nnanga is responsible for directing the attention of the readers in an exploration of the Guinean socio-cultural landscape during the Post-Colonial period. The author uses the female voice to recount her experiences at the critical and formative stages of her life. Therefore, the narration of the story does not follow a linear development, but presents episodic scenes in which the action alternates between the present and the past time. From the beginning of the story with the forecast of an impending tragedy the urgency of communication is presented to the readers. The elements of the natural environment transmit a message to the human consciousness that on the edge of the horizon their lives will be impacted by tragic circumstances. The celestial bodies come together to transmit a message of the death of one of their leaders who would also be accompanied by a young man. This was first described as a miracle which took place in the sky when the clouds came together to create the shape of a tomb stone. (19)

The sacred cedar tree also reflected the same message, the birds and other creatures of the forest in their own language filled the air with the tense message. The narrator comments on this phenomenon that the town witnessed in the environment when she states that, “Devastated by timidity, the son is covered by a screen of yellowing clouds. The sign in the sky disappears and while from one side to the other the clouds drift like gases impregnated by multicolored inks, from some undetermined point we hear the cackle of a hen, monotonous, persistent, heavy with the pain like the mourn of a strange soul that, even though present, knows of things

incomprehensible for man.” (22) (Devastado por la timidez, el sol se cubre con un tul de nubecillas amarillentas. Se desvanece la señal del cielo y mientras de un lado a otro vuelan las nubes como gasas impregnadas de tintas multicolores, desde algun punto indefinido nos llega el cacareo de una gallina, monótono, persistente, cargado de dolor como el quejido de un alma extraña que, aunque presente, sabe de cosas incomprensibles para el hombre.) The narrator also indicates that the leader of the tribe entered the sacred forest to find answers to the questions that haunted both him and the community and after consulting the ancestors he is even more convinced that doom was upon them.

This preliminary scene with its descriptions of the sounds and silences, the darkness and the light, the delirium that is in motion among the creatures of the forest and the plant life seem to conjure up a menacing scene which inspires terror in the all the members of the community. They seem to foreshadow an unprecedented turning point in the history of the community. It is also significant that on one hand the elder of the village defends the village from the fury of the hail storm through the power of the ancestors. Meanwhile, on the other hand, Mother who claims that they are witnessing the end of the world kneels in constant prayer in a corner of her kitchen. These preliminary scenes with their tensions set the tone for the rest of the story in which there is an urgent need to find the causes and subsequently the solutions to the personal problems that beset the protagonist couple, as well as the communal problems of the tribe to which they belong.

The voice of the female appears to occupy a dominant position in terms of the narration in the novel. It is for this reason that the female subject achieves a level of unprecedented un-silencing in *Ekomo* and can be heard throughout the novel. Therefore, as the first person female narrator she introduces, presents and connects the scenes and events which come together to create the story. The readers hear her voice on a more personal level as she gives council to herself, makes observations and expresses her reflections on the events that she witness or is a part of. Her voice also gives credence to the tribal origins of the fang, their values, their religious and moral beliefs, their myths and legends, and their history that began on the banks of the revered river NTEM in Central Africa. (158-161) Alternatively, her voice is also utilized to explore the conflicts between tradition and modernity, between the conservation of their cultural traditions or displacement and loss.

Hence, it seems that the theme of communication is central to this narrative in which the female voice is privileged. The author seems to have created a sense of urgency to communicate, to break silences and to construct bridges of comprehension and understanding at all levels. In the opening scene the female subject also expresses her need to communicate with her husband, *Ekomo* whom she has not seen nor heard from for about three months since he left for the city with his brothers. They returned but he did not and so this caused her to be plagued by a haunting and painful anxiety. Her anguish is palpable in her monologues in her interior when she indicates that, “ I call Ekomo from the door of my soul, from my being, and I feel him distant and ... I call him with the lips of my soul, meanwhile my mouth remains

sealed, rebellious to the shout of anguish that arises from within and, as in bad dreams, my mind shouts:” (21) (Llamo a Ekomo desde la puerta de mi alma, de mi ser, y le siento lejos. ... Le llamo con los labios de mi alma, mientras mi boca permanece sellada, rebelde al grito de angustia que me sale de dentro y, como en los malos sueños, grita mi mente.)

Therefore, even though she may be silent on the outside yet still in her interior she is actively communicating and searching for answers to this problem. Thus, the author by attributing communicative attributes to the interior system of the persona of the female subject appears to be recreating a system of communication which is located on the mental and emotional level of Nnanga. In this internal communicative process she not only expresses her anxiety verbally, but also listens for a response which is demonstrated when she states that, “My mind shouts: ! Ekomo! -until I hear his mind shout back at me:- Wait! ” (21) (Grita mi mente: Ekomo! -hasta que oigo a su mente gritarme:- Espera!) This response demonstrates an exchange between Nnanga and Ekomo at an existential level and indicates that they share an inner communication. The pattern of the communicative process even at this level seems to reflect a call and response system which is central to oral communication strategies.

The lyrical nature of this oral system is also reflected in the expressions which the author uses to introduce, link and punctuate many of the descriptions in the narrative. These seem to heighten the feature of orality that are present in the narrative and can be noted in the description of the opening scene of the narrative where she observes that, “ ... a little sun and a little bit of shade, ... a little son and a little bit of shade...

and ... little bit by bit ... a little shade and a dead sun, ...”(18-19) (... un poco de sol y un poquito de sombra, ... un poco de sol y un poquito de sombra ... y ...poquito a poco ... un poco de sombra y un sol muerto, ...) The contrast between the mental and inner speech that are reflected by the narrator/protagonist, as well as the orality and the storytelling devices that are utilized in the narrative contribute to the play between sound and silence, action and in-action. This eventually results in the creation of a palpable tension and suspense within the narrative of the story.

The role of the black female voice-

In this role as the narrator of the her(s)tory the female voice narrates the personal story of the couple, as well as the story of the community to which she has integrated through her marriage to Ekomo. She is able to participate in the life of the group and so at the discursive level can provide an insider perspective on their cultural norms and traditions in which she is completely immersed. Women’s speech seems to be privileged on the whole since the narrator also makes mention of a speech act that women engage in the village. She states that they congregate at different huts for these sessions and as they join one another on the way they do not share greetings but they immediately begin to speak about the weather, the crops and finally they begin to talk about the latest gossip or rumors. (92) This custom indicates that women have their own forum for expressing themselves and conducting their dialogues and discussions as they try to make sense of their lives and the significant, as well insignificant happenings in their community.

The female voice is also utilized to refer to previous events and antecedents that are relevant to the present state of affairs in the personal life of Nnanga, as well as the

community. The technique of the literary flash back is utilized to make the transition between the two levels of time and action. The primary function of this literary device being to provide the reader with the precursor to the present consequences and conditions in the narrative. In so doing the female voice is used to infuse narrative continuity between the past and the present so that the whole picture and not only a fragment would be reconstructed in the narrative frame. As such, this device is used in the narration of the first meeting between Nnanga and Ekomo during her childhood.

The narrator signals the transition from the present to the past with the comment that, “The sun was moving sadly among the clouds that morning when my mind, thinking about Ekomo, reverted back in time to locate the first day that I saw him many years ago.”(52) (El sol estaba tristemente asomado entre las nubes, aquella mañana cuando mi mente, pensando en Ekomo, retrocedió muchos años atrás, para localizar el primer día que le ví.) This introduction opens up to the scene where the children met Ekomo for the first time when his father, a witch doctor had been summoned to the village to assist their aunt Nchama who was experiencing difficulty in childbirth. Over a period of four days she had been in labor and it was said that this was on account of the curse of the evil eye on the community.

As such, the good witch doctor came to their village accompanied by his son in order to reverse this condition through his rituals and incantations. On this occasion the children from the village had a violent confrontation with Ekomo which Nnanga never forgot. Nnanga’s brothers and friend Nkili were encouraged by the dwarf Mba to initiate an attack on the stranger who seemed to present a threat his authority through his

expression of confidence and assurance in himself. When they finally launched the attack on him they surprised to see that he was not an easy target because he retaliated with force against the first attacker, Nkili. Shocked into immobility the boys seemed to be unable to respond to the challenge. Therefore, Nnanga was forced to intervene in the battle against the stranger. She brought him down by striking him with a pitcher over his head with all the force she could muster. She then realized what she had done and stated that, “On seeing him covered in blood and, so still, everyone ran in different directions. I also ran away screaming.” (58) Therefore this first meeting that she recollects begins the trajectory of the relationship between herself and Ekomo and it is through the flash back that this is interjected into the narrative.

Through the use of this literary device in which the female narrator is the main protagonist not only is the connection made between the present and the past. Rather it seems to set the stage for a corresponding connection to be made between objective realities on one hand, and subjective realities on the other. Thus there seems to be an inter-play between the two as the narrator’s voice brings to life the story of *Ekomo*. Similar to the Dove of fire (Paloma de fuego) which symbolizes Nnanga in the story her thoughts take flight from present to past on several occasions during the narration of her childhood encounter with Ekomo. She also reveals in one of the episodes this connection between the objective and the subjective world. She indicated that everyone was instructed by the good witch doctor to take shelter in their homes closing all windows and doors. This was to ensure that no one would witness the battle between the good and evil witch doctors in progress outside.

However, Nnanga insisted that she still could not miss the battle on the night of the vudú and so she made every effort to stay awake to get a glimpse of what was happening so that she could report to her friends the next day. (61) Then she got ready to do so, and looked upwards with her eyes open looking at the ceiling. Then to her surprise between the sounds of the horn and the shells she heard the witch doctor address her specifically when he said, “My little daughter in law, the one who wanted to kill my son at the river, I implore you to turn your head towards your grandmother and close your eyes.” (63) (Mi pequeña nuera, aquella que quiso matar a mi hijo en el río, te suplico que vuelvas la cabeza hacia tu abuela y cierras bien los ojos.) Not only did she do this but she squeezed into her grandmother so that he would not see her again. (63) The recommendation of the witch doctor even though he was outside the house, and could not have possibly seen her banished her skepticism about his powers that night.

This episode therefore reflects a contrast and inter-play between the objective and the subjective modalities which seem to permeate the cosmovision of the tribal group. The natural elements seem to possess a life of their own and they interact and intervene in the life of the village to communicate messages or to even carry punishments as deemed necessary by the ancestors and the gods. This contrast between the natural and the magical is seen with the fulfillment of the prophesy that the Lion of Acecho, “... that man of herbs, son of the ancestors, it was said born to use with a skilled hand the bow and the spear (would die).” (35) (... aquel hombre de hierbas, hijo de ancestros, fue dicho, nacido para usar, con mano diestra, el arco y la buena lanza.) After the long process of agony, he finally dies and the narrator laments about the significance of his

transition when she indicates that the last African hero, “... the man, god, that hero ..., marked with his death the end of an Africa and made way for the beginning of another.” (42) (... el hombre, dios, aquel héroe, marcaba con su muerte el fin de un África y daba cominezo a otra.) The narrator witnessed what she termed a historic “apocalyptic spectacle” in which not only men broke down in tears but the natural elements seemed to be broken as well.

Hence, she indicates that, “Concretely, it was the first time that I saw so many men crying at the same time...” (42) (Concretamente, y era la primera vez que veía llorar a tantos hombres a la vez ...) She also observes that at the same time, “A downpour of fine rain came in affirmation that the angels of the sky were also crying because of that historic death.” (43) (Una fina lluvia había comenzado a caer como afirmación de que también los ángeles del cielo lloraban aquella muerte histórica.) As the great warrior made his final journey to the beyond the villagers also experienced a turbulent agitation of the natural elements in response to this. She reveals that, “The soul of the old man throwing down houses and trees, struggled between the shadows to embark on its journey.” (43) (El alma del anciano derrumbando casas y árboles, luchaba entre las sombras por emprender su vuelo.) While all this was taking place there was an intense silence in that was indicated by the description, “The crickets were not singing, the owls were not singing, whisperings were contained by men in the shadows. The soul always in suspense and the fire consumed.” (44) (No cantaban grillos, no cantaban búhos, suspiros contenidos de hombres en las sombras. El alma siempre en vilo y el fuego consumido.) This night of vudú was an eventful night for the villagers since they

witnessed an animation of the elements surrounding them together with the onslaught of the phantom finger and the foot which proved to have a threatening presence in the night. (44-45) Therefore, the female voice guides the reader on a journey of the real and the fantastic in the African cosmology. Through the use of contrasts in sound, light and the rhythm of the words the writer conjures up a scene of immense tension and conflicts which reaches deep to touch the soul of the protagonists as well the reader alike.

Another aspect of the function of the female voice is reflected in the dual role that it has in the narrative. This duality is firstly demonstrated through the name which indicates the title of the novel, while at the same time it is the name of the male protagonist of the novel. This double function of the title of the novel also seems to extend to the double role that the female subject plays in the narrative. As her voice is utilized in both the roles of narrator and as the female protagonist, which N'gom also describes as "Narrator – witness, protagonist" of the novel, the author thus situates the female voice in a privileged space on two levels within the narrative. (N'gom, 304) As such the female subject is designated the roles of the narrator and active subject in the action of the narrative. In doing so the female perspective is in focus, and the social realities and conditions which frame her life are un-veiled so that they can be explored and analysed. Thus, while Nnanga narrates the story of her partner, Ekomo, concurrently her life story is also emerging and evolving as it takes center stage and occupies a space alongside his story. Although, at times her(s)tory is developed in connection with his(s)tory, but at other times it seems to deviate from his to follow a course of its own. Such episodes are usually introduced by flashbacks which allow her to revisit her

childhood days of adventure with her brothers and friends such as Mba. She also revisits the passionate existence of her adolescence in which she is the famous and esteemed lead dancer of a touring troupe. They also include the experiences of her adult life as a married woman who expresses a mature perspective as she deals with her own personal struggles for meaning and self-fulfilment. As she tells her(s)tory she also connects with those of other women in the village and displays a high degree of empathy and concern for them as they deal with various forms of oppression in the society. As such, the experiences of other women such as Nchama, and the wives of Oyono also contribute to her exploration of the female condition in the tribal society. Thus, this characterization illustrates what Maryse Conde explains as the role of the feminine “I” in the works by female African writers. As such, she contends that, “the African woman doesn’t direct herself to the world, but to her frustrated and desperate sisters. When she talks, she does it in the name of those women who do not have a voice, who suffer in the fields and who are only left with the ambiguous vestments of maternity.”(Cited in N’gom, 305) The Africana womanist theorist Clenora Hudson-Weems similarly recognizes a genuine sisterhood among Africana women which she describes as, “ This sisterly bond is a reciprocal one, one in which each gives and receives equally. ... They are joined emotionally, as they embody empathic understanding of each other’s shared experiences.”(Huson-Weems, 65)

The female voice and gender relations

The first meeting between Nnanga and Ekomo:

At this time the children were also playing a game with make-believe babies as Nnanga began to question the relationship between marriage and maternity for women. She found it difficult to accept the idea that the destiny of all married women was to be subjected to childbearing. (55) She did not think maternity should be synonymous with marriage and an inevitable consequence of partnership with a male. Even as a child it can be noted that she was already developing a sense equity and justice for women. She intuitively concluded that women should exercise some control of their bodies and their reproductive functions. When one of her brothers insisted that she should not marry if she wanted to avoid such pain, she responded in her mind that, “ How foolish were some adult females! What does marriage have to do with having babies!!” (55) (Qué tontas resultaban algunas veces las mayores! Qué tendrá que ver el matrimonio con los hijos!) Nnanga could not see the connection between both roles for women and found it outrageous that, “... a woman’s reason for existence was to bear children.” (hooks, 27) In her mind she can recognize the choices that women have available to them in partnerships with males and therefore believes that to negate that choice is an irrational act on the part of adults. This type of reasoning therefore seems to demonstrate the beginning of a feminist/womanist consciousness in the female protagonist of *Ekomo*. As the critic bell hooks indicates any woman who embraces choice is displaying allegiance to feminist politics. (29) hooks further indicates that when women have no choice in their reproductive rights what usually ensues is a profound degree of, “... powerlessness and vulnerability to exploitation” (29) This expression of the protagonist’s opinion reveals a rejection of the gender roles based on biological dictates and imposed on women by means of the propagation of the stereotypes of the patriarchal society. She is

already questioning the morality of limited choices for women and the gender based oppressions that women suffer. She also demonstrates a distinct feminist ethic since, "... she believes, in social, political, and economic equality of the sexes."(Sandberg, 158)

On the first examination of the marital relationship of Ekomo and Nnanga it seems that their marriage follows the traditional patterns of male domination. However, on further consideration it is found that many aspects of their relationship do not conform exclusively to the traditional model. The fact that Ekomo exercises greater freedom of movement than his wife, Nnanga is the first indicator of the disparity between them. He visited the urban center in search of adventure and excitement and did not return for three months. Meanwhile his wife, Nnanga who remained in the home was distraught and overcome with worry over his absence. She received no message from him during this time and could only imagine what he could have been doing. Her emotional suffering was profound but she remained in the domestic space and fulfilled her responsibilities. Therefore, while he had the freedom to attend the fairs and parties of the city she was bound by the chores and duties of the home. This illustrates the Gender Inequality that she experiences in her relationship since, she is always bound by the duties of the home. On the other hand, her partner has the freedom to explore the public sphere outside of the home and the village. This situation clearly indicated a family structure governed by gender roles sanctioned by the male patriarchal system. Nevertheless, some aspects of their relationship did indicate that it was also true that their relationship also reflected non-traditional tendencies.

However, it is evident that she does not passively accept Ekomo's infidelity without assessing it and trying to come up with a plan for dealing with his betrayal. As such on hearing Ekomo's voice when he finally returns to the village she is overcome with conflicting emotions and states that, "... my heart beats with force not knowing if it is joy, sadness or simply fury."(26) (... mi corazón late con fuerza sin saber si es de alegría, tristeza o simplemente furia.) The emotional pain that she experiences as a result of the actions of Ekomo causes her to feel an incredible urge to respond. At the first sight of him she states that, "A strange warmth covered my face, ears and cheeks, and Nnanga's voice came to mind saying- You should sting his conscience like wasps... Yes my heart stings like a wasp and I wait." (26- 27) (Un calor extraño me sube por la cara, orejas y las mejillas, y la voz de Nnanga me viene a la mente diciendo- Debería de picarle la conciencia como avispa. ... A mi si me pica el corazón como una avispa y espero.)

The voice of her mother enters into the dialogue with her in order to decide on the most appropriate action for dealing with the situation. As the activist Carol Hanish stated in the late 1960's, "women are messed over not messed up! We need to change the objective conditions not adjust to them." (Cited in Language of Power, 4) As such Nnanga is aware of and understands the depth of the pain caused by her partner's unfaithfulness, however she opts for a more thoughtful approach to dealing with him. She does not deny what she feels and decides that the most appropriate response to him would be to wait. She knows that her trust in him has been violated and she is not in denial about it however. The process by which she arrives at this approach as

demonstrated in the narrative indicates her utilization of the technique of reflexivity as described by Mary Carol Bateson. (101)

Meanwhile, as the other men-folk tease Ekomo about his exploits in the city and he takes a defensive stance claiming that they were trying to provoke a fight between Nnanga and him for their amusement, Nnanga on the other hand understands the game and understands that to respond with rage would have very little consequence with him. (27) In order to avoid her reaction completely, whether rage or hurt Ekomo decides to escape quickly to a safe haven and enters his room and locks the door.

Another case in which the female voice explores gender inequality in the narrative is when the female villager, la Zalamera, was punished publicly for being involved in an extra-marital affair. For this act of infidelity both partners were severely punished by the council of male leaders. The male was criticized for violating one of oldest rules of their tribal society, that, “ You must not go after your brother’ wife.” (18) (No busques a la mujer de tu hermano.) The female participant was also scorned and criticized by the entire village as well. All the villagers came out to publicly condemn the couple for their transgression, while the narrator as a witness indicated, “The men speak, (and) the women are silent”. The elder pronounced his sentence for the transgressors which consisted of fifty lashes across the buttocks for the female, while the punishment for the male was “ – for the adulterer, two goats, thirty thousand bipkwele and a hundred and fifty lashes.” (18) (– para el adultero, dos cabras, treinta mil bipkwele y ciento cincuenta palos.) Thus, it seems that while they were both punished physically for their violation, yet still the male offender received a considerable compensation for his loss. The elder

justified this sentence by asserting that the female could not be considered as totally responsible for her actions, “Because the woman is like a child. She does not have the understanding of what is fidelity. And her guilt is lesser.” (18) (Porque la mujer es como un niño. No tiene conciencia de fidelidad. Y su culpa por lo tanto es menor.) This justification for the unequal punishment of the male and the female seems to illustrate the inferior position of the female in comparison to the male in the society. It indicates an unequal valorization of the female since she is not held to the same standard of accountability as the male for her contribution to the violation. This judgment is therefore indicative of the unequal and subordinate status of the female occupies in the male dominated social system.

Furthermore, on examination of the process by which this case was carried out where the female had no recourse to an adequate defense, the male was still allowed to speak in his defense but she was not. Thus, one can observe the level of victimization of the female suffers in the society. She was not allowed to speak in her defense, nor could anyone speak on her behalf. In this manner, she was effectively objectified by the system. Just as she did not have any responsibility in the transgression, she also had no right to defend her action.

Furthermore, another instance in the story where gender inequality is also apparent is in the story of the family of Oyono, the gray haired man. In this family polygamy is being practiced and as such its many implications and difficulties as well are highlighted. He had four wives because his first wife was unable to have children, and since they had amassed a small fortune together, they decided that one of the ways to transfer their

wealth to the next generation would be to adopt the family pattern of polygamy. (94-95) Therefore, with her consent he was able to expand the family since he was able to have children with the other three women that he brought into the family. However, when Oyono decided that he wanted to be baptized in the Christian church, the priest told him that in order to do so he would have to marry only one woman in the church. He recognized the difficulty that he was encountering when he states that, "I, Oyono, I am seeing that a curse has fallen upon my house. I thought of becoming baptized in order to save my soul, and what is coming upon me is a condemnation itself." (98) (Yo, Oyono, estoy viendo que la maldición cayó sobre mi casa. He pensado bautizarme para salvar mi alma, y lo que me está llegando es la propia condenación.) Consequently, an intense conflict ensued among the women in the family, since he had to make a decision as to which one of them he would marry according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

This subsequently ignited the conflict between these women as they feared that he would have to abandon three of them. In the public forum in which the case is presented all the misunderstandings and conflicts in their relationships were made visible for the entire community. As the narrator revealed the details of the proceedings she also expressed her own belief that none of the women would benefit from the decision that Oyono would make. In her opinion they would all be affected adversely by it, as they would experience feelings of betrayal as a result of Oyono's decision. As she herself became immersed in the consecutive testimonies of these women she was moved to express great empathy for each one of them. In her view they were all affected by a force

that seemed to be very intrusive, and destructive to the family unity since the family pattern which they had adopted had served their purposes to a great degree.

As such, the first wife gave her testimony as she explained that her condition of infertility and her fear that Oyono was going to abandon her at this time because of her age. (95) The complaint of the second wife was that she felt betrayed and used because she was never able to function as a mother after she became Oyono's wife. She stated that, "I chose Oyono without knowing that all he wanted from me was a fertile uterus for the happiness of his wife ... " (96) (Escogí a Oyono para esposo sin saber que lo que pretendía de mí era mi matriz fértil para la felicidad de su esposa ...) She also testified that she was never allowed to function in the role of mother since the first wife had taken over control of her children from birth. She therefore felt violated and marginalized because of this treatment. The second wife also felt that Oyono had taken advantage of her and then he and his first wife had abandoned her. She therefore incisively questioned the fairness of the roles the women were required to assume in this particular situation as she asked, "Is it fair? What counts more: to work the land next to the man you love or to bring children into the world as I did?" (96) (Es justo esto? Qué es lo que más cuesta: trabajar el campo junto al hombre que uno quiere o traer hijos al mundo como hice yo?)

Thus, it seems that the value of maternity in the female is being examined and interrogated in this discourse, as well as the validity and the morality of the polygamous family patterns. The second wife felt completely deceived by the couple because after she had given birth to the children she was treated as an object that was valued only for her biological function. In her opinion this was unjust, since she seemed to have been

subjected to a form of victimization and marginalization in the society from the time of her arrival. Additionally, the divisive actions of the first wife ensured that all emotional ties with her children had been broken, since after she gave birth to them they were cruelly separated from her both physically and emotionally. For these reasons she suffered great emotional pain and psychological turmoil.

The narrator seemed to sympathize not only with her friend, Ayekaba who was one of Oyono's wives, but with all of the women involved. After she listened to the arguments that they presented she could understand their predicament, since they were all very reasonable justifications for their positions. As such, she expressed her own frustration over the conflict that had arisen due to the contrasting values and traditions between the Western world and the African traditions religious and family traditions. Hence she complains that, "I curse in my interior all men and especially that man of God who proposed without any conscience to destabilize a peaceful and happy family." (93) (Yo maldije en mi interior a todos los hombres y especialmente a aquel hombre de Dios que se proponía sin ningún remordimiento de conciencia incordiar en una familia pacífica y feliz.)

Furthermore, Nnanga, the female protagonist of the narrative also experiences great suffering and victimization as a result of tribal customs which unjustly traumatize the female widow in the society. Thus, when Ekomo finally succumbs to his illness and dies she is subjected to extreme humiliation and punishment as she is considered as having committed the worst transgression against the tribe. First of all she has broken a taboo and so she is condemned to the worst punishment and degradation because of it. After a

long and exhausting journey in search of a cure for Ekomo they found themselves in a distant land far away from their village. As such when he dies she has no support from anyone and so with no other recourse, she is forced to assume the responsibility for his burial for herself. When the inevitable moment of his death arrives she is thrown into a state of acute affliction. In great pain she therefore laments, “Ekomo has died and for his death I cry. I have here with me a cadaver friend, that is only mine. Grief /Grief /Grief. May the drum beats sound.” (180) (Se ha muerto Ekomo y por su muerte lloro. Tengo aquí conmigo un cadaver amigo, que es tan solo mío. Luto/Luto/Luto. Que toquen los tambores.) She is extremely disoriented as she deals with the loss of her husband and her laments express the extreme anguish and pain that experiences.

Even though there is no close relative or friend with whom she can share her grief she still does not succumb to the debilitating effect of the circumstances. She somehow finds the strength and courage to keep on moving ahead to complete the tasks that are necessary. Now she has to assume the responsibility for burying Ekomo on her own even though according to the traditions of the Fang it is prohibited that the widow should touch the body of her dead husband. Conscious of the transgressive act that she is committing, she has to carry it out anyway. During the process of getting his body ready for burial she can perceive feelings of culpability that invade her consciousness and she reveals this when she states that,

From the time that I touched the cadaver of Ekomo, my body is filled with an intense and penetrating coldness. Each one of the knocks that sound on nailing the boards tell me: You failed the tabu ... you failed the tabu ... You touched the cadaver of your dead husband. You will die!” (181) (Desde que he tocado el cadáver de Ekomo, mi cuerpo está lleno de frío intenso y penetrante. Cada uno de

los golpes que suenan al clavar las maderas me dice: Fallaste al tabú ... fallaste al tabú ... Tocaste el cadáver de tu marido muerto. Morirás!)

These internalized messages of persecution begin to gnaw away at her heart and her being for she knows that the condemnation which she faces is real. She knows that she has violated the collective norms of the tribe and she will be made to pay for this act of treason. Consequently, the persecution of the widow is inevitable on two counts. Firstly, according to the tribal customs as a widow she has to undergo a period of mourning and grief, which entails self-sacrifice and self-abnegation of the female. Then, additionally since she had broken one of the sacred norms of the fang tradition she has to face the inevitable consequence. She reveals these conditions when she indicates that,

I am thrown among the ashes. It is natural! I am a widow. But the aunts sting me and I am unable to move away because it is taboo. The sticks fall upon my body. It is natural! I am a widow and everyone has a right to whip me. ...” (184) (Estoy echada entre las cenizas. Es natural! Soy una viuda. Pero me pican las hormigas y no puedo moverme porque es tabú. Caen los palos sobre mi cuerpo. Es natural! Soy viuda y todos tienen derecho a flagelarme.)

Nnanga therefore experiences extreme agony due to the death of Ekomo, as well as physical and emotional pain caused by the cruel and unforgiving punishment by the tribe’s men and women. Her expressions indicate that she is in a state of profound suffering and misery, as she laments, “ I am nothing more than an outline cut against the infinite sun, with the consciousness of not having been more than a shadow, that, with its millennium existence at stake, it continues dragging in a desert of stones, salt and shadows.” (185) (No soy más que su perfil recortado contra el sol del infinito, con la conciencia de no haber sido más que, con su milenaria existencia a cuestas, va arrastrándose en un desierto de piedras, sal y sombras.) This monologue expresses the anguish that Nnanga is made to experience because of her transgression according to

tribal dictates. She suffers the condemnation by the other members of the tribe and is forced to endure the physical and psychological pain for the crime that she is accused of committing, that of being a widow who has broken all the sacred rules.

She is now situated in an ambiguous position in which, according to the norms of the tribe, a woman without a husband, a widow is destined to occupy a position of misery and destitution in the society. Her future is uncertain because Ekomo has not been survived by a brother on either his mother's, or father's side of the family. She appraises the severity of her situation when she states,

To whom are they going to give my dowry so that they may marry me and have children that have to serve afterwards in the house in which they stay at? (188) (... a quién darán la dote mía para que pueda casarse y tener hijos que han de servir después a la casa que queda?)

As such she is ridiculed and tortured so that she too almost succumbs to death during this weakest, and most vulnerable phase of her life. Without compassion and understanding she is objectified and devalued because there is no male who can directly assume responsibility for her. She is therefore treated as a possession and is considered as having little or no value. Her Nana also derides her misfortune as she claims that as a widow she no longer has any rights to anything. (187) Her future is uncertain as the tribe is unable to make a conclusive decision under the circumstances. She is also aware of her plight for she realizes that she is older, and that more than likely she no longer has a future with the tribe. (187)

The patriarchal violence to which Nnanga is subjected as a result of gender inequality is at its worst during the period of her widowhood. She recognizes the injustice and

comments on it when she states that, “The life of a woman is always (determined by) the decisions of the abaha, from birth to death.”(188) (La vida de una mujer está siempre expuesta a las decisiones del abaha, desde que nace hasta que muere.) She is childless because of her infertility, and so this also exacerbates her situation and leaves her feeling worthless and powerless. She seems to be in violation of all the virtues that are considered sacred in this patriarchal society and therefore she must suffer for it. This situation in which she is cruelly and mercilessly victimized by the tribe, reflects what the critic Fajardo Calvo would contend is due to her challenge to “ ... the old dogma that women were born exclusively to facilitate the existence, pleasure and well being of males.”(116) (... el Viejo dogma de que las mujeres nacieron exclusivamente para proporcionar existencia, placer y bienestar a los varones.) The protagonist however, believes that while council of ancestors are indecisive about her future they can also seek an answer in her. Again she recognizes herself as a person, who is capable of thinking and feeling, and as such making a decision for herself. To that effect, she asks the question,

Why will they not ask me what I want to do and what I think? Then, I would knot to them that I don't intend to marry anyone. I could probably stay at the side of mother and be her daughter as I have been up to now.” (188) (Por qué no me preguntarán a mi qué es lo que quiero hacer y qué pienso? Entonces, sabría decirle que no pienso casarme con nadie. Que me quedaré al lado de madre y seré su hija como hasta ahora he sido.)

Although, the protagonist is in a position of voicelessness in the society where all the odds are against her, yet still she knows exactly what she wants. Similar to Ramatoulaye, the female protagonist of the novel *So Long a Letter* she also has expressed a degree of awareness, and resistance to the system that condemns and oppresses her.

They both are treated as possessions to be excluded and denigrated, when the source of their value, their male partner is no longer present. Ramatoulaye, at the end of her period of four months and ten days of mourning she too articulates her displeasure and resistance towards the imposition of unjust rules upon her by her extended family. Therefore, she indicates that, “My voice has known thirty years of silence, thirty years of harassment. It bursts out, violent, sometimes sarcastic, sometimes contemptuous.” (58) She too is aware of her objectified status in the patriarchal society and is adamant about resisting the attempts to direct her future. She also does not opt for another marriage after the death of her husband and similar to Nnaga expresses her resistance to this possibility when she states that,

You forget that I have a heart, a mind, that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you. (58)

It seems that both female subjects in their distinct narratives, emphatically present a questioning and interrogation of the external authority which seeks to determine the course of their lives so that they would be effectively undervalued and marginalized by their gender roles. Both women express their resistance to the credibility of this power structure which force women into a status of non-personhood and silence. The critic Fajardo Calvo in support of the resistance to female domination asserts that, “But there is no institution that deserves to survive, if for its existence it needs to appeal to injustice.” (17) (Pero no hay institución que merezca sobrevivir, si para su existencia necesita recurrir a la injusticia.)

The narrative of *Ekomo*, as much as it highlights the gender inequalities that the female voice experiences in the patriarchal society, also focuses on the possibility of an element of complementary in the relationship between the two genders as well. Fajardo Calvo also recommends that in order to remedy the endemic inequalities in the family, changes should be made to the institution so that it is no longer an origin of slave relations of humanity. (18) At the symbolic level the partnership exhibited by the male and the female protagonists of *Ekomo* appears to imply a social and psychological complementarity, moreover, a shared commonality between the black male and female in terms of gender relations.

The critics and writers such as Alice Walker, Buchi Emecheta and Clenora Hudson-Weems through their essays and theoretical assertions further reflect on the connection between genders in the black racial and cultural context. Their assertions indicate that irrespective of the privileging of gender equality in their literary works, that they do not propose a struggle for hegemonic dominance for the female, but rather they advocate and support a certain degree of complementarity of purpose and action between the male and female.

Accordingly, Walker one of the pioneer female proponents of this ideology indicates in her definition of womanism in the essay, *In search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*, that it is an outrageous, audacious, courageous, or skillful behavior, “and, “committed to survival and committed to wholeness of entire people, male and female. (Cited in Cole, 107) Therefore, this definition while elevating the female to subject status and proposing the articulation of an assertive female self still does not

deride the status of others. It appears to indicate the necessity of inclusion and privileging of all peoples, not just a single minority whether it be female or male. The critic, Hudson-Weems also concurs with this view of the complementarity between the genders in the black context in her seminal text, *Africana womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. Additionally, Fajardo Calvo also expresses a similar view in support of this facet of the male/female relationship when she states that, “The future of the world can never be the product of only one sex, whether masculine or feminine, but rather the effective cooperation and complementarity of both sexes.” (18) (El porvenir del mundo no puede ser jamás producto del monosexismo, ya sea masculino o femenino, sino de la cooperación efectiva y equivalente responsable de ambos sexos.)

Therefore, the struggle for gender equality that is represented in this narrative while underlying the privileging of the female gender, is not focused on the exclusion of the male but on his inclusion in the struggle for justice and equality. It is not based solely on the elevation of the female cause, but on the valorization of the contribution that they both make toward the improvement of social and political conditions for all. As such, the common solidarity, cooperation and the building of bridges between the genders are rather the objectives which can lead to greater equality, and ultimately the reversal of hegemonic patriarchal patterns of domination in the society.

Thus, the complementarity between the male and the female protagonists in Ekomo is indicative of their collaborative action in support of each other at a critical moment in their lives.. The story demonstrates how the couple join forces in order to find an effective cure for the illness of Ekomo, as well as to defy the ominous ancestral

prediction that a young man would also depart from the world after the last great warrior, the León of Acecho. Together they undertake an exploration of unknown corners of their country in order to do this. One can consequently interpret this search that the two initiate together as symbolic of the collective struggle of the community to restore and strengthen their identity. The exploration of the interior of the countryside, as well as the urban center, also leads them to revisit and revalorize their ancestral roots and customs in terms of their culture and traditions. They both become more conscious of the wealth of knowledge and wisdom that they have inherited from their ancestors and therefore achieve a greater appreciation for their cultural origins and themselves as members of the group. As they undergo the treatments that are administered by the traditional healer they are submerged in the religious beliefs and healing practices that are based on the mysteries of the natural environment. (119)

Additionally, on the banks of the river NTEM they also share the stories that have been narrated to them by their elders, and thus they are able to further reconstruct the story of their historical past and revisit the beginnings of many of the traditions that they did not completely understand or appreciate. One of them is the origin of the practice of presenting the family of the bride with a dowry among the tribes of the sons of Afrikara. (160) They also established that all the descendents of the seven sons of Africara should have a second tribe. (160) Ekomo also describes to Nnanga how their tribal customs and traditions evolved through a process of transculturation as their forefathers attempted to cohabit and interact with other peoples and their cultures in the geographical spaces that they sought to occupy when he states that,

Our languages are not as different as some think. You must not confuse the bilobolobos with our people ... and also our fathers, since they were nomads, arrived and they became mixed in with the inhabitants that they met in the area ... They inter-married with the women of the area and with time the accent began changing little by little according to place in which they settled. (161) (Nuestras lenguas no son tan diferentes como piensan. No debes confundir a los bilobolobos con nosotros. ... y también nuestros padres, al ser nómadas, llegaban y se confundían con los habitantes que encontraban en el lugar. ... Se casaban con las mujeres que encontraban y al cabo del tiempo el acento iba cambiando poco a poco según el lugar donde se establecían.)

Another demonstration of the complementarity which existed between Ekomo and Nnanga is evidenced in the deep solidarity and harmony that is exhibited in their relationship. Even when his death is imminent and desperation is palpable between them, they both express great compassion for one another. As such, in the last months of Ekomo's life the couple share a higher degree of unity, and comprehension which results in a more harmonious relationship than they experienced before. The narrator observes that, "Ekomo and I fight almost every day, and every day we used to make-up in order to fight again." (172) Even though they seemed to have had a volatile relationship, yet still they loved each other. He recognized her love for him and expressed his appreciation of self-less sacrifice and dedication to him during the period of his illness. When he attempted to hurt her by emptying the infected liquid from his leg on her she responded instead with great compassion for him, since she understood that he was a victim of immense frustration due to his impending fatality. (170) When he finally dies she is undergoing the tribulations of the mourning rites imposed on her by his family she still expresses her love for Ekomo thus indicating that even death will not alter that bond that they have in common when she concludes that,

Each human being is his own heaven and hell. Each individual is a little piece of God and a little of the devil. We love each other and in fact we are happy within our love, exempt from contamination, and all madness.” (189) (Cada ser humano es su propio cielo o su propio infierno. Cada individuo es un poco de Dios y un poco de demonio. Nosotros nos amamos y he aquí que nos sentimos felices dentro de nuestro amor, exentos de contaminación, de toda locura.)

CHAPTER-3

Shadows of your black memory (Las Tinieblas de tu memoria negra)

The representation of the female voice in the narrative:- Position, Structure, Role.

Introduction:

Donato Ndongo's his(s)tory, which is narrated in the novel *Shadows of your black memory* explores the social and political dimensions of the Spanish colonizing enterprise in Equatorial Guinea during the early twentieth century. Similar to *Ekomo*, written by Ndongo's contemporary Maria Nsue Angue, it depicts the experiences of the Equatorial Guinean community as they deal with the introduction of Western influences in their culture. As such, in N'dongo's account the his(s)tory focuses specifically on the incursion of the Spanish imperialist power in the tribal community, and by extension in the country as a whole.

The members of the community are confronted with the dilemma of how to defend and protect their cultural values and traditions, and hence their national identities from the invasive influences of the foreign intruders. Therefore, while the her(s)tory appears to privilege a greater cultural focus, and accordingly a culture which is being threatened by outside influences, the narrative of *Shadows* also demonstrates this but the emphasis seems to indicate greater political tensions and conflicts in the encounter between the natives and the Spanish agents of imperialist expansion. This narrative therefore reflects on the socio-political tension of the colonial experience in the Guinean context. As such, it explores the consequences of the contact between the Guinean tribes-men and women,

and the Spanish colonialists as it narrates the story which unfolds as these two distinct world views and cultures interact and sometimes collide with each other in a bid for supremacy and control in the African spatial territory.

The colonialists through the propagation of their ideologies, and the establishment of their institutions sought to impose hegemonic control and cultural dominance in the African territory. As such, the interactions of cultural ideologies and traditions between the European and the Guinean peoples set in motion a process of cultural transformation of both groups. The cultural transformative process which Fernando Ortiz (1947) described as a process of transculturation is demonstrated in this narrative. Due to the interaction between the foreign and the native cultural patterns and traditions, there would result a transformation of the cultural identities of both groups. Through the successive stages of acculturation, and de-culturation of the original elements of the divergent cultures there would eventually be a genesis of a new cultural form. Thus, it would be composed of the discrete cultural phenomena belonging to each of the groups which is involved in the process of cultural transformation.

As such, the reader is able to witness the historical meeting the two peoples which took place in the history of Equatorial Guinea, as well as the relationship which was characterized by acute animosity as both groups sought to maintain their hold of power. On the one hand, the natives made an effort to acquiesce to the foreigners but they were also aware of the sacrifice that this entailed since it could lead to a loss of their own cultural identity as they assumed that of the invading European power. The novel thus focuses on the tensions that arose as the natives also exhibited resistance to the

impositions of the ideals, values and traditions of the foreign culture. A fervent resistance to the intrusion of the foreigners in the Guinean homeland can be witnessed in the characterization of Uncle Abeso.

He is one of the characters in the novel who is a guardian of the fang traditions and recognizes the changes that emerged as a result of the intrusion of the foreigners. He thus refers to this when he asserts that, “And he had complied faithfully with his duties until the white masters came from the other side of the world and had changed the customs of our people.” (96) Y él había cumplido fielmente su cometido hasta que los nuevos amos blancos venidos del otro lado del mundo habían cambiado las costumbres de nuestro pueblo.) Thus, Ndongo has confirmed that there is a struggle underway for control and power in the African territory. Therefore, it appears that in order to demonstrate an antagonistic relationship between the fang tribal group and the Spanish colonists, N’dongo has created a story in which the Guinean male is at the center of the his(s)tory.

Thus, *Shadows* traces the life experiences of the male protagonist during this period of cultural and existential conflicts between the two groups. It includes a focus on his formal educational experiences under the patronage of the Catholic Church, as well as, the alternate education that he is exposed to for becoming a leader in the tribal community. It examines the roles that the contrasting systems played in the shaping and molding of the personality of the protagonist, and the expansion of his nationalist consciousness.

The Position of the female voice

As such, the black female voice that is positioned at the margins of the plot in the novel never leave that space to assume a more central positioning in the narrative. Thus, the voice does not achieve the same level of participation and development as the minority male voice in the discourse. In comparison with his voice, her voice reflects a limited scope and agency throughout the development of the his(s)tory. The female character is not represented as a subject who as a result of the challenges and difficulties that she undergoes in the narrative, is able to demonstrate an expansion in her character, and that she possesses a courageous spirit and a heightened sense of agency and selfhood. The female characters and the female voice that appear in the narrative seem to be represented in a largely one dimensional frame and as a passive observer to the action. Consequently, there is no single female character represented in this narrative, who overcomes the marginal positioning to achieve the status of protagonist on a comparable level to the male voice. She clearly performs a secondary role in contrast to the active role performed by the male in the narration and protagonism in the novel. There is no female character who achieves the same status of visibility as Nnanga does in the narrative of N'sue who through the inversion and subversion of the normative roles for women in the society is able to include the female at the center of the discourse.

Unlike Nsue, the novelist of *Shadows* seems to follow closely the traditional literary patterns for the representation of the female subject. Accordingly, he opts for representing the female voice with greater realism in accordance with the expression of the female voice in the West African society. Instead of exercising his creative licence

as his female counterpart does in the representation of the voice of the female protagonist, Ndongu instead, only privileges the male voice in creative ways while the female voice which he renders is in accordance with the social structure. Thus, while the male voice is energized and dynamic in the narrative, the female voice is rendered as relatively timid and in many cases as silenced or voiceless. Effectively, she does not receive the same level of valorization as the male's voice, and is rendered as a symbol of the 'other' in the social hierarchy of the colonized indigenous society. Since, her position in the narrative is limited to the marginal spaces she does not achieve a significant amount of un-silencing, and ultimately the expression of her voice in the discourse. Even though the prevailing objective of the narrative is the decentering of the master discourse, however, the female voice is not included in this project to the same degree as that of the male's voice.

The female voice rarely occupies a central position, nor does it reach the same level of prominence in the discourse as the minority male voice that expresses a distinct male identity. While, his voice seems to articulate a defense of his right to self-determination he also renounces the domination by the colonial power whether it be physical, political, economic or socio-cultural. The female voice, on the other hand, never articulates an equally convincing resistance to the colonizing influence. In her condition as a dependent, and secondary subject she is unable to articulate an effective criticism, or palpable resistance to the dominant influences at the same level as the male subject in the discourse. Since her voice seems to be permanently situated at the margins of the action and the discourse, she therefore does not significantly contribute to the project of the

decentering of the master discourse which one of the principal objectives of the Post Colonial novel.

Whereas, the male voice can be seen as occupying the foreground of the narrative and can be considered as being unsilenced in the discourse, the female voice on the other hand is not accorded the same level of un-silencing. She mainly occupies the marginal spaces where she is invariably silenced, or it is very difficult for her to speak with her truth with clarity and precision. The subsequent marginalization of the female voice, and hence her exclusion from the center of the narrative seems to be explained *The Empire Writes Back*, “Feminism and Post-Colonialism” which explains that, “African cultural values systematically denigrated by colonialist ideologies and institutions demand positive representation, and this restitutive impulse has frequently been seen to conflict with feminist reformation.” (Ashcroft, Griffins and Tiffins, 249) Hence, the representations of the minority voice in Post Colonial texts while seeking to recuperate the minority voice as a whole as an act of decentering or of “writing back”, hardly ever extend to demonstrate a privileging and inclusion of the black female voice. Her voice rarely intervenes in the main explorations, dialogues, as well as debates and discussions that are included in the narrative, in order to transmit the anti-colonialist ideologies that act as the impetus for the decentering process.

Since the black female voice is situated at the margins, or the periphery of the main discussions and critical actions in the plot, the reader can therefore observe how the female voice is effectively excluded from the center. Thus, there exists a clear division between the types of activities that males and females can actively participate in. As

such, the female is excluded from many of the activities in which the male presence is dominant. As in the case of the protagonist's mother and his father the reader can observe a distinct separation in their spheres of activities. Thus, while they both work alongside each other in the gardens, however, in the domestic sphere she would occupy that domain exclusively. She contributes to the satisfaction of the family's physical and emotional needs, but with regard to important decisions in the family, and public activities she would be relegated to a secondary position, as the father would occupy the dominant position in these areas.

When the young protagonist is experiencing the most physical pain that he ever experienced in his life, such as after his circumcision, it is his mother's comfort that he sought. When he is in need of emotional support especially after a violent confrontation with his male contemporaries, it is again his mother that he confides in for her understanding and support. Even when he has a question about the doubt which the boys have implanted in his consciousness about his gender identity he approaches his mother for answers. The other boys of the village called him a "little girl," but he knew that he could "pipi" just like the other men of the village that he knew. Therefore, the mother's voice is able to provide the protagonist with the assurance and support that he needs in order to reconcile these conflicting realities that he is confronted with in the narrative.

On the other hand, one also observes that the female is not allowed to participate in the major decisions and activities that are situated in the public domain of the tribal community. Thus, in the public domain of the community her presence and influence are often minimal and secondary to that of the male. Accordingly, in the preparation of her

son for the circumcision rite she is the one who prepared the special bath of the herbal potions for him, and then dressed him for the ceremony. However, she was prohibited from being a witness to the actual ceremony, or from participating in it. All the women of the village were strictly prohibited from involvement in this activity, which seemed to be dominated by a male influence and presence.

Therefore, along with the other women of the village that included his aunt Té, his grandmother, the six wives of his uncle Abeso, mamá Andeme and his cousin Micue, his mother had to remain in the house that was located at a distance from the actual scene where the circumcision took place. (42) The women were thus excluded from the center of this male dominated activity. When the ceremony was about to begin the leader of the tribal group, uncle Abeso directed a series of questions to the others who were present asking if there was anyone there who should not be there. Then the protagonist's father responded that there were only pure eyes looking on " ... and I myself looked around trying to make out the impure eyes of any woman or of any enemy of the tribe." (43) This comment indicated that women were not supposed to view the proceedings, because they were unworthy and could have a detrimental effect on the results. While the protagonist's father was able to participate completely in the ceremony, the female could only participate in the background and even in the ceremony her presence was limited to the periphery and so she was effectively excluded. (44)

The gaze of the female was deemed as having the power to contaminate the ceremonial space where the male dominated. This illustrated that there were spaces in the community in which the female presence, the female voice was marginalized. For

this reason, the mother and the other female members of the family were only allowed to occupy the space in the background of the circumcision ceremony, while the men occupied the central position where the it was being performed.

In order to conclude the circumcision rite accorded to the protagonist, his foreskin had to be buried under the banana tree, and here again the readers can hear a comment made by a male character that refers to the secondary status of the female in the society. It therefore reflects on the exclusion of the female from the privileged spaces delineated for male dominance according to patriarchal principles. The protagonist's grandfather, Ngueme Anseme on giving his final blessings to seal the circumcision rite also made comments that indicated the relatively low esteem by which women were held in the tribal society. As such, after he spat three times on the spot where the protagonist's foreskin was recently buried, he then warned that any female who dared to cross the spot would be cursed for life and that if she ate of the fruit of the tree she would be equally condemned. (48) This statement emphasized the exclusion of the female from the rites and traditions that were deemed as the special domain of male influence and control exclusively. These scenes in the narrative demonstrate the undervaluing of the female voice since she was considered as unworthy of certain privileged activities due to her inferiority, as she was considered on the same level as the evil spirits and the enemies of the tribe. Thus, these values and ideologies that guided the tribal practices and customs to a great degree marginalized the female, as well as effectively positioning her as a subaltern of the society.

Additionally, even with regard to the spaces controlled by the Catholic Church there appeared a similar pattern of gendered segregation against women. In many cases the male was permitted to occupy the privileged positions in keeping with their superior status in the hierarchical system. Similar to the fang tribal society the males in the European hegemonic culture were designated with the central positions of power and authority, while women were relegated to the lowest rungs, or were effectively displaced to the marginal spaces. As such, in the narrative, while the male intern was positioned at the center of all the activities, his female companion who was represented by his sister seemed to always be positioned at the margins. In this position, she remained invariably invisible or marginalized to such an extent that she was effectively silenced.

Thus, it is evident that the promotion of gendered spaces was also strictly supported by the cultural norms of the colonizers as well. This was reflected in their policy prohibiting girls from visiting the school for male interns. Even the protagonist's sister who was an intern in the convent next-door was not allowed to visit him. Furthermore, when the female interns attended mass at the same church as the males, they were heavily supervised so that no communication could not take place between them. Many of the religious precepts of the Catholic church also included messages which promoted a belief in the inferiority of the female voice. Father Ortiz in warning the protagonist about the distracting and corrupting influence of the female voice admonishes him to, "... don't let them trap you in their net, immunize yourself against the evil of women, and the best formula for doing this is to occupy yourself for hours, because idleness is the mother of all the vices." (142)

It can also be observed that as the protagonist prepared for undertaking the next step in his professional life as a priest, it is his father along with Father Ortiz who exercised the most authority in the discussions and the decision making. Usually, after the consultations took place between the men, then the women were informed of the decisions that they were made by them. (74) Even at the first step in the process towards his becoming a priest, his first communion the female voice was also overlooked, since the male voice played a dominant role in the organization and preparations for the religious rite. Thus, his father assumed almost sole responsibility for planning the festivities which he claimed had to be extraordinary to reflect his son's achievement. He wanted a huge celebration in which blacks and whites from near and far would be invited to observe this historic occasion. Therefore, it was also his voice which was emphasized in this scene as he expressed his pride in the achievement of his first born son. (80) The males which included Father Ortiz, Ambrosio the catequist and Don Ramón also played an important role in the training and preparation of the young protagonist for the ceremony.

The women as was customary, were situated in a distinctly secondary position with regard to the men even at this time. Even in the scenes which deal with the first communion the women could not assert themselves verbally in any way. The protagonist's mother only listened to the comments that were made by her husband, but she was silent about the festivities, as well as how she viewed her son's success. Therefore, she was effectively situated in the realm of the silent "other". She would be involved in some aspects of the personal preparations of her son for the religious

ceremony, since it was she who was charged with taking him to the tailor to have his special suit made for the occasion, but even in this context her verbal involvement was always minimized.

Usually the women also occupied the spaces at the margins in the spaces delineated by the Catholic Church for their activities. In the chapel where the religious ceremony of the protagonist's first communion was taking place the reader can also witness a distinct separation of spaces for the male and the female. The protagonist described this distinction at his Communion ceremony when he commented on the different positions, "... the boys on the left and the girls on the right of the altar, as was also the men to the left and the women on the right of the temple (prohibited to be together, it is a sinful). (83) The Catholic Church, therefore supported and promoted an ideology which also emphasized the marginalization of the female subject. The priests directly and indirectly through their precepts and teachings instilled in the minds of young men that women they were agents of the degradation, and were viewed as having a corrupting influence on the affairs of males.

As such, the narrative demonstrated the manner in which the female voice was excluded from the public sphere of decision making, leadership and action in the society. These functions seemed to have been the exclusive domain of the male voices and are exemplified first and foremost by the privileging of the male voice in the position of the narrator as well as the protagonist. In these spaces the female voice are distinctly secondary to the male's voice. They are marginalized and silenced to such a degree that her voice could make no significant impact on the action of the narrative. The voice of

the female characters that appear in the narrative are relatively muted or in many cases their interventions are overshadowed by the male's voice.

In the ceremonial and mythical initiations of the protagonist into manhood and into the tribal hierarchy it seems that the female voice reached its most significant representation with the inclusion of the priestesses in the rituals. Their voices were being used to transmit messages from the ancestors of the spirit worlds to the initiate who was considered as the incarnation of his great-grandfather Motulu Mbenga. Even though they transmitted the pertinent advice and messages that were important for the physical, emotional and spiritual development of the new warrior and leader, and was only being utilized as a channel for the transmission of these primordial messages for the new initiate. The narrator indicated that he was, “ ... invested with the prudence, ... invested with the necessary strength ... and justice invaded your spirit ... “(50) She also advised that he develop the skills needed to take care of his physical well-being and not be dependent on a female.

Additionally, she warned that he never resort to crying because that would be the end. (51) The female voice did not express its own perspectives but her voice is merely being used as a medium of communication in order to transmit the messages which originated with the male ancestors. As such, when the last priestess disappeared from sight the narrator observed that he could still hear her voice in the distance, “ ... reciting the names of the ancestors and lamenting the faded glory and the difficult times that they were obliged to live.” (148) Even though this scene illustrated an instance in which the female

voice was audible in the narrative, however, it was only in the service of the male objectives, and not that of the female herself.

Structure of the female voice; uni-dimensional voice, limited development, passive participant

Therefore, the representation of the female voice can be considered as not developed to the same degree as the male minority voice. She seems to experience a double exclusion because of her race first of all, and also her gender. Accordingly, Spivak's comment about the subject/object formation of the female in the literary discourse indicates that, "Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization." (Spivak 1988 (1995), 306) Thus, the rendering of the female voice in this narrative that clearly privileges the nationalist project does not significantly promote the female voice in its patterns of reassertions, and reaffirmations of the minority voice and identity.

The independence movement according to the critic N'gom sought to promote a male dominated leadership, while the female was to a great degree left on the margins. (302) Additionally, the critic Yadira Calvo in "The woman, victim and accomplice" when she comments on the marginalized position of the female in the society and in literature indicates that, "... , the recognized doers in the culture that we know today were men, and the women have been maintained at the margin of the culture. This privilege of the male is reflected in all the cultural manifestations including, ... the mythology and

religión.” (109) (... los hacedores reconocidos de la cultura que hoy conocemos fueron los varones, y las mujeres han sido mantenidas al margen de ella...Este privilegio viril se reflejó en todas las manifestaciones culturales incluyendo, ... , la mitología y la religion.) Therefore, she seems to be indicating that with regards to human civilization these patterns of inequality among the male and female have been in existence since the establishment of the patriarchal society. As such, the male assumed the position of superiority in the culture while the female has traditionally been relegated to a secondary position bases on her lack of recognizable accomplishments in the society.

In contrast to the multi-dimensional treatment given to the male voice in the novel the female voice does not enjoy an equal privileging in the narrative. On examining the treatment of the female voice in the narrative, it is found that in many instances her voice is absent, or silenced even though her image might be present. She is therefore a significantly muted female figure that is a consequence of the marginalization of the female that seems to occur in the traditional literary treatments. The critic Fajardo Calvo, describes the process of the silencing of the female voice when she asserts that, all the virtues which are ascribed to the female are invariably the characteristics that are the most socially and psychically negative, for the achievement of independence and personality; they are more or less the qualities of the slave such as, humiliation, obedience, silence, timidity, sacrifice, humility, modesty, which ultimately lead to dysfunctions of the character, and can cause a healthy person to become psychically damaged. (110)

Therefore, in this his(s)tory it is evident that the female character does not speak for herself and so she does not articulate her own ideas, beliefs and perspectives. She is not allowed to express herself with any measure of independence. Her thoughts are many times expressed for her through another voice in the narrative. For instance, there is the scene where the protagonist's father scolds his children on behalf of his wife, for their lack of cooperation in assisting their mother with the chores in the home. The male voice comes to the fore-front of the scene, to outline to the children all the burdensome tasks that their mother is responsible for carrying out in the fields, as well as the many sacrifices that she has undertaken on their behalf. In his opinion their behavior does not display any appreciation for her at all. He indicates that, "... your poor mother bent over day after day from sun up to sun down on the field planting yucca collecting peanuts picking bananas weeding ... and you all are not paying any attention to the effort and all the sacrifice that you are costing us..." (73) In this monologue the male voice seems to show great empathy for the female as he describes her daily struggles. However, in spite of this empathy, this is his perspective that he is expressing and it does not belong to the female voice. He has not given her an opportunity to intervene, to express her own feelings and ideas with regard to their behavior. As such, it is the male's perspective that is privileged over that of the female's in the discourse.

The readers never learn about her life's hardships from her words and, thus her voice. Her perspective is never highlighted or assigned a space in the discourse so that she could express herself in a significant manner. Her belief about herself in relation to the children is never articulated, nor revealed to the reader except through the male's voice which acts

as a filter or a mediator for the female's perspective and vision. Therefore, this illustrates the manner in which the male voice in the his(s)tory is used to displace and marginalize the female voice. In so doing he has actively contributed to the voiceless-ness of the female character in the narrative.

The voice of the female is also overshadowed and forced into silence even in the epistolary communicative exchanges between the father and the son in the narrative. The letters are sent directly from the father to the son, but never from the mother to the son in order to communicate the news of the latest events in the family and the village. The mother never seems to have the opportunity also to directly address her son in a letter either. It is the father's words and expressions that deliver the messages of their disappointment and deception at his decision to abandon the seminary. He speaks for himself, and at the same time also articulates the disappointment that the mother experiences. He states that,

My father, with his crudeness a bit caustic and mortifying, has told me with abundant detail of the unceasing tears of my mother in the weeks following the receipt of my letter ... My father does not talk about his tears, even though I can read between the lines that he also has cried, ... ” (69) (Mi padre, con su crudeza un tanto cáustica y mortificante, me ha narrado con todo lujo de detalles las interminables lágrimas de mi madre en semanas que siguieron a la recepción de la carta, Mi padre no me habla de las suyas, aunque puedo leer entre líneas que él también ha llorado, ...)

It is apparent that on another occasion, the female voice is situated in a secondary position in relation to the male's voice in the family. She herself is not given the opportunity to describe and express her pain to her son directly. Instead the male voice takes control to give expression to what she thinks and feels about the disappointment of his decision. This representation critically portrays the absence of the female voice in the

narrative, and seems to be following the assumption that the female is not capable of self-expression in the social space created in the literary narrative.

Role of the female voice

The protagonist's mother and his grandmother mostly functioned in the background of most of the scenes, and occupied rather secondary positions. Therefore, their characters were never revealed, nor developed in the foreground of the narrative. Thus, the protagonist's mother was mainly defined by her labor in the field and in her relations in the home with the children. Mamá Fina, the grandmother was also recognized for her attention to detail and her attitude for being in control. In effect, the mental portrait of the women that the protagonist reflected in the narrative indicated that,

I could detect my mother's figure, her face distorted by the tears, there in the background, in the interior of the thatched roof house, holding my baby brother in her arms, ... and my sister at her feet looking at me overjoyed, and aunt Te at her side also whimpering, ... , and my grandmother, Mamá Fina, moving around as if in control of everything. And there would be the six wives of my uncle Abeso, ... , although I only distinguished the piercing cry of Mamá Andeme, and the giggle of the cousin Micue, ...” (42) (Pude advinar la figura de mi madre, surcada la cara de lágrimas, allá en le fondo, en el interior de la casa tapiada, sosteniendo a mi hermanito en los brazos, ... y a mi hermana a sus pies mirándome divertida, y a la tía Te a su lado también lloriqueando por todo y por nada, y a mi abuela, Mamá Fina, meneándose parsimoniosa y como dominándolo todo. Y allí también estarían las seis esposas del tío Abeso, ... aunque solo distinguí el pesado lastimero llanto de Mamá Andeme, y la risita de la prima Micue, ...)

In his mental portrait of the women, each one of them seemed to be overwhelmed by emotion and therefore characterized by it. He further reinforced this claim when he stated that they spent their time whimpering over everything and for nothing. (42) Thus the women of the narrative are not represented as strong and as confident as the males.

Neither are they presented as self-confident and self-assured, in comparison to the males in the narrative.

The protagonist's description of his male role models clearly indicates this distinction between the male and female representations in the novel. He indicated this in the statement, "And there was my father with his arms crossed behind, grave but smiling, and grandfather Nguema Anseme, satisfied in his old age well supported, and uncle Meco, his son, ... and above all, uncle Abeso, ..., and he told me to sit down, with authority and affection..." (42) Therefore, when compared to the male characters, the females do not present models that can be considered as exemplifying strength of character and courage. As the critic Johnnetta Cole contends, they cannot be considered as projecting the image of "sheroes" and therefore, positive role models for females or males in the story. They do not display clear and decisive leadership qualities as they are completely overshadowed in the public domain as well. Whereas, the protagonist admired and recognized the male members of his family for their various attributes and strengths, he never expressed any real admiration for the female members of his family or the community.

The male protagonist was also instructed that typical female qualities were not to be trusted or incorporated in his personality. As such, at the end of his initiation ceremony for the tribal leadership the officiating priestess warned him that he should never resort to weeping under any circumstance. (51) She explained that this was a response to pain and sadness that women readily expressed, but that he should be wary of expressions like this. Hence, within this suggestion lies the implication that the protagonist should not be

associated with the qualities and behaviours which the patriarchal system deemed as unfavorable for males and as signifying inferiority and weakness of character.

Additionally, she implored him to learn to cook so that he would not be dependent on women in this way. Thus the ideology of female inferiority that the protagonist is being exposed to at this time as the critic Coles observes breeds, “... attitudes, beliefs, and behavior that promote the subordination and oppression of women.” (83)

Another indicator of the lack of esteem for the female voice, depicted in the narrative is demonstrated in the expansion and development of the male character as opposed to that of the female. While the male protagonist displayed a marked evolution in his character, the female on the other hand reflected no maturation and expansion in her character. While the male exhibited an increased awareness in terms of his new sensibilities as an adult, and a growing understanding of his identity the female character did not reveal any indication of an expansion in her development whether emotionally or intellectually. The male character seemed to reveal an expansion in his sensibilities when he stated that he was no longer afraid of the night, and that he was able to dominate the sounds and the shadows, and he felt that his will power was much stronger. (58)

Therefore, on all levels the protagonist displayed important expansions in his personality, as he matured and developed physically, emotionally and intellectually. Meanwhile, the female voice was not accorded a comparable treatment through which she could display comparable achievements in the growth of her personality, as well the agency in her life. As such, the characterization of his sister for instance, never reflected any development beyond a blurred one-dimensional figure, that more or less walked in

the shadow of her brother's achievements in the family and the community. While his voice was privileged in the central position of the narrative, and directed and lead the reader's attention throughout the novel, the female's voice is relegated to the corners where voiceless-ness, and ultimately powerless-ness prevailed for the female.

While his education and initiation into the tribal and Catholic religious systems took center stage in the narrative plot, the female character did not occupy a role which was of comparable importance in the story. Her personality instead of taking a definite shape and expanding gradually throughout the narrative was more or less seen as decreasing or shrinking. The protagonist seemed to refer to this element in the characterization of the female when he referred to the personality of his female cousin Micue as, "... a distracted girl, the older she gets the less diligent, that way no man would want her." (130-131) This comment revealed the perception of the male that the female was someone who was not ruled by intellect, but by whims and emotions, and therefore instead of growing in wisdom and value, she was rather diminishing in value. The critic Cole indicates that beliefs such are bases on the "Demeaning and fallacious analyses of women as helpless, vacuus "little creatures" ... manufactured to justify and bolster male domination." (84) Thus, the female was being characterized as displaying inferior qualities, which therefore situated her in the position of a subaltern, whose character had little depth or substance.

Additionally, this comment made by the protagonist, although it seemed very precise, but it also indicated a limited conception of the female value and purpose as far as the standards of the male was concerned. Her growth and development as a person seem to

be measured by the approval or disapproval of the male. Thus, in effect she is considered as a possession of the male, and her impetus for growth and development is located in the standards that he has established. Adherence to these standards would ensure that the character of the female is thus compromised, since her growth and progress are determined by her ability to obtain the approval of someone else, and so, her validation as a person does not come from within herself but from external standards.

These negative assumptions and considerations of the female serve to limit the female characterization in the novel to one dimensional static images that do not possess a voice. Accordingly, a diversity of character traits for the female are never highlighted in order to represent a whole and balanced personality for the female in the text. Thus, these female images as the critic Johnnetta Cole asserts function, “... as stereotypes are designed to cast complex and diverse human beings into simpleminded singularities.” (68) Hence, anytime the multi-dimensional nature of an individual is denied there is a measure of silencing that is taking place due to the omission of significant aspects of their personality. Consequently, women are not characterized in the narrative as complex characters who can play significant roles as competitive, competent and brave leaders as is achieved with the treatment of the male characters. As Cole would conclude representations of women in this light, would be an exception to the rule and a perversion of nature in the patriarchal society. (84-85)

Another aspect of the characterization of the female that stands out in the narrative is her rendition in the role of victimizer as well. Therefore, she is alternatively presented as a perverse “other” in the character of the aunt Té, who occupied the position of the

victimizer when she made inappropriate advances to her adolescent nephew. She took advantage of her privileged position in the family as the elder of the two as well as being a trusted member of the family.

This encounter between them commenced just as he was immersed in the throes of guilt, and emotional devastation brought about by his sexual experimentation with a duck. (106-107) His aunt Té then seemed to exacerbate his inner turmoil even further, when she encouraged him to culminate the sexual desire that she had sparked in him to full fruition. As the female aggressor she dominated him completely as she guided him to follow her instructions to consummate the sexual liason. In this case it was the female voice that dominated as she instructed him,

Touch me here. ... and you touched with the keenness of a novice, with contained fear and haste, ..., you touched her from the belly downwards without thinking, without believing, without waiting, seeing in her a woman when she was nothing, she seeing in you a man when you were nothing, nothing more than a squalid, measly tormented child.” (110) (Tócame aquí. ... y tocabas con avidez de principiante, con miedo contenido y presuroso, ..., le tocabas el vientre hacia abajo sin pensar, sin creer, sin esperar, viendo en ella a una mujer cuando era una nada, ella viéndote hombre cuando no eras nada, nada más que un cadavérico, esquelético niño atormentado.)

Afterwards, she made him swear to secrecy about their encounter and he especially swore to absolute silence irrespective of the consequences. This scene therefore cast the female as a sexual abuser of a child. Her final act of abuse was to silence him through the pact of secrecy. Therefore, in this instance it was not the female who had been objectified and silenced, but rather the male who in effect objectified and silenced.

Alternately, it can also be considered that the female was conforming to the traditional stereotype of the female as a sexual temptress, who could bring about the fall of man as

she had done from the beginning of time through her sexual advances. Father Ortiz had given the protagonist a formula for dealing with the anticipated advances of the temptress, “the evil of women.” (el maleficio de las mujeres). Therefore, in order not to fall victim to her traps he should occupy himself completely at all times because idleness is the mother of all vices. (142) The female in this scene is completely defined by her sexual transgressions, and therefore she is still trapped within the confines of a stereotypical one-dimensional image. One of the results of this conception of female sexuality is that instead of it becoming a healthy, liberating attribute, it becomes a constraint and a reason for condemnation of the female. (Cole, 103)

Gender relations:

The defense of polygamy in the tribal context:

Unlike the female voice in *Ekomo* which is used to present in an objective manner the advantages and disadvantages of the family pattern of polygamy the female voice in *Shadows* remains silent on this issue. She is shown as playing no role at all in the defense or the opposition of the cultural pattern when it comes under attack from the dominant Western cultural norms and expectations. Therefore, when the family pattern of polygamy is severely criticized by the agent of the Catholic Church, Father Ortiz and it is only the voice of uncle Abeso that emerges in defense of the tradition. The female perspective remains absent from the exchange of viewpoints between the two male subjects as to whether the tradition follows a primitive and outdated system and results in greater injustice towards women in the society. In the text, *The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* the researchers comment on the implications of the inclusion of the

female voice when they state that, “When the woman’s voice is included in the study of human development, women’s lives and qualities are revealed and we can observe the unfolding of these qualities in the lives of men as well.”(Belenky, McVicker Clindy Goldberger, Tarule, 8) Therefore, when the inclusion of the female voice is not achieved then the ideas and perspectives of the female are effectively excluded from the dialogue. Consequently, when a consensus is being formed and the needs of the female are not represented or considered, then her needs cannot be addressed adequately, and therefore the female voice is silenced.

Therefore, when Father Ortiz charged that his practice of polygamy was based on licentious and immoral behavior uncle Abeso countered with an argument which was linked to the core teachings of Christianity. He emphatically indicated to the priest that, “... he had heard that the God of the whites had ordered man to increase and multiply so that they would not disappear from the face of the earth because he had made them in his image and likeness.” (94) Father Ortiz then claimed that he served his God through sacrifice and refraining from the pleasures of the flesh and that that is what was pleasing to God. (94) Uncle Abeso, again argued that if his God had created the world and bestowed upon man the superior capacity so that he may make use it then, he would be the first to disobey the command of his own God and ultimately bring about his dis-favor.

Unlike the female protagonist in *Shadows* who was rendered largely as voiceless in the narrative, the female protagonist of *Ekomo* was able to give expression to her thoughts and ideas about different critical aspects of the conditions of life of women in the Guinean society and culture. She expressed these ideas and values even though at

some level she was aware of the realities, and constraints to change in the society for women. She reflected the awareness that there were aspects of her life that were within her power to change, while on the other hand, there were things that would be resistant to change despite her best efforts. She utilized her voice to explore the advantages, as well as, the disadvantages of the practice of polygamy in the society. She was also able to reflect on her own condition of marginalization, and exclusion from participation in the public life of the tribe. She was aware of the restricting norms and values of the tribe with regard to the freedom and equality accorded to the female, however, she was able to reflect on it and many times express her own disapproval and resistance.

The female characters in *Shadows*, do not express a comparable range of ideas and opinions as in *Ekomo*. They have in effect been silenced, as the male voice occupied the privileged position to speak and be heard in the narrative. He is able to voice his fears, concerns and vision for a changed state of affairs for the tribe and the nation. Whereas, the female on the other hand was never shown as becoming an active participant in the search for a viable solution for overcoming the problems of the tribe, and for justice for the female in the society. Her voice seemed to be completely eliminated from the discourse since she was treated as a shadow of the male protagonist, and she never emerged or evolved out of the characterization as a one-dimensional objectified “other”.

Many stereotypical and negative images of black womanhood abound in the narrative and were transmitted through the voice of the protagonist and the other male characters. These came together to paint a picture of an inferior and under-valued female voice. Women seemed to be trapped in a web of inferiority in comparison to the male subjects.

Many of the messages transmitted in the discourse expressed a negative opinion of the female, and that she was dominated by her emotions, easily distracted, passive- nameless or faceless, malicious, hyper-sexualized temptresses. Thus the direct focus of the reader's attention to these flawed characteristics of the female subject indicates the incidence of a measure of gender inequality among the men and women.

The male characters are mainly characterized as strong leaders who made a significant impact on the community especially in the struggle to defend and protect their traditions from the invasion by the Spanish colonists. (92) Uncle Abeso was thus the famed and respected elder of the tribe who epitomized excellent leadership qualities and resistance to the foreign invaders. The protagonist seemed to show a greater affinity for his uncle through his many expressions of admiration and respect as well. His father in spite of the differences between himself and his son, was always considered as a man of decisive action who aspired towards progress. He also had a reputation of being an astute businessman who was respected by both blacks and whites. The protagonist himself at the time of his initiation inherited the strength and glory of his male ancestors. (46) Therefore all the principal males of the story were being invested with positive values and qualities which reflected dynamic personalities and character traits.

On the other hand, women were never described in such favorable terms, nor invested with values and qualities which would put them on par with the male characters. To a great degree they seemed to reflect what is considered as, “ The extreme sex-role stereotypes that the silent women reflect the powerlessness they have experienced. Men are active and get things done, while women are passive and incompetent.”

(Belenky,Clinchy,Goldberger,Tarule,29) The typical female character such as cousin Mecue was portrayed in the novel as hysterical, and emotional. The protagonist also expressed his negative opinion of women when he commented that women weep for everything and nothing. (42) Supposedly this was considered as an innate signifier of weakness among women and in the tribal system.

Relations of complementarity:

The readers can also observe that the voice of the female is more or less being utilized in support of the patriarchal system which posits relationships based on inequality and power imbalances. Thus, in view of the emotional suffering that the protagonist undergoes, his mother does not seem to interact with him in a very sensitive and compassionate manner. Instead of trying to find the real cause of the anguish that he is experiencing. She responds by silencing him with a negation of his suffering, and therefore never learns of his conflicting experiences with his sexual experiences. While she inquires about what is wrong with him, she does not wait for an answer from him, but quickly warns him of the consequences if his father were to come home and he was behaving in a disillusioned manner. She as well, also punished him for herself by sending him to bed without any dinner. (109) Through this insensitive reaction his mother seems to exhibit a tendency to discourage, and suppress the expression of the deep feelings of anxiety and emotional dissonance of the protagonist. In her mind there could be no reasonable explanation for his sadness and agony. As such, she seems to be utilizing her voice in support of patriarchal values which prohibit the expression of emotions in males.

As far as she can see only physical imbalances are credible and should be treated. Her physical vision can only perceive physical ailments and distortions but she is unable to recognize and therefore adequately deal with the more evasive inner turmoil that was plaguing her son. She seemed to believe that if he was not physically ill, then he should not be complaining or languishing in pain. Her articulation therefore advocates a submission to the authority of the father which for the most part does not recognize emotional ailments, and especially its expression by male subjects. Thus, his mother's warnings therefore served to reinforce his fear of punishment and ridicule from the punitive dominant system.

In this dilemma it is the female's voice that is being utilized as an instrument of control for perpetuating the patriarchal value system which silences the expression of emotional conflicts. At this time the articulation of the female voice thus seems to promote passivity, denial and subordination to others even when a violation has been committed against the person. Consequently, instead of liberating him from the situation of entrapment through his self-expression, the female voice seemed to submerge him even deeper into it.

In terms of the academic accomplishment of the protagonist, both the father and mother of the protagonist seem to reflect a certain degree of complementarity especially in their influence on the upbringing of their son. They both believed that it was because of their influence in concert with each other that he had grown up to be a man of honor in the society. (142) The protagonist also commented that they both believed that, "To have a son who is a priest is the most important thing for them, those of his generation, that

generation that is at the point of achieving political independence The priest, for them is the compendium of all the human wisdom and divine, . . .” (69-70) As the parents seem to reflect on their influence on their son, his mother does seem to express feelings of ambivalence, since she now believes that the discipline that they used with their son might not have been appropriate for a child of his religious calling. The male parent, however, expressed greater confidence in his decisions, since in his view they used the best judgment that they could in guiding their son. (142) She also revealed that with regard to confessing her sins to her son according to Catholic religious practice, that she did not think that she would ever be able to fully disclose her faults to her own son. In this conversation among the parents of the protagonist there is a high degree of reflection and sharing of opinions as they contemplate the significance of their son’s accomplishment for their family and their contribution to his success.

Largely, in this narrative the reader observes that the male minority voice achieves a level of inclusion which has resulted in its effective un-silencing in the Post- Colonial discourse. The male minority voice is therefore represented and utilized in such a way as to decolonize the literary narrative. Moreover, the male vision and perspective are thus positioned at the center of the discourse so that it can be said that it achieves a significant level of privileging that the master discourse does not allow. As such his voice seems to no longer entrapped in silence at the margins of the main action of the novel, but has become the main focus in a decisive and profound manner.

On the other hand, when the representation of the female voice is considered it becomes evident that the same level of privileging of the minority female voice does not

occur in the narrative. Consequently, the female voice is hardly ever audible and her perspective on the critical themes and issues in the thematic realm of the narrative are never revealed to a significant degree. She remains as a passive and voiceless “other”, whose representation follows closely the traditional patterns for the marginalization of the black female in the master discourse. In this regard, one can say that while the black male voice illustrates a critical and emphatic presence in the novel, the black female voice receives very little attention, and therefore the complexities of her voice and her story are not effectively expressed to the same degree as the his(s)tory of her male counterpart. Therefore, it can be said that this rendition of the female voice does not result in the liberation of the female voice at any level.

CHAPTER- 4

Limón Blues:

The representation of the female voice in the narrative:

Introduction

The narrative of the novel *Limón Blues* continues the examination of the representation of the black female in the Afro-Hispanic literary tradition of this study. Therefore, it is another novel which in many ways focuses on the “... ‘not - at-homeness’ (which seems to motivate) the reconstruction of the social and imaginative world in post-colonial writing.” (Ashcroft, 81) Consequently, it reconstructs the Post-Colonial condition of an ambiguous home and an uncertain identity which arose as a result of geographical displacement firstly, followed by social, cultural and political displacements and dislocations. (8) As such, the plot of the novel is situated in the Antillian experience of displacements and dislocations of immigrant workers, who moved between their homelands in the Caribbean, and the coastal provinces of Costa Rica and Central America. They provided the labor force for the multi-national companies that worked in the area, and very soon moved from temporary workers to permanent settlers who contributed to the creation of stable communities in the region.

There is a palpable desire among the protagonists of the novel to find or construct a suitable home for themselves and their families. This impetus sometimes fueled a desire to return to their Caribbean homelands from which they originated, and this was extended to include their ancestral homeland of Africa. Thus, the story chronicles the many phases in the displacements and dislocations which were demonstrated by a series of departures

and arrivals from several islands of the Caribbean such as Jamaica and Cuba, as well as other islands of the Lesser and Greater Antilles. The immigration cycles thus featured the voluntary displacement and relocation of groups of African descendants firstly to the Central American Isthmus, the United States and finally to Liberia, Africa. It also included the active recruitment of workers to provide the labor force for the banana plantations of the United Fruit Company of the United States. The Northern railway company was another important employer of immigrant labor as well. Further, in times of aggression against the workers forced displacement took the form of deportation and was invariably utilized as a means of control by the corporate monopolists and the Central government of Costa Rica. (Chomsky,838-841) Additionally, voluntary displacement also occurred and took the form of repatriation efforts to the African homeland. This movement was first proposed and organized by the Universal Improvement of the Negro Association led by the Pan Africanist leader of the early twentieth century Marcus Garvey.

Consequently, the novelist, Rossi has situated the story of Orlandus and Irene, at the center of the narrative of the history of Limón. Thus, the novel while it relates the story of the couple, it also illustrates the story of the community as it evolved and developed on the Atlantic coast of Costa Rica. This community although, it was considered a marginal community, occupied a space in the Costa Rican nation that proved to be a center of intense globalized activity in the Costa Rican society. (Interview with Ana Cristina Rossi, August 2004) Thus, as a commercial enclave it held strategic economic importance for the growth and development of the country as a whole. Within the story Irene recognizes

this aspect of the region in which she lives when she reveals to Talita, her aunt her plan to open a hostel. She is convinced that her business venture will be a success since as she states, “ ... Limón is the most important port of this country and people never stop entering and leaving through it.” (341) The trajectory of the story of the life of the couple as they established and expanded their family is therefore utilized to illustrate the story of the community as it also experiences expansion, and development. Their lives are as much influenced and transformed by the cycles of change that are present in the trajectory of the life of the community. The protagonists also exercise a measure of influence on their environment as they seek to mold and shape their lives into a worthwhile and satisfying endeavor.

As such, the reader learns early in the story that it is Orlandus’s mother, Nanah who first introduced him to Costa Rica at an early age. She did this by recounting to him, her many memories and stories of her experiences of her life in Limón. She had been a member of the earliest wave of immigrants to visit Port Limón in search of opportunities for a better future. She seems to have fallen in love with the countryside and expresses it when she states that, “If happiness exists. I found it in Cahuita.” (96) Her first impression of the social and physical landscape was that it seemed to be an overwhelming mixture of cultures, activities and influences. The fauna was also overgrown and thick but amid the contrasts she felt a certain attraction for the place. She indicated her enthusiasm in the comment that, “With all of that in the middle of a forest that if it went unchecked, it would swallow up the houses. In spite of all of that, I liked Port Limón.” (17) However, when her husband, Prince became gravely ill after working

on the railroads she had to return to Jamaica. She thus transferred her dream of a productive and prosperous future in Limón to her son through her reflections of their life in Limón.

Therefore, when they were beset by the years of acute crisis in Jamaica and her children were on the verge of starvation and death she decided that she would entrust Orlandus with the responsibility of going to Limón where he could re-establish the small farm that she had owned in Cahuita. Therefore, at the age of fourteen when he arrived on the small farm in Cahuita he began his journey in the Costa Rican Caribbean territory. His mission was first of all to cultivate bananas as a business venture and send the money home for his family's sustenance in Jamaica. Thus began Orlandus's life experiences and his(s)tory in Limón as he endeavored to realize the dream that his mother had implanted in his consciousness since his childhood days in Jamaica.

As such, the story of the protagonist couple unfolded within the context of a Post-Colonial community that also reflected a transnational dimension. It therefore, exhibits the factors which are present in what can be considered a transnational nation. The voice of the male protagonist, Orlandus is audible to the reader as it is his voice that commences the narration of his(s)tory of *Limón Blues*. He begins to describe and explain the many challenges, struggles and triumphs that he experienced on his arrival in Limón. Similarly, the voice of his female partner, Irene is also articulated at a comparable level in the narrative so that she is able to position her(s)tory of her experiences in Limón alongside his in the narrative. In this manner, her voice seems to also occupy a central position in the narrative from the beginning as well. Therefore, from this position she

narrates her(s)tory and thus makes a significant contribution to the development of *Limón Blues*, as well as to the discourse that is conveyed by means of the interactions between the characters in the plot development. Her voice therefore seems to be equally important in the narrative to her partner's voice, thus illustrating somewhat of a shared narration and protagonism in the story.

Thus, both the voices of the male and the female characters seem to occupy a position of privilege in the discourse as they share the space situated at the center of the discourse. Neither the male voice, nor the female's voice seem to be privileged at the expense of the other, even though their stories may reflect at times different realities and perspectives of life in the transnational space. They both seem to share a strong bond through their common interest and dedication to the improvement of the conditions of life for themselves and their family, as well as for other blacks in the diaspora. For this reason, they are motivated by a deep commitment to the organizations and causes in their community which promoted the achievement of this goal for black people both in the diaspora, as well as in Africa. They both became active members of the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association) almost from the very beginning of its inception in 1914. They therefore, supported and promoted the Pan-African vision and the black cause which formed the central pillars of this movement which was championed by the Jamaican leader Marcus Garvey.

Consequently, it can be ascertained that in the public domain both voices achieve equal levels of prominence and thus un-silencing in the narrative. Both voices are equally expressive and potent in the public domain as illustrated in the narrative.

Alternatively, in the private domain both male and female voices seem to reflect a certain level of psychological silencing due to the personal inhibitions caused by the traumatic experiences from their past. Orlandus, for instance never seemed to have recovered from the trauma that he experienced when he was sexually abused as a child by the Scottish expatriate that he worked for as a servant boy in Jamaica. (pgs. 28-29) It was a scar which always marred and inhibited his communication with women, and especially with his wife, Irene for whom he always wanted to appear as the honorable and ideal mate. Irene, for her part also inherited the trauma of her mother who had been scarred by the ravages of the Spanish Colonial wars with Cuba. Thus, she was unable to care for Irene as a child because of her mental conditions that she subsequently suffered as a result of the violence and destruction of black bodies that she witnessed. (242)

After her mother died then she was brought up by her father and her aunt and cousin, Jesusa and Talita in Cuba. She was a child that had suffered from the psychological wounds of the Cuban/ Spanish war of 1898 as a result of the trauma that her mother suffered from the violent occurrences of the period. Thus, both the male and the female voices reflected a similar condition of being unable to disclose these inner-most experiences from their past with each other. They both seemed to experience a level of silencing or voiceless-ness in terms of these difficult experiences, and this mitigated against profound sharing and communication between them in the private space.

In addition, the multi-dimensional aspect of the narration is also heightened by the inclusion of other male and female voices that support and extend the narrations of the protagonists. The novelist begins the evolution of the narrative process with the narration

of Orlandus in conjunction with his mother. While he recounts the difficulties that he is experiencing in the present, his mother's narration intervenes to recount her experiences in Limón with her husband, Prince. (17-21) Another female narrator who is able to effectively reveal and un-silence Irene's past life in Cuba is her cousin Talita who introduces this segment through her intervention in the narration as well. The male narrators who also contribute to this multi-dimensional narration and polyphony of voices in the story include Marcus Garvey, the Wesleyan reverends and the union leaders such as Phillip Grant, as well as the journalist and activist Sam Nation. They all present diverse aspects and perspectives of his(s)tory and her(s)tory which when combined in the narrative produce a complete portrait of the story of Limón.

In this way Rossi has facilitated the un-silencing of multiple voices in the narrative space, and in so doing seems to have followed the example of the Mexican writer, Elena Poniatowska. Her narrative "La noche de Tlateloco" featured the recreation of a polyphony of voices in the narrative space, through a multiplicity of eyewitness accounts and commentaries that reflect on the tragic onslaught of the Mexican government on the student population in October of 1968. Similarly, the compendium of narrators utilized in the narrative of Limón Blues also serves to conjure up a narrative which is multi-dimensional in nature and focus. This type of representation of not only the voices of the main protagonists, or of the male at the exclusion of the female, or vice versa, implies an emphasis on the un-silencing of all the voices. Just as in the case of "La noche de Tlateloco" it also represents a strategy which is focused on achieving a high degree of inclusivity and authenticity as marginal voices are centered in the creative process.

It can be noted that “The night of Tlatelolco” (*La noche de Tlatelolco*) which portrayed a tragic occurrence in the history of Mexico was created by garnering multiple accounts and testimonies of experiences of the tragedy. In a similar manner the author of the novel *Limón Blues* has indicated that she also consulted and made use of a number of non-fictional resources in the creation of the narrative. These included newspapers, letters, telegrams and other archived documents. (Rossi, 397-408) Therefore, many of the personalities and events that are featured in the novel were taken from Central American and Caribbean history of the early twentieth century. Therefore, this novel which has been constructed on a non-fictional foundation can be considered as a metafictional account of the lives of the immigrant workers, who first arrived to work on the banana plantations of the United Fruit Company, as well as the construction projects of the Northern Railway Company.

Various personalities that appear in *Limón Blues* were also members of the organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association, that included the members such as Orlandus Robinson, Marcus Garvey, Sam Nation, Henrietta Davies and Maymie de Mena. Other historical figures included Charles Ferguson, Washington Sterling and Arthur Gutzmore who were labor leaders and were instrumental in advocating on behalf of the workers. The Costa Rican presidents and government officials that appeared in the novel were Cleto Gonzalez Víquez and Ricardo Jimenez, E.J. Hitchcock, was the manager of the United Fruit Company and also appeared in the novel.

Many of the significant events and occurrences which form part of the plot of the novel are also based on the historical occurrences in the community. Thus, the

formidable censorship of the freedom of expression in the community which was recreated in the novel also formed part of the historical antecedents of Limón. The forced closures of journalistic enterprises, and the subsequent deportation of members of the production teams was also part of the non-fictional base of the novel. It was one of the ways in which the Costa Rican state apparatus sought to oppress and silence the voices of the immigrant workers. The militant trade union leaders also suffered a similar fate whenever they opposed the unjust practices of the multi-national companies and the Costa Rican government as well. Thus, at the center of this narrative of the story of Limón is a very potent non-fictional current which gives credibility and vigor to the narrative as it reflects on the process of integration of the community into the Costa Rican national landscape.

Position of the female voice in the narrative:

Parity between the male and female voices in the narrative for there is equal participation of both male and female.

The business of making a new life for oneself proved to be an enormous challenge as the protagonists discovered after a short time in the Costa Rican Caribbean region. It first of all involved experiences, decisions and consequences that they had not foreseen before. Some of these unforeseen events included economic hardships and struggles, physical illnesses, in addition to social and political abuses. They encountered many barriers to the life of stability and prosperity that they had not envisioned when they decided to undertake their journey. Many had not anticipated these possibilities, nor were they sufficiently prepared to deal with them. For instance, the narrative illustrates

this situation through the narration of the difficulties that Orlandus experienced in his early years as a farmer in Cahuita. He had to confront the rigors of the natural environment which proved to be an enormous challenge for him. After working on his field he was always exhausted and drained not only of his energy, but also of his enthusiasm for the undertaking. Therefore, many times he thought that he had been thrown into a world where there were only problems. (14) Cultivating the land successfully proved to be an almost insurmountable enterprise for the young farmer. In addition to laboring to painstakingly to cultivate the land, he also had to protect his crops from the destructive attacks by the wild animals that were common in that area.

Additionally, the working conditions that he and the other workers had to deal with in the banana fields of the United Fruit Company and the Railroad construction sites also presented significant challenges for the workers. Many times the exploitative policies of these companies also resulted in great financial hardships and psychological distress for the workers. The abuses committed by these companies, as well as the Costa Rican government against the Antillian populations were extraordinary. As such, the workers were exposed to conditions of work which were reminiscent of the Colonial slave system from which they had only recently been emancipated. They were overworked and underpaid, and subsequently had no recourse to any of the benefits that the native Costa Ricans were accorded under their government. They were therefore treated as mere chattel labor and their rights as human beings went unrecognized and violated to a great degree. Orlandus was expelled from his farm in Cahuita under the claim that the land on which his farm was situated was within the territory south of the Pacuare river and the

border with Panama. This territory they claimed belonged to Minor C. Smith and not to him. Therefore, he was unjustly and forcibly removed from the property. (22) When Orlandus tried to seek redress for his loss at the offices of the British Consulate in Limon Town. He was treated very rudely by another agent of the “United Fruit Co.” This agent insisted that the government did not permit land ownership by Africans in Costa Rica. Although Orlandus insisted that he was not an African, but a British citizen he was still ignored by the agent, and subsequently removed from the office. (24) Therefore, Orlandus was gradually becoming more aware of the hostile conditions and the violence that the immigrant worker was confronted with in Limón. His understanding of the severity of the challenges expanded as he realized that not only was he dealing with the rigors of the natural environment, but also dealing a system which was unfavorable for the social and political well-being of the immigrant population. He discovered that racial discrimination, exploitation and human extermination were also prevalent in the community. He soon discovered that in Limón town there were places that blacks were forbidden entry. On his first visit to Limón town, Orlandus tried to enter a restaurant in which he had seen a black waitress, however to his surprise she immediately ordered him to, “Leave immediately, blacks are not allowed here.” (23)

One of the first incidents in the narrative that Orlandus witnessed of a violation against minorities was the onslaught of the authorities against the Ará indigeneous group in the Sacred Valley. In an effort to clear the area for the expansion of the United Company, their settlements in the valley were burned down to the ground by the authorities. As such, Orlandus began to witness first- hand about the many violations and

extenuating circumstances to which minority groups were exposed to in the Costa Rican social and political landscape. These conditions of suffering and depravity sometimes reminded Orlandus of the difficult conditions that he had experienced as a child in Jamaica, when his family suffered because of extreme poverty and social injustice.

Hence, these early experiences of acute hardship, inequality and injustice, that the male protagonist of *Limón Blues* narrated about from the beginning of *Limón Blues* had a critical influence on the evolution of his personality and character and ultimately, his commitment as a political activist. He was committed to the cause of fighting for the improvement of the life conditions of the blacks. Thus, he shared in the dream of achieving genuine freedom which would encompass not only political and social freedoms but economic freedom as well. His early experiences in the Central American region therefore, acted as a potent stimulus which lead Orlandus, the male protagonist to dedicate himself firstly to his self-improvement, and further to the struggle for justice, and the improvement of the conditions of life for the African descendants in Limón. The aspiration towards these goals of social, political and financial stability was many times met with resistance, calculated and overt attacks by the entities that did not consider the promotion of the black cause as favorable to their objectives of exploitation and oppression of the black worker.

There seem to be definite similarities between *Shadows* and *Limon Blues*, as well as, *Ekomo* and *Limon Blues* in terms of the position of the male and the female voices in the narrative. Just as in *Shadows* there seems to be a pointedly significant male presence, it can be observed that in the narrative of *Limón Blues* there also appears to be an important

male presence as well. Therefore, the male voice is positioned in a central space in the narrative where it can be heard with distinct clarity and force at the center of the discourse. When *Ekomo* is considered as well, one can identify a similarity between its narrative construction and *Limón* in terms of the female presence since both literary texts seem to feature an important female presence in the narrative. The female voice is given ample space at the center of the discourse of both novels. As such, in *Limón Blues*, one observes that in addition to the male voice, the female voice is also present at the center of the narrative. Therefore, the novelist seems to be working towards the representation of a great degree of parity in the expression of both voices in the text. Both the male and female voices seem to be privileged in the development of the story of the Antillian presence in the adopted homeland. Hence, they both bear witness to the movement for justice and equality for the black population, not just in the Central American coastal region, but to a movement which extended far beyond its shores to include the United States and Liberia in Africa, in its Pan-African thrust.

The main characters of the story, the protagonist couple are situated at the center of the narrative and they occupy the central space alongside each other throughout the story. Their stories are therefore elevated in the narrative as a couple first of all, but also as articulating separate histories, the female projecting her(s)tory, while the male his(s)tory as well. Together their stories complement each other, and reflect a balance of perspectives between the male and the female voices. Although, their experiences are not always the same, yet still the somewhat alternating patterns of the narrations reflect on their lives together in the community. These narrations demonstrate their interactions

with each other, and additionally how the external elements from the community influenced them and compelled them to move forward in the development of the story. In *Limón Blues*, it can be observed that not only are the male and female voices of the protagonists significant for the narration of the story, but additionally other male and female voices play an important role in contributing to the narration of the her(s)tory, as well as the his(s)tory.

Structure of the female voice: multiple female voices:

The female intervention in the narrative is initiated firstly by the articulation of the voice of Orlando's mother. It is her voice that sets the stage for the narrations by the other black female voices such as Irene, Talita and the female Gaveistas. The female voice represented in the narrative, therefore seems to be made up of multiple voices even though that of Irene is the most prominent in the narration. Nevertheless, they all occupy a significant position in relation to the male voice in the narrative as the reader observes first of all with the voice of Orlandus's mother. Her voice seems to be situated in a central position of the narrative, since she is shown as playing a critical role in the life choices and experiences of her son, Orlandus.

It is through her direct instructions to him that he first departed from Jamaica and immigrated to Costa Rica in order to make a better life for himself and his family. As he goes through his first experiences in the new community he refers back to his mother's narration of her own experiences in Limón for comfort and strength. From this point the reader observes that there is a strong connection between mother and son. Cordelia first commented on this distinct connection between them when she described him as being as

good-looking as his mother. (22) In the spaces in Cahuita, where he perceived that his mother's was strong he was able to find peace and tranquility. One such place was under the mahoe trees where he was able to sleep without any nightmares and on awakening he was able to communicate with her by letter.

His mother's voice therefore had an enduring influence on the life of the young protagonist since she seemed to embody both roles as mother and father of the family. She was described as the woman who had the key to Orlandus's personality. (352) His father was depicted as a sickly man who did not or could not contribute much to the well-being of the family. He did not have a close relationship with his son and so his mother's voice had a greater impact on the molding of the character of Orlandus. It was her voice that he carried in his interior, and so he was able to draw upon the lessons and advice that she had given to him as a boy in order to begin a new life for himself amidst the vagaries of the hostile and difficult land and wild-life in Cahuita. (16)

She was also responsible for his religious orientation, and was able to transmit to him her revivalist beliefs, as well as an appreciation of the value of his cultural heritage. These preliminary teachings and ideas provided him with the foundation for his later aspirations for growth and development. Thus, she implanted within him the seeds of "espiritismo" which took the form of revivalism and myalism. Although he did not embrace every aspect of these religious systems such as the power of the "Yumma" doll, but some parts of it did resonate with him and formed a profound part of his being which he himself could not deny. This was part of his cultural heritage that he shared with his first love, Leonor, who was a Costa Rican. It thus resulted in a bond between them which

was extremely strong, and which even though they were separated for many years could not be extinguished.

Additionally, Orlandus seemed to embrace the music of the revivalist religion to which his mother exposed him, through her custom of always singing to him as an infant. Therefore, when he encountered the jazz and blues of the African American musical genres on his visit to the United States, it seemed familiar to him and he was able to readily make connections between those styles, and the revivalist music that he had grown up hearing. Moreover, it seemed that in this aspect of his personality his mother's voice had also played an important role in shaping his sensibilities. In his explanation of the melody of jazz, blues and its connection with Caribbean music, he indicated the influence of his mother with regard to his familiarity with the musical form. He states that, when Nanah was singing, her voice would enter in a crisis and when you thought that her voice would break, it would rise again. (281) He also extended the connection to the effect of music in the Pocomania and Revivalist ritualistic traditions when he stated that, the voices seemed to be falling down sharp ditches and you had to allow yourself to fall with the voices. Then came the trance. (281) His absolute passion for the jazz, blues musical form which he traced back to his exposure to his mother's voice when she used to sing when he was a boy seems to be an important metaphor for the personality of Orlandus in the narrative.

It seems to have implications for the self-concept which he develops and how he perceives the people that surround him in the social arena. Just as the jazz and blues musical form features a more or less alternate pattern of sharps and flats, Orlandus arrives

at the conclusion that this paradigm illustrates who he is as distinct from the people that surround him. He is therefore able to describe himself using the analogy of the jazz-blues form when he claims that his personality is similar to the “bemol” flat, which represents a tone which was more profound than the flat, while that of Garvey and the other members of the movement was identified with the sharp notes. He therefore positioned himself as having a distinct outlook on life which could sometimes extend from realistic to disillusioned. Whereas, on the other hand that of Garvey according to his interpretation was more un-realistic and exaggerated. (281)

The next female voice to be considered as occupying a position of importance in the narrative of *Limón Blues* is that of Orlandus's wife, Irene. Orlandus met her in Jamaica when he returned to assist Garvey with the launching of the Universal Negro Organization which would champion the cause of blacks in the diaspora. During that time Irene was in Jamaica and she was also enthusiastic about the intellectual and political discussions and debates that were in vogue in Jamaica at that time. (102) The common interests which they shared soon brought the couple together, and they were married shortly afterwards. Then Orlandus began to introduce his new wife to Costa Rica through his descriptions and explanations of the country and the population. He told her that Costa Ricans were of a heterogeneous race, and so she related the term to an explanation by her professor in Habana who had explained that it was a group that was made up not only of Europeans, but that there were some people who were racially mixed like herself. (104) Shortly after this introduction, the couple then undertook the journey back to Costa Rica to begin their life together.

As his companion and wife Irene's voice was therefore positioned alongside his in the narrative from this time onwards. The narrator alluded to the parity that would be demonstrated by the representation of both the male and female voices in the narrative by stating, that biblical queen, his wife and his equal. (128) Therefore, the assertion that both members of the protagonist couple were equal, gives the impression that they are both of critical importance to the narrative, and therefore they both will be rendered in such a way as to reflect a balanced treatment in the novel. The reader first observes this as being reflected in the importance of the female voice to the life of the male protagonist and subsequently in the way in which they both complement each other in the narration of the story.

Firstly, this is reflected in the influence that her voice seemed to have on his life. Her voice seemed to have provided him with the courage and support that he needed many times to achieve the many goals that he set for himself. He was determined that he would not follow his father's example and live a life of passivity and chance as he referred to it. (138) He desired to create a future for himself and his family in Limón and to achieve something worthwhile in his life. Even though he did not have a traditional education he aspired to become educated through his own efforts. He made an effort to read extensively as Garvey and his other mentors such as Robert Love, the Bahamian doctor and activist had suggested. He also attended conferences and became extremely committed to pursuing intellectual goals. (100) He was determined to rise above mediocrity and illiteracy which Marcus Garvey emphasized were the greatest obstacles of the black man. His emblematic message that, "For your mediocrity, friends, you can't

put the blame on the “blancocracia”. Set yourself a goal, decide what you want, and persevere in seeking it.” (138) With these ideas for self-improvement through education and intellectual development Orlandus thus set out to create the future that he desired.

Thus, his new wife who had been educated in Cuba also shared and complemented this vision that he held for a high quality of life for himself and for black people in general. Therefore, at every step of his progress towards his goals, her voice was positioned alongside his. They endeavored to have a relationship that was based on mutual sharing, but at the same time they recognized that each had his or her own individual voice. She was inspired by the leaders but also expressed a critical view of their discourse and actions. Her political and social consciousness expanded and developed alongside her husband’s. They were partners who shared the same vision for the future of the black race. They were both liberal in their views of marriage and family life and allowed each other the space to think and grow. They both seemed to share a great degree of freedom and equality in their marital relationship.

As such they were both attracted to the message of Garvey and became committed members of the U.N.I.A. They both supported each other’s participation in the activities of the association. Thus, when Garvey invited Orlandus to come to Jamaica in order to help him launch the organization and start spreading the message of black pride, unity and self-determination for blacks in the Diaspora, she willingly encouraged him to accept the invitation since she understood its importance for him. (127) Her voice therefore had a positive influence on the male protagonist, and was possibly just as critical for him as his mother’s voice in his early as a child and a young adult in Limón. Marcus Garvey

also seems to have recognized this influence of the female's voice on Orlandus's life when he expressed his approval of his wife and his marriage.

Thus, he concluded that she had contributed a high degree of stability in his life. (212)

Even Sam Nation, the veteran journalist and activist also recognized her strength of character and that the voice which she articulated was a decisive, clear and uncompromising. He realized this when he printed an article in his newspaper, "The Times" that she thought was denigrating to the black woman. Although, he tried to explain and defend his position with the excuse that he was only commenting on how men viewed the involvement of black women in the suffragist movement at the time. She still accused him of being "machista", and her displeasure with his position lead to an estrangement between them. When Orlandus asked her why she was not talking to Nation she insisted that, she would not speak to him while he did not change his ideas about women. (120)

They both shared the same vision for the improvement of the conditions of life for the Antillian community in Limón, and so they both contributed actively to this cause through their respective professional and social activities. Irene was an educator, and was thus involved in this aspect of community life. Orlandus's skills were in business and so he was involved in the business sector, as well as, the mobilization of the workers to resist the unjust treatment and exploitation by the American companies and the nation state. He became a member of the "Artisans and Laborers Union of Costa Rica" labor organization in order to seek redress against the discriminatory and unjust practices of the United Fruit Company. The convincing words in the Jamaican creole of his friend

Gutzmore that, "... Dis mus stop, dis blasted tortura" also persuaded him to join the organization. (72) They were both writers as well and contributed to the many journals and newspapers, such as the *Times* and *The Searchlight* that were popular in the community. As such, both partners reflected on the struggles, and the many difficult life situations that they experienced together, such as the years of crisis during the World War in the immigrant community.

Together they both participated in the narration of the immigrant experience as equals, and additionally shared the central space in the novel both as the main protagonists of the novel. Thus, while Orlandus told the story from the male perspective, his wife, Irene, told it from the female perspective. Their voices therefore narrated experiences or events that are sometimes parallel, but in some instances they seem to function in tandem to each other. Thus, they may reflect on, or represent different aspects of the same experience or event.

Each partner therefore narrated their particular version of the story of the immigrant experience from their point of view. As they confronted the victimization and injustice which were especially severe in times of crisis they worked together to find solutions to these problems. The narrative demonstrates that they were both alternatively victimized in the system. They invariably, experienced similar fates because of their ideological persuasions. They both believed in the black cause and were progressive thinkers. In his case of Orlandus, he was imprisoned at one point for being an active member of the labor movement, as well as for his close collaboration with Marcus Garvey to launch the Universal Negro Improvement Association in Central America. He stated that he was

charged by the authorities for being a, “ Bolchevik anarchist like his friend Gutzmore” and was imprisoned. (190) He was held in prison for one month until after the fall of the Tinoco government.

Similarly, Irene also was not spared from the experience of mis-treatment and violations by the authorities. Therefore, on her arrival in Costa Rica she had to under-go a physical examination as part of the procedure for entry into the country. In her opinion this mandatory examination by the police felt like a violation of her personal space. (105) This certainly was a shock to her since even before the trip she had begun to envision her new home as an idyllic paradise. The first images of the city of Limón made a great impression on her as she observed the diversity of races and dresses that she could identify at the port. (105) Then suddenly she was surprised by the treatment that she would receive at this point of entry into the country. She stated that,

... the old gringo wants me to remove my blouse, this can't be, I struggle with the yankee, a police with a moustache and blue uniform comes to tell me that it is a mandatory medical examination and if it is not done then I can't enter the Republic.” (105) (... el gringo Viejo quiere que me quite los corpiños, no puede ser, forcejeo con el yanquum un policía de bigotes y uniforme azul viene a decirme que es un examen médico obligatorio y si no me lo hacen no puedo entrar a la república ...)

Therefore, she felt insulted and victimized by these agents who exercised an invasive influence on the arriving immigrants irrespective of whether they were male or female.

Another major experience for her of the violation of the rights of the immigrants was the calculated attempt by the central government to close down the Adventist school at which she was teaching the children of the community. This was an attempt by the

government to impose its hegemonic control and to exclude and irradicate all the cultural norms and traditions of those who lived in the region, especially those of the Jamaicans. It was an attempt to "... "españolizar" the colored race." (384) In doing so they decisively put into motion a campaign to exclude and marginalize the cultural practices and language of the Jamaicans. They viewed their cultural and educational norms as a serious threat which was not racial, but political and social. (385) Therefore, in addition to the physical and economic deprivations that the community endured, they were also faced with the cultural deprivation as well.

During the war years when the economic crisis was at its peak the finances of the couple had dwindled severely and at this time both partners were unemployed because of the extreme difficulty in finding work. Orlandus was unable to find work in his field because of the high unemployment rate, and the poor economy. Irene also could not find a teaching position after the private schools that she worked at had to be closed because of the lack of finances. She was not able to find a job at the government schools because it was against the law to hire married women as teachers. (150) Orlandus describes a scene of acute poverty and degradation in Limón when he states that, " I was walking around a Limón that I knew as active and clean and now I saw filth and many signs that said " for sale" and " for rent". (150-151) (Caminaba por un Limón que conoció active y pulcro y veía ahora sucio y lleno de rótulos de " se vende" y " se alquila") Everywhere he went there was no work for him, even though by this time he would do anything in desperation. Finally, when they reached their last "colon" Irene decided to accept a job as a domestic worker in the North American Zone. This job was very frustrating for her,

since she was overworked and under-paid and several times she was subjected to physical abuse by the female boss. She revealed that she only tolerated the abuse from the American boss, Mrs. White because she knew that they needed the money. (154) When Orlandus found out about this however, he responded decisively and from then on made a greater effort to find work so that she would not be forced continue in that position.

The female protagonist as narrator of her own story therefore, presents the female perspective of the story of Limón and the struggle for justice, as well as the promotion of the black cause. To that effect, her voice is a conscious voice, that expresses great interest in what is taking place around her. She is not pushed to the margins but is allowed to occupy a central space along with the male. Although she provides the support that Orlandus needs and plays a major role in his life, but she also has her own story to narrate about the immigration experience for the female in Limón. As such, she is able to present her own perspective on the events and occurrences in their lives, and that of the wider community.

Consequently, the voice that she articulates in her(s)tory expands on and complements that of the male voice in his(s)tory. While his(s)tory is privileged in the narrative, her(s)tory occupies a crucial position alongside his to relate the story of the survival of the Caribbean workers in an environment in which they encounter both a hostile physical, as well as social environment. This parity between the voices illustrates that the story of the marginalization and victimization of the workers was not only a male story, but it was also a female story as well. Gutzmore was one the first persons to come forward to alert Orlandus of the plight of the workers in Limón, who were exposed to the exploitative and

abusive practices of the United Fruit Company. He indicated that they tortured, “ ... the black workers who do not obey the whims of the foremen. And the Costa Rican policemen witness it and they laugh, this must stop, this blasted torture.”(A los peones negros que no obedecen de dyam capichos de los capataces. Y los policías paña lo ven y se ríen. Dis mus stop, dis blasted tortura.) (68)

Both protagonists therefore came to understand the significance of what he related, either through the act of witnessing similar acts for themselves, or through their own first-hand experience of the dehumanizing of the minority community. They were both compelled to join the struggle to bring about the recognition of the human rights of the immigrant population. Therefore, their voices joined together in the narrative in order to un-silence these crimes and violations committed against the immigrant population by the American multi-national companies in Costa Rica. Orlandus referred first of all to the complicit relationship that he observed between the American company and the government forces during the war between the United and the Atlantic Fruit companies. He stated that, “The army and the police of the Republic at the service of illegality and yankee violence. Incredible.” (116) (El ejército y la policía de la República al servicio de la ilegalidad y la violencia yanqui, Increíble.) He made this statement after he witnessed the attack of the bullies on the farmers during the war between the United Fruit and the Atlantic Fruit companies who were rivals in the industry. The representatives of the United Fruit Company had forbidden the sale of bananas to the Atlantic Company under any circumstances.

They claimed that all those who had cultivated on the “no name land” had a life-time commitment to the company through Keith. (113) Therefore, when the farmers insisted that they knew nothing about that and that the Atlantic had paid them in advance the bullies began to brandish their machetes and to destroy not only the bananas, but also the mules that were carrying the bananas. As such Orlandus, was severely affected by the bloody massacre that he witnessed when the bullies were ordered to destroy the bananas which the farmers were attempting to load onto the trains to be delivered to the Atlantic Company. He stated that he heard,

... the blacks scream and beg that they spare the animals. The bullies assured them laughing that they were only cutting up the bananas. When a machete made the sound CRAC and the mule fell to the ground with a horrible thud and I felt my shirt soaked with blood, my vision went cloudy. (114) (... a los negros chillar y rogar que no les mataran los animals. Los matones les aseguraban riendo que solo estaban cortando el banana. Cuando un machete sonó CRAC y la mula se fue al suelo con un rebuzno horrible y sentí mi camisa empaparse de sangre, se me nubló la vista.)

Even with the appeal of the workers to the governor nothing was done to remedy the situation and the Atlantic was still ordered to leave the country and hundreds of farmers were accused of being traitors and were forbidden to continue cultivating the land. (117)

Orlandus also relates how the displacement of these small farmers and their families from the “no name lands” resulted in even greater suffering and misery for them and the community. The dislodged families were thrown into a state of desperation as they began their search for new dwellings. Orlandus also observed how the desperate situation drove the journalist Sam Nation to begin to write articles constantly in the *Times* to attack and denounce the cruelty of system. He observed that Nation, “... acted as if he was going

mad. Every day he was writing in the *Times*: “Is it that no one cares?” (119) (Es que a nadie le importan?) Nation told Orlandus that it was their eyes that he was most affected by, and that they seemed liked ill-treated animals and he lamented that, “They don’t let me sleep.” (119) (No me dejan dormir.)

Thus, as a result of these violations, the male character was moved to give voice to, or to express his horror at the incidence of the unjust treatment of human beings. This ultimately lead to his condemnation of such treatment through the written word, as demonstrated through the journalistic narrative within the text. He joined forces with Sam Nation to denounce the atrocities in the “Limón Times” and other periodicals. The female character also followed the same pattern of the un-silencing of the voice so that she too could denounce the abusive treatment. Therefore, in the narrative both male and female voices seemed to act in tandem with each other, and as such while the male narrates one aspect of the narrative, the female emerged to narrate another. At times they seem to both narrate an incident at the same time and this produced, a dialogue and also reflected a high degree of parity between their voices. For instance, one scene which demonstrates this complement between the voices in the narrative is when Irene just awakened from an unconscious sleep state after experiencing great difficulty in giving birth to her first child. It is her voice that narrates the entire scene, as she functions as the witness to the delivery of her daughter, and continues as she awakens from the unconscious state.

In the altered state she is conscious of other realities, and claims that she was lost in the “Oloddumare” the infinite space. (186) She is aware of someone calling her back,

charging her to return and not abandon her newborn. When she finally regains consciousness she took the hand of Orlandus and begins to cry. Then he continues the narration, as he states that she wanted to name her newborn daughter Katherine, but that he thought the name was too long and decided to shorten it to Kate. (188) From that point onward the voice of Orlandus continues the narration. The contribution made by both voices to the naming of the newborn child, serves to demonstrate the shared quality of the narration, and ultimately the equal privileging of both the male and female voices in the narrative space.

The role of the female voice in the narrative space

Another female voice that seems to be privileged in the narrative and forms part of the multiple female voices represented in the narrative is that of Irene's cousin, Talita who lived in Cuba. When Irene discovered that the U.N.I.A. had headquarters in Cuba as well, and that Talita was the lady president of the U.N.I.A. in Cuba she became very excited and decided to write a letter to her immediately. Therefore, she was able to reconnect and restore the important relationship with her cousin. It was a nurturing relationship and most of all it allowed the space to speak and be heard. Talita always emphasized that this was an important aspect of their relationship since in her view she needed to speak. This aspect of their relationship is also reflected at the core of the literary work by Maya Angelou, "I know why the caged bird sings." Similar to the caged bird metaphor, Irene displays a great necessity to sing, or to communicate her inner feelings and thoughts, and as her cousin attests she would not be able to survive without it.

Hence, from that scene Talita's voice emerges to the foreground of the story to also contribute to the narration of her(s)tory. Through her voice Rossi is able to provide the readers with the link between Irene's present life and her past. As such, Talita revealed essential information about her niece which facilitated Orlandus's understanding of his wife's personality to a greater degree. He admitted to Talita that for many years there had been a lack of mutual understanding between them and he confided this to her when he commented that, " ... some years ago she was very hostile..., I didn't understand her... or I didn't understand myself... neither did she understand me..." (238) (... hace unos años estuvo muy hostil ... no la entiendo ... o no me entiendo yo ... ella tampoco me entiende ... tal vez debió haberse casado con otra persona.) Consequently, he realized that just as he had not completely disclosed his past to her, she also had done the same with him. (239) As such, the intervention of Talita did prove to expand his knowledge and comprehension of his wife. Finally, he could begin to more clearly understand the reasons for her insistence on greater communication and emotional intimacy in their relationship.

Talita revealed to Orlandus that Irene's childhood had been very difficult, since she lost her mother at a very young age. Therefore, she was raised by her aunt Jesusa, Talita, her cousin and father. (239) She stated that Isabel, Irene's mother had always suffered from a nervous condition, but when she witnessed the violent crimes of the Spaniards against the Cuban population, it precipitated her condition even more. Firstly, the discovery that she made of the unfortunate fate of many blacks who had disappeared in

the society would have an adverse effect on her mental stability. This occurred while she was helping a client to look for a female slave who was missing.

They discovered that she had been the victim of a gruesome crime, and that many other blacks had suffered the same tragic end. They were being killed in order to provide the meat for a delicacy that had become popular in the society at the time, “longaniza francesa”. Talita indicated that Irene’s mother screamed so loudly that she could be heard in the “Plaza de las Armas”. She left the store traumatized by the sight and went missing for two days. When her husband found her she was in a terrible state and could not recognize anyone. (242) After her slow recovery from this traumatic experience, she would then occasionally suffer from relapses as she recalled the horrible scene. Her condition also worsened when she witnessed the violent onslaught on the Cuban population by the Spanish soldiers during the wars of independence of 1896. (243) This time the persecution and torture of the people according to the narrator was unprecedented, and also included their forced relocation into what seemed like concentration camps, and the subsequent burning of their villages and towns.

Talita stated that in the East where Maceo had his stronghold the persecution was at its worst. (243) Consequently, Isabel and her daughter Irene were affected by the wave of violence perpetrated by these forces. They were relocated to one of the camps, but Isabel could not be easily controlled by the soldiers, and she used all the physical strength that she had to escape and to protect herself and her daughter. They hid in a mangrove where she submerged her baby under water to protect her from harm. (244) This experience left her permanently damaged and her descent into mental instability was final. Increasingly

she became less able care for herself and her child and finally her life ended tragically in an accident with a quitrin carriage. (244)

Therefore, this narration by Talita bridges the gap in the knowledge of Orlandus of his wife's background and her formative experiences. As a result of this he also discovered a critical piece of information about her family history that helped him to determine that Irene's first child, Kate could not be his child, since the biological traits that she possessed did not correspond to anyone in either of their families. Orlandus discovered that the color of her maternal grand-mother's eyes were light brown or hazel, and they were not similar to the color of Kate's eyes which were grey. (244) Therefore, through the reconstructed image of Irene's mother which Talita's narration provided he was able to finally discover the truth.

The narration of the events of the war of Independence of Cuba by Talita seems to also add an integral part of the history. It seems to complete the circle as it continues the narration began by Irene earlier in the narrative about this event. They both experienced the event in different positions and they bear witness to the reality through their narrations. Irene first recounted to Ariel her personal experience of the violent persecution by the Spanish forces in Cuba. She commenced this narration when Ariel asked her about the treatment of the Cubans by the Spaniards before the independence. She responded by stating that it was,

Very bad,... , I remember everything, although I was very small. The blacks and mulattos had spent many years in struggle without any success. It was a relief when Maceo and his men took the Oriente and they launched their attack, we all supported them. The problem was the cruelty with which the Spaniards

responded, they put us in concentration camps, and it was there that mother's attacks of madness began ...” (172) (Malísimo, ... , yo me acuerdo de todo, aunque era muy pequeña. Los negros y mulatos tenían tantos años de pelear y nada. Fue un Alivio cuando Maceo y sus hombres tomaron Oriente y se lanzaron sobre el resto, todos los apoyábamos. El problema fue la crueldad con que pipostaron los españoles, nos metieron en campos de concentración, fue allí que a mamá le empezaron los ataques de locura ...)

As such, Talita's narration therefore corroborated with the story previously told by Irene about the violent conflict and the effect that it had on her mother. (243) The narration by Talita however extended even further to disclose more details of the political persecution that they experienced. It also went further to make a connection between the trauma that Irene's mother experienced during the independence wars and her previous traumatic experience of her discovery that human beings were being slaughtered by Spaniards in the society even in times of peace. Talita therefore provides a piece of information that Irene's narration lacked. She did not know why her mother was so afraid of Spaniards, nor why she feared that would eat them. Talita's narration included that terrifying experience which could never be erased from the consciousness of her mother, and which also led to her tragic end. (242-243)

Talita also played a pivotal role in the narration of the story since she seemed to be positioned in a central space between the protagonist couple in the novel. From this position she could provide information about them, and alternatively, receive information about them as well. Thus, from this position she narrated events and experiences, while at the same time she also listened to the narrations of both Orlandus and Irene. As such, her voice not only related the missing histories of both Irene and Orlandus, but she was also a listener within the story who sought information so that she could reveal what was

taking place on the personal and the public spheres. Her two-fold function in the narrative as she confided to Orlandus was to divide her trip into two objectives. The first was to be with Irene, to give her all her affection. The second was so that he would explain to her what was happening with the U.N.I.A.? Was it true that they were going to imprison Garvey?" (269) Therefore, she seemed to symbolize a bridge between the two protagonists, between the personal and the public spaces in the society that is represented in the text, as well as in some instances between the text and the reader.

Consequently, both protagonists are able to relate their deepest secrets to her with the confidence that she would be an objective listener and adviser in the family, and hence in the story. Even though Orlandus was a very timid and reserved person, but he was able to speak his truth before her without any inhibition. He could admit aspects of his personality which he would never admit to his wife. He could also talk to her at length about the problems of corruption and inefficiency which plagued the U.N.I.A. organization. Therefore, with that impulse Orlandus began to share all that he knew about the causes of the many problems that they were experiencing in the organization. His narration of the problems began with the revelation that Garvey had been charged with fraud by mail and was sentenced to a fine of ten thousand dollars and ten years in prison. (269) He talked at length about his discovery of the corruption in the organization to which Garvey was always in denial, and also of Garvey's pretensions to assume the position of a King of Africa, while he observed that he was rejecting the African cultural norms and traditions that they had inherited in Jamaica. He also disclosed information about the money that they lost in the failed business projects such as the, "Black Star

Line” in which they lost half a million dollars.” (270) On learning this Talita was shocked and also indicated that the Cuban members had invested a substantial amount of money in the Liberia project and had not been paid any interest on their investment. (271)

Additionally, Orlandus was also able to go a step further to talk openly about himself and his personal feelings in his conversation with Talita. Uncharacteristically, he was not afraid to reveal his insecurities and problems to her since he knew that she would not judge him. He stated that, “ ... if I confide in you it doesn’t matter if you think that I am strange or not, ..., with you I have nothing to gain or to lose, since you may leave in a few days and I may not see you again in years.” (274) (... si te lo cuento a ti no me importa si me crees raro o no, ... , contigo no tengo nada que ganar o perder, así te vas dentro de unos días y tal vez no nos veremos en años, ...) This was his rationale for divulging many of his personal dilemmas with regard to his sexual orientation, and his inability to communicate at an intimate level with his wife, Irene. He even confessed to her his surprising meeting in New York with his first love, Leonor. (285) She was the Costa Rican woman that he had fallen in love with in his youth, and with whom he had a secret relationship for over a period of ten years because she was married at the time. At this point his narration which is signaled by the lyrical phrase, “ If we do meet again, why, we shall smile ...” commenced and his narration flashes back to the scene in which they meet in New York during the U.N.I.A. Convention of 1921. (286)

In their passionate reunion after many years of separation, they both exchanged critical information about the movement with each another. He indicated his awareness that there were major difficulties and problems that caused inevitable vulnerability in the

movement. Therefore, Leonor confirmed his suspicions about the affairs of the organization when she stated that she was informed that neither the United Fruit Company nor the banana planters should be afraid of anything from Garvey's movement, unfortunately. That only the Liberian project may work; and that even that seemed to be in crisis. That the Black Star Line is in bankruptcy, that Liberty University is a complete failure, that the stores, laundry marts, the hat stores and the restaurants of the U.N.I.A. will all fail. (293)

Leonor also, listened attentively to his complaints about the problems that the organization was encountering, for she knew that what he feared had great truth in it. Then, she in turn exchanged a packet of documents with him which would prove that his fears and suspicions of an impending conspiracy were all true. (295) He would discover that even the repatriation project to Liberia by the U.N.I.A. was also targeted by the conspirators since the papers supported these claims. The documents revealed that the Costa Ricans were aware of the political initiative of the U.N.I.A. They thought that they posed a threat to the government of Costa Rica, since they could destabilize their present government, and replace it with a Garveyist controlled group, that could begin a reconquest of Africa. They already knew that the government of Liberia would not be disposed to promote the aspirations of Garvey but that the president King wished to use him. (296)

Therefore, with this discovery of the conspiracy effort by the CIA and other agencies to undermine the U.N.I.A. on every level, Orlandus immediately informed the leader of the organization. However, Garvey's response was that of denial, and he insisted that he

was respected by the European powers. Thus he refused to acknowledge the danger that the evidence represented, and proceeded with his plans to relocate a large group of African descendants to Liberia. (297)

Just as Talita functioned as the listener within the story for the narration for the male voice, she also functioned in the same way for the female voice as Irene narrated her(s)tory in her marriage and her experiences in Limón as well. She was always one of the people that she looked to for understanding and sincere advice. As such she was able to communicate her truth, her fears and doubts to her with complete confidence even though they were very close. In this way, she was different from her husband who spoke freely to Talita, since she represented a distant listener, who was removed from his immediate personal space. On the other hand, Irene was different in that closeness and intimacy did not represent a threat, but served to promote greater communication and sharing between them.

Her cousin understood her strengths and weaknesses, and was therefore able to satisfy her need for verbal communication and sharing in spite of any differences of opinion that they had between them. Talita did not agree with what seemed to be an unwise decision to have three children in the difficult economic circumstances that they were experiencing at the time. She implied this when she remarked that, “You and your pregnancies girl, one after the other.” (265) She also seemed to perceive the network of conflicting relationships which existed in the family when she murmured, “... each family is a world, how happy I am that I don’t have a husband, nor do I have children, Irene seems to be trapped. (266-267)

Talita then indicated that she would like their conversation to be sincere and honest about her family. This request implied an insistence that the female voice speak clearly and openly instead of silencing itself through half-truths or evasions. Talita reflected this when she initiated the conversation by stating,

“Let’s talk sincerely”, ... “as sisters speak, forgive my crudeness: your first-born is for the Jew, ... the second is for Orlandus, you did it with a view towards achieving justice, to equalize things, but the boy, whose is he? Don’t tell me that you felt obligated because Orlandus wanted a boy.” (267-268) (“Vamos a hablar sinceramente”, ... “como hablan las hermanas, disculpa mi curdeza: tu primogénita es del judío, ... la segunda de Orlandus, se la hiciste por una cuestión de justicia, de empate verdad, pero el niño, para quién es? No, no me digas que lo pidieron porque Orlandus quería tener un hijo varón”.

At this point, Irene replied that Denmark was not born for any particular reason, that he was an unplanned birth. (268) Talita’s response to this revelation indicated her view that Irene had not exercised sufficient control in her life, and especially since had been trained in feminist principles in Havana. (268)

The problems that she was experiencing made it evident that she had become a victim to the prescribed roles in the patriarchal society that were responsible for the oppression of women. She herself recognized that she had not been able to responsibly or decisively exercise her rights, to live the life that she had envisioned for herself. Previously, she reflected on this when she admitted that,

... here a feminist converted in mother; ... but if I chose this why do I feel regret and as if I’m trapped, ... feeling oneself trapped by children is something that would never happen to an authentic feminist such as Garvey’s wife. (229) (... heme aquí de feminista convertida en mamá; pero si yo me lo busqué por qué me siento pesarosa y como atrapada, ... sentirse atrapada por hijos es algo que nunca le ocurrirá a esa feminista auténtica que es la esposa de Garvey.)

She also told herself that perhaps she envied her, as she similarly envied her cousin Talita. (229) Therefore, it seems that Irene was confronting the challenges of finding balance in the society. She aspired to overcome the inequalities of gender as established by the traditional norms of society, but she found that it was not an easily won battle. She realized that in spite of her resolve she still had to contend with the many factors that influence and determine the directions that one can take in life. She mentioned that,

She had imagined her life with Orlandus as the growth of the two partners, a liberation of both, now with the movement of Garvey they were achieving a liberation from white domination, but there remained intact other oppressions,” (228) (Había imaginado su vida con Orlandus como un crecer de a dos, un liberarse a dos, ahora con el movimiento de Garvey se estaban liberando de la opresión blanca pero quedaban intactas otras opresiones. Garvey decía que la opresión de la blancocracia era la principal, pero ella ya no estaba tan segura.)

As such, while assuming the role of the objective listener for her cousin’s story, Talita also seemed to act as her counselor. Although she understood and supported her to large degree, however she was not afraid to question her resolve and commitment to break-away from the traditional patterns of female oppression in the family. Further, she also seemed to make a connection between her inability to uphold feminist values and principles, and her weakening allegiance and devotion to the religion of her Cuban heritage, “La Regla de Ocha” into which she had been initiated as a child. (168) Irene herself revealed to Ariel the dimensions of this religion of which she was a devotee and had taken the sacred rites of Ocha. She also expressed her uncertainties and doubts about the religious system which she thought might not be suited to her temperament. (168) However, Talita was convinced that this was the reason for the many complications that she was experiencing in her life.

In her view she had been ambivalent in her devotion and in her commitment to her own empowerment. Talita's words emphasized what she herself was conscious of,

But look at yourself, you're in a bind. With ochún you could receive blessings, a happy married life, money, with Eleggúa you would have a prosperous future; once you adjust to his ways, which you don't do, which you never wanted to do." (268) (Pero mira cómo estás, hecha un nudo. Con Ochún recibirías las bendiciones, un matrimonio feliz, dinero, con Eleggúa tendrías un future próspero; siempre que te ajustes a sus leyes, lo que no haces, lo que nunca has querido hacer.)

In her view since she had been unable to up-hold the premises of both her feminism and her faith in an un-compromising way, she had fallen into the position of victim. In this way it seems that Talita's voice serves as her conscience which reminds the female protagonist that she has choices to make in order to achieve a life of liberation and self-determination.

Similar to Orlandus, Irene also related her(s)tory to Talita about her experiences during the eventful trip that she and Orlandus made to New York in 1920 to attend the U.N.I.A. convention held in Harlem. She was very interested in the meetings and conferences, but she also had a secondary motive for attending and she confided this to Talita. She stated that it was in order to settle accounts with the doctor who had been her lover. (299-300) During this visit she realized that she was still deeply in love with Ariel and that it was reciprocated although they both knew that they did not have a future together. She also finally revealed to him that he was the father of her first child, Kate and that it was not an accidental birth. He did not approve of her decision since he thought that women deceived themselves by thinking that children could cement love, or facilitate it. (307) They both understood however, that despite the differences between

them, and the inability to cross the boundaries of race, religion and class which separated them, that their love for one-another was equally profound and enduring. The metaphor that he used to express this was that he was her slave, and she also admitted to Talita that she too was his as well. (308)

The romantic reunions of which both protagonists, Irene and Orlandus relate to their confidante, Talita in addition to equaling each other in intensity and depth, also seemed to be symptomatic of the process of transculturation. This process of racial and cultural mixing seems to be exemplified by the inter-racial nature of the relationships that they both have outside of their marriage. The subsequent births which resulted from their relationships appear to directly refer to the creation of a new hybridized racial group, and cultural patterns which are related to, but distinct from the original formative entities as indicated by Ortiz in his theory of transculturation. Although their unions have encountered great resistance from both groups in the society, yet still both couples defied the limitations and boundaries of the hegemonic society to bring about their interactions at some point. Leonor and Orlandus were firstly separated by the threat made by her husband, Joachim that he would kill him if she refused to end the relationship. In his opinion she had committed a serious crime in the society, that of falling in love with a black man, who besides was half her age. (65) In his view this transgression to the hegemonic society merited death of the offender. Her husband expressed great hate and racism when he stated that,

... , right now those sheets are nauseous because they smell of a black man and I would like to have him killed immediately, there is nothing easier. Who is a black man? They are not even registered in the Consulate. He can disappear in an

accident, die from a stab wound in a fight. (66) (... , ahora mismo esas sábanas están nauseabundas porque huelen a negro y quisiera mandarlo a matar inmediatamente, nada más fácil. Qué es un negro? Yo no los registran ni en el Consulado. Puede desaparecer en un accidente, morir apunaleado en una pelea.)

Therefore, it can be seen that many Costa Ricans of the Central State were totally opposed to interactions with the black minority and promoted the segregation and the marginalization of the blacks through official and unofficial strategies and policies. When Leonor finally was able to obtain a divorce from her husband she lost the custody of her second daughter because her estranged husband accused her of “ ... a scandalous concubinage with a negro, a certain Orlandus Robinson Reed, an activist, communist and witch who was imprisoned.” (353)

On the other hand, the transcultural process seemed to also have been met with opposition and resistance on the side of the Jamaicans as well. They did not readily embrace or welcome relations with Costa Ricans especially when they realized that many of them displayed an attitude of superiority towards them. Orlandus’s mother, for her part seemed to express a distrust for them after she witnessed an argument between the government official, Mr. Leiva and the governor of Limón, Don Adolfo Escobar. She stated that Mr. Leiva criticized the governor for his liberal treatment of the Jamaicans. He would not listen to his defense of them, but stated that he gave them too much freedom and did not control their actions sufficiently in order to extract sufficient revenue from them. (19) She indicated that, “ ... from that day, ... I did not look favorably on the Costa Ricans from the interior.” (19) The community as a whole did not reflect a great deal of receptivity to the language and culture of the host country either. They went to great pains to maintain their language and cultural traditions and practices through the

organization of their own educational institutions, churches, lodges and other cultural forms. They thought of themselves as having a more expanded perspective and worldview than Costa Ricans, because of their alignment with the British Crown and other international influences.

Therefore, in the narrative Orlandus's mother who opposed the relationship between her son and Leonor was instrumental in obstructing Leonor's final attempt to contact Orlandus when he was ill. In this way he would never read the letter which she had sent to him revealing to him that he was the father of her son before he died. Again it was Talita who acted as an intermediary as she found the letter and disclosed its contents to the reader as she read it. (352) Thus, it is by means of Talita's voice that the hidden information about the birth of Orlandus's and Leonor's child is revealed to the reader. (355-356) These instances of interactions across racial and cultural boundaries demonstrate that in spite of the efforts to maintain the divisions and limit the interactions between the races, yet still in the multi-cultural space of Limón it could not be eliminated.

The process of racial and cultural interactions had been set in motion, and it would be difficult to counteract it, or restrict it through official or unofficial means. These relations rendered in the narrative exhibit evidence of transcultural interactions between the different races and cultures that co-habited in the Caribbean region of Costa Rica. They were testimony to a process which resulted in the formation of new racial and cultural entities that reflected hybridized patterns. To this end Ashcroft indicates that the Post Colonial literary texts by featuring a composite of cultural signifiers from ancestral,

indigenous and the Western cultures exemplify cultural variants which indicate a tendency towards hybridity. (35) Thus, the representation of the transcultural processes seemed to be at the center of both his(s)tory, as well as her(s)tory as told by both protagonists in the immigrant community in Limón.

The female voice and gender relations

It can be observed that the novelist has represented the male and female protagonists of the novel as demonstrating a high level of parity in terms of the un-silencing of their voices in the narrative plot. Yet still the marital relationship that they both shared has not been represented as a perfect union. Their relationship does not seem to be idealized, since they encounter various challenges and conflicts in their life together. They both possess an ideology which reflects liberal values and tendencies. Both partners had dreams and professional interests which they sought to realize even after marriage. Irene had been instructed in the rights for women in Cuba therefore, “ ella quería ser independiente, quería estudiar, pero quería casarse ...”(227). (she wanted to be independent, she wanted to study, but she wanted to get married.) Orlandus for his part, was self-educated and displayed a great thirst for knowledge. He was involved in the trade union organization and a founding member of the many newspaper ventures that arose in Limón Town. Irene’s vision of her marriage was one of an equal partnership where there would be a high degree of equal rights, role sharing and complementarity among the couple. She did not seem to relish the idea of having children, and neither did Orlandus. (227) Their marital experience was harmonious up to a certain level. They both seemed to have problems on the emotional level, as they found it difficult to achieve

open and profound communication in their marriage. At the beginning Orlandus observes that Irene was completely happy, in love, adapting to everything and also, “ ... looking to him for conversation and he wasn’t able to talk to her, to reveal himself, his soul. “ (127)(... buscándole siempre la conversación y él que no podía hablarle, revelarle su ánimo.) As such, the relationship which is demonstrated by the relations between both protagonists appears to be affected by this inability to communicate because of emotional tensions within the personalities of the male and the female as well. Thus the inequality among the male and female in this narrative seems to be situated at the emotional level.

Even though Irene and Orlandus experience a relatively stable life together, yet still they do not experience an intimate form of communication that they yearned for in their marriage. The physical and emotional communion which they both desired seemed to elude them. While they do seem to be physically compatible, however the emotional openness was absent and for this reason Irene insisted that she did not know him and she believed that he was not interested in her innermost feelings and experiences. Orlandus also acknowledged the reality of this when he states that, “ I never could open my heart to her, we always communicated with physical love. But when the physical finished for me, we remained without communication.” (350) (Yo nunca pude abrirle a ella mi corazón, , siempre nos comunicamos con el amor físico. Pero como lo físico se me acabó, quedamos incomunicados.) However, it seems that they both found this type of unrestricted and uninhibited communication and sincere communion of the soul with other partners outside of the marriage. She questions herself about her intentions when she reflects, “Did I really fall in love with Orlandus? All her parameters were dislocated

when she met Ariel.” (227) (Me enamoré realmente de Orlandus? Todos sus parámetros se habían trastornado al conocer a Ariel.)

Therefore, the marital bond of the Western family pattern seems to be under examination in this representation of the marriage of the protagonists. They both want their marriage to be successful, but there are factors that seem to be challenging the realization of this goal. Orlandus also thinks that maybe he should not have married her because they seem to have different ideas about the marital bond. He explains what Lorena thinks about marriage, as opposed to what he thinks, and states that,

... she says that one gets married to delve into the other but that is impossible because there are regions of oneself that frighten you, and if they frighten you who has them, how will one risk frightening their partner, who as a result of the shock, may dissolve the marriage?” (274) (... ella dice que uno se casa para ahondar en el otro pero eso es imposible porque hay regiones de uno mismo que asustan, y si le asustan a uno que es el que las tiene, como se va uno a arriesgar a asustar a su pareja, que puede, del susto, romper el matrimonio?” The main cause of this dilemma which they experience seems to be also the previous antecedents which both partners have experienced in their lives.

Their problems with communication could therefore be attributed to the troubled past experiences that they both suffered in their formative years. Orlandus, for his part experienced sexual abuse when he was at a vulnerable age during a time when his family experienced great financial hardship and he had to enter the workforce prematurely. This experience seems to have left a permanent psychological scar on his psyche from which he never completely recovered. The relationship of his parents could also be seen as a contributing factor as they did not have a very harmonious relationship. His mother always seemed to bear the greater weight of the responsibilities for the family than the father, who seemed to be reclusive and not very involved or concerned about the needs of

the family. As such, his mother was the more active and dominant presence in the family, while his father withdrew into his books. For that reason, Orlandus identified more with his mother than his father, and he developed qualities which reflected a more sensitive and introverted character. These were some of the difficult experiences that he could never reveal to his wife because he felt ashamed and that it would place him in a vulnerable position in terms of his marriage.

His inner conflicts were additionally heightened when as a youth in Limón, he then fell in love with a Costa Rican mestizo woman, who represented a transgression for him on all levels. This was a forbidden love for him because she first of all, was of another race, and she was an older woman who was married and came from a very influential Costa Rican family. In spite of these differences between them, yet still their love was never erased by time, nor the threats of her jealous and racist husband who really did not love her. In this relationship she seemed to be able to bare his soul more easily than with Irene. Instinctively they seemed to be able to understand each other, and be able to communicate at deep and profound level.

Irene on the other hand, seemed to enter the marriage with an insatiable need to communicate and share her deepest thoughts and emotions with her partner. That was her driving force and her cousin Talita attests to this aspect of her character. She stated that she grew up in an environment in which she was always able to express herself freely, and so this provided with emotional sustenance. However, when she realized that despite her most earnest efforts at achieving greater emotional intimacy with Orlandus, that he could not overcome his inhibition to speak and to share verbally with her, she

became disappointed and frustrated with the marriage. Then she resigned herself to thinking that he must not have been interested in her and her experiences. She began to think of him and to call him, “My distracted black man.” (Mi negro despistado)

Then she like Orlandus also experienced an intense, and sincere emotional communion with another partner, Ariel. With him she would experience a profound sense of satisfaction as she felt that she was able to speak to him and be heard. As such, she experienced a depth of emotional bonding that she had not been able to experience with Orlandus even though she had tried. In this relationship she found that she was able to share a lot more about her past history in Cuba, and reveal the doubts about her religion that she was never able to admit and disclose with Orlandus. She experienced a greater fulfilment in this relationship as she was able to reveal her deepest fears and anxieties to someone that she felt really cared about her deeply.

It seems that this representation of the marriage of the protagonists in the narrative focuses on relations which seem to non-traditional as they do not conform to the ideals of the patriarchal marriage bond. The partners first wanted to have a relationship based on liberal values, where each one despite their union would still be able to function as an individual. Then they encounter unforeseen factors which challenge and frustrate their ideals and vision of marriage. Instead of maintaining their independence they find that the responsibilities of the family, the economic times and even their emotional orientations have an impact on the goals that they originally had set out to achieve. In view of all these considerations and problematizing factors the marriage bond that the novelist has painted seems to take on the dimensions of real life proportions and

imperfections. In this way she seems to be challenging all the idealized images and stereotypes about the gender relations in marriage as prescribed under the Western society normative patterns. The representation of the gender relations of the protagonist couple thus indicates that all marriages do not fit into the idealized frame, and that the partnership between the male and female is sometimes governed by other commonalities that the couple may share.

CHAPTER- 5

The Four Mirrors (Los Cuatro Espejos 1973)- The representation of the female voice in the narrative.

The limited competency of women is implied by the profusion of heroes in literature and the paucity of sheroes, by the predominance of quotations and photographs of male experts and leaders in the media's coverage of major events and issues. (Cole, 104)

Introduction

The novel, "The Four Mirrors" presents a narrative that demonstrates the struggle of the African descended peoples in Costa Rica to overcome the racial tensions, conflicts and deterrents to their total inclusion in the Post Colonial society. They were subjected to overt racial attacks, as well as to stereotyping and discrimination as they attempted to create a better life for themselves and their families. The narrator also refers to the incidence of the ideology for the exclusion and marginalization of blacks in the center as being theorized at the academic level. Thus the implementation of these theories followed an organized and systematic plan of action. He indicates in the story that it was one of the distinguished members of the Cedeno family, don Hugo Centeno Hewit who contributed to the expansion of these theories for his prestigious treatise, " Mi Palito de Café" proposed the delay of the incorporation of the barbarous creoles for many years. (Duncan, 74) To this extent the European trained Costa Rican intellectual made a significant contribution to the shaping of the mind- set of the mestizos and in establishing this ideology of the de-valorization and marginalization of diverse groups in the society. The influence of intellectuals trained by don Hugo would set the stage for the creation of a Euro-Centric cultural context at the center of the nation state. Quince Duncan,

additionally states in his text “ Contra el Silencio” (2001) that the three elements upon which Costa Rican racism is based are, “ el blanqueamiento, el eurofilia, el etnofobia.” (131) The first element deals with a cast system which emphasizes the whitening of the skin, and allows black families to gradually become whiter over six generations. By extension, the second element deals with the preference or valuing of European phenotypic features over African features. Alternatively, the last element deals with the fear that any emphasis on difference could result in an attack on the national unity. According to Duncan the implications of difference is that it goes against the idea that we are all equal which is to be white, Catholic and to speak Spanish, among other characteristics. (131) Therefore, to be different is largely discouraged and seen as an infraction against the hegemonic culture.

The patriarch of the Cedeno family in the novel articulates his biased perception of the black community when he offers an explanation for his objection of the marriage of his daughter to a black man. He reveals that, “Because blacks being different – good for sports and the rhythm and work – nothing will they gain by marrying a white woman.” (75) His explanation is indicative of the stereotypical view of the capabilities of the black man and what he could achieve in the society. This attitude of denigration of blacks reflected from the top echelons of the society set the precedent for the racial divide and the creation of an underclass in the society. As such, the propagation of these racial biases instigated by the elder Cedeno and his adopted daughter, Magdalena in the Cedeno family demonstrate how these values are implanted in the minds and consciousness of the members of the mestizo group. According to their preconceived beliefs, the blacks from

Limón conform to a certain type of behavior which is deemed as inferior and therefore they are not equal to the ruling class at any level. According to Carlos Melendez Costa Ricans from the Central state showed little concern or understanding of the Black people of the Atlantic coast or their culture. They did not consider them to be “ticos,” and usually referred to them as “chumecos,” “morenos,” or, at best “limonenses.” They also showed their disdain for them by viewing them as “negros bananeros.”(Negro, 91)

In addition to demonstrating the trauma of the overt and covert racism of the mestizo class towards black Costa Ricans, the novel also illustrates the tensions that arise within the Afro-Costa Rican community itself as its members compete with one another for entry into the ruling class. They seem to compete on the personal and professional levels as they strive to attain the goal of inclusion and acceptance into the prized center. Therefore, in this narrative these tensions appear to fester and reach their peak when they manifested in the hateful crimes committed by one family against another. Traditional and Western cultural practices are also in conflict and rivalry with each other. The uneducated sectors remain loyal to the beliefs, practices and traditions of their ancestral origins, while those that have been influenced by the Western cultural practices through education show a greater contempt and distrust of the traditional beliefs and practices. Thus, the duality of traditions leads to further rivalry and contentions within the group which erupt into violent conflicts whether at the subjective or objective levels.

Within the community they also confront the debilitating tendencies of “blanqueamiento”, and “eurofilia” which are linked to the ideology of racial superiority according to Duncan. They function to undermine the achievement of complete

liberation and inclusion of persons of the minority group into the privileged center.

These social processes which facilitate the integration of blacks into the European based center promote the minimizing and gradual elimination of the racial characteristics of the African descended peoples in favor of those of the white race. Through the favoring and privileging of the dominant mestizo race the members of the black community seem to reject their own racial and cultural identities and heritage in order to embrace that of the European based racial group. The members of the minority community endeavor to change their characteristic physical traits in order to approach more closely the traits of the privileged group which they perceive as more accepted by the dominant culture.

Similarly, the protagonist of *The Four Mirrors*, Charles McForbes reflects these values and beliefs which play a critical part in his personality when he claims that, “ You all can see my skin: ‘pucha’, it is not black. That is, if it weren’t for my hair and my features I would be able to pass for Latin in any part of the world.” (Duncan, 128) (Ustedes pueden ver mi piel: pucha, no es negra. Es decir, si no fuera por mi pelo y mis facciones yo podría pasar en cualquier parte como latino.) He thus reveals his conscious aspiration towards conforming to the European norms of appearance, values and preferences. For this reason, the critic Richard Jackson asserts that this novel delves into the center of the theme of black identity, as much on the personal, as on the national level. (Jackson, 70)

In this literary exploration of the complex questions on racial, personal, as well as national identity presented in the “Four Mirrors” one observes that it is the male voice that is a greater force in the foreground of the novel. The female voice, although it is present and plays an important role in the story, yet still its impact is not comparable to

that of the male voice on the resolution of the primary conflict. While his voice occupies a privileged position throughout the novel, the black female voice, in comparison seems to occupy a secondary position to his. As such, the male character utilizes his own voice to speak for himself, and about himself in the present and the past time. Her voice is not represented in a similar way and the articulation of her voice is never as far-reaching as his in the narrative. The black female voice mainly forms part of the past and the memories of the protagonist. Thus, her voice does not reflect a comparable level of clarity, flexibility, and transcendence in terms of the position, structure and role that it assumes in the novel.

The voice of the male narrator begins to weave the tale of the his(s)tory that is presented in the novel *The Four Mirrors*. The story takes the form of a biographic account of the life of the protagonist, Charles McForbes. Therefore, he narrates the story of his search for personal, cultural and national identity in the Costa Rican social and cultural networks. From his account, the reader learns that he is a second generation Afro-Costa Rican of Caribbean heritage who has achieved a high level of integration into the society of the Central State of Costa Rica. He has been able to achieve this through his educational and professional accomplishments in the society.

Thus, in his opinion he was able to overcome the limitations, and difficulties of the life at the margins in Limón in order to become an accepted member of the center of privilege and dominance in the country. Additionally, his second marriage to a member of the dominant racial group and bourgeoisie class of Costa Rica, seemed to guarantee his inclusion into this social circle. He refers to the benefits that he enjoyed as a result of this

marriage when he admits that, “It was nice being Ester’s husband, after all. I’m not saying that she did me a favor by marrying me, no, it’s not that. But I can say well, well, that I benefitted a lot from the marriage.” (13) (Era bonito ser esposo de Ester después de todo. No llego a afirmar que me hizo un favor casándose conmigo, no, no es eso. Pero sí puedo decir bien que he ganado bastante con el matrimonio.) As a result of his social mobility and success, he grew further apart from his cultural values, traditions and his roots in Limón in order to become completely absorbed by the elitist class. He also reflects his belief that blacks are inferior to whites and the ideology of “blanqueamiento” when he describes a black female as being beautiful in spite of her color. (13)

Therefore, he effectively wears the mask of the white man as he reflects the perspectives and expectations which illustrate a presumed superiority of the white race. In this state of a seemingly false identity he also expressed a number of assumptions which lack validity. He believed that the assertions that blacks and other minorities experienced discrimination in the society was a fallacy, that there was no credibility to that statement. For that reason, he was emphatically opposed to the conference speaker’s lecture which focused on “ The alienation and the marginalization, the extreme exploitation of which the blacks and the indigenous peoples are victims in our country ...” (12) Thus, he concluded that the lecture was, “ Verborrea política” (Political Posturing) suggesting that it was an attempt to transmit a message to the listeners that had a definite political agenda at its core. As far as he knew, no one was in a desperate situation in Costa Rica, and he was convinced that there was equality among the races in the nation. In his experience he had witnessed the interaction between blacks and whites

at social events and he had not witnessed any problems since everyone seemed to interact freely with each other. He included the example of a black female, Ivonne who had interacted with them at a party. He expressed admiration for her as he described her as a brilliant and articulate conversationalist who was able to speak on any topic. She even pointed out that if the son of the minister was drunk he would be described as “... as having a little too much to drink ...” (un poquito pasado de tragos), but if it were a worker or a peasant, on the other hand he would be labelled as “a drunk” (un borracho).

(13) In his view her candid and daring declaration about the double standards which prevailed among the higher classes in the country indicated that she did not feel marginalized, intimidated or inferior to anyone in the group. She was exercising her freedom of speech, and therefore he thought that was a manifestation of a democracy.

At that point in time he could not discern the difference in treatment or the inequality that existed between mestizos and the minority groups in the nation. He was under the impression that the only separation in the society was that of class, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated. He and his friends, such as Luxe considered that they had arrived in the society, and celebrated their success. They were well connected, they had material wealth and they lived on the end of the street that was prosperous. In his view, the issue of race never posed any real problem for his mobility and freedom in the society. His vision was thus, tainted by the white world as he saw everything from the perspective of their values and attitudes according to Fanon’s perspectives on the dilemma of the black man. Therefore, he wore the mask of the white man until one day he is compelled to take a closer look at himself in the mirror in order to discover his true

identity. Although, the protagonist was extremely critical of the lecturer's message and discredited it with his harsh observations, however, it seemed that on some level it had resonated deeply within his sub-conscious mind. From that point onwards he seemed to experience a metamorphosis in terms of his physical features. Imperceptibly, it had triggered a drastic change of his image which would destabilize his conception of who he was and how he saw the world. As he was propelled into a state of panic and shock as he grappled with the magnitude of the change that he witnessed before his own eyes in the mirror. He lamented, "Damn conference. Just yesterday I was free, until we went to the damn lecture. Something must have been wrong with that speech." (121) (Ayer no más era libre, pero fuimos a la maldita charla. Algo tenía de malo la tal charla.) After the lecture it seems that the protagonist found himself in a state of panic since what initially seemed to be a slightly provocative speech, turned into a major event in his life as he experienced a radical change in both his outer and inner worlds.

Undoubtedly, it is the male voice that occupies the central position in the narration of this crisis of identity that the protagonist undergoes. It is his voice that initiates the exploration of racial identity in the Costa Rican context in the narrative and leads the reader on a journey through the process of the recuperation and restoration of identity. The male voice first explores the fragmentation of the false identity, the mask that the protagonist had become comfortable wearing in the society. It was one behind which he could hide his true identity as he denied his Afro- Caribbean roots and identity in the Eurocentric culture. He convincingly portrays this critical stage in the life of the protagonist as he takes the painful plunge into the past in an attempt to find answers to

the questions that he had about his lost identity. He seemed to have entered a stage of hyper-sensitivity firstly to his negritude, and, then to the incidence in the society of discriminatory practices against blacks, and other minority groups that manifested in overt and covert forms.

When he observed his darkened skin in the mirror he could not believe what he was witnessing and at first he thought that he might be losing his eyesight. He explained in anguish that, “An inexplicable darkness buried my face in the night. My God, I am going blind at the most brilliant moment of my life.”(10) (Una inexplicable negrura sepultaba mi rostro en la noche. “Dios mío, yo quedándome ciego en el momento más brillante de mi vida.”) Frantic and in a hysterical state he then decided to consult the eye specialist, Dr. Pineres immediately. After examining him the doctor could find no indication of impending blindness. However, despite the doctor’s assurance that nothing was wrong with him, he still insisted that he could not see his face. He took another look at the mirror in order to be certain about it and stated that, “ ... I proved that I hadn’t dreamt the situation with the mirror: I wasn’t seeing my face. My eyes yes and, on opening my mouth, my teeth. But the face no.” (21) (En el baño comprobé que no había soñado lo del espejo: no veía mi rostro. Mis ojos sí y, al abrir la boca, los dientes. Pero el rostro no.) These details served to confirm the reality of the condition to Charles himself even though no one else could see or understand what he was worried about. The doctor then referred him to a psycho-analyst whom he approached expressing certainty that he was losing his sanity. Thus he questioned himself, “How can one tell the psychoanalyst that one is mad? ... Those words would be too formal to be believable.” (24) (cómo se le

dice a un psicoanalista que uno está loco? ... Esas palabras también serían demasiado formales para ser creídas.) The psycho-analyst after careful examination could not find anything out of the ordinary with him despite his protests to the contrary.

Psychologically he was not prepared to confront his own negritude since he had always believed that the black man was inferior, and through his many accomplishments he had proven that he was not inferior. As Duncan attests in his study on racism that color consciousness was an integral part of the Caribbean social system, one could assume that Charles had assimilated this ideology from his Caribbean heritage. His Jamaican grandfather seemed to have been a strong advocate for this ideology of color consciousness and thus valued the process of “blanqueamiento.” Therefore, Saltman always insisted that the family had to aspire to be as close to white as possible. He instructed his children that,

You all and all the other people of color are the future. One can't expect much from the blacks ... you have to get a good education. I don't want any of you marrying a black woman. Look for a mulatta or an English woman. You have to become whiter in order to rise out of the pit in which we are. (130) (Ustedes y toda la otra gente de color son ese future. No se pueden esperar mucho de los negros. ... hay que meter la cabeza al aprendizaje. No quiero a ninguna de ustedes casado con una negra. Búsquense una mulata o una inglesa. Hay que subir de color para escapar de esta cochinidad en que estamos.)

As such he had implanted this value in the consciousness of the family and it had been passed along to the future generations. Therefore, the mask that the protagonist wore resulted also from the social conditioning that he was exposed to in the black community as well.

Therefore, the heightened awareness of his connection to the black race catapulted him from his safe haven of privilege and stability to a place where he experienced grave insecurity, self-doubt and near neurosis. He believed that he was going blind, or more than likely that he was insane and in disbelief and confusion he lamented,

Pucha, I tell you all it was irrational to think of those two fools at such a critical time. I was going blind, Do you all know what is that? A sane man, in the prime of his youth and success, suddenly he finds himself alone. But I imagine that it was a way to escape from my reality. (19) (Pucha, les digo que era irracional pensar en esos dos babosos en un momento de tanta congoja. Me estaba quedando ciego, ustedes saben lo que es eso? Un hombre sano, en plena juventud y pleno éxito, de pronto empieza a quedarse solo. Pero me imagino que era una manera de escapar de mi realidad.)

The tenets of the progressive philosophies and ethics which had propelled his personal and professional success in the society up to this point had been shattered by the reality of his racial heritage and also the racial discrimination and marginalization which were prominent in the society. The metaphor of the shattered mirror indicates the falling apart and crushing of the mask of his false identity, as well as the values and beliefs which he embraced as truth in his life. When he realized that there was no way to ignore the truth, or to continue living a lie at first he responded by crying out in agony for his “... absurd and sudden mutation.” (31) (... resultaba absurdo mi repentina mutación.) The truth caused him to cry in self-pity at his condition of having black skin. At that moment he also began to make a seemingly irrationally petition to his God,

Father, have mercy on me, a sinner; ... because I am a worm and not a man;
Indefinable wait for death and the dizziness growing within my veins; Worm and
not a man, worm and not a man, (31)

(Señor, ten misericordia de mí, pecador; ... porque soy gusano y no un
hombre; indefinable espera de la muerte y un vertigo creciendo desde las venas;
gusano y no hombre, ...)

This agonizing cry of the protagonist is indicative of the deep existential and psychological suffering that he experienced as a result of the loss or shattering of the identity. This was important for him because it would have an impact on his position and acceptance in the Eurocentric social environment. He was terrified by this un-foreseen change in his physical image, and considered it to be curse from God for being a sinner who had committed the un-pardonable crime of being black. Thus, he was forced to awaken to, and to confront the reality of his own negritude in spite of his past orientation and negation of his identity, his culture and his roots.

As Jackson contends the inability of the protagonist to see his face in the mirror dramatizes not only his loss of his identity, but also represents his escape from a reality, that he had deceived himself to believe that he belonged to ... (76) In my view the terror that he expressed on viewing himself as a totally black man, indicated his inability to deny or distance himself from the truth any longer. His self-deception had finally caught up with him and he was forced to recognize it. He could no longer escape the truth of his deception, and so the mask had to disintegrate in order to reveal his true identity. No longer was it safe for him to seek refuge behind the mask and so he was forced to confront the past that he had abandoned and forgotten. He also realized that it was not only material possessions that were important for a man's wellbeing and happiness, but that he also needed a history and culture that he could call his own, and that his identity should not be compromised under any circumstance.

As such, he realized that the loss of his true identity was indeed a catastrophic event in his life. Consequently, he indicated his awareness of the implications of his loss of identity when he asked the question,

In which moment precisely did I lose my own identity? What accumulation of dreams put me in conflict with the culture on which I suckled at my mother's black breast, and sipped on, drop by drop from the pale knees of Pete McForbes?" (128) (En qué momento preciso perdí mi propia identidad? Qué cúmulo de sueños me pusieron en conflict con la cultura mamada en los negruzcos pechos de mi madre, y sorbida gota a gota desde la pálida rodilla de Pete McForbes?)

As such, he realized that in order to find the cause of the crisis that destabilized his life he would have to undertake a journey of self-discovery. Ultimately, he would have to travel backward in time and space in order to answer the critical questions that he had about his identity and in order to resolve the existential and psychological fracture that had occurred in his personality. He first revealed his perception that this would be the course of action to take when he expressed the wish,

But it seemed to have shown to me another type of death. Perhaps the most degrading of all, because it was a passive death, useless. I tried to look forward; I would wish to return a little in space, or in time, if only a quarter of a meter, or an hour. Perhaps that would serve to rehabilitate me. (8) (Pero parecía haberseme señalado otro tipo de muerte. Tal vez la más degradante de todas, porque era una muerte pasiva, inútil. Traté de ver para atrás: desearía regresar un poco en el espacio, o en el tiempo, un cuarto de metro o una hora. Quizás eso me bastara para recuperarme.)

Thus, he understood that in order to recover from this crisis and resolve the conflicts that plagued him he had to return to his roots in order to re-evaluate his own history and that of his family and the foundations upon which they had been constructed. Only this process would facilitate the acceptance of the truth about his identity, and further allow the reconnection with that part of his being that he had suppressed after his integration in

the social networks of San José. His second wife, Ester alluded to this dilemma of his personality when she tried to explain to her father her reason for marrying a black man. She described him as, “ ... a strange person; he is not black nor white. His identity defies these definitions. Perhaps it is satanic: a strange combination in any case, that makes one go crazy.” (111) (... una persona extraña; no es ni negro, ni blanco. Está más allá de esas definiciones. Tal vez sea satánico: una mezcla extraña en todo caso, que enloquece a una.) Therefore, it was apparent to anyone that was close to him that he was in denial about his true identity, that he had suppressed it in order to embrace another culture. Consequently, the journey that he was compelled to take at this point was on one level real and on another it seemed to be a metaphoric journey. He thus abandoned his matrimonial home in San José in an effort to return to the land where it all began for him in the village of Estrada in Limón. It was therefore not only a physical journey but an existential one as well. He was covering physical distance and also returning to his past as he recalled all the triumphs and tragedies that had brought him to this point in his life. The narrator’s voice signaled the movement of the protagonist’s attention from the present time and space, to his past life experiences and his eventual re-visiting of his native land. He revealed that,

Now I was returning to the black land that pierces and penetrates my pores. Black land that adheres suddenly to the gums and influences the appearance. Timeless, formless land, that is imbedded in our language. (128) (Ahora volvía a la tierra negra que perfora y penetra los poros. Tierra negra que se adhiere de pronto a las encías, y limpia el barniz. Tierra sin tiempo, sin forma, que se nos mete en la lengua.)

Therefore, the shattering of the mirror upon his face in addition to symbolizing the crumbling and dissolution of the white mask also indicated the inward journey that he would have to take to recuperate his true identity. The onset of the illusion of his darkened face in the mirror revealed that now he could no longer benefit from the protection of a false identity. Thus, he was completely exposed to the vagaries of racism and discrimination which prevailed among the privileged class in the society. Subsequently, it can be seen that he went through a phase in which he experienced a state of heightened awareness of the various manifestations of racial injustice. Fanon makes reference to this phenomenon of des-alienation in his text, "Black Skin - White Masks" as he analyzes the black/white relations in the Post-Colonial world. This intense perception of the divisions and tensions made the protagonist more receptive to the full impact of the physical and psychological victimization that members of the black community suffered in the Costa Rican society. As he encountered the persecution and the offensive treatment in the unprotected zones that he now traveled he began to realize that the ideology of superiority had extremely deep roots in the consciousness of the Costa Rican mestizo population.

Without a doubt the belief systems were firmly established and it was demonstrated in many forms of de-humanizing acts. Even Charles's wife, Ester who was a well-educated Costa Rican, and had a wide knowledge of the struggle for emancipation and equal rights of blacks around the world, also seemed to be influenced by the prejudiced beliefs especially before her marriage to Charles. This belief in the inferiority of the black man espoused that, "the black man descended from the ape; he is a being in a state of

evolution permanently inferior, and that was a fact.” (107) (el negro desciende del mono; es un ser en estado de evolución permanentemente inferior, y punto.)

Therefore, in this situation of extreme vulnerability, the male voice is utilized to direct the reader’s attention to the incidence of inequalities and injustices that contributed to the black man’s plight in this Central American nation. Thus, he was able to identify and explore the general consensus that existed among the members of the ruling class that the black man was unequal in his abilities and potential to the white man, and therefore he could be considered as inferior to him. As the male protagonist made his way through the districts of San José he encounters different situations in which he either is a witness or becomes a participant. In this manner, his voice is articulated to give expression to his thoughts and emotions about the social interactions between the members of the society. One of his first experiences occurred when in his state of hysteria over his darkened skin he became the center of a scandal on the roadside. He bought two mirrors and broke one of them on his face to assure himself that he had a face. (30) This seemingly inexplicable reaction was viewed by the vendor who sold it to him, as well as the onlookers as very strange, and as an indication of his instability.

Thus began a scathing persecution of the protagonist by some of the onlookers who began to attack his first with unpleasant remarks. Later on, one of them made an extremely derogatory comment that provoked his violent response. He insulted her when she stated that, “Se le rodó la tapa del perol a la morrena.”(31) Then as the scuffle escalated the other witnesses immediately began to taunt him on by saying, “Give him a hard one. That’s it Casius, give it to him!” (31) (Dele duro. Eso, Casius, dele duro!)

Thus, the use of the name Casius indicated an association with the famous African American boxer, Mohammed Ali, whose original name was Casius Clay. This reference therefore illustrated that the stereotype of black men as skilled fighters was at play in this interaction between the protagonist and the mestizo residents of the city. As he ran away from the scene that had escalated to a full-fledged altercation he heard the insult made by a young girl who shouted, “shameless, negro, ...”(31) (negro desgraciado) He stated that this final insult followed a half a block down the road. This indicated that besides the inner-conflict that he was already suffering, that he was also subjected to an onslaught of racist comments and stereotyping by the city dwellers for blacks.

Thus, it can be observed that it is the male voice that leads the investigation and discussion of identity and race relations that is the primary focus of this narrative. The male voice seems to communicate to the reader the majority of the observations, comments and assumptions that are being made on the themes. Therefore, as the male protagonist investigated the assertion made by the conference speaker that, “There is a distinct treatment.” the experiences that he had, or that he witnessed were utilized in the creation of a vivid portrait of the various manifestations of this claim, and what its implications for the integration of black Costa Ricans in the society. Hence, as he journeyed through the urban landscape he frequently encountered more incidents that illustrated the difference of perception and treatment of the Afro-Antillians of Limón by the mestizos of the Central State. Thus, when Charles was in the company of the psychoanalyst, Dr. Diaz, who the narrator indicated belonged to the “nouveaux riches” of San José, he was able to witness the difference in the doctor’s comments about two women who

crossed the street in front of his car. In the first instance, he exclaimed with excitement at the scantily dressed female, “Mira qué copita de helados.”(24) This statement could be considered as a clear indication of the objectification of the female body, especially since he made reference to food in his description of her body. When he stopped again to allow a young black female who was wearing a mini-skirt to cross the road, he responded with alarm to reveal not only his objectification of the female body, but also his racial bias towards her. To this effect he criticized, “What a daring black woman... Did you see? They dress loosely as if they were in Limón. Only in Limón the people walk in the streets like that. (24) (Qué descaro de negra ... Viste? Se visten a lo relajo como si estuvieran en Limón. Sólo en Limón la gente camina por las calles.) His comment about the black female this time consists of a direct criticism of not only her dress, but also of her personality and her culture. In his view she was scandalously dressed, and this was also linked to her cultural heritage. Therefore, this time his objectification of the female body was also accompanied by his attempt to denigrate the female. Ironically, in the middle of this expression the doctor also asked Charles what was his problem, to which he indicated that he could not see. (24)

This seemingly ironic slip of the tongue could be considered as indicating that he was a witness to an instance of expression of unequal perceptions and standards towards the two women of different ethnicities. He could thus see and understand how the superiority/ inferiority paradigm was practiced, and how it influenced the interactions between the groups in the society. The protagonist also displayed to some degree a level of objectifying of the female body also, as he too described the female in terms of her

physical attributes when he stated that, “A black woman in a mini-skirt ... her legs thick, well formed, her breasts filled fresh.”(24) (Una negra en minifalda ... Sus piernas gruesas, bien formadas, sus pechos rellenos, frescos.) However, while his description remained in the realm of thought, the doctor still went a step further to express his thoughts to another person.

With every incident which the protagonist encountered on his journey towards the recuperation of his identity, his recognition of the disparities between mestizo and black Costa Ricans was expanding. Consequently, he also began to display a greater tendency to be more pro-active and decisive in his response to the practice of inequalities. Instead of opting for negation and denial, he was beginning to express his resistance to it. One instance in which he gives an idea of his progress in this direction is when he began to imagine the psycho-analyst’s reaction if he were to approach him in his present condition. He supposed that he would have called the police for him claiming that, “This black man is mad, and I believe that he has killed someone, Diaz will say. For it is already known that it is not the same to be black and to be a man. Because the men are white.” (122) (Este negro está loco, y creo que ha matado a alguien”, dirá Diaz. Ya se sabe: no es lo mismo ser negro que ser hombre. Porque los hombres son blancos.) This comment, on one hand, seemed to reveal his understanding of the position of blacks in relation to whites in the system. On the other hand, his verbal hypothesizing seemed to indicate a level of distrust towards the privileged class to which he had once aspired and become a member. He now recognized the center of privilege for what it was, and that it based its

conceptions of “others” heavily on preconceived ideas situating them as one inferior group of people. He stated that,

Black people are great dancers, it's in their blood. And besides being passionate, they are intelligent as well. As if all blacks were made in the same mold, one by one, physically and morally similar, with identical attributes, and the same faults. (119)

The position of the female voice

While undoubtedly, it is the male's voice that is situated in the central position of the narrative of “*The Four Mirrors*,” the female's voice does make its appearance in the story, even though it is not to the same degree as that of the male's voice. She does not seem to occupy an equitable position in the narrative in comparison to his voice. As such, she seems to be situated in a secondary position from which her voice cannot be heard with equal intensity, or in an equally compelling manner. The inclusion of the female's voice in the narrative does not display the same level of privileging as the male's voice, that has been accorded the roles of narrator, as well as, protagonist. His conflicts propel the development of the novel's plot from the beginning to the end. It is his voice that takes the lead in the expression of the angst and existential suffering that ensued as a result of his confused and eventual loss of his identity. He himself expressed his awareness of his dilemma and questioned its significance as he reflected, “ Or could it be rather that I had opted mistakenly for a system of values contrary to the essence of my being?” (142) (O sería más bien que había optado equivocadamente por una escala de valores contraría a la esencia de mi ser?) Therefore, it is the male protagonist who bears the greatest burden for the compromising of his culture and roots, which lead to the loss of his identity. Consequently, just as he was responsible for this, he had to assume the

responsibility for its reversal. As such, he had to undergo an arduous journey in search of answers which would lead to his successful re-discovery and recuperation of his ethnic, cultural and personal identities.

However, the female consciousness depicted in the narrative does not undergo the same level of extensive interrogation and reflection that the male undergoes. She does not wear a similar mask of deception, nor does she experience the loss of her identity in a devastating way as the male protagonist. In effect, the main conflict of the narrative has not been positioned in the voice of the female, but in that of the male. The crisis and oppression that she undergoes is connected to his but in a more indirect way. Whereas, she suffers directly from the tensions that occur locally, his has been extended to the national arena as well. Thus, it can be observed that the voice of the female has been positioned in the local space of Limón, while the male voice has been accorded the flexibility to not only occupy Limón, the marginal space, but to also occupy the larger space of San José, the center. The narrator also directs the reader's attention to this distinction when he states that, "San José was not Limón; stretch of salt encrusted between the railway and the sea. San José became gigantic by night, much more so than Limón." (144) (San José no era Limón: pulmón de sal incrustada entre el ferrocarril y el mar. San José se volvía gigante de noche, mucho más gigante que Limón.)

Additionally, it can be observed that the female voice which is represented in the his(s)tory besides being positioned in the marginal space of Limón, was also firmly situated in the past time. During this period she contributed an important part of the experiences which the protagonist had to re-visit in order to re-connect the pieces of his

shattered identity. Thus she is not part of the conflicts of the present time, but rather of the conflicts of the past that plagued the community during that time.

As such, the female voice did not display the same ability to shift between spaces as did the male voice. Thus, her voice can also be considered as being situated permanently in the past time due to her untimely death. The scenes in which she is a part become accessible to the reader through the device of flashbacks from the present time to the past in the narrative. Accordingly, the protagonist's memory is utilized to transport the reader from the present time period to the past. The narrator sometimes indicated the transition through phrases which referred to the journey over undetermined distance, as well as the passing of time. The indefinite space was accompanied by his experience of a state of timelessness. His first transitional experience was indicated when he stated, "I didn't have the slightest idea of where I was. It didn't occur to me to ask either. I simply began to walk. And I was walking while the hours accumulated at my feet." (32) (No tenia ni la menor idea sobre el lugar en que me haallaba. No se me ocurrió preguntar tampoco. Sencillamente eché a andar. Y estuve caminando mientras las horas se acumulaban a mis pies.)

Through his recollections the protagonist/narrator was able to evoke the presence of the female, and to reconstruct his past life experiences with her in the community of Limón. Another instance in which the narrator indicated the transition from the present to the past is when he commented that, "The truth is the whistle caused me to remember Lorena. Her voice returned to my memory with cruelty." (124) (Lo cierto es que el pitazo me hizo recorder a Lorena. ... Su voz regresó a mi mermoria con crueldad.) She

therefore, occupied a specific place in the past, as well as a specific time period in comparison to the male who was able to effectively transcend both place and time for the resolution of his agonizing conflicts.

As the daughter of a renowned Obeah man in Limón, Lorena grew up firmly centered in the Afro-Antillian culture of Limón. Therefore, the system of beliefs that she reflected, was largely influenced by the African ancestral beliefs and practices inherited from their African ancestors. She did not display the same type of hybridity, or the mixing with the Western cultural values and systems that Charles displayed. Since her formal and informal education was obtained primarily in Limón, she was not exposed to the contrasting influences. Charles, on the other hand, was educated not only in Limón, but also in San José. Thus, his more expanded educational experiences served to facilitate an expansion in his consciousness to include the Western religious beliefs, as well as the objective and scientific methods of enquiry. Consequently, Lorena and those members of the community whose exposure was limited to the dominant influences that characterized the community of Limón maintained their allegiance the etheric, the magical and the power of the ancestors.

Inevitably these two contrasting cosmovisions lead to tensions among the members of the community, as well as in the consciousness of the individuals themselves. In the case of Charles, he displayed a distinct conflict in his beliefs which many times resulted in his expression of doubt and distrust in the validity and effectiveness of the customs inherited from his parents. He first displayed this distrust in one of his first responses to the news that Lorena had fallen ill when he complained that, “God, how I hated the

darned customs of the blacks- that Lorena had fallen ill, and they couldn't give me an explanation.” (40) (Dios, cómo odiaba las condenadas costumbres de los negros- que Lorena estaba enferma, y no me dio ninguna explicación.) Then when he was told that a “duppie” or a ghost had attacked her, he questioned the logic of this explanation when he reasoned, “But the explanation was abstract. A magical response to a real fact. In the absence of better explanations one had to accept that.” (41) (Pero la explicación era abstracta. Una respuesta mágica a un hecho real. A falta de mejores explicaciones había que aceptar esa.)

Thus, the voice of Lorena was positioned so that it reflected a strong connection with the mysterious ancestral forces which formed an integral part of the religious beliefs of the community. Consequently, when she was experiencing the excruciating pain and suffering in the final days of her life, she was still able to maintain her unwavering confidence in the ancestral powers and traditions. She did not doubt what had caused her demise as she revealed,

... she would have liked to deny the presence of the ghostly vision. But she saw it. ..., it was white just as Ruth described it. For good reason they both were daughters of obeah manes.” (86) (... hubiera querido negar la presencia del espectro. Pero ella lo vio. Lo vio, y era blanco, tal como había dicho Ruth. Para algo las dos eran hijas de Obeahmanes.)

Thus, she was convinced that if her father was still alive he would have protected her from the fatal attack by the forces which were manipulated by her enemies to harm her. She knew that he would have been able to protect her, and even to reverse the intended result through the utilization of the supernatural forces as he had done previously for Charles when Cristian Bowman had tried to ruin his agricultural venture. (77-78) The

miracles of her father were widely known, but right now she could not rely on his intervention on her behalf. However, during the period in which she battled with the illness she was still able to receive recommendations from the unseen forces through her dreams. Charles's deceased father had instructed her to give him instructions as to where the poisonous substances were located in the house, and additionally about how to eliminate them so that he would not be harmed. Her voice therefore gave credibility to the beliefs in the ancestral powers and the surreal level upon which they had positive, as well as negative experiences.

The male voice on the other hand, reflected the opposite to the confidence and trust in the religious beliefs in the ancestors that Lorena reflected. His college and university education in San José, undoubtedly provided him with exposure to which she did not have access. Thus, he displayed a greater affinity for the Western religions and systems of thought, which were based on objectivity, scientific enquiry and a rational system of thought. Therefore, this proved to be directly in contrast to the cosmovision of the Afro-Antillians. His lack of appreciation for the traditions and cultural beliefs was also displayed by the comprehension he had for Clarita de Duke. She was a nurse by profession and demonstrated an arrogant disbelief for the traditional beliefs and medicinal practices of the culture. Charles sought her opinion and consulted with her on the best treatment for his wife's sickness. He indicated that,

I would like to hear ... from her lips of some concession, some point of support to pass from the world of his parents the only one that he knew until he went to college, the world of the Duke's. The world which for the rest was in sharp contrast to that of Lorena and Ruth. (47) (Desearía eso: oír de tales labios alguna concesión, algún punto de apoyo para pasar del mundo de sus padres al único que

había conocido hasta que fue al colegio, el mundo de los Duke. Mundo que por lo demás parecía estar en lucha total con el de Lorena y de Ruth.)

On the other hand, he was however still able to attest to the veracity of the messages that Lorena transmitted to him after the surreal conversations that she carried on with his father, Pete. He also had dreams and visions of his own in which his father gave him specific instructions and insights into the causes of their problems and their resolutions. He had witnessed the two mysterious horsemen riding on the same horse towards the railway. One of them with his head turned backward towards the tail of the horse. (45) When he remembered the code that his father had instructed to use whenever he was in danger, another two horsemen appeared and then disappeared. This was his own experience with a supernatural occurrence and it still left him in a state of doubt, in which he was asking himself whether what he just witnessed was real or not. Thus he corroborated, “ ... I had just had a strange experience. Was it real or imaginary? He was not in a position to determine at that time.” (45) (... acababa de tener una experiencia absurd. Experiencia real o imagianria? No estaba en capacidad de definirlo en esos instantes.) Charles received many more affirmations about the truth of what was taking place from his father, but still he demonstrated a double consciousness. On the one hand he was plagued by disbelief, while on the other he was aware that what he had experienced was real. Even within himself there was a war being waged in terms of which of system of beliefs was valid and effective. As such Charles in his state of dual consciousness resorted to the use of both of them and explained it when he said that, “ If confronting natural illness, then regular medicine. But Lorena’s illness was not physical, even though the consequences were. Since it was necessary to remember the events as

they occurred: she was attacked by an evil spirit.” (48) (Ante also natural, la medicina corriente. Pero la dolencia de Lorena no era física, aunque las consecuencias lo fuesen. Porque era necesario recordar las cosas tal como sucedieron: fue atacada por un espíritu maligno.) Thus, nothing was able to cure her illness, it could not be cured by the ancestral means nor by means of Western remedies and medical treatments.

Thus, while he believed in the objective reality, he was also aware of the subjective system of the ancestors as a valid force for understanding and dealing with reality. He did eventually reach the position where he admitted his lack of complete belief in the ancestral system when he stated that, “But what happened is that I never accepted Pete’s explanation. I preferred to hold onto the scientific pretensions of Clarita de Duke.” (127) (Pero lo que sucede es que yo nunca acepté en realidad la explicación de Pete. Preferí agarrarme a las pretensions científicas de doña Clarita de Duke.) Lorena, however never displayed this type of fracturing of her beliefs and her identity. Therefore, the confusion and identity crisis that the male character experienced in the narrative, is not manifested in the same way by the female character.

Structure of the female voice

The privileging of the male voice

This his(s)tory of the crisis of identity among Afro-Costa Ricans seems to explore the dilemma which surfaces as the Afro-Costa Rican community interacts and relates with the mestizo community of the center. The narrative demonstrates that this journey towards integration as Quince Duncan suggests is fraught with pitfalls and obstacles.

Therefore, instead of leading to wholesome and mutually enhancing integration it was leading to distortion, absorption and eventual loss of essential markers of the minority cultural heritage. In this drama of the dilemma of integration and assimilation of the Afro-Costa Ricans in the Central American nation state of Costa Rica, it is the male voice that dominates the central stage as it is rendered as having a captivating and all-embracing influence in the story. Accordingly, in the construction of this narrative, Duncan's utilization of the narrator/protagonist model in the development of the story similarly parallels the use exemplified by both the Guinean novelists, as well as the Costa Rican female novelist previously examined in this study. However, the model depicted in his narrative more closely approximates Ndongo's depiction in terms of the privileging of the male voice in this double role rather than the female voice as illustrated in the narratives by the female writers. Effectively, he has ensured that the male voice would occupy the dominant position to the female voice in the exploration and interrogation of the main theme of racial and cultural identity.

The male voice by exerting its influence from the central axis of the narrative provides the motivating force for the objective action, while that of the female voice which occupies a more secondary position functions largely in the realm of the subjective in the narrative. The description of Lorena's personality by Charles more or less adheres to the pattern for the female traditionally represented in Western literature. His description alludes to the nature of her personality which he has difficulty explaining and states that, "It is that, pucha, it is not pretentious, but it is difficult to describe certain things. But believe me, Lorena was like that: predictable and unpredictable at the same time."(123)

(Es que, pucha, no es cursilería, pero cuesta explicar ciertas cosas. Pero céanme, Lorena fue así: rutinaria y agitada al mismo tiempo.) The critic Fajardo- Calvo indicates in her text “ La Mujer, victima y cómplice” that traditionally the female voice is cast in a more intuitive mode in keeping with the traditional dialectics. The female she comments is considered as the inferior of the two since she is, “... the earthy, the sexual, the irrational, the mysterious, the demonic” (... lo telúrico, lo sexual, lo irracional, lo misterioso, lo demoníaco ...) Whereas the male on the other hand, generally is cast as the active thinker and participant in the discourse, “ ... the virile conceived as luminous, logical, spiritual, rational, scientific.” (58) (... en contraposición a lo viril concebido como luminoso, lógico, espiritual, racional, científico.) As such, the female voice achieves greater potency in the sphere of the unconscious and ethereal states which Lorena is shown as inhabiting as she struggles between life and death.

Thus, the male voice seems to be rendered as a dynamic interlocutor who inevitably, presents, retracts, extends and embellishes the story-line from its inception to the conclusion. As such, he gives form and shape to the story while presenting the major and minor scenes of the narrative. He constantly makes connections and references and incorporates the pertinent details and antecedents. Thus, he facilitates the reader’s understanding of the causes and effects of the action and transitional phases of the story. On one hand, the voice relates and interacts with the reader as the narrator, then on the other hand it functions actively in the narrative as the protagonist interacting with other characters in the narrative plot.

He commences this active narrative style when he announces that his life has not been without its challenges, and confides that “... I will tell you all about it.” (10) The narrator in many scenes of the narrative assumes the first person subject form, and uses a language which is self-reflective and self-critical as he addresses the reader. As such, he describes his second wife, utilizing this technique as he asserts that, “... she is intelligent and friendly. You all will have to forgive me for my pretentious ways, because when you call a female friendly, it is a pretentious thing. Everyone says that, Isn’t that true?” (11) (... es inteligente y simpática. Ustedes me perdonarán lo cursí que soy, porque eso de decirle simpática a una mujer es cosa cursí. Todos dicen eso, no es cierto?) The narrator therefore, speaks directly to the readers as he endeavors to capture and engage their participation in what seems to be an animated conversation. He also seems to express an awareness of his digressions as he unravels the story and as in a real live conversation exercises this technique of returning to the point at hand. Thus in the middle of his digression about his pretentiousness he suddenly questions himself, “What was I telling you all about? Oh, yes, the way in which Ester was dressed that night” (11) (De qué les estaba hablando? Ah, sí, de la forma en que Ester vestía esa noche ...)

The narrator is also able to engage the thinking of reader in the improvised conversations with the “What If?” and hypothetical scenarios that he presents. In presenting his dilemma of his change of color he presents he makes use of this technique. As such, he confides to the readers,

Imagine it: good-day Ester. Excuse, but don’t you remember him. I am your husband. What? And then follows the certain laughter that would inundate the whole neighborhood. Then she herself would begin to notice and the laughter would subside.” (121) (Imagínense: Buenos días, Ester, Disculpe, pero no le

recuerdo. Soy su marido. Qué? Y la infalible carcajada inundaría el barrio. Pero luego ella misma empezaría a fijarse y la risa se iría apagando.)

Sometimes the narrator gives the impression that he has heard a response from the reader, and in so doing anticipates a reaction to his descriptions, or the assertions that he has made. Thus when he illustrates the materialism of the class to which he belongs he asks,

And perhaps you all will ask yourselves why air condition in this climate of 22 degrees. Well then, if you believe that everything that is bought is to be used, only you all believe that. People don't buy things for their utility, but rather to impress. ... It is not necessary that you become defensive because no one is accusing you of anything. (11) (Y tal vez ustedes se pregunten por qué acondicionado en un clima de 22 grados. Pues bien, si ustedes creen que las cosas se compran para el uso, solamente ustedes saben eso. La gente no compra cosas para su uso, sino para impresionar. ... No es necesario que ustedes pongan al la defensive porque nadie los está acusando.)

At other times, he does not use the first person subject, but instead alternates with the second or the third person. As such, he is able to weave a tale that is not one dimensional or linear, but that flashes back in time, and features digressions and reflections in order to create a very interactive and dynamic story between narrator and reader. Thus, the reader's interest and attention are stimulated and engaged in an intriguing drama of the loss and recuperation of identity.

The language of the narrator/protagonist also contributes to the creation of the tone of the scenes in the narrative. Consequently, the tone could vary from comic, to sarcastic, intellectual, poetic at times, as well philosophic at other times as he deals with the themes of identity, race, class and gender during the course of the story. The language that he incorporates in the narrative also seems to be very expressive as he many times recreates self-reflective and self-critical forms. The narrator seems to create an ironic tone in the

narrative when he presents the rhetorical question, “How does one inform his wife that he became black in the early hours of the morning, a little before or after making love to her?” (113) (cómo se le dice a una esposa que uno se volvió negro en la madrugada, un poco antes o después de hacerle el amor?) He also maintains the discussion with the readers through the incorporation of expressions such as “Cursileria,” “cursi” and “Pucha, carajo” which seem to invoke a high level of emotional reaction, as well the informal register of the oral discourse. The male’s voice therefore provides the reader with a panoramic view of not only the environment, but also the society, and the lives of the characters that will have and impact on his in his quest for the recuperation of his true identity.

The female voice

Thus, when the structure of the black female voice is examined it is found that she does not share an equally expansive treatment as the male voice. Thus the presence of her voice seems to be focused in limited spaces in the narrative. Therefore, she does not exert a decisive and compelling influence on the development of the story as the male voice does in the presentation and resolution of the main conflicts. While her voice is heard to some degree, but it is not with the same intensity as that of the male’s voice which occupies a privileged position throughout the narrative. When the female’s voice is heard it is within a more restricted frame, and many times the reader learns about her character and the events which led to her tragic demise through the voice of the male narrator/protagonist and not exclusively through her own voice.

Since her physical characterization in the novel is rendered as the site of multiple violations she therefore is unable to present a forceful and vibrant expression of her voice throughout the narrative. She speaks mainly from her dying bed, in a defenseless and weakened state. Her narration of the events in her life seem to occur in the sleep or a semi-conscious state, as she lays agonizing from the incurable illness. Her speech is usually signaled by comments by the narrator that refer to this state to the effect that,

She was overcome by sleep in broad daylight. The years began to reveal themselves without stopping. Her twenty- three years, her five years of marriage; her un-known son that in some part of the city had lived without a mother.” (84) (El sueño la vencía en pleno día. Los años se revelaban ahora con crudeza. Sus veintitrés años, sus cinco de casada; su desconocido hijo que en algún punto de la ciudad habría vivido sin madre.)

Her voice is often enveloped by a surreal and mysterious tone since she appears to inhabit the space between life and death. As such she is able to communicate with the dead and sustains conversations with Pete McForbes, her father-in law who provides them with advice and guidance for dealing with the illness which would ultimately claim her life. She learned from him that she would be taken to the hospital in San José for treatment but that it was too late for her to recover. She also learned that Cristian did not hate her but that it was Nabe, his wife who was the author of her destruction. (85)

Even in the episodes that deal with the attacks made directly on Lorena, it is often the voice of the male that is utilized to narrate her(s)tory. She does not speak with her own voice even when she is the target of the harshest of attacks and abuses. Rather it is the voice of the male that supersedes her own to assume the lead in the narration of the female’s story, thus presenting his memories, reflections, as well as his interpretations of her experiences. Her life history is more or less narrated entirely through the voice of the

narrator. (96-97) When Cristian sexual abuses Lorena, it is the narrator that first relates the incident and her voice is silent. When the reader first learns of the circumstances of the supernatural attack on Lorena, it is also through the voice of Charles, the narrator as well as Ruth, who was the eye-witness. Their voices seem to converge as they recreate the sordid scene. His introduction provides the frame and her voice expands on the details of the attack. The narrator's commentary commences with,

But the explanation was abstract. A magical explanation to a real event. ... that was what happened, that was it. Everyone agreed on the ghost, even though only Ruth because she was the daughter of an Obeah man could distinguish the color. A white ghost, shameless ... he used the front door to leave ... (41) (Pero la explicación era abstracta. Una respuesta mágica a un hecho real. ... eso fue lo que pasó, eso fue. Todas estaban de acuerdo en cuanto al fantasma, aunque solo Ruth por ser hija de un obeahman pudo distinguir el color. Un fantasma blanco, descarado ... Usó la puerta de enfrente para salir, ...)

Then Ruth continues with the eye-witness account of the attack in which she states, "But then I heard Lorena using profanity and I told myself, that is not normal I told myself, that is not normal because Lorena with great effort says anything ugly." (41) (Pero entonces oí a Lorena maldiciendo y me dije: eso no es normal. ... "eso no es normal, porque Lorena con costos dice "feo".)

The narrator through his poetic recollection of the hour of Lorena's final passing provides the reader with a concise picture of the key events that she herself would have remembered at that very moment. In this portrait of the most difficult moments of her life he thus chronicles the series of unfortunate experiences that Lorena suffered in her life. He thus highlights the both the real and the surreal and mysterious attack when he metaphorically asserts that,

Lorena had to die remembering the rise of the flower that conquered the resistance of the bulb at dawn. ... the pain choking her and the screams of the child, savage, cruel, overwhelming, cold, the hands of the beast Cristian clinging to her shoulder, impatiently circling her waist, and she hated him, she hated him in the middle of her madness but she could not resist him, she did not have the strength to resist, ... Miss Ann ... It is a boy. A boy? Yes a handsome boy. (97) (Lorena tenia que morir recordando el surgir de la flor que vence la Resistencia del bulbo al amanecer. ... el dolor ahogándole los gritos del niño, salvajes, crueles contundentes, frías, las manos del bestia de Cristian aferradas a su espalda, recorriendo impacientes su cintura, y ella lo odiaba, lo odiaba en medio de su locura pero no podía rechazarlo, no tenia fuerzas para resistir, el golpe seco en la nuca, Miss Ann ... “Es un varón.” Un varón?” “Sí, un hermoso varón.”)

In spite of the precision of the poetic language that is used to recreate the critical scenes that preceded her death, yet still it is never articulated in her voice. She never has complete control of the expressions and the speech which reflect her feelings and perspectives with regard to how she perceived these violations of her body, mind and spirit. It is the male voice takes control in order to present to the reader what she might have said, and how she might have reacted considering all that she had experienced in her life.

When the female voice presents her version of the critical events in her life she seems to do so in an indirect manner as the narrator/protagonist seems to present her case, or to invariably speak for her. As she reflects on the beginning of her life, her childhood days, as well as her married life she conjures up recollections which include the good memories, as well as the conflicts and tensions within the community which led to her illness and impending death. In this space which reflects the transitional nature of her existence she tries to make sense of all the episodes of her life. The narrator indicates

that as she agonizes she will not forget the part of her history that includes Charles and how they met and how they were finally united.

Accordingly, the narrator discloses the aspects of Lorena's history through the use of the future tense which seems to contribute a tone of supposition and probability to the narration of her story. Through the use of this construction he is able to retrace her life's journey in the community, and revisit these experiences for himself as well.

Consequently, this device is illustrated when the narrator relates that,

She will remember now, the sudden dizziness and the desire of Lorena McForbes, how it pained her conscience. Or when the inspector of the Campaign against Malaria called her Mrs. Mc Forbes. Or when the children called her madam. ... She will remember now, the sudden, dizziness and the desire for Charles ... Charles ... or whomever. Unwillingly, she could not resist when he carried, almost dragging her to the bed to celebrate his victory, alone ... ” (83) (Recordará ahora, el repentino mareo y la gana de Lorena de McForbes, cómo le remordía la conciencia. O cuando el Inspector de la Lucha contra la Malaria le decía Mrs. McForbes. O cuando los niños la llamaban señora. ... Recordará ahora, el repentino, mareo y la gana de Charles ... Charles o de cualquiera. Sin voluntad, no pudo resistir cuando él la llevó casi arrastrando a la cama para celebrar él solo su triunfo.)

On viewing the full circle of her life largely through the voice of another person, Lorena's voice seems to be lost to the readers. The recollections of her life are not completely owned or articulated by her, but through another filter which interprets her experiences and in the process it undergoes an inevitable transformation before it can be delivered to the reader. Therefore, it can be considered that her true voice is not unsilenced in the discourse, but is effectively displaced to the margins, while the male voice takes center stage in the narration of her story. Thus, the female subject is largely

rendered as voiceless in the interest of privileging of her male counterpart in the narrative.

The role of the female voice:

Heroism of the male voice as opposed to the victimization of the female:

Although, the narrator does make it clear that both male and female characters shared in the legacy of the victimization of the black race due to their capture in Africa and enslavement in the New World. Yet still it is the male voice that exemplifies the role of the hero in the narrative. Despite the many difficulties that he suffered due to his heritage, as well as his present life circumstances which he described as, "... his ups and downs. Failed efforts, set-backs ... " and ultimately the fracturing and loss of his cultural identity, he still occupied the privileged position of the hero in the narrative. (10) (... sus altibajos. Fracasos, esfuerzos, regresos ...) He was forced to undertake the hero's journey according to Joseph Campbell, in which he would confront the most difficult challenges in his life, and finally emerge as victorious. The metaphoric comment which he made at the end of the final transitional stage from the past to the present in the story reflected this achievement. As such, he stated, "The worst was over. I was recuperating the clarity of things. The night was intense and cold." (144) (El spoor había pasado. Estaba recuperando ya la nitidez de las cosas.) This also indicated that after all of the confusion and uncertainty in which he had been submerged, he was now at the point where he had confronted his mistakes, inconsistencies and contradictions to arrive at a place psychologically where he experienced greater acceptance of himself, his community and culture. He thus indicated coming to terms with these past mistakes

when he admitted that, “I hold myself accountable because the truth is that I abandoned Victoria without understanding that this was my people. Without understanding that those were mine.” (133) (Me contengo porque la verdad es que yo abandoné a Victoria sin comprender que ese era mi pueblo. Sin entender que esos eran los míos.) Therefore, this understanding that he attained was followed by the restoration of his psychological vision, which was metaphorically followed by the restoration of his physical vision. He had recovered from what the critic Johnnetta Cole defined as “self-stripping”, which she explained comprised, “Efforts to identify with the oppressor and prove oneself worthy are accompanied by self-denial and self-deprecation because it is difficult if not impossible to embrace one image of oneself without letting a conflicting one go.” (64) Therefore, no longer fettered by the guise of a false-identity the black male protagonist could recuperate his true identity and overcome the crisis that caused his psychological and existential affliction.

Alternatively, the voice of the female was cast in the role of the victim on various levels in the narrational space of the novel. She was first of all the victim of the deception and sexual abuse by Cristian. He was someone with whom she had grown up with in the community, and so she did not expect that he would harm her. As a result of this ill-fated act, she suffered greatly at his hands first of all, and then at the hands of his wife, Nabe. The tensions and hostilities which existed between Charles and Cristian were motivated by the envy which Cristian harbored against him. While Charles was able to complete his college education in San José, he was unable to do so due to his father’s unwillingness to support him any further. Therefore, he resented all those whose

parents supported them and provided them with a stable family life. Then, when Charles committed another transgression by marrying the woman of his dreams, Lorena he decided that he would effectively take revenge. He therefore considered Charles as the usurper of his dreams, against whom he had to retaliate even if it meant doing so at the expense of his beloved. (55) His wife, Nabe also encouraged him to commit the aggressive act since she too felt great envy towards her since she knew that Cristian had deep feelings for Lorena. As such, after he committed the crime of sexual abuse Nabe still was not convinced that he has expressed enough hate towards Lorena, and so she decided to take things into her own hands in order to cause even greater injury to her. As such, it was she, and not Cristian who intentionally brought about the final and most fatal attack on Lorena Sam from which she would never recover. This time the attack was not just a physical act, but also a spiritual one, thus ensuring that she would not survive this critical blow. She thus rejoiced when the news reached her that Lorena had been struck by a supernatural force. She then commented to herself that, “She had achieved her biggest dream: that Cristian would finally hate Lorena. Hate her to the point of wanting her dead. It was too much of an accomplishment.” (55) (Había logrado su gran sueño: que Cristian odiara a Lorena. Odiarla hasta el punto de desear su muerte. Era demasiado logro.)

Therefore, Lorena had been entrapped in a web of hateful attacks and her body could be considered as the site on which rivalries and hostilities were being unleashed. As such, Clovis’s observations refer to the victimization that she suffered even at the level of the community when he lamented that,

Her death was unjust, because she did not die from natural causes. She died simply, murdered by the powers that attacked her in full body. Lorena died unjustly. ... She succumbed in that manner because a wretch felt like abusing her and then his wife, his very compliant wife, blamed the victim for her husband's crime. (127) (Su muerte fue injusta, porque no murió por causa natural. Murió, sencillamente, asesinada por poderes que la reventaron en medio cuerpo. ... Pasó por el tránsito de esa condenada manera porque a un desgraciado le dio la gana violarla y luego su esposa, su muy complaciente esposa cobró a la víctima el pecado del marido.)

Even after many years had passed after the death of Lorena, Clovis still remembered her tragic end, and expressed his sorrow for her victimization at the hands of members of their own community. In his opinion, Cristian's transgressions reflected badly on the black race, and made all black men seem like abusers. (128) Therefore, as Clovis reminisced on the double attack on Lorena that was orchestrated by both Cristian and Nabe, he was able to illustrate to Charles, that there was a connection between the individual and the group. As such he answered the question that emerged as they spoke about who would be affected by Cristian's habitual violations, "To everyone? ... To all of us: the blacks?" (128) (A todos? ... A todos nosotros: los negros.) In this manner, he expressed a level of inclusiveness in which Charles was able to understand and identify. Thus, he ultimately implied that it was the responsibility of the individual members to contribute through their actions to the identity and reputation of the group whether good or bad. He further implied that it would be more difficult for them as a group to achieve integration in the wider society if members like Cristian continued to commit erroneous crimes against others.

The un-wanted pregnancy which was forced upon Lorena by Cristian's sexual aggression situated her in the position of a victim. This forced sexual acquiescence and the maternity which resulted exemplified the valuing of the female body in the patriarchal

society as a sexual, as well as a reproductive object. Cristian therefore believed that he could use deception and force to illicitly acquire the love of the victim. She on the other hand, was too ashamed to reveal the violation to her husband, Charles and seemed to act in complicity with the violator until she could no longer conceal the truth. The revelation of the truth further unleashed greater hate and violence among the rivals as Charles sought to avenge the crime. Charles resorted to an aggressive means in order to resolve the affront. He shot him and then immediately took the child to an orphanage. In effect, this immediate stripping away of the child from his mother did have its effect on Lorena because in her mind it seemed to follow the pattern of the legacy of the enslaved black woman.

Just as the female body had been exploited both sexually and maternally during slavery she seemed to have experienced a similar violation both sexually and maternally. Therefore, as she agonized on her dying bed, this was one of the episodes of her life that she would reflect on. She stated that although Charles had been good to her, they never had a child together and the only child that she had was, “... unwanted. It represented in a certain way the extension of the spirit of a wicked person, but the child was innocent. Innocent. Perhaps for that reason, and as a punishment, she was now abandoned by God.” (88) (... no había deseado. Representaba en cierta forma la prolongación del espíritu de un malvado pero el niño era inocente. Inocente. Tal vez por eso, y como castigo, estaba ahora abandonada de Dios.)

In her reflections on this experience she then identified a connection between the victimization of the black female in the slave society and her own experience. The critic

Johnnetta Cole also makes reference to the multiple oppressions that the black female confronts in the society when she states that, “... the Black woman is still victim of a triple jeopardy- discriminated against because she is Black, a woman, and usually poor.”

(142) Thus, in many ways Lorena’s experience seemed to parallel the experience of her ancestors who were enslaved in the colonial society. Similarly, in the Post Colonial society she too found herself in a similar situation of being the victim of multiple violations, to her body firstly, and then further to her offspring. Accordingly, she thought to herself that,

Her son, snatched away. To how many grandmothers before her had this happened, during those shameful four hundred years of crimes ... they snatched away their children to sell them in the plaza: ..., and how many children like her son had come into the world through the exclusive will of the slave owner?” (88) (Su hijo, arrebatado. A cuántas abuelas antes de ella, durante estos ignominiosos cuatrocientos años de crímenes ... le arrebataron a sus hijos para venderlos en la plaza: ..., Y cuántos hijos como el hijo de ella, habían venido al mundo por la exclusiva voluntad del esclavista?)

Further, her rhetorical question which concludes this segment of her reflections, “Where had God been during these four hundred years?” (dónde había estado Dios durante cuatrocientos años?) seem to be directed toward the questioning of the justice of this system of oppression which formed part of the status quo for so many years. (88) Similarly, her rights as the mother of the child were completely disregarded since she was not consulted with regard to the fate of her child. Her husband took the lead in seeking a solution to the problem and left her wishes unheard. As she reminisced on her dying bed she did recognize that the child was innocent of the crime which his father committed against her.

Additionally, she made a connection between the present perpetrator and the previous one, the slave master. She wondered whether the educational and social systems had conditioned him to continue to perpetuate the oppression of the black female in the contemporary society. She reflected this when she stated that, “ Only this child was not engendered by any slave master, but rather by a beast as black as herself.” (88) (Sólo que este hijo suyo no era de ningún esclavista sino de una bestia tan negra como ella.) This fact that she was abused by someone that belonged to her race and her community was even more painful for her. This seemed to be the greater tragedy since it reflected the conflicts and the lack of unity that characterized some of the social relations among the members of the community. These incidences demonstrated that members of their ethnic group and culture were also guilty of committing similar offences against their neighbors and countrymen. She was extremely remorseful as she declared that what he did could not have been in the name of love, but rather another manifestation of the struggle for power and dominion over another. She concluded that, “On that tragic day he demonstrated clearly; he didn’t love her at all.”(89) (En aquel día trágico lo demostró claramente: no la quisó nada.)

It seems that even the personal history of Lorena that was traced in the narrative also illustrated the female voice in the role of a victim. Therefore, it revealed the difficult antecedents of her early life which influenced her personality to some degree. Charles appears to have captured the essence of her personality when he observed that, “Children, whose parents are separated are like Lorena: trapped by time in the middle of two poles.”

(125) (Los niños, cuyos padres se separan se quedan como Lorena: atrapados por el tiempo en medio de dos polos.)

As such, he indicated that her personality reflected a “bi-dimensional” quality which was a characteristic of children who had suffered through the trauma of the separation of their parents. This area of pain in her life extended back to the circumstances of her early life. First of all, she herself seemed to be an unwanted child, since her mother had tried to terminate the pregnancy when she discovered that she was pregnant for her father, an Obeah man. Fortunately, her father had intervened and was able to prevent the termination of her life. As soon as the child was born he took responsibility for her to ensure that she grew up in a safe and favorable environment. Then on another ill-fated day in her early years, she was struck by tragedy again when she witnessed the drowning of her mother and grandmother in their tiny home. The waters of the river Matine had overflowed the banks to claim all that was in its path. Thus, immersed in grief she was unable to reverse the flow of events. Lorena’s personal life story seemed to have been impacted by these tragic events in which contributed to the formation of her character and her vision of the world. Thus, she was a character who was entrapped in a network of tragic events which emphasized the impotence of the female voice and her status as a victim in the story. Ultimately, she was a victim of the many unfortunate life circumstances which impacted on her life and to which she had no real control.

The female voice and gender relations

“*The four mirrors*” is another one of the Post-Colonial novels in this study which deals with gender relations as one of its main areas of focus in its thematic structure.

Accordingly, the novelist's rendition of the marital or male/female relationship, between Charles and Lorena illustrates the dimensions of gender relations which are situated and developed in the novel. Consequently, the manner in which the male and female articulate their voices for the representation of gender equality or inequality in the discourse is very significant. Therefore, as the characters interact with each other in the context of their marital relationship the readers are able to get an insight into the main features of gender relations among the male and female characters of the novel.

Moreover, the marital union between Charles and Lorena, does not seem to adhere strictly to the patterns of the traditional marriage of the patriarchal system. On the surface, it appears to reflect some similarities with this normative pattern, but, on closer examination important differences can be observed. Firstly, both male and female seem to follow the prescribed gender roles, but while Charles's description of their lives together attests to this similarity, it also indicates a contrasting non-conformity. As such, he claims that their life together was, "... routine on one hand, yet unpredictable on the other." (123) (... rutinaria y agitada al mismo tiempo.) After their initial encounter with resistance to their union they both seemed to adapt easily and comfortably to married life. They seemed to accept the traditional roles that at the center of the traditional marriage without complaint or resistance.

Thus, they assumed the division of labor according to the patriarchal dictates for the most part, where the male was responsible for providing the financial resources of the family, thus playing an active role in the public domain. He cultivated cocoa on his own farm, and served as a pastor every other Sunday at the community church. Lorena, on the

other hand was responsible for the domestic organizing the home, and providing the support that her husband for functioning effectively in the public domain. He did help with chores in the home, especially those that she considered as appropriate for the male. As such, she fulfilled the role of the homemaker in the relationship, but she did it out of love for him, and not as a result of obligation. The narrator indicates that, “ ... it was love that made her get up morning after morning during so many years and prepare his breakfast ... And it was love that made her on afternoons, store away for him on afternoons, his dinner on the stove... “ (85) (...fue amor lo que la hizo levantarse mañana tras mañana durante tantos años y prepararle el desayuno ... Y fue amor lo que la hizo aguardarle por las tardes, la cena lista sobre la estufa,) The narrator/protagonist also indicated that this routine that they had developed over the years, would leave him sick after her death, to the point where he had to look to others for what had become a habit. (141) However, he seems to indicate that he had become so accustomed to the predictable and harmonious nature of their life together that he became addicted to it. He also acknowledges that he did experience a very satisfying life with her when she states that, “ ... life with Lorena was the type of life that suited me ... because during that time I was at my best. (141)

Their marriage however, did depart from the traditional patterns in some critical areas. Even though Lorena after her marriage to Charles, Lorena seemed to conform faithfully to some of the dictates of the patriarchal marriage yet still, her character did not conform exclusively to the female archetype of the submissive and servile wife. In fulfilling her role as wife she demonstrated great devotion to Charles and made every

effort to take charge of satisfying his physical needs. Charles was aware of her devotion for him and he confirms this when he states that, “Her love had been like that, without extravagance.” (85) (Su amor había sido así, sin extravagancia.) While she supported and cared for him she did not allow herself to be completely absorbed by his personality. She was very aware of her own identity and never wanted to be owned by anyone. This was one of the things that she was most concerned about as she entered the marital relationship.

For this reason she had reservations the traditional marriage, and opposed it when she complained to her father that, “ ... If I get married he will think that he is my owner and he is going to do whatever he wants with me. I don't want to be tied to anyone and anyway ... “ (82) (Si me caso va a creer que es dueño mío y va a hacer lo que le dé la gana conmigo. Yo no quiero sentirme amarrada a nadie y de todos modos ...) Lorena seems to be very conscious of the presence of male domination and the inequality that could pervade in the traditional marriage. As such she did not willingly agree to change her status in order to become repressed or subjugated by another. As such, she does not display the typical behavioral characteristics of the passive female who is receptive to male control and domination.

Additionally, the couple did not wait for the exchange of traditional marital vows in order to consecrate their union. This is another area in which the patriarchal norms were challenged by the couple. When Lorena dared to reveal the fact to her father that she had already been united with Charles, “ Soy su mujer ya.” (I'm already his woman.) before a formal marriage, he responded immediately with great severity towards her.(82) His

aggressive reaction therefore displayed his disapproval of their assertion of their agency in determining how they would honor their love for each other. Still another facet of the marriage tradition that posed some difficulty for the bride is the traditional displacement of the family name of the female in order to accommodate the name of her husband. His name does not experience any transformation to reflect the change of status, but hers has to undergo this change. (82) In her view this signified ownership and she shunned the idea of being the possession of anyone. The critic Fajardo Calvo also confirms this dilemma when she states that, “... the habit of the Hispanic speaking countries to add to the name of the married woman that of the husband preceded by the genitive “of” is an indicator of possession, or it means that she is the property of the husband.”(31) (... el hábito de los países de lengua hispánica de añadir al nombre de la mujer casada el apellido del esposo precedido del genitivo “de”, es indicio de posesión; o sea, significa que ella es propiedad del esposo.)

She further explained that this signifies a loss of identity for the female as her identity becomes absorbed by that of the male. (31) The non-traditional courtship of Charles and Lorena also illustrated an aspect of non-conformity with regard to the traditions upheld by the society as appropriate to the rules of courtship. It was Lorena who took the initiative and first expressed her interest in Charles. She also actively provoked a conflict between the two families as she approached Charles’s father and falsely accused him of making her pregnant. (44-45) As such, she was challenging the rules as she actively sought to provoke interest and interaction between them.

Thus, these decisive actions by Lorena demonstrated that she possessed an independent and forceful character as a young woman. Charles described her as having an “invincible spirit,” and stated that she exercised a cohesive influence in the community. (123) These characteristics which are identified in her personality, therefore place her outside the typical feminine behavior according to patriarchal standards. Lorena’s strengths do not allow her to fit into the frame of the humble and servile maiden, or as the innocent snow-white female figure. (Calvo, 57) Although, there seems to be a binary configuration that is created through the contrast between the two female characters, Lorena, the innocent female and her antithesis, Nabe, the contaminated evil witch who completely breaks from the code of female conduct according to Fajardo Calvo. (57) Yet still Lorena does not quite fit the mold of the “snow-white” female figure since her character does not reflect an innocent and naïve personality.

Another, non-traditional feature that arises in the interactions between Lorena and Charles is the incidence of infidelity on the part of Charles. This was one of the memories that surfaced as she agonized and she revealed that, “... the night when they told her that Mill, precisely Mill, with all her handicap and her stupid ways was able to take her husband to bed. In Nabe’s bed, she slept with him.” (84) (... la noche cuando le contaron que Mill, precisamente Mill, con todo lo coja y estúpida que era, llevó a su marido al lecho. A la cama de Nabe, y se acostó con él.)

Unknowingly, he had become another one of Mill’s victims, as she manipulated the compassion that he felt for her because of her physical condition. When he tried to explain this to Lorena she would not be persuaded that he was lured into this situation.

Even, her best friend Ruth tried to console her by explaining that, “ ... a husband is like a child. He eats whatever is available if he is hungry.” (84) Lorena found it difficult to excuse his offense and neither would she easily accept the explanation from her friend about the inevitability of such a situation for males.

Lorena was not completely convinced by this rationalization made by her well intentioned friend. Many years after the incident she would still indicate that she had not forgotten the incident even though he had apologized many times for his offense. On the one hand, this jealousy displayed by Lorena could be considered as symptomatic of her insecurity, however, the critic Farjado Calvo seems to concur with the belief that it is a trait which reflects a desire to assert one-self in the female character. Thus, she contends that, “ ... (it is) a feeling that is typically masculine and for that reason, it is found that the jealousy in the female has a sense of virility.” (135) (... un ansia de posesión total, lo que los hace, ... un sentimiento típicamente masculino. Pore so encuentra que los celos de la mujer tienen un sentido viriloide.)

The presence of this trait in her personality therefore illustrates that the character of Lorena was not situated strictly within the confines of femininity, but to some degree ruptures the traditional framework. It signals the female as possessing characteristics which put her in the realm of the masculine. This is demonstrated by her determination not to allow Cristian to persuade her to leave Charles and marry him instead. She always maintained that she did not love him, and that she considered him as a brother. Therefore, she expressed great clarity and a strong will in defense of her beliefs and wishes.

In spite of the challenges that Lorena and Charles encountered in their married life, they seemed to have genuinely shared a deep love for each other, which was exemplified in a relationship that was satisfying for both partners. Although, their marriage did not completely deviate from the traditional marriage patterns since they both followed the differentiation of the male/female roles according to gender. They both seemed to be aware of the inequalities between the male and female in the traditional marriage, but they made an effort to treat each other with respect and consideration. He indicated that he must have loved her since he withstood her persistent accusations of his one act of infidelity for many years. (85) In many ways he tried to demonstrate his love for her and the song which he had composed in her honor was the final memory which she herself embraced as she was dying. The narrator stated that,

She heard the song that Charles ... , resonating in the echo: “ love, when there are no more hilltops, we will climb towards that which is my own. Love, when no more valleys remain, we will descend towards mine.” (95) (Oyó la canción que una vez Charles ... , resonante en el eco: “ amor cuando ya no queden cimas, escalaremos hasta el mío. Amor cuando ya no queden valles, descenderemos has el mío.)

These words of assurance and affection which were expressed by the male towards his beloved is what she heard as she departed from this world. Therefore, it shows the enduring love that they both shared equally despite the traditional factors of the patriarchal marriage which exerted their very real influence on their relations.

CONCLUSION

It seems that after the various representations of the black female voice in the her(s)stories and his(s)stories are considered together as in my dissertation, it can be observed that they separate into two divergent categories. The first category is that in which the black male voice is privileged by the male novelists in the post-colonial discourse, while the second category features the privileging of the black female voice. Thus, the narratives created by the female writers do not reflect a congruent pattern with their male counterparts, but rather a contrasting pattern. Whereas, in the his(s)story, the male voice occupies the central position in both Ndongo's and Duncan's narrative plots respectively, on the other hand that of the female writers, María Nsue Angue and Ana Cristina Rossi there appears a distinct deviation from the traditional representations of the black female voice. Therefore, it is found that the female voice in Ndongo's narrative when compared to that of the voice of the male character occupies a marginal space in the narrative. Additionally, a similar pattern for the representation of the female voice is appears to be repeated in the narrative created by the Afro-Costa Rican writer Quince Duncan. This his(s)story also portrays the female voice according to the traditional patterns where the male voice occupies the central position, with the female voice relatively displaced to the margins where her voice is hardly ever heard or she does articulate a voice which proves to be as instrumental in the resolution of the central conflict of the novel.

By contrast, the black female voice which is situated in the narrative spaces in Nsue's, as well as Rossi's narratives demonstrate a level of privileging of the female voice which

displays a vibrancy which is on par with that of the male voice, if not at times superceding it. The female voice when situated in the roles of narrator and protagonist of the narratives exert an influence in the discourse which is as significant as the characterizations of the male minority voices by the male novelists. Instead of following the traditional patterns and stereotypes for the representation of the female voice and situating her in the silenced and excluded domain they go beyond this to reflect the opposite. Through this challenge to the normative and hegemonic patterns the female voice and a distinct female experience and perspective is articulated. Thus the female is allowed to speak within the discourse despite the limitations, and social constraints that are an integral part of the patriarchal societal contexts in which they live. The female authors are cognizant of these realities and in their renditions of the female voice they do acknowledge and recognize. However, they also demonstrate that the female voice can still be liberated irrespective of these barriers which are erected to suppress female self expression and procure her voiceless-ness. The female writers seem to mold their characters with the same care and attention that the male writers do in their narratives. Thus, they are able to design and create multi-dimensional characters that possess complex personalities and are thus able to reflect various dimensions to their personalities in the narratives.

As the female voice engages in dialogue as much with others, as with herself she is empowered to reveal the profound nature of her outer and inner psyche. Therefore, the female “other” when she owns her voice, and is able to express it despite the limitations and inequities that are imposed in the personal and public spheres is able to reach beyond

the borders of voiceless-ness and silence to demonstrate that she is able to speak and give voice to her feelings, ideas, visions and imaginative faculties. Thus, Nsue Angue and Rossi through their literary representations have advanced towards the achievement of greater inclusion, privileging and assertion of the female voice in the literary context. Through their intentional reversals and inversions of normative patterns they have gone beyond the areas where "... there were no indications of dialogue with "the self." There were no words that suggested an awareness of mental acts, consciousness, or introspection (of the female subject)." (Belenky, McVicker, Clinchy, 25) Hence, with these demonstrations of the possibilities for the expansion of the representation of the black female voice these writers have effectively exposed the her(s)stories so that the readers are presented with characters who represent the female experience in a real and meaningful manner. They represent much more than one dimensional characters and superficial lives in their narratives as they allow the female characters to speak for themselves with others, and with themselves. In this way they also achieve a high level of self direction and agency in the narratives.

These innovative and unprecedented representations of the female voice by in these her(s)stories in contrast to the his(s)stories reveal a rupturing of normative patterns of representation for the black female voice. They go beyond the assumptions that "Men are active and get things done, while women are passive and incompetent." (Belenky, McVicker, Clinchy, 29) Consequently, this type of literary rendition of the black female voice is characterized by a significant degree of fluidity, dynamism and agency in the narrative texts. As the critic Assebe d'Almeida contends these writers seem to be

utilizing alternative platforms through which the female voice can achieve liberation and a great degree of self-expression in the discourse. (Cited in N' gom, 305) The inversions and reversals of the hegemonic patterns that these female writers have achieved in their negation and resistance of the ideology of the subordination of the female voice, has ensured to a great degree the unfettered expression of the female voice as she has been allowed to move from the margins of silence to the center of the discourse where her voice has been expressed and heard literally, figuratively and ideologically.

Common Currents

Common Afro-realist characteristics that appear in the texts, *Ekomo*; *Shadows*; *Limón Blues*; *The Four Mirrors*.

After close examination of the texts I was able to identify a common current traversing the narratives included in this study. In their fictional representation of the Post Colonial realities in Equatorial Guinea and Limón they display distinct commonalities which the writer Duncan has identified as belonging to an Afro-realist aesthetic system. Those writers who employ these aesthetic elements in their works he has named as Afro-Realist writers. Thus without any prior consensus or collaboration they seem to create works which reflect common elements especially rooted in the African and Diasporic traditions. Accordingly, Duncan contends in his Afro-realist manifesto that many of the works of writers in the Afro-Hispanic literary tradition seem to bear evidence of this Afro-realist aesthetic. He thus indicates that writers such as Nicolás Guillen, Manuel Zapata Olivella,

Georgina Herrera, Nancy Morejón and Cristina Cabral are some of the principal adherents to the tradition. He asserts that Afro-Realism is a code which does not conform to a Eurocentric vision and the “Europhilia” mentality. Rather it is firmly situated in a tradition which highlights, “Multiple voices. Stories stemming from a common original African ethnicity rooted in spirituality and reverence for the Ancestral Lore, a common experience with abduction, enslavement, colonialism, displacement and racism.” (11)

Consequently, the writers featured in this study, Ndongó, Nsue Angue, Rossi and Duncan also seem to follow this tradition, since their works reflect the commonalities and distinguishing features that characterize the Afro-realist aesthetic. As such they have incorporated to varying degrees, and in various configurations the six determining features that Duncan has identified as typical of the system. These six basic foundational features that contribute to the creation of Afro-realist aesthetic in the text include first of all, “The Restitution of the African voice” which features the use of the language and linguistic forms of the African and diasporic cultures with the intention of recreating that voice. (5) Duncan also reiterates that the Afro-Cuban poet Guillén pioneered the movement for this subversion of the Spanish language and literary and cultural markers, through the privileging of the African influenced linguistic forms, patterns and imagery in his poetry. This recuperation of the African voice through this type of subversion is also evident in the narratives under discussion in this study. They too have incorporated some of the African grammatical structures, linguistic and lexical forms, as well as vocabulary words from the Bubi, Fang, Igbo and Yoruba languages which form a part of the cultural heritage of both Equatorial Guinea and the Diasporic populations of Limón.

Therefore, African names of characters, such as Nnanga, Bitomo, Nchama abound in the context of *Ekomo*. In the Caribbean context words such as “Dopie or Duppie, obeahman, bembé, wemba and the typical food names such as yucca with bofé” are also utilized in the creation of the Afro-realist aesthetic. The use of these cultural language markers within the official language, promotes a sense of authenticity in the representation of the characters and the cultures of which they are members. Similar to Guillén, they also make use of the rhythmic patterns of the language which many times produce a high degree of orality in the narration of the story. Sequences of repetitions and the incorporation of the lore of the community in the form of legends, proverbs and words which possess a sonorous quality, work together to create a distinct African voice in these narratives.

The following element which the Afro-realist narratives seem to have in common is the revival of the “African Symbolic Memory.”(6) Departing from patterns which privilege the Greco-Roman myths and symbols, and in general the European cultures, the Afro-realist authors focus on alternative myths and symbols. Thus, they show a greater tendency to incorporate the religious beliefs of the African world, as well as the African Diaspora, as well as their myths and symbolic codes into the realism that they weave into their narratives. This symbolic memory can be observed in *Ekomo* to a great extent. The main motivating force for the action in the narrative is the search for a cure for the illness of the male protagonist. Therefore, he and his wife Nnanga journey into the depths of the forest in search of the traditional healer and priest. At his camp they both undergo treatments that are based on the consultation of the spiritual deities and the natural forces.

His son functions as a medium who is able to bridge the gap between the objective world and the supernatural in order to reveal these treatments for healing of the patients who may suffer from physical ailments or psychological disorders as well. The traditional healer utilizes the benefits of the plants, other natural medicines and enchantments, as directed by the divine spirits in order to restore healing and well-being to his ailing patients. The monumental storm of which Nnanga narrates as being of a magnitude that she had never experienced before, also had mysterious and mythical implications for the village. The tombstone image which appeared in the sky due to the movement and formation of the clouds and the winds, had great significance for the tribe since, it foretold both the death an elder, as well as of a younger man.

The narrative of *Tinieblas* also incorporates the beliefs and the mythology of the ancestral religion. In spite of his education according to Christian and European traditions, his father, uncles and grandfathers also ensure that he also receives an education in the religious rites of the tribe. Therefore, he undergoes circumcision in order to be initiated into the tribal leadership hierarchy. He is educated in terms of ancestor worship as well as introduced to a series of surreal experiences, in order to support and fortify his training as a young male leader and warrior.

The religious systems, mythology and symbolism of the African Diaspora also exercise an important influence in the narratives of both *The Four Mirrors* and *Limón Blues*. This Afro-realist element also appears in the novel by Duncan with the incorporation of the religious beliefs of Obeah. As such enchantments for healing as well bringing about harm to others are featured. Charles consulted with Lorena's father Mr.

Sam when he could not determine why his farm was not producing at the level that it did when he first started to cultivate his crops, and despite his concerted efforts in taking care of his farm. The Obeahman, through his intercessions was able to correctly determine who was the cause of his problem and to make recommendations as to what he could do to reverse the harmful forces that Bowman, his enemy was using to hinder his success. Then later on Lorena, Charles's wife was struck by a "duppie" that was supposed to bring about Charles's demise. Through communication with Pete, Charles's father, mainly in the dream state they were able to receive instructions to counteract the evil force that was unleashed on them by their enemies in the community. Other symbols that some evil force was involved with Lorena's illness was the two horsemen on one horse that Charles observed riding over the train tracks and the head of one of them was turned backwards. He remembered the secret code that his father given him to use whenever he encountered anything like that. As he used it he realized that it vanished almost immediately.

The African religious customs and beliefs also have a strong and significant presence in Limón Blues as well. Lorena's aunt Talita is a Santera from Cuba and she is a devotee of Yemaya. Although, she does not practice the religion completely, and seems to be indecisive about whether she wants to advance in the religious system, yet still when her husband, Orlandus almost drowns in the sea because she believes that they entered the wrong way she invokes Elegua to save his life. Orlandus, her husband also shows allegiance to the religion of Mayalism, which is one of the African based religions practiced by Jamaicans. His mother was a priestess in it and he inherited his devotion from her although he was not completely committed to it. His mother, however had used

its secret powers in order to cast a spell on the Scottish foreign landlord, and thus avenge the crime that had been committed against Orlandus. In *Limón* Orlandus also attended the ritual dances that devotees of the Mayalism lead by Maymie Briggs. She was the priestess who was able to cross the frontier between life and death to save Lorena's life when she too was at the point of death during the birth of her first child. (188)

The third element that the Afro-realist narratives have in common in the incidence of "Historical Memory." (7) Therefore they utilize the historical memory in an informed and objective manner. Many times its use encompasses a revalorization of the historical antecedents of the African and Diasporic societies. Thus, in *The four mirrors* the narrator makes direct reference to the history of the slaves in the New World societies, indicating that this foundational experience of inequality and discrimination is still responsible for the present conditions of marginalization and exclusion that the descendants of slaves encounter in the Post Colonial society. The connection between the present and the past is also illustrated in the comment that Lorena makes about it. She states that, "And we feel proud of the English, the language of criminals. Because Charles had done research on the black experience, and he spread the word among those closest to him." (Y nos sentimos orgullosos del inglés, idioma de criminals. Porque Charles les había indagado sobre la experiencia negra, y la pregonaba entre las más cercanos a él.) (89) In *Limón Blues* two of the female voices, Irene and Talita also recreate the historical memory when they narrate the history of the wars of Independence, 1896 in which Gómez and Maceo and their troops defended the island heroically, but they were defeated by the Spanish forces. They tell of the horrors that the Cuban rebels and regular citizens suffered at the

hands of the Spanish soldiers and that they were placed in isolated villages which were very similar to concentration camps. (243)

The recreation of the historical memory is also included in *Ekomo* when the protagonist couple journey through the country from one village to another in search of a cure for Ekomo's ailment. Nnanga as the narrator also begins to recollect the creation legend of her peoples as told to her by her grandmother. Ekomo as well intervenes to contribute his version of what he stated was also told to him by his grandmother. The legend recounts the story of the beginnings of the tribes on the West African coast, and then traces their expansion from the banks of the sacred River Muni. The novel *Tinieblas* also highlights the historical memory of the tribe through the training of the young protagonist. He is taken under the tutelage of his uncle Abeso who is responsible for transferring to him important knowledge about their beginnings as an independent tribe. He is first of all educated on the wars that they fought to defend and protect their sovereignty against the neighboring rival tribes. He is also educated on the importance of the ancestors and the significance that they have for the continued survival of the tribe. After his circumcision and initiation into the tribe as a man he also had to undertake his education of the spiritual teachings, values and traditional rites of the tribe.

Another element which seems to connect the Afro-realist narratives is the " ... the reaffirmation of the Ancestral Community concept." (8) Duncan indicates that this concept implies the existence of a " ... global consciousness corresponding to a worldwide Diaspora, as a result of the Trans Atlantic slave trade." (8) This concept drives the notion of unity between all black people, whether they are of African origin or African

descendants in the Diaspora. The common heritage and cultural connections are difficult to negate or erase. This is demonstrated clearly in *The Four Mirrors* as the critical problem of Charles, the male protagonist. He separated from the community in Limón in order to achieve complete integration into the San José social network. However, he discovered that in doing so he had lost his identity and the one that he had assumed was a false identity. He thought that his separation was justified because of the difficult experiences that he had experienced in the community. However, in order to restore the balance in his life he had to return to the past and to his native community in order to regain his true identity and his stability. In the novel, *Limón Blues* the concept of community is also very important to the Antillians and this seems to be one of the main features on which the back to Africa movement of the United Negro Improvement Movement was founded even though their goals were eventually undermined by different forces acting against them. Through the solidarity of the community they did build Liberty Hall which was a meeting place for all the members of the organization and the community. The narratives of the Hispanic African tradition focus on the community and demonstrate that the individual belongs to the community and that communal unity and solidarity are important for confronting and solving difficult problems. In *Ekomo*, “Paloma de Fuego” had a unifying influence on the people for whom she performed and anywhere she went people adored her and were enlivened by her ability to communicate through her art. In *Tinieblas*, when the young protagonist was about to leave home to enter the seminary and go to Spain to study to become a priest all the villagers came to his celebration in order to show their support for him.

The utilization of an “intra-centric” perspective is another element which is common in the narratives of the Afro-realist writers. Duncan therefore contends that the black characters that these writers create deviate from the realm of caricatures or stereotypes.(9) They reflect more authenticity in their characterizations, as well the experiences that they depict. The vision originates from within the group and not from outside, and therefore there is less likelihood for the occurrence of mis-representations and distortions of the reality. Duncan also indicates that these writers also strive for a respectful and balanced rendition of the black experience whether it be slavery, cultural heritage, racism or marginalization in their literary works as well. (9) *In The four mirrors* as well the writer presents the conflicts that arise on all sides of the racial coin, and does not idealize the relations between the members of the black race either. The protagonist points out that many people act as if all blacks are the same, that they are all made from the same mold. Therefore, it seems that in his representation of the community he has tried to include all types, the trustworthy and honorable, as well as the scheming and dangerous personalities as well. The other three writers in this study have also sought to present real and complex personalities in their narratives, who also display a combination of character traits which include their strengths, as well as weaknesses, commendable qualities as well as the questionable.

The last characteristic which is a determining factor for Afro-realist writers is according to Duncan a tendency to exalt the theme of identity in their creative works. (10) As such, it is always a theme which is extensively examined as the writers reflect on the challenges, as well as the achievements of the black communities on which they

focus. Theirs works always seem to promote a discussion on the different aspects of the identity question whether it be racial, cultural or national. In the novel written by Duncan *The Four Mirrors*, the entire narrative is constructed around the theme of identity and so the narrative invokes this discussion on the loss of identity, as well as its recuperation from the beginning to the end of the novel.

Similarly, *Limón Blues* also projects a rendition of the nascent community in the process of change, especially towards the development of a new identity. Her husband, Orlandus displayed an affirmation of his Jamaican heritage and identity when he indicated that,

The identity that Garvey tried to give us was also false: he asked us to identify with the great accomplishments of Crispus Attucks or of Sojourner Truth, but those are not our heroes, those are the heroes of the gringos. Our heroes are Daddy Sharpe, Cuaco, Cudjoe, Cubah.” (348) (La identidad que Garvey trató de darnos era también falsa: nos pedía que nos identificáramos con las grandes hazañas de Crispus Attucks o de Sojourner Truth, pero éstos no son nuestros heroes, éstos son los heros gringos. Nuestros héroes son Daddy Sharpe, Cuaco, Cudjoe, Cubah.)

Further, Orlandus adamantly refused to become a nationalized citizen of Costa Rica as well. However, his wife Irene after his death became a nationalized citizen and so began the process of integration into the Central state. Her personality also reflects adaptations in terms of her religious beliefs and practices, which indicated a transformation in her cultural identity. In her religious beliefs while she still recognized the powers of the deities of the Santería religion she also realized that she was in a new environment, and so her religious practices and devotions would have to adapt to suit the new environment. Her cousin Talita, was happy when Lorena in spite of her seeming resistance to the original practices still displayed an allegiance to Changó as her father. (359-360)

The characterization of the historical figure Sam Nation, is also symbolic of the treatment of the identity of the Antillian immigrants in Limón Blues. He was very instrumental in the organization of the trade union movement in order to ensure that workers were not subjected to inhumane conditions and practices. He also utilized his newspaper ventures in order to inform and educate the community of important social, cultural and political considerations. His words are symptomatic of his contribution to the search for the identity of the Jamaicans and the other island groups in Limón. He expressed, “I am not of the rich, I am like Diogenes who carries a lantern in search of our identity. I defend the worker’s cause.” (107) (No soy de los ricos, yo ando como Diógenes como una linterna buscando nuestra identidad. Defiendo el element trabajador.)

The narratives of Equatorial Guinea also indicate a close connection with the the theme of identity in their thematic structure. The cultural identity of the tribal communities represented in *Ekomo* is also in question as the influences from the Western civilization seem to be gradually infiltrating the tribal society. Increasingly they are exposed to the foreign ideologies and values, which seem to exert an influence on their national and cultural identities. The tribal ancestral norms are being challenged by the Christian religious beliefs and traditions and so their culture is also in the process of making adjustments and will ultimately make the appropriate interchanges in the transcultural process that has been set in motion. The female protagonist in *Ekomo* encounters the use money for commercial exchange and this is something novel and surprising to her. Also, in order to cross borders between regional areas, they now have

to produce an identification card and this is also a new reality for them. Western medicinal practices are also becoming prominent in the society now, and produces a contrast with the traditional medicinal practices of the indigenous peoples.

Another African tribal culture that is on the cross roads of transition and change is that represented in in the narrative of *Shadows*. It also experiences an infiltration of foreign influences at every level of their social and political systems. There is a close confrontation between the Western ideologies and that of the African in many instances involves violent tensions. The protagonist undergoes a dual educational process as he progresses from childhood to adulthood in terms of religious beliefs and cultural practices. On the one hand he belongs to his tribal group and therefore he is educated to assume the role of a leader of that group. Then, he is also exposed to a European oriented education so that he will prepare for the priesthood according to the Catholic religious traditions. Thus, the male protagonist experiences a double identity, one which is dominant and the other which is reserved for the secondary space. This is the duality that he seems to be rebelling against as he decides to leave the priesthood and study an area which would be of greater relevance to the development of his society. Consequently, he decides to abandon the foreign country and return to his native land where he can participate actively in order to make a significant contribution to the development of the country. His decision in effect, reflects his assumption of nationalist ideologies and values which serve as an impetus for his desire to be reintegrated into his country, and to make a valuable contribution to the national identity and more sustainable and effective development.

RECOMMENDATIONS :

In this study of the representation of the black female voice I have examined the narratives of four Afro-Hispanic writers. They include two male writers, Donato Ndongo and Quince Duncan, and two female writers, Maria Nsue Angue and Ana Cristina Rossi. I undertook to study these his(s)ories and her(s)ories in order to determine whether the black female was rendered as silenced, and thus voiceless, or whether her voice was unsilenced, and thus, liberated in the discursive spaces.

On examination of the hi(s)ories of Ndongo and Duncan which narrate stories which deal invariably with the expression of an identity despite challenging forces and situations. In these narratives, I have found that no female character occupies the position of protagonist, or adequately shares in the protagonism of the novels alongside the male characters. While the male subjects take the lead as the protagonists of the action, as well as providing the narrative voice for the stories the female characters largely occupy a marginal space in the narratives. In *Tinieblas* the female voice has been situated at the margins of all the important critical actions in the novel. The novel *The Four Mirrors* also follows a similar pattern for the representation of the female although there is some difference. The black female subject does make a more palpable appearance in the narrative in various scenes, such as the incidence of the stereotyping of the black voice, as well as in the objectification of the female body. The novelist has allowed some space for the treatment of the female problem of exploitation and objectification, but this never occurs from her perspective. The male narrator relates her story of by speaking for and about her. The focus on issues such as the objectification and the exploitation of the

female body feature the male voices as they discuss whether this commodification of the female body is justified or not in the society. Therefore, it the male's voice that is being privileged rather than that of the female since the readers never learn about the female perspective on these issues. Even with regard to the protagonist's first wife, Lorena, the narrator also relates her story especially making use of linguistic structures which illustrated the narrator's control of the language, as well as his role as an interpreter of the messages that are being transmitted to the reader about her or on her behalf. Thus it is evident that the representation of the female voice in both narratives follow more traditional patterns of the representation of the female voice. Similarly, the female voice is excluded from the spaces considered as the main preserve of the male character in the narrative of the Western literary tradition. As such, the female voice does not share in the space at the center of the narrative where the conflicts, challenges and ultimately the resolutions and achievements occur. She is effectively excluded from this preserve and there is also no subsequent growth and expansion in her character. In these narratives for the most part, the female voice is unable to overcome the traditional voiceless-ness that she is usually accorded in the traditional literary representations.

As I examined the representations of the female voice rendered by the female novelists, Maria Nsue Angue and Ana Cristina Rossi in their her(s)ories, I observed that there were differences between their renditions of the female voice, and those of their male counterparts. Instead of featuring a marginalized female voice, that was excluded from the central spaces of critical action and the exploration and sometimes the resolution of conflicts, the opposite was depicted in their stories. Largely, the female characters are

seen to occupy a crucial and decisive position in terms of the delineation of the action of the plot, and the main themes of the discourse. Marie Umeh in her article, "Signifying the Griottes" observes that the Nigerian writer Flora Nwapa in her creation of a feminine perspective believes that it is critical to create female characters whose actions, "... catalyze events, and furthermore, the fates of other characters depend on those actions."(117) As such, the female character is not only given a privileged position in a hegemonic discourse where she achieves dominance according to patriarchal norms, however, it is a positioning which allows for and permits greater equality and sharing of the central spaces by both male and female voices. Nsue Angue demonstrates this alternative positioning of the female voice in Ekomo when she assigns to the female the role of narrator of the story of her partner, Ekomo while at the same time narrating her own story.

Through this narrative technique the voice of the female and consequently the identity of the female are not trapped in a place of silence and obscurity where the female voice normally resides. In the case of Rossi, her rendition of the female voice also seems to illustrate greater parity and equality between both male and female voices on all levels in the narrative space. They are both involved in the development of the plot of the story, and many times achieved a measure of parity in the experiences that they have to the extent that they mirror each other. Both male and female characters also seem to reflect similar weaknesses and strengths in their personalities to a great degree. He was not able to completely confide all his intimate secrets to her, and she as well was not able to effectively communicate her inner thoughts and feelings to him. Through what seems to

be a meta-textual narrative device that is utilized in the text, they are both able to relate their stories from their own perspectives to produce the whole picture. The introduction of Irene's cousin, Talita to the story leads to the creation of a listener within the text, and so as the male and female protagonists relate their stories to her, and the reader in turn is apprised of their experiences.

Ultimately, Talita herself takes on the role of narrator in the text as she narrates the story of Irene's difficult childhood experiences to Orlandus. She also relates to the reader the story of Orlandus's relationship with Leonor as she reads the letter that Leonor sent to him, in which she revealed that she had his son. Therefore, the utilization of this polyphony of narrative voices in this novel contributed to the expression of a series of voices and perspectives in the her(s) tory. It seems that the communicative interaction is presented as an ideal and value in this novel, and represents an important trope in the narrative. In effect, contrasting perspectives are unsilenced in the discourse so that the reader can obtain a clear and precise understanding of all the factors that are at work in the exploration of the themes in the novel.

This type of inclusiveness and un-silencing of voices, in the narratives of the female writers is not a feature which appears to be developed to a great degree in the hi(s)stories crafted by the male novelists. The male writers use of multiple persons in the narration of the action of their his(s)stories, while it does create a high level of orality in the text, however the female voices are not included in this type to treatment. She still remains as a silent, one-dimensional figure in their narratives.

The female writers therefore impart a vision of the male/female relations as demonstrating a greater tendency towards equality and complementarity between the genders than their male counterparts. They acknowledge the realities of the inequalities and injustices that black women encounter in the patriarchal marriage bond or male/female relations in the society as a whole. However, they also recognize that these conditions that oppress women are not absolutes, and that they have options for self-expression as they work towards achieving more equitable gender relations.

Through the parity that is demonstrated between the male and female voices in the narrative of the female writers, there also seem to be a call for greater equality between males and females beyond the text. Thus the fictional representations that appear in the her(s)stories seem to transcend the literary context and solely aesthetic representations. Thus, these representations of male/female relations which emphasize equality and complementarity of the genders could be utilized to transmit these values to the wider society. Hence, the literary representations may have a significant impact on promoting reform of the present patterns of silencing and voicelessness of the female subject in the Diaspora and Africa. As Flora Nwapa's work exemplifies that there is value in using art as an agent of social change and social justice for it can bring about the transformation of society's disparities and injustices in the values and perspectives that it transmits to readers.

In a quote by Amy Ashwood Garvey that refers to the black female's importance to society she states that,

A nation without great women is a nation frolicking in peril. Let us go forward and lift the degradations which rest on the Negro woman- God's most glorious gift to all civilizations.

In this quote the speaker articulates an uncompromising assertion about the value and significance of the black female influence in the society. She recognizes that the black female has a valuable contribution to make to the improvement of her life conditions, that of her family, her nation as well as the civilization of which she is a part. Therefore, in my view it is imperative that writers create works that feature the un-silencing and authentic expression of the black female voice in their art. Consequently, they will be able to focus on the injustices that women suffer in the society due to racism, sexism and other systemic injustices that marginalize and cause the black female to lead a subaltern existence. Therefore, the literary platform is well suited for the transmission and dissemination of positive ideas and values for the un-silencing of the female voice, and ultimately the empowerment of the female in the society at large.

This forum can effectively achieve these objectives if writers would integrate a revisionist stance as that advocated by the Nigerian writer, Flora Nwapa in their literary creations. In order to make this possible she asserts that the fiction can first of all be used to subvert the literary tradition of patriarchy. (Umeh, 117) In her view, instead of only male characters being charged with the role of "carriers" of the cultural identity, female characters can also be utilized. She also recommends that female characters be given an authentic identity- more individuality, personhood or power and resilience. (117-118) The critic Fajardo Calvo, also advances her vision with regards to this revisionist position for the representation of the female image when she asserts that,

While there is no adjustment in the female image that is basically flat, one dimensional, that the civilization has created and cultivated ... , in which the female herself has become an accomplice, you cannot aspire to any kind of liberation, (105) (Mientras no se altere la imagen feminine fundamentalmente plana, sin dimensiones, que ha creado la civilización y cultivado ... , en la cual la mujer misma se ha vuelto cómplice, no se puede aspirer a ningún tipo de liberación, ...)

Similar to the proponents of the creation of a feminine perspective Fajardo Calvo asserts that the change, “ ... has to originate from among women themselves. It is the oppressed that are obligated to fight for their own liberation, since no one willingly relinquishes their privileges.” (105) (... tendrá que originarse en las mujeres mismas. Es el oprimido el que está obligado a luchar por su liberación, puesto que nadie cede de buen grado sus privilegios.)

I also concur with these writers and critics who propose taking a revisionist position for the creation of literary works, specifically to reflect a feminist/womanist perspective. I believe that it can be an effective tool for reforming the literary tradition so that the black female subject instead of being rendered as silenced and voiceless can exhibit a greater degree of liberation in the literary discourse. In effect, I also believe that it is possible to reform the representation of the female subject through inversion of the negative characteristics and behaviors that women are usually associated with in order to reflect well-rounded and strong characters, that is “sheroes”, that is female heroic figures who through their strength, values and purposeful actions can inspire women and men alike. Since undeniably, the black female voice has a lot to offer the world, and therefore should not be silenced or marginalized by the repressive forces of patriarchy and racism whether in literature or in the social context. She should therefore be allowed the

freedom to express her truth, present her perspectives, ideas and opinions in both the private and the public spaces of our societies in the African Diaspora, as well as Africa.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate the view that literary creativity when linked to social activism, can have a profound effect on the empowerment of the black female voice, since as the critic Roberta Rosenberg indicates in *The Language of Power* that,

For women of color and their sisters, writing is an act of self-creation, an act of resistance and self-affirmation in a society which prefers passivity from its women and minorities. (Rosenberg, 230)

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I attended Teachers' College in Trinidad and Tobago where I began my career as an Elementary School teacher. I then received my Bachelor of Arts degree in Spanish and Latin American Studies from Kennesaw State University in the United States. I later continued my studies in Spanish at the graduate level, and obtained a Master of Arts degree from Bowling Green State University. The first year of which required a year of study at the University of Guadalajara in Mexico.

After graduation, I worked in several corporations in the Atlanta area where I utilized my Spanish language skills in the growing field of bilingual professionals. In 1999 I joined the foreign language faculty in the Department of World Languages at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia. I taught Spanish to undergraduate students, and co-directed the Spelman Summer Study Abroad Program in the Dominican Republic for several years. In 2001 I obtained a fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities to participate in an Institute held at the University of Missouri which had as its theme, "Teaching the African Diaspora through Romance Languages."

After garnering a wealth of valuable teaching experience at multiple levels, I returned to the University of Missouri as a doctoral student in 2007 to pursue a program of studies in Romance Languages. I was able to expand my research interests and scholarship to include Afro-Hispanic literature and culture. I have presented conference papers at a number of regional and international conferences, and have written articles on "The representation of the female voice of resistance in the literary representations of the

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