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### Into the Interior of Cultural Affiliations: Joan Anim Addo's Imoinda and the Creolization of Modernity

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## **Into the Interior of Cultural Affiliations: Joan Anim Addo's *Imoinda* and the Creolization of Modernity**

Mina Karavanta

### **Abstract**

If creolization was represented as the property of the postcolonial world, the sign of hyphenated cultures emerging from the slave plantation economy and the slave trade, it has become a concept that names the transformation of the dominant cultures from within the other “minor” cultures and histories with which they have been living. Creolization emerges as the urgency to develop new concepts and disseminate “contrapuntal” and “affiliated” histories (Said) in order not only to narrate the Caribbean diaspora but also the social, political, and historical development of a wider British culture. In this light, this essay examines *Imoinda: Or She Who Will Lose Her Name* as a text that mediates between cultures represented as oppositional and operates as a site where their discrepant histories are translated, written anew, and rethought. The text as a site of translation and affiliation of different aesthetics, genres and traditions represents a new poetics of the human whose history is now narrated by the formerly dispossessed and expropriated other. The history of imperialism and slavery narrated of imperialism and slavery is an old narration but its telling is new for it generates new ways of understanding this history in the present where constituencies and communities of different cultural practices, often speaking different languages while sharing the language(s) of the dominant culture, are called forth to live together and live well.

### **Behind the Looking Glass: Creolization and the Challenge of Intercultural Translation**

“Looking behind the looking glass” is a metaphor employed in our AHRC “Translating Cultures” research network for the screen of knowledges and practices that constitute what Sylvia Wynter calls the “autopoietic turn” (Wynter 2007), through which we interpret and constitute ourselves and others. I borrow her phrase to describe the intent and desire of our transnational network to critically engage the discomfort zone of Édouard Glissant’s “shared knowledge” (8) and histories across and beyond epistemological, cultural and discursive divisions that disseminate the binary between civilized and savage, metropolitan and peripheral, strong and weak cultures. My intention is to effect such a turn by deconstructing these binaries rooted in the history of imperialism and colonialism, in order to address the silencing of the histories of the constituencies and communities that have inherited the legacy of hybrid cultures, not only in the so-called postcolonial world but also in the metropolises of the West.<sup>[1]</sup> Our network’s address, we hope, is not limited to criticizing the discourses that have monolithically constructed the non-western constituency and its culture as the Other. We rather want to excavate narratives that write the history of slavery and colonialism with the intent of drawing on “shared knowledge” or what Edward Said calls the event of “the overlapping territories and intertwined histories” (Said 15). These narratives do not simply tell the story from the perspective of the Other, thus interpolating her or his voice in an already fixed text. They rather attempt to change the very text

by hybridizing it, drawing on the legacies of western and non-western traditions, discourses and aesthetics.

Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda: Or She Who Will Lose Her Name* (2003; 2008) has been such a paradigmatic text in our research network. A libretto that rewrites Aphra Behn's *Oroonoko* by focusing on Imoinda, Anim-Addo's text makes use of the genres of tragedy and opera, but also draws on African and Caribbean music and songs to narrate the history of African enslavement and dispossession with the discourses and aesthetics of "shared knowledges." This does not mean that her story of Imoinda is told in a way that brings the world together as a harmonious whole. Anim-Addo's text does not gloss over the history of violence and expropriation. Rather, it sings this history in a staccato rhythm that makes it indelible. Moreover, how does Anim-Addo fill in the gaps of forgetting? How can she repeat the songs on board of the slave ships and tell the story of Imoinda and the other women in their authentic voices? The archive of slavery is so rich in silences and omissions, compiled by the colonizers with the sole intention of making profit of the number of the colonized and enslaved and not the mission to record their voices. To fill in these gaps, Anim-Addo borrows elements from different cultures and traditions that were implicated in the history of slavery and uses the master's tools not to dismantle the master's house but to deconstruct its economy. She deconstructs its philosophy of being, metaphysics, and racism by building a new poetics of the human. I read *Imoinda* as an example of this new poetics of the human; her story as the story of the enslaved Other translates their disparate histories, traditions, and aesthetics into a site of "shared knowledge." This is an act of unmaking and remaking history as a site shared by different and oppositional cultures, knowledges, and traditions.

In the light of this practice that we call intercultural,<sup>[2]</sup> we are geared towards effecting an "autopoietic turn" attuned to "the empirical reality of our collective human agency" that can be critically revised by the "recognition" that what "we have made, we can unmake then, consciously now remake" (Wynter, 2007: 75). Some of our shared goals in our effort to build a community by employing an intercultural and translational method have been: firstly, to engage with texts that represent the aesthetic, political, historical and social affiliations between different cultures developing outside and within Eurocentric and metropolitan cultures and their discourses; secondly, to conceptualize cultural translation as the risky practice of transgressing the comfort zones of discourses and knowledges that have relied on a grammar of self and other, and engage creolizing practices that draw on the history of the Caribbean diaspora and its poetics of expropriation and "exappropriation" (Derrida, 1994: 112),<sup>[3]</sup> namely, the reconstruction of the political through the loss of what is proper to oneself, property of land, commodities and self alike; and finally, to ask the question of a creolizing and intercultural poetics of the human from the perspective of the exponential growth of worldly affiliations between cultures within cultures and of the potential formation of new collectivities and solidarities no longer answerable to the idea of the national community, as is the imagined community of a fraternity dependent on a structure of filiation and blood relations.

The practice of intercultural translation that attends to "other cultures within" does not simply focus on the concurrency of cultures within dominant cultures and their exchanges nor does it assume the existence of a comfort zone between them. Interculturality does not refer to a given, a multicultural society formed within a dominant culture. Instead, interculturality invokes the literary, social, historical and political processes by which new affiliations between the dominant or host culture and the non-dominant or migrant and diasporic cultures are forged in the age of a

transnationalism that facilitates processes of creolization and unsettles former cultural hegemonies. This is despite the persistence and exponential growth of economically, socially and politically uneven and unequal relations between different nations and communities. If multiculturalism has signified the discursive and socio-political processes of *métissage* by which the dominant metropolitan cultures on both sides of the North Atlantic reinvented themselves by co-opting, assimilating or at least trying to accommodate the “other cultures within,”<sup>[4]</sup> the past decade in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has witnessed the radical transformations of dominant cultures by the co-occurrence of interdiasporic, interethnic, multilingual and intercultural communities. Glissant best accounts for the different referent of creolization as a web of intercultural relations when he describes it as a “new and original dimension allowing each person to be there and elsewhere, rooted and open, lost in the mountains and free beneath the sea, in harmony and in errantry” (34). The radical and unanticipated occurrence of the new that results from the coexistence of rootedness and errantry signifies in his articulation the “idea of Relation” that moves beyond the politics of a mere “encounter” and their effect of the originating “shock” (34). Since for Glissant, “creolization carries along then into the adventure of multilingualism and into the terrible explosion of cultures” (34), rather than signifying the binary between dominant culture and the dependent minor cultures, intercultural poetics is the autopoetics of the new communities forged beyond the dream narrative and imaginary of the sovereign nation state as a homogeneous community linearly developed through history. It names the event of another post—post the national imaginary as the only vocabulary by which to form community and culture—and it attends to new imaginaries and communities engendered by the forces of expropriations and deterritorialization of transnational capitalism, even as these processes are mediated by the nation as a persistent and at times growing economic, social and political category.

By interculturality, transnationalism and the postnational imaginary, I do not wish to suggest the disappearance of the nation-state; the recent economic crisis has revealed the failure of the rhetoric of the end of the nation to attend to the regulating and mediating forces of the nation within transnational capitalism and flows. Rather than the waning of the nation as a social, economic and political unity, it also reveals the unevenness between nations as well as the transformation of the nation by the formation and development of other cultures within it and at its borders, and cultures that contest the boundaries of the national imaginary and project a differentiated temporality to the myth of the nation as a more or less homogenous community of a restricted linguistic, religious, and ethnic identity.<sup>[5]</sup> The event of new communities is steeped in violence, conflict and dissent; it is counter to the multicultural signifying a hybrid world accommodated within a dominant culture. Thus, the intercultural world is a world of conflict and affiliation, opposition and exchange, co-occurrence and strife. The co-occurrence of cultures that the prefix “multi-” signifies has been inscribed in inter-dependencies, inter-agencies, inter-changes causing not only coexistence but also conflict. Interculturality is the challenge that the contemporary world faces in the present, especially with regard to the nations whose histories are rooted in colonialism and imperialism--and are there any that are not? This is more than ever evident not only in the postcolonial and diasporic worlds but also in the metropolitan cultures of Europe. On both sides of the Atlantic, the demise of multiculturalism as a set of practices and institutions dominated by the dominant ideology and its strategies of assimilation and acculturation is followed by the accelerating growth of intercultural and interdiasporic communities. The terms “intercultural” and “interdiasporic” refer to communities that are creolized in ways no longer accountable to their colonial and postcolonial origins; despite the

historical, ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences between communities of immigrant origins, there rises a network of trans-relations between them that creates the event of an inter-diaspora. These individual but overlapping communities develop with the dominant culture in a contrapuntal way. I borrow this term from Said's analysis of the "contrapuntal" (Said, 1994: 332) that signifies the inevitable co-implication of oppositional histories and antiphonal development of culture within the history of imperialism from its beginnings to the present. The co-occurrence of different collectivities, communities, and their cultural practices is characteristic of the cultures of various urban centers and global cities across the world.

Creolization as an aesthetic and political process represents a hybrid world. To avoid emptying hybridity of the slave trade history, the slave plantation and racism, that is, of the history of colonization and capitalism, we must always relate it to imperialism and neo-imperialism. Rather than narrating creolization only in aesthetic terms by which to celebrate the hybrid world and forget the racist origins and neo-racist policies that continue to haunt hybrid, hyphenated and creole identities, we should also think of it as a concept-event.<sup>[6]</sup> Creolization speaks the history of expropriation and "exappropriation" (Derrida, 1994: 112) by which the loss (of community, of origin, of mother tongue) becomes the beginning of the new property, the new belonging, the new diasporic and trans-national living. The Atlantic is the historical and political site of this shared history of expropriation and exappropriation in what Boelhower calls a cartography drawn by the "circumatlantic flow of peoples, goods and cultures" (86), the African diaspora's "endless stories of woe but also of cultural resilience and creative survival" (87), and what Glissant casts as the Caribbean's "poetics of relation" against the "spatial elitism structure" of a Eurocentric reading of the Atlantic as the matrix of a modernity run by the West, that is, against the politics of exceptionalism that have made peoples "an exception" to throw them "into the abyss" (8). Displacing the center of modernity from the Western sovereign nation to the Atlantic flows and its contrapuntal histories, contemporary writings of its rich archives narrate the event of creolization, as the ongoing event that Enrique Dussel calls "trans-modernity" and refers to all the cultures that have been "actors in the history of the world system" counter to their having been "until now depreciated and undervalued" (223-4) by European modernity predominantly for their non-western, creole, hybrid, colonial and postcolonial origins. Creolization counters the myth of the national community as a homogeneous fraternity that shares the imaginary of a national community based on filiation<sup>[7]</sup> and names the event of an unevenly differentiated temporality lived by heterogeneous constituencies and communities engendering new discourses, new aesthetics, new "gnoseologies" emerging on the "borders" (Mignolo 22) of these communities, what Gloria Anzaldúa in her analysis of an active rather than a co-opted multiculturalism has called "a borderland."<sup>[8]</sup> Represented as the property of the postcolonial world, the sign of hyphenated cultures emerging from the slave plantation economy and the slave trade, creolization has become a concept that names the transformation of the dominant cultures from within the other "minor" cultures and histories with which they have been living. Creolization is emerging as the urgency to develop new concepts and disseminate "contrapuntal" and "affiliated" histories (Said, 1994), in order to narrate the Caribbean diaspora together with the social, political, and historical development of a wider British culture. The co-occurrence of discrepant but intertwined cultures and their histories, the emergence of new hybrid communities, the transformation of the dominant culture from within the network of dominant and minor cultures and histories, the development of "New Englishes,"<sup>[9]</sup> the rejuvenation and birth of

new aesthetics and discourses are a few symptoms of this new Britishness that, despite the hegemony of Englishness, develops through the growth of interculturality and creolization.

**Into the Interior of Cultural Affiliations: Joan Anim Addo's *Imoinda: Or She Who Will Lose Her Name* and the Unsilencing of the History of Modernity**

To examine creolization as the practice of intercultural translation in contemporary Anglophone literature from the Caribbean, I here draw on Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda: Or She Who Will Lose Her Name*, an intercultural libretto that counterwrites the history of transatlantic slavery and critically responds to Aphra Behn's charting of the imperial cartography in *Oroonoko* (1688).<sup>[10]</sup> Centered on Oroonoko, the Black Prince, and his story of loss, expropriation, resistance and fall, Behn's novel is the first text written by an English woman writer who, having journeyed to Surinam in 1663, ventures into the transatlantic history of what Eric Williams labels the "triangular trade" (52) in his inaugural study, *Capitalism and Slavery*. This trade stimulated the British economy by expropriating and dehumanizing the native and indigenous constituencies who were enslaved or forced into indentured labor. Behn gives this history of the capitalist economy of slavery an anthropomorphic center by narrating the physical, ontological and political afflictions of Oroonoko, a gallant African prince from "Coramantien" (Behn 78), the west coast of Africa where the Europeans "found the most advantageous trading" (78) for slaves. Of a distinct "native beauty so transcending all those of his gloomy race, that he struck an awe and reverence" (87), Oroonoko is thus justified to be the subject matter of a text that juxtaposes his humanity with the barbarity and violence of the slave trade. Behn's Europeanized and thereby humanized hero, who "learned so much humanity" (79) from a "Frenchman of wit and learning" (80) and developed his noble spirit by engaging the Englishmen and Spaniards "with whom he traded afterwards for slaves" (80), is sold as a slave after the king discovers his betrothal with Imoinda he has chosen as one of his concubines. Behn's "seventeenth-century theme of aristocracy" determines the Other according to "class, breeding, and inherent nobility, which alone oppose the shoddy commercialization and commodification of values and feelings she saw around her in London" (Todd 19) and, hence, focuses on the subject matter of heroic values and ethics that Oroonoko best exemplifies against the corrupted Europeans.<sup>[11]</sup> This renders Imoinda and the other colonized subjects in Behn's text the receptacles of Oroonoko's distinguished honor and the silenced partners in his acts of resistance. Always protected by his honor and exceptional humanity, Imoinda is a bystander who remains honorable and unmolested by the afflictions of slavery, rape and torture. The child she bears is his--Behn's text keeps Imoinda's purity intact--and she willingly sacrifices herself at the end of the text, when Oroonoko kills his wife and child to save them from ending their lives in slavery after his fight fails to free them and the other slaves he has led away from the plantation. Throughout Behn's text, Imoinda remains a lagoon that engulfs Oroonoko's insistence on freedom and honor and reflects his unbending will to resist slavery and his flourishing gallantry in his fight for their freedom.

Anim-Addo's text fills this lagoon with a presence that unsettles the boundaries that fix Imoinda to being a mere shadow of Oroonoko's heroism; she turns to Imoinda to give her the voice and agency that she lacks in Behn's text. Rather than revise Behn's *Oroonoko* by supplementing the silence with a voice, Anim-Addo's *Imoinda* departs from that silence to search "for Imoinda as a subject, a speaking subject" and discover the "meanings of Atlantic slavery [that] are crucial for African-heritage women whose colonial education misrepresented and distorted the personal impact of being heir to a slave history" (Anim-Addo, 2003: 76). Her search does not rewrite Behn's representation of the history of



slavery but rather counterwrites that representation by writing the gendered subaltern's slave history. The African woman whose body bears the offspring of rape and creates a community of perseverance by enduring the "physical" and "sexual" mastery (Anim-Addo, 2003: 76) of the whip becomes the subject matter of Anim-Addo's text. The different emphases of Anim-Addo's text on the black women who "risked their flesh to maximize the survival possibilities of their children" (Anim-Addo, 2003: 76) and the new community they formed through their struggle to remember what "the whip can't undo" (Anim-Addo, 2008: 64) give it a different direction from the one Behn's text necessarily takes. This way they write the history of creolization as both a history of dehumanization and expropriation and a history of diaspora making in the Caribbean. As Giovanna Covi aptly remarks in her seminal essay that comparatively examines *Oroonoko* and *Imoinda*, Behn's historical constrictions--the first woman writer of the first novel about colonialism and imperialism with a faith in the aristocratic values--account for the reason her text cannot clearly critique the institution of slavery but rather focuses on "Astrea's profound indignation ... at the inconsiderate and maliciously deceitful management of the slavery system in Surinam; her moral condemnation is shouted loudly and expressed dramatically in the form of a love compelled by the circumstances to turn into murder and tragically end in death" (87). But in the "folds and silences of Behn's censure," Anim-Addo "found a whole people" (87); in the interstices of the plantation plots, her text discovers the work that the slaves do, especially the work performed by the female slaves whose bodies are planted to bear the new plantation slaves, in order not only to endure the conditions of their own dehumanization but also to rehumanize themselves under these conditions. In Wynter's words,

the Caribbean islands constitute the classic plantation area...the Caribbean islands, were "planted" with peoples not in order to form societies, but in order to carry on plantations ... Yet it was to be at the locus of the plantation, and in resistance to the dehumanization imposed on him by the market impressive of capitalism, that the black would rehumanize himself as a native of the Caribbean. (in Bogues xi-xii) <sup>[12]</sup>

Shifting the attention from the individual heroic act emphasized in Behn's text to the collective act of resistance, Anim-Addo's libretto follows the development of *Imoinda*, her servant, *Esteizme* and a chorus of women who in the process of their expropriation form new relations of solidarity under the inhuman circumstances of their enslavement. She records the work that their new bond generates, the work of making a community of the future in the unimaginable conditions of the present. Mistress *Imoinda* of Act One that represents the life in Old Guinea, the life before slavery, becomes *Imoinda* in Act Two, a woman who is enslaved and raped like her fellow women, with whom she forges a sisterhood out of pain. This transformation depicts the slaves' lives on the plantation and follows the Middle Passage, the theme of Act Three, and represents the economic and ontological expropriation, the moral degradation and the dishonoring of the slaves. The question of honor, which remains bound to the aristocratic and heroic values of the seventeenth century in Behn's text, is subverted in *Imoinda* in several ways. First of all, *Imoinda* and *Oroonoko* lose their royal status and, therefore, their honor as soon as they are sold away to the slave trader at the request of the Chief who thus claims "retribution" for his own "honor" (52). The African community's honor system is thus tied to a domestic system of slavery and dependency of the less economically autonomous subjects on the more powerful leaders. As Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death*, the monumental study of the different histories and institutions of slavery from the ancient times to the present, explains, "[i]n the struggle for prestige, what was critical in all African societies was the number of dependents an ambitious man could acquire" (83) and the institution of slavery was the "third important means" by

which one could “accumulate dependents” (83). By exposing the complicity of the African communities with the white slave trade and their complex social structures that already implicated their societies in the institution of slavery, Imoinda exposes such history of complicity and draws on it to demonstrate how the ethical and moral code of the African subjects, albeit transformed by the condition of slavery, persists even under the most dehumanizing conditions.

Having violently been deprived of their royal status, Imoinda and Oroonoko are forced to succumb to the dishonoring force of the whip on board of *The Greenwich*, the slave ship that carries them to the “New Land” (Act Two, Scene 1, 55-68). Humiliated by the crew and beaten until his back becomes “a drum skin” echoing the sting of the whip, Oroonoko becomes one of the multitude of pain, no longer Behn’s distinguished hero. On board of the slave ship that in Anim-Addo’s text is represented as a “nightmare canoe” (62) and not as the trap of the enchanting modernity of the European captain whose “globes and maps, and mathematical discourses and instruments” (Behn 101) cajole Oroonoko and his men to board the slaver with their consent, Imoinda, Oroonoko, but also Esteizme, and the other men and women, former servants and maids, all become numbers as echoed in the chorus song, “Number Eighty Three”:

I am number eighty three. Best to forget. Raped again yesterday. Mouth stuffed with rope. (Spits) Tossed and dashed and tossed again, Some new terror strikes the nightmare canoe. (Sounds of the ship) Come! Don’t let those tears fall inside of you. We have each other for now and that’s true. (62)

To their cry of agony and pain on board of the “nightmare canoe” that steals their dreams--“Dreams come cheap in this nightmare canoe” (62)--and debilitates their spirits--“nothing we can do” (62)—Imoinda’s former servant, Esteizme, becomes the voice of dissent that infuses the courage to invent and practice resistance into the others, “No! Always, there is something we can do” (62). In Anim-Addo’s text, the hero is no longer Oroonoko, and not even only Imoinda. It is the text by the new collectivity of resistance formed by the recognition that their bondage secures the only strategy of survival they can rely on, their bond, their having each other which will keep their memories of who they are alive, a memory that will keep their faith in their dignity and honor as human beings alive:

IMOINDA:  
To be sure even a nightmare canoe  
Must wash us up some place, some day. Courage!  
And should anyone gain the chance, send word  
To the children, and the menfold, our brothers.  
ESTEIZME:  
Yes. Always, there is something we can do.  
Remember and this will see us through. (63)

This is the beginning of a process of resistance that the libretto represents as the forgotten history of the multitudes of slaves who kept their dignity and developed a new code of honor inscribed in their sense of collectivity and dependency on each other. Esteizme and the other women become a collective body: together they perform the heroic act of maintaining their human capacity to care for each other under the most dehumanizing conditions and form a community of perseverance through suffering thus propelling their present of slavery into the future of the Diaspora. The coming of the future later materialized with the growth of the communities of the Caribbean peoples is alluded to by Imoinda’s baby daughter, not the offspring of Oroonoko as in Behn’s text, but the mother’s child of rape and torture. Yet, for this new collectivity, the child manifests the slaves’ persevering and



“incredible dignity” (Patterson 100). As Patterson remarks, “one of the most remarkable features of slavery” is the “slave’s yearning for dignity” (101) counter to the view that the slave “internalized the degraded conception of him held by the master; or that his person was necessarily degraded by his degraded condition” (100). Imoinda counterwrites this view through a dramatic action that represents how the slaves and especially the women, whose bodies bore the impact of the slave plantation economy by being forced to reproduce it and man it with more slaves. They sustained and even nurtured a different concept of humanity and the human from that upheld by the Europeans, whose enlightenment ideals and discourses on the human failed to produce anything else but the contradiction that symptomatically prevails in Behn’s text. The European humanistic ideals and scientific discourses that lure Behn’s Oroonoko to have faith and emulate a single civilization paradigm, the European colonizers’ dehumanizing and humiliating practices that lead to the tearing apart of Oroonoko’s body in the last scene of his torture. Behn does not fail to depict this scene in an image that is bas-relief like (139-140). Despite the vehement disapprobation of Behn’s text against the dehumanizing practices of the colonizers, “Behn makes no effort to resolve the contradiction that Oroonoko should have acquired his virtues from his contact with Europeans even though the Europeans we meet in the story seem hardly worthy of admiration, displaying instead the baseness and deceit whereby the captain beguiles him into captivity” (Torres-Saillant 112).

Instead, Anim-Addo’s *Imoinda* counterwrites this contradiction and with it the humanist paradox of colonial modernity, with its European dehumanizing practices performed in the name of the enlightenment of the colonized. By staging the history of slavery as the history of the human whose resistant ruses and decolonizing practices will generate a new understanding of being and community and produce new knowledges about freedom, democracy and equality coming from the world of the colonized, Imoinda takes the form of a community built by Imoinda with the other slave women, that secures and nurtures the promise of a diasporic community in the future. This community is not empty of the past, nor is it empty of meaning. Rather, it comes to presence (it is a presence-ing, an open process of community formation) only through the new conditions on the slave plantation forcing connections of domination and control, but also affiliations and contact zones between different constituencies, cultures and traditions. Within the “enclosed space” (Glissant 64) of the slave plantation, different histories “converged” (63) and rendered its boundaries structurally weak (75). In “Closed Space, Open Word,” Glissant explores the contradictions of the space of the slave plantation as a space both closed and open, seemingly autonomous but economically dependent on a world of connections, dominated by the culture and language of the colonizers, yet multilingual and relational:

Let us, nonetheless, consult these ruins with their uncertain evidence, their extremely fragile monuments, their frequently incomplete, obliterated, or ambiguous archives. You can guess already what we are to discover: that the Plantation is one of the focal points for the development of present-day modes of Relation. Within this universe of domination and oppression, of silent or professed dehumanization, forms of humanity stubbornly persisted. In this outmoded spot, on the margins of every dynamic, the tendencies of our modernity begin to be detectable. (65)

This contradiction of the perseverance of humanity within “the universe...of silent or professed dehumanization” is staged in the last act of *Imoinda*, where the death of Oroonoko is followed by the birth of Imoinda’s child—not his own for, as Imoinda says, “How could it be his?” (78), a retort to Behn’s text that keeps Imoinda’s purity protected from rape to thus secure Oroonoko’s honor. Before

the decision to meet Oroonoko's fate or live a life that for Imoinda is a life "without choice" (91), Imoinda is embraced by Esteizme and the other women to choose life and keep the baby:

IMOINDA:  
What life is this without choice? Birth here?  
To a pikin I would not have  
except I had been forced. What life is this?  
I will not have a pikin in whose face  
I'll see my own humiliation  
every day. It is the massa's.  
Let him scrape it from the blood fed soil.  
WOMAN:  
(MUSIC--"Her Back a Bridge")  
In order to cross the river  
We first must build the bridge. (91-92)

Imoinda and the women who surround her, a chorus of supporting and acting agents, hold Imoinda's baby daughter, born under slavery, the offspring of rape and torture, as the promise of the future delivered in the present. In the closing lines of the libretto, they baptize this new daughter of their expropriation and the future mother of the diaspora in the "waters of five rivers" (95), Volta, Nile, Gambia, Niger and Congo. A "baby charged not to forget" (95), this new life redirects their memory, the memory of Africa as their motherland, to the future, the Caribbean diaspora. The performance of the baptism ritual on the slave plantation, a poetic drawing of an intercultural cartography of a world violently connected in unevenness as communities and peoples have been wrenched from their lands and homes, signifies these women's liminal position. However, it is within this liminality that they manifest themselves and the community they form; they not only create a memory of the lost origin through the ritual, but also make the history of their community that Imoinda's daughter bears as the promise of the future in this other world called the western world, which is also being transformed by their liminal and yet persevering presence. This baby represents "bridges" to the past and the future, and secures the passage from expropriation to "exappropriation" (Derrida 112), that is, to repossessing, reclaiming, reconfiguring the world at hand from within the history of deracination and colonization. The baby also foregrounds the long and arduous resistance of black women who, "risked their flesh to maximize the survival possibilities of their offspring" (Anim-Addo, 2003: 76), profoundly conscious of the importance of this "new generation" that "represented the emergent nation, the Caribbean nation" (76).

### **Counterwriting Modernity, Writing an Intercultural Opera**

Written in the form of a libretto and using the structures of the genre of tragedy, Imoinda conjures the representational frame of Western narratives and their origins in the Greco-Roman tradition. Indeed, both the Italian opera and the tragic elements are combined to narrate an-other history, the history of the gendered and racialized subject who becomes expropriated from her world to mother the diaspora to come, the history of the gendered subaltern whose story is left unrepresented, an archival detail, in the dominant discourses of the western and the postcolonial nations—after all as a "she," she is only matter to the nation, a body to be torn, reshaped, violated, conquered—the history of the black woman slave as a historical actor, a figure of resistance and a community maker. She is also the actor who mothers and enables the growth of the Caribbean diaspora. The reconstellation of these predominantly western genres in what has been represented as the history of the Other is not a simple

act of appropriation of western aesthetics. The text becomes a site of affiliation and contrapuntality between the oppositional histories it conjures in order to narrate them concurrently rather than only through their binary oppositions. As a tragic subject of coloniality, Imoinda's specter, immanent in the history of slavery that haunts Western imperialism and in the diaspora she founds with her daughter, invokes the long history of women as the tragic subjects of resistance. For instance, Imoinda is affiliated with the hybridizing and postcolonial practices of Femi Ọsófisan's *Tègònńi*, an African Antigone (1999) that, in rewriting Sophocles's tragedy, recasts the tragic subject of Antigone who contests the law of the state in the name of the larger context of the polis and its unaccountable constituencies on the colonial stage, thus affiliating the classical, the colonial and the postcolonial worlds through the affinity ties that different, discrepant and disjunctive histories of women's struggles and resistance share. As a counterwriting of the history of a constituency who resists her ontological and political depravity and dares imagine a world of justice and democracy beyond that—the symbolic significance of “building bridges” in the text—Imoinda invokes and becomes affiliated with other western and postcolonial texts from which the figurations of impossible resistance emerge.

This structure of affiliation and affective relations with other texts, histories, and traditions is not only textual; it symptomatically reveals the aesthetic, political and historical connections that have always formed the pre-colonial world as well as colonial modernity. The origins of the West in the classical world, often represented as its ideological alibi for the cultivation and domestication of those cultures without a similar tradition, are after all, origins rooted in the Mediterranean basin, the seafaring of cultures in exchange, opposition, competition. Africa as the dark continent is at the center of this exchange as much as the Greeks, the Phoenicians, and later on, the Romans. Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* has amply demonstrated this, despite the criticism that it has received for unsettling the monocultural reading of these origins. Imoinda symptomatically invokes this history when the women call on the five rivers of Africa and their rich multicultural histories and traditions of Mediterranean origins. Hence, the text does not only write the history of the Black Atlantic from the perspective of the diaspora; it also counterwrites the idea of the origin of civilization and cultures as a monocultural and predominantly white, Christian, and western origin. As Imoinda's specter from Caribbean coloniality connects the history of western imperialism with the history of opera and tragedy, it does not simply affiliate Imoinda's story with British imperialism but also with its roots in the classical world of tragedy and opera which emerge from a world that was as intercultural and heterogeneous as the postcolonial and global world in which we now live. The hybrid structure of the text thus counterwrites the history of origin as a history of diaspora, creolization and interculturality that prevail in the global world in which we live, despite the ongoing presence of nationalisms, their myths and lived political realities, and can contribute to the engendering of a postnational imaginary that attends to the urgent call for a new democracy no longer contained in the myth of homogeneous communities.

The telling of the story of Imoinda does not only contribute to the “palimpsestic narrative of imperialism” (Spivak 249); it also translates the history of a “signifying minority” (Anim-Addo 2009: 124) into a narrative that reconfigures the pivotal events of this history and the transformations they effect: expropriation engenders exappropriation, loss engenders survival, deracination engenders community making.<sup>[13]</sup> Through this process of translation, the history of a “signifying minority” signifies the connected, albeit discrepant, affiliated, albeit uneven, histories of constituencies and their collectivities. This term minority signifies the singular story of the constituency made an exception by

the processes of exceptionalism, and concurrently writes the history of the past, namely, the history of the community from which this constituency was wrenched and of which she was deprived, and the history of the present, the making of a diasporic, intercultural community. Anim-Addo's term "signifying minority" draws on Sylvia Wynter's 1990 essay, "On Disenchanted Discourse: 'Minority' Literary Criticism and Beyond" and her analysis of the responsibility of the "minority" critic to disenchant rather than affirm the West as the authentic, unique source of myth, history and discourse. By "minority discourse" Wynter does not refer to yet "another voice in the present" but rather to the event of a new knowledge, a new gnoseology, that "should bring closure to a conversation which is now as conceptually and imaginatively exhausted in our post atomic, post bio-technological order of reality" (233). As a "signifying minority" narrative, Imoinda counters the "systemic figure of man" (Wynter 238) with the "discourse of the category of Ontological Other" (238) and stages the history of the black woman as the history of the human as Other who exappropriates, to follow Derrida here again, a diasporic world and new communities thus performing imaginative acts and generating intellectual practices beyond the reach of the discourses and epistemologies accountable to the "figure of man," the white, christian and European man of colonial modernity. As a "palimpsestic narrative of imperialism," it de-subjugates "a whole set of knowledges" that have been "disqualified as naive knowledges...beneath the required level of cognition or scientifically" (Spivak 249).

Anim-Addo's intercultural libretto counterwrites modernity as the unevenly shared history of the revolution of the multitudes of the dispossessed, the poor, the unconstituted represented by those humans whose very humanity was denied, the enslaved Africans and their descendants. By propelling their histories of revolution and resistance to the forefront, it does not simply enrich our understanding of the history of modernity by supplementing it with the forgotten narratives of the revolutions of those who were for centuries misrepresented as ontologically inferior, depraved and hence incapable of "envision[ing] freedom--let alone formulat[ing] strategies for gaining and securing such freedom" (Trouillot 73); it rather causes an epistemological break in the historiographical narrative of modernity itself by counterwriting it as a culturally hybrid narrative not owned by the subject that the Enlightenment discourses construct as what Sylvia Wynter calls the "overrepresented Man" (Wynter 2003) who set the measure of the humanity of his others. Imoinda narrates the impossible task of its characters' envisioning another ontology and another humanity even as they are being expropriated from the right to one. It thus creolizes the ontological and the political counter to the hegemonic discourses of the West that consolidate the idea of one man, one ontology, one culture taking over the whole of humanity and speaking for it as if it were indeed one.

Imoinda effects this creolization of the ontological and the political through a creole aesthetic that translates tragedy from a predominantly western genre rooted in classical antiquity and developed by Shakespeare as its spokesman in modernity into an intercultural genre used to affiliate these oppositional histories and traditions by narrating and staging the histories which the west holds in the standing reserve of sanctioned ignorance. The representation of the tragic action of the hero as a collective act; and the dramatization of the figure of the specter, as the constituency of the forgotten but not erased history, are two key elements of the creolizing aesthetics and politics that this text develops to rewrite the history of Caribbean revolution and resistance as an intercultural history, whose center is not the ideological property and exclusive right of a single culture and its heritage.

Imoinda also effects this creolization in another important way. Written in the form of an intercultural libretto, the text invites its constant translation and simultaneously performs the

transculturation of the genres of tragedy and opera. In other words, the text as a libretto is an invitation to the musical tradition and operatic heritage of the host culture. Its publication in Trento and London, and its performances in London, Rochester, NY and then again in London, have occasioned the writing and performance of a different musical text that hybridizes the local musical traditions of its various host cultures and their investment or attachment to colonial modernity through the wedding of the baroque and renaissance with the African elements: the oboes and the flutes counterpoint the percussion ensembles and drums in a contrapuntal dance of histories, cultures, aesthetics, and texts to conjure Said's vocabulary here. Because of its subject matter, giving birth rather than choosing death, and hence enabling the potentiality of a community to come, the communities of the Caribbean diaspora, the creole and intercultural communities of the future, Imoinda challenges the "Western concepts of mortality, as manifested historically in opera" and transforms the way the "modern audiences respond to witnessing these concepts on stage" (Hutcheon & Hutcheon, 2, *Opera: Or the Art of Dying*). By deriving its force from the opera's power to "bring together dramatic narrative, staged performance, a literary text, significant subject matter (in the case of Imoinda not only death, as Hutcheon suggests, but also birth), and complex music in a particularly forceful way" (Hutcheon & Hutcheon 7), Imoinda performs an "excess" not only of "effect" but of "affect": its audience<sup>[14]</sup> is challenged to "share knowledges" from across the scene of the disaster, the Black Atlantic, with those constituencies that in western texts and librettos often occupied the place of what Catherine Clement calls "madmen, negroes and jesters" (119). Imoinda interrupts that space in western operas and texts that is occupied by the "different and the uneasy...[who] across centuries and histories, across worlds and seas, they are the heirs to forgotten gods, as the pagan witches in the Christian world" (119). Here, Clement has Parsifal, Othello, Rigoletto and Falstaff in mind, as the renegades and castaways that challenge the symbolic structure of the opera by representing the "different," the "uneasy," the "forgotten."

Imoinda adds the black woman from the Caribbean diaspora to the list by representing her voice in a careful and responsible way. The ellipses and the silences accompany the antiphonal structure of the libretto that stage the exchange of the character, particularly the women slaves, at the center of the narrative. Attentive to the challenges of a "responsible telling" (Kodat 161) that carefully avoids the dangerous simplifications and the exaggerations of a melodrama, Anim-Addo's libretto "desegregates the grand opera repertoire" (Kodat 169) and contributes to what Kodat, in her critique of Richard Danielpour and Toni Morrison's Margaret Garner, calls a "reimagining" of

the entire treacherously seductive nineteenth-century structure underlying grand opera itself: not only its appropriateness as a vehicle for contemporary representations of certain kinds of historical narrative, but also the strongly racialized and only occasionally questioned notions of verisimilitude and authenticity that structure opera productions even to this day. (169)

Moreover, her libretto invites the polyphony of the musical traditions of Europe, Africa and the Caribbean in order not only to appropriate the western genre of the opera to stage this story and its history before its wide audience but also to return to the roots of the opera and the tradition of tragedy on which her libretto draws that are to be found in the polis that meets in these two genres and their public character its need to converse with itself. On the stage of the opera and the tragedy, the polis confronts the history that haunts it and asks the impossible questions of the displacement, expropriation and reinventing of community and belonging in the name of the constituencies it has

named as its others, facing their ontological and political complexity that counters their misrepresentation as the deprived others.

By displacing the focus from European civilisation and its commodity culture as the centre of the colonising enterprise in the Americas to histories of resistance, insurgency and revolution that reconfigure our understanding of modernity and the human, *Imoinda* contributes to the urgent task of reinventing democracy and community in the present. Its intercultural and translation politics force its readers and audience to bear witness to the making of community out of its ruins and the birth of another imaginary, another collectivity, another politics, to witness, in other words, the writing of other histories, the dissemination of new aesthetics, the excavation of the dormant archives of modernity and the making of new narratives. Resisting the politics of a *lieto fine* (happy ending)--after all, *Imoinda*, *Esteizme* and the other women remain enslaved on the plantation---and yet ending with birth, life and the potentiality of another bios, this libretto becomes a testimony from the past that secures the survival of the potentiality of the future, “opening to what is coming, that is, to the event that cannot be waited as such ... to the event as the foreigner itself, to her or to him for whom one must leave an empty place” (Derrida, 1994: 82). This way, we can imagine the communities yet to come, and I take this imagining to be the urgent call for a revisionary formulation of the political in the present.

Anim-Addo’s text reconstellates tragedy in a larger secular and intercultural tradition that emerges from the affiliation of cultures and narratives that have been represented as oppositional and incommensurable. By translating the traditions and narratives of colonial modernity into an intercultural narrative, it rewrites its history and develops the genre of tragedy into a structure of creole affiliations and intercultural relations. My essay reads *Imoinda* as a modern Caribbean tragedy that locates the tragic subject of the enslaved woman in the histories of resistance and insurgency of the multitudes of the oppressed in the colonies thus counterwriting tragedy as the genre of revolution. It moves into the interior of modernity as the beginning of the violent expropriation of humans and their communities from Africa by the European monarchies and concurrent making of new communities on the slave plantations and, through the insurgency and revolutionary politics, beyond them. It displaces the focus from European civilisation and its commodity culture as the centre of the colonising enterprise in the Americas to histories of resistance, insurgency and revolution that reconfigure our understanding of modernity and the human, which contributes to the urgent task of reinventing democracy and community in our postcolonial present. This reinvention implies the drawing of other imaginaries, the writing of other histories, the dissemination of new aesthetics, the excavation of dormant archives of modernity and the making of new narratives. This is realised in *Imoinda* so that we can imagine the communities yet to come from “behind the looking glass” and move into the interior of cultural affiliations to inhabit the discomfort zones of new knowledges, and new relations, even as a much-needed new poetics of the world is invented.

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<sup>[1]</sup> These binaries perpetuate the violence of the “rigidly binomial opposition of ‘ours’ and ‘theirs’, with the former always encroaching upon the latter” (Said 1979: 227). Edward Said’s critique of orientalism has exhaustively represented a wide set of binaries that have cut across the human to categorize and hierarchize levels of humanity that expropriate very many humans from the condition of humanity.



[2] To specify my use of the concept of interculturality, I draw on *Interculturality and Gender*, a collection of essays that Joan Anim-Addo, Giovanna Covi and I co-edited as part of the work of ReSisters in Travelling Concepts, a transnational and interdisciplinary group formed within ATHENA, a European Thematic Network (2000-2008). *Interculturality and Gender* explores the social, political, social and literary dimensions of interculturality within Europe and across the connections and affiliations between the different cultures that make up Europe from the differentiating perspective of gender that reflects an inflection of differences across the structures of class, race, religious, ethnicity, language and discipline.

[3] In “Apparition of the Inapparent,” (Specters of Marx) Derrida explores the “capital contradiction” (191) that mobilizes and hence transforms the being of commodities at the same time that it appears to be framing things, human beings and their relations within the boundaries of the process of commodification. What Derrida calls the “economy of the proper” (1992, 81) binds “appropriation, expropriation and exappropriation” (81) in a process that is not linear but rather diffusive and diffractive. In the case of slavery and the Caribbean diaspora, Derrida’s analysis of the “economy of the proper” and his insistence on the incalculable resources of the event of “exappropriation” generated by the haunting of the event of expropriation and loss and constituting the The ontological, economic and political expropriation of slaves does not result in a life of ontological deprivation but in precisely what Glissant calls the “unforeseeable consequences” of creolization (34).

[4] See Charles Stewart “Syncretism and Its Synonyms: Reflections on Cultural Mixture” for a recent historicization of the terms transculturation and acculturation and the latter’s attachment to the multicultural discourses that have been disseminated since the 1960’s in the US.

[5] In *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, Shalini Puri aptly argues against identifying the postnational with the rhetoric of the end of the nation that is completely blind to the contemporary political scene where the nation-state is manifested as the omnipresent economic, political and social category. In my use of the postnational, I mean the project of formulating an unevenly shared imaginary of contrapuntal cultural origins to attend to the transformation of the national community by the emergence of new communities in the nation no longer located in a cultural insularity but rather growing out of a long-lasting co-occurrence that has generated new affiliations between them.

[6] Here I draw on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s “What is a Concept?” and their definition of the concept not as the thing that names but as an “incorporeal” coordinate of “heterogeneous components” that “speaks the event, not the essence of the thing,” the “event of the Other” (21). For Deleuze and Guattari, this “Other” signifies not only difference but the multiplicity of heterogeneity that cannot be contained in a discourse, no matter how powerful its hegemony is. The “event of the Other” unsettles, ruptures, and defers the centers of discursive fields. Creolization can be thought as such an event of displacement, deferral, and transformation of knowledges, discourses, aesthetics and politics, what Edouard Glissant calls “errantry” and “diffraction” (see *Poetics of Relation*, 11-35).

[7] See Benedict Anderson’s analysis of the nation in *Imagined Communities*.

[8] In “Penser La Creolité,” Maryse Condé critiques the articulation of the concept and its politics by “the Martinican writers Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant and the linguist Jean Bernabé in their 1989 manifesto “Éloge de la Créolité,” [In Praise of Creoleness]” (Dobie 149) to demonstrate how their rhetoric is still entrapped in a binary between France and the Caribbean that further affirms rather than deconstructs the metropolis-periphery or empire-colony binary. To deconstruct this binary structure that affirms the Empire as the center against which the Caribbean needs to measure up to celebrate its difference, Glissant hence theorizes the concept of creolization as the event of deferred mobility that “carries along into the adventure of multilingualism and into the incredible explosion of cultures” by alerting his readers to the rootedness of this explosion in the “consensual, not imposed, sharing” of cultures. He thus transforms the concept by relating to the event of affiliations and relations born out of imperialism and delimiting it from the antagonism of binaries.

[9] See “New Englishes,” a special issue of the *European Journal of English Studies*, co-edited by Bessie Dendrinos, Mina Karavanta and Bessie Mitsikopoulou.

[10] In “The Injunctions of the specter of slavery: affective memory and the counterwriting of community,” I develop my reading of Imoinda as a counterwriting that constitutes a beginning in the archive of transatlantic history. By drawing on Edward Said’s term “beginning” and Radhakrishnan’s analysis of it, I explain how Anim-Addo’s text enriches but also unsettles the archive of transatlantic history by giving voice to the silenced gendered subalterns, the African women who were deracinated and thrust into the colonies, and by recording the history of their own making, knowledges and practices that contribute to the creation of the Diaspora.

[11] See Velissariou (2003c) for an interesting analysis of the radical politics of Behn in conjunction with Anim-Addo’s rewriting of Behn’s text in *Imoinda*.

[12] This important excerpt is from *The Native*, Wynter's unpublished manuscript that is in Anthony Bogues' possession, as the author informs us in his introduction to the revised edition of Sylvia Wynter's *The Hills of Hebron*.

[13] See also Shirley Toland Dix's analysis of Wynter in "The Hills of Hebron: Sylvia Wynter's Disruption of the Narrative of the Nation" and Anim-Addo's analysis of Wynter in *Touching the Body*.

[14] Their analysis of audience and of the openness of the libretto as a text that can be transformed by each production is very pertinent here: "A word is needed to explain what we mean by the 'audience.' Do we mean real people watching a particular production? The answer is: not really. [...] In other words, each time even the same production is staged, the audience members will see something different, and, of course, they will respond individually in different ways. The variety of possible responses and interpretations is immense. For this reason, the 'audience' here is, in a way, a virtual one. Throughout our own discussion, however, we will be using what Kier Elam calls the 'dramatic texts' of the operas, that is, the libretto and the score, and not the 'performance texts' of particular productions. We acknowledge that scores and librettos are only relatively fixed texts, for new scholarly work produces new editions with some frequency. Yet they are still the shared raw materials, if you like, with which a production team (a second group of artist-interpreters) then works: directors, conductors, designers, singers, musicians, and so on. A specific production is, therefore, the collective interpretation of a second group of artists, but it remains only one possible reading of the dramatic texts. And audience members will, in turn, interpret that reading in their own multiple ways" (Hutcheon and Hutcheon 13-14).

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