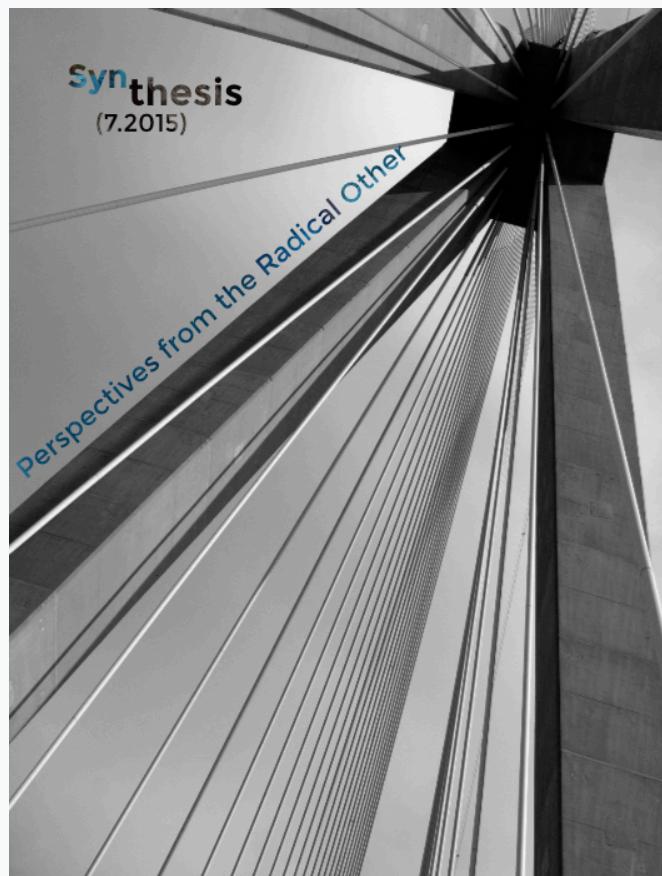


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**Creolizing Cultures and Kinship: Then and There,  
Now and Here**

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# Creolizing Cultures and Kinship: Then and There, Now and Here

Giovanna Covi

## Abstract

This paper considers literary texts by women writers that trouble mainstream definitions of family and love to figure shared knowledges. Through intercultural performances, they stage conversations between Euro-American, African-American, and African-Caribbean cultures to re-present kinship (Judith Butler) as a concept which by being as elastic as intimacy (Ara Wilson) and affects (Leela Gandhi), enables figurations (Donna Haraway) and hence actions that point towards a shared planetarity (Gayatri C. Spivak). I argue that these cultural products nourish creolizing agency (Edouard Glissant and Kamau Brathwaite) which prevents us from falling into a regime of terror, where crisis is equated to public and domestic paralysis under a state of emergency. This is so because they effectively show how to join poetics with politics and ethics, and thus to build collectivities of belonging (Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich). I seek to demonstrate that the creolizing capability of such discourse, as articulated for example by Toni Morrison, Kim Ragusa, Joan Anim-Addo, and Jamaica Kincaid, deconstructs otherness without assimilating it, because it embraces translation as the mode (Walter Benjamin) of the always already necessary impossibility. In tune with Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan's emphasis on translation as a mode which allows us to imagine conjunctures and intersections that have no originals and cannot speak in a single language, this paper insists on the primary importance of critique to confront questions of power; it offers figurations of the global that, by incorporating intimacy, affects, and by troubling kinship, map material and discursive reality in a manner that is widely inclusive, through affiliation (Edward Said) rather than filiation. By thematizing love as political practice, the literary texts here examined contribute to the phenomenological grounding of the discourse on affects inaugurated by Eve K. Sedgwick and further elaborated by Rosi Braidotti. Kincaid's *See Now Then* provides the wording of my argument: because these figurations never forget the then of colonialism, they bring forward a now of globalization that is populated by subjectivities—Radical Others—capable of subverting and transgressing the establishment, without erasing their own vulnerability.

## Creolizing Poetics, Theory, and Politics

This paper is grounded on the concept of identity as continuous becoming and constant creation of the new, which is at the heart of Edouard Glissant's poetics of creolization as a celebration of cultural transformations. As such, creolization must be not only an ongoing process, a creolizing rather, but also a poetics: indeed, it is poetry which allows us to be projected towards change—the new—to imagine and name that which is not yet, as is clearly indicated by Audre Lorde. This paper relies on a poetics of creolization as becoming, which is a status of constant in-between-ness, a continuous process; as such, it does not partake of the order of filiation, but rather of the order of alliance (see Deleuze and Guattari); creolizing is thus developed from affiliations (see Edward Said). Consequently, it does not inquire about genesis and lineage, upon which the colonial project has been built, but rather about relations among differences (see Lorna Burns). This is where, I contend, the hope to build a justly shared “planetarity” (see Spivak, *Death of a Discipline*) rests. The paper pursues representations of contemporary globalization that are intercultural, gendered, and transnational (see Anim-Addo, Covi and Karavanta) by conjugating creolizing as theorized by Glissant and Kamau

Brathwaite with relational, located and performed subjectivities as articulated by feminist theorists—specifically by Judith Butler, bell hooks, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Leela Gandhi, Elaine Scarry, Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick, and Rosi Braidotti. This paper argues that literature by African-American and African-Caribbean women nourishes a deeper understanding of the contemporary; it considers Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye*, Kim Ragusa's *The Skin Between Us*, Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda*, and Jamaica Kincaid's *See Now Then*, and comparatively refers to Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, NourbeSe Phillip's *A Genealogy of Resistance*, Michelle Cliff's "Europe is Becoming Blacker," as exemplary articulations of epistemic changes called forth by socio-economic changes, and highlights the innovative force of the literary discourse by African-American and African-Caribbean women. Thematically, it focuses on family structures to consider comparatively changes imposed by colonization and changes produced by globalization on structures patrilineally defined through marriage, and regards instances of what might be worded as kinship trouble, by restating Butler's fundamental study on gender in light of her incisive essay on kinship. It claims that the local Caribbean grounding of creolization as the creation of a new ongoing culture may powerfully contrast the discourse of modernity and its colonial heritage. Namely, it aims at showing that kinship trouble in relation to forms of families in the contemporary context may be affiliated and contrasted with the forced creolization of kinship within the history of slavery. I argue that this non-deterministic historical perspective gives writers such as Morrison, Anim-Addo and Kincaid the creolizing force to shape figurations for a democratic globalization.

To begin, allow me to share some personal intimate feelings, to then develop my thoughts through an analysis that comes to the heart of the matter, with the aim of offering a political conjugation of the intimate with the global. My intention is to regard the encounter between Euro-American cultures and African-American, African-Caribbean cultures—their conflict, friction, tension, but also their exchange, dialogue, sharing—through the lenses of literal, semiotic, cultural and ontological translation, and to do so by focusing on an analysis of family structures within the colonial and the contemporary contexts.

### **Creolizing Learning, Creolizing Teaching**

Many years ago, as a foreign doctoral student in an English Department in the USA, self-conscious about my linguistic and cultural limitations, I approached with apprehension and often with apologies the literatures written in Englishes declared 'other' by the supremacy of the Oxbridge and Academic American varieties. I had studied English in Italy from textbooks, and was just tuning my ear to American speech, when my interest in the cultures of the peoples who suffered through and endured Atlantic slavery urged me to overcome my fear of being unable to grasp, that is to translate, words and the contents of their Otherness into my own foreignness. Trepidation marked my approach to these Other cultures within British and American cultures, which for me were in turn already 'other' cultures. The experience of reaching for a conversation with such double-otherness was magnified when I returned home to teach American literatures: my uncertainty about being myself able myself to understand the condition of blackness within the racist history of the Euro-Americas was coupled with misgivings about how to communicate my understanding to my students, so that their knowing could

be transformed into thinking and acting within the domestic context of the racisms in contemporary globalization. My effort now as then, has been directed at preventing students from perceiving Atlantic history as if it is unrelated to theirs. I struggle to seek ways to translate these “others within”<sup>[1]</sup> into yet one “other” culture and language—Italian (and German for a number of my students in our bilingual region). My purpose is socio-political as well as pedagogical: to deconstruct otherness without assimilating it in the process. The always already necessary impossibility of translation provides the ground for this pursuit.

My pedagogical imperative, as it were, is neatly captured by jazz artist Louis Armstrong’s proclamation: “there are those that if they don’t know, you cannot tell them.” This is my assumption in the classroom: that there are always those whom I cannot tell. I have learned from my own practice of teaching that when teaching is just telling, it fails. Rather, teaching must always be a seeking together of a solution to a question, jointly taking a path without knowing the destination—thus, effective teaching is the travelling, not the arrival. The travelling together of various “others” has proved a solid vessel in my practice, both as scholar and teacher, two functions that have continually nourished each other.

### **A Politics of Untranslatability**

Both as a researcher and as a teacher, by a positioning which seeks to retain “the specificity of the autochtone” (see Spivak, *A Critique* 198-311) while deconstructing the notion of “other” as well as the tendency towards the universal, I am forced both to make political decisions about dominance and to constantly exercise critical thinking. This means, too, that I am frequently obliged to interrupt and contradict myself in the sharing of knowledges. I hasten to add that facing the challenges of uncertainty, temporality, and provisionality is to me a most welcome practice. Emily Apter proposes a politics of untranslatability, which I wish to consider in order to further explain my pedagogy and cultural politics. The purpose of such politics is not so much to overcome the double-bind of the untranslatable and the translated, which is a superficial juxtaposition of Spivak’s insistence on linguistic and cultural particularity (see *Aesthetic* 443-54) with Franco Moretti’s casting of a World Literature based on the “distance reading” provided by translated texts. Rather, it is more aimed at keeping alive the tension of the double-bind, a tension upon which Spivak forcefully insists (*Aesthetic* 97-118), between untranslatability and translated, between the depth of close reading and the breadth of cross-cultural communication. Apter’s politics thus enables me to pursue the respect for difference and its challenge to translation without turning difference into exceptionalism—an isolationism into one’s own uniqueness that has negative effects not only for powerful constituencies like the USA, as amply demonstrated by the New Americanists’ deep critique of the traditional interpretation of US cultural history, but also for powerless minorities who risk encapsulation inside their own folkloric enclaves within mainstream culture. I like Apter’s proposal of defining comparative literature in the plural, as World Literatures, a gesture that corrects Moretti’s definition of World Literature without opposing it tout court, a project that calls for translation against all odds, translation that must be, even when it is impossible, and that exists by showing its own impossibility. This indication is in tune with the kind of comparativism supported by Spivak: “if we want to preserve the dignity of that strange adjective ‘comparative’ in comparative literature, we will embrace creolity. Creolity assumes

imperfection, even as it assures the survival of a rough future" (Aesthetic 454). Although I would correct Spivak's "creolity" with "creolizing"—a process, verb, action, not a static noun, drawn rather from Brathwaite's "tidalectics" and Glissant's "poetics of relation" than from Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphael Confiant's "creolite"—here I want to stress the need for translation and comparativism in the effort to build intercultural conversations without resorting to any exceptionalism.

It has always been clear to me that translating Black English and Anglo-Caribbean Creole into Standard English is an act of power forged on colonial supremacy. Equally, it has all the time been patently obvious to me that linguistic insulation cannot be a winning strategy. At the time when I started to tackle these issues, Chinua Achebe's invitation to subvert rather than reject colonial language appeared to be a good strategy, one that challenged cultural translation at its core and made linguistic translation indeed impossible. To me, this terrain has proved fertile for nourishing critical thinking, pedagogy of the oppressed, and feminist resistance. This has meant treading a very narrow and insidious path designed by the effort to keep the difficult balance between language and communication, one that Ngugi wa Thiong'o had convincingly demonstrated in his discussion of Achebe's position. By adding complexity to the "frictional" (Braithwaite) relationship between African and European languages, Thiong'o broke the dichotomy of colonizer-colonized in ways that I perceived to be in dialogue with Derridean articulations of aporetic experiences as experiences of justice that are not insured by one law. Rajagopalan Radhakrishnan incisively elaborates the relation between translation and distributive justice with regard to Thiong'o's position in an enlightening manner ("Why Translate").[\[2\]](#) Justice is a vital concept for the matter I am trying to tackle: justice calls for a conjugation with beauty by way of the balance that both pursue, and by extension by their sharing of fairness both in the sense of being good-looking and in that of being equally distributed (Scarry 95), together with responsibility and answerability represents an ethics of care that is at the foundation of the feminist positioning I embrace and the democracy of which I dream.

This aporetic positioning made it politically possible for me to devote my scholarship to "other" cultures without feeling that I was occupying the position of a traditional anthropologist collecting exotic knowledge from native informants. In 1989, it was Robert Creeley's poetry (not "other" from academic mainstream for any racial, gender, nor linguistic reasons, but "other" for its ideological and stylistic stance) that most visibly showed this path to me. As his translator into Italian, I intended simultaneously to foreground the arithmetic and underline the rhythm in the lines of his poem "A Piece":

One  
and one,  
two,  
three.

The lines compel arithmetic and rhythm into a shared tension,[\[3\]](#) so I opted for "più" instead of "e" in my version of "and." The double-bind of a two that is already three and a three that is already four, of an addition that also turns into an enumeration had to be accepted in this poem in a way that was familiar feminist practice to me: a militancy for and by the feminine seeking balance and harmony

with, rather than annihilation and domination of the masculine. This practice had been powerfully articulated earlier, in 1984, by Caribbean feminist, Black poet, Audre Lorde. Her “Poetry is not a luxury” solidly foregrounds language critique as a vehicle for political action: it is not a cause-consequence hierarchical relation, nor a simplistic equation—change the word, and you’ll change the world—but rather a forceful call for agency that attends both form and content, both representation and material circumstances.

This Bildung led me in 1990 to engage Caribbean literature with the trepidation described above, which in retrospect I value as a useful critical skill. Caribbean literature was gaining international attention and would soon be regarded as exemplary in postcolonial discourse of European colonization and in socio-cultural discourse as a model of contemporary globalization. Today, it is widely viewed as a transnational site, having moved, historically, moving from colonization and the importation of coerced labor from Africa, South Asia, and China, to being a region populated by a broad variety of ethnic groups whose high rates of migration have consequently contributed to an immense diaspora in North America and Europe. It is also a place that today is densely travelled by tourists from around the world, beset by drugs and human trafficking, and economically tied to foreign currencies and markets. This picture both reflects appreciation of the complexity of the region and a thirst for its assimilation into ‘our world, now’. Indeed, James Clifford’s infelicitous declaration in 1988 that, “we are all Caribbeans now, living in our urban archipelagoes,” should stand as a timeless warning of the risks of translating “the other” into “the one.” By engaging Caribbean studies with the intention of resisting Clifford’s facile frame, I have since engaged interpretation and translation as an open double-bind, similar to that which characterizes the performance of feminist acts of resistance. Feminism in my understanding is never oppositional in a binary sense—“feminism is for everybody,” as bell hooks forcefully put it in 2000, not just for feminists; feminists fight for changes that affect women and men alike. Unquestionably, being a feminist always entails being against and with, at the same time—as I have repeatedly argued, it entails picturing oneself as a divida rather than an individual; more accurately, it means operating within an epistemology that is not aiming at moving beyond but rather at standing “beside” (the case is pointedly made by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick). Translation as an open double-bind is translation that is never finished, never a one-way movement from the source into the target language, but rather an ongoing conversation between the two languages: it is a text that stands beside the original.

Gina Valdés’s poem “English con Salsa,” for example, comes to mind with its obvious impossibility of translating “salsa” with “sauce.” Here the opening lines that plunge us into two languages:

Welcome to ESL 100, English Surely Latinized,  
inglés con chile y cilantro, English as American  
as Benito Juárez. Welcome, muchachos from Xochicalco,  
learn the language of dólares and dolores, of kings  
and queens, of Donald Duck and Batman. Holy Toluca!

The poem that ends with the lines:

When a teacher from La Jolla or cowboy from Santee  
asks you, Do you speak English? You’ll answer, Sí.  
yes. Simón, of course. I love English!

And you'll hum  
a Mixtec chant that touches la tierra and the heavens (4-5).

Valdés clearly shows how encounter between source and target texts may create a tension that opens up a space for a third possibility, that of the accepted double-bind between their fruitful dialogue and their impossible conversation. Pedagogically, it prevents representing ethnic specificity like an exhibit in a natural history museum and allows engaging it instead as a knowing that can be shared in the pursuit of a more even, and thus multicultural and plurilingual world.

Walter Benjamin invites translators “to liberate the language imprisoned in a work instead of resembling the meaning of the original” (163): the original and the translation, for Benjamin, are not the latter the rendering of the former, but two entities that come together as “fragments of a greater language” (161). Benjamin emphasizes that translation turns the original into a relational text. This relationality, in my understanding, is perfectly in tune with the insistence of feminist theory on the relational subject as opposed to a given identity. To appropriate Benjamin in these terms, I might state that when a text is translated, it is no longer a monolithic Identity, but rather becomes a Subjectivity in temporal relation to Another. Such relation, I contend, opens up a space within which “decolonialized language and thought” (Carter 75) can be articulated. Moreover, the target language, “other” from the original, powerfully puts the source language in movement, and translation comes to occupy a zone that Benjamin defines as standing between poetry and doctrine. This zone, too, I am accustomed to perceive as feminist: lyrical philosophy has been claimed as essential by Audre Lorde in her powerful dictum that for black women who want to change the world, “poetry is not a luxury” but a vital “necessity” (37); it births ideas not yet represented in racist patriarchal cultures. This partakes in the pursuit of thinking within the texture of texts, not in universals. Textuality is sharing, let me emphasize.

My first literary acquaintance with the Caribbean was through Jamaica Kincaid’s stories. Her work has been harshly criticized for not being truly Caribbean and her language for failing to be Creole and being instead the speech of the colonizer. Nevertheless, her focus has undeniably been on the Caribbean, work after work; more precisely, it has consistently occupied the space of the relation between the Caribbean and Britain, the USA, and Europe. Exemplary in this sense is *A Small Place*, a lyrical essay that brings the tourist into the telling of the Caribbean to cast colonizer and colonized as opposites first, and blur the dichotomy when the focus moves to contemporary times where the relation is more than dual. The text points towards a zone in which two oppositional voices may speak together, provided they both relinquish their initial position; they may speak together, it implies, not in a single voice but in their two languages, which communicate without subsuming each other. Granted that her narratives may well be translations of the Caribbean for the West, instead of being rightly Caribbean narratives, yet what is the implication of drawing this distinction? What is the gain in using the colonial paradigm for the evaluation of postcolonial discourse? What would preclude the language of translation from carrying culture in addition to communication? If translations can ultimately be “the expression of the most intimate relationships among languages” (Benjamin 154), why shouldn’t a narration express such intimacy without losing cultural identity in the communication? Over the years, I have often praised Kincaid’s language and narration for being

always already a translated language that inhabits aporias, which nourish intellectual resistance to the given and comfortable. Her stories are lyrical and theoretical at the same time, and thus, as Benjamin suggests, they are like translation: situated between poetry and doctrine. Potentially, they bring languages together, show the way towards sharing knowledges and the world. Defined this way, the language of translation has the force to become agency because it points towards change, foregrounds tensions, explodes contradictions. Such language, its philosophical genius and lyrical passion, is transformative. *A Small Place* is transformative reading for tourists today as it illustrates a colonial heritage that can no longer be transformed: a then that must be utilized for making a better now, to paraphrase the title of Kincaid's latest narrative, *See Now Then* (2013), to which I will return in my closing remarks.

### **Joan Anim-Addo's *Imoinda, or She Who Will Lose Her Name***

I experienced the full effect of this transformative force in 2001, when Joan Anim-Addo shared with me her manuscript, *Imoinda, or She Who Will Lose Her Name*. To describe my emotional encounter with this text, I declared that I had felt interpellated<sup>[4]</sup> by the protagonist Imoinda and her author Anim-Addo to the point of bringing me to translate the play, and also to first publish the original, with translation, in the collection *Voci caraibiche e interculturalità*. Indeed, this was a text that produced transformative effects not only in terms of my perception of the Caribbean, but most importantly in terms of my own self perception. Watching an African woman deported to the New World into slavery, and listening to the expression of her suffering, resistance and heroic survival performed through the creolization of an Italian genre—the opera—could not leave me intimately indifferent. Why would Anim-Addo use opera to give a voice and the center of the stage to Aphra Behn's silent character Imoinda, subordinate to Oroonoko? Why would she choose an Italian mode to break the silence on the brutality of gendered slavery? There is more to this choice than just the need to sing, in order to tell of and to celebrate survival—the survival of the raped and enslaved woman, her child, her community, of women and men who endured unspeakable humiliations, deprivations and violence for generations, and now are telling that tale. For an Italian like me, performing the representation of slavery through the singing of lyrical opera translates into the impossibility of watching the action from a distance. By dragging me into the action of her story this way, Anim-Addo's creolizing has given me indispensable critical tools that enable me to feel I can be more than a mere spectator paralyzed by the fear of reproducing colonial appropriation and the fear of misunderstanding, when reading the literature about slavery by the descendants of slaves. More than any other text, *Imoinda* has given me no choice but to radically pursue in practice my initial ideological purpose of engaging the Caribbean without othering it, as well as without assimilating it. The form of the Italian opera deeply transformed by the African-Caribbean content precludes any distant reading, and puts me in the midst of the text—I am implicated to the point that ever since, whenever Christopher Columbus is mentioned or quoted in Caribbean narrations in English, I can hear, so to speak, his Genoese accent. Only knowing intellectually that the history of slavery is shared, knowing that the discoverer was not only an invader but also a slave merchant and slave owner is not enough. What is needed in addition is being touched by a shared feeling (Sedgwick), by the emotions produced by the translation of one's

familiar language, the opera, into another, the speech and songs of Caribbean slaves creolizing the opera.

Is their creolizing an act of translating? Is such translated language less true to the Caribbean? I am trying not to value it in terms of either colonized or colonizer, nor in terms of original vs. translation. What I know is how this “creative friction” (Brathwaite) has worked for me: after Imoinda, and likewise after *A Small Place*, I could no longer watch the history of the British Empire from an assumed Italian distance. The British Empire was no longer theirs—of the British only. Its enslaved peoples were no longer others—other than me. The texture of these texts produces imbrications that are deep, epistemologically and ontologically. They communicate cultures across differences through translation, transposition, transcodification, ekphrasis, transliteration: these are not reassuring messages but rather displacing discourses—discourses of a then and there which was also here, for a now and here which is also there.

As a result of the transformation that I experienced through Anim-Addo’s *Imoinda*, I can also teach Behn’s *Oroonoko*, not only to talk about the then of the history of slavery, the birth of the novel, and the entry of women in English literature, but also to reflect upon the now of the paradigms of racial and patriarchal domination that are still in place. Much has been said about Aphra Behn’s romanticization of the figure of the Noble Savage, and a lot has also been written about the racial features she draws for the characters of Oroonoko and Imoinda to cast them apart from the African types and naturalize them physically and culturally as European aristocrats instead. And it is undeniable that her 1688 travel narrative/romance/novel is much more a defense of the right to royal kinship than of the human right to freedom. Hers is neither an anti-slavery text nor a feminist text, although it is likewise undeniable that it is a text to be received with the feminist pride nourished by Virginia Woolf’s appreciation of, and admiration for the first professional woman writer and pioneer of modernity in the narrative exploration of individuality and thematization of slavery. Anim-Addo’s 2001 opera libretto *Imoinda* provides a much-needed correction to the representation of gendered slavery in *Oroonoko*, one that not only guides contemporary readers to assess the historical and ideological limitations of Behn’s work.<sup>[5]</sup> The comparison, most importantly, shows us what in Behn’s story needs to be translated in order to understand the functioning of race and gender within plantation society. It is not a matter of breaking the silences and filling the gaps that Behn’s perspective could not or did not want to voice.

Anim-Addo clearly shows that the interpretive paradigm must be replaced: it is no longer feasible to represent the history of slavery through the lens of a male protagonist who needs to kill his beloved before killing himself in order to become a hero. This romantic paradigm is lethal, as Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* pointedly demonstrates. The fact that Africans survived, endured slavery, humiliations, whippings, dehumanization and systematic rape, Anim-Addo proudly sings, is proof that we need to look at the living force of the slaves, not at their deaths. What makes this paradigmatic translation of death into life particularly vital for feeding intercultural discourse today is that Imoinda rejects the frame of the silenced, chained and killed slave to embrace resistance, survival and birth instead, and that she does so from the perspective of the enslaved woman. Anim-Addo’s character of Imoinda stands ideologically opposite to Behn’s character Oroonoko.

The opposition is pedagogically relevant, in that it also indicates what needs to be done in order to fight a contemporary global tragedy. Like Anim-Addo's Imoinda, the women victims of male violence need to break their chains, speak up, and move forward, and they need the support of a friend and a community of women to do so. In order to achieve this goal, they need to take the steps that Anim-Addo's Imoinda slowly but steadily takes throughout the play, such as redefine love as a relation between independent lovers. These are the steps that Toni Morrison's Pecola is tragically prevented from taking because she lacks a supporting community. This condition is necessary for Imoinda and all subjugated women then and now in order to choose life instead of death, despite their despair, despite their annihilation. Their choice is the exact opposite of what we read daily now in our newspapers, "husband kills wife and then commits suicide." Daily chronicles tell us repeatedly that there are still too many Oroonokos in our families, too many heroes who need to kill in order to say they love, too many men who consider women their property.

Teaching Oroonoko together with Imoinda allows me to show my students not only that there is a different frame within which to understand the history of slavery then and there, but also one within which to define love now and here. Behn's Imoinda is confined to the role of victim and her Oroonoko to that of hero by roles that are predefined within the paradigm of romantic love, where agency is male and passivity female. Thus Behn's "novel" in the end must turn into a "revenge tragedy" and drown its victims in blood, including the victim represented as hero. This way it leaves plantation slavery intact and the romantic love paradigm unchallenged. Colonial and patriarchal values live long, sadly they are still doing well in our societies where racisms of colonial cast are doing well in the public sphere, and romantic love pervades the media and invades the domestic sphere, which is often the theatre of feminicides and femicides.

### **Kim Ragusa's *The Skin Between Us* and Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye***

Indeed, the language that results from these "translations within" points towards translation as "a mode" (Benjamin 152) in the terms so precisely captured by Radhakrishnan's interpretation of The Translator's Task, when he says that translation as a mode offers a space of confrontation where politics and aesthetics are always in a relation of mutual dialectical tension. Radhakrishnan responsibly situates translation in the diasporic context of globalization, to define its ethics. He follows Benjamin with contemporary incisiveness when he concludes his insightful essay by declaring that the ethics of translation today is "to 'imagine with precision' (Benjamin 35) conjunctures and intersections that have 'no originals'." This precise definition is vital in the light of the observation that he offers in his essay "Why Translate?", where he argues that "there are no innocent or disinterested translators," because no translator can be oblivious to "the geopolitical implications" of the fact that, "translating between and within languages immediately bears witness to the brutalities of an uneven and asymmetrical world polarized as developed and underdeveloped, rural and metropolitan, indigenous and cosmopolitan" (74). This world cannot be forced to speak a single language, but will have to learn to speak shared languages that reflect its intertextual rather than textual nature, always contrapuntal, a fugue that does not bring its components to a final solution.

How can my teaching, which is always translating the already translated, and which is always more than merely interpreting because it is interpreting with and for both my interlocutor and myself, do

justice to the uneven world that is offered as a subject of study? The practice of translating within and translating with, of seeking ways to bring the students within the texts the same way that Imoinda had brought me now and here within her “other” world then and there has proved fruitful for me over the years. It has been most successful when I have designed comparativist strategies for bringing my students into the text so as to experience the effects of translation within.

I usually have students read Kym Ragusa’s *The Skin between Us* together with Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*, two narratives which I approach as a pair in order to enhance the effect of their comparative analysis. Most of my students are divided between Italian-speaking Italians and German-speaking Italians, a number of them come from Eastern Europe or Albania, and every year I have a few Erasmus students in the class, mostly from Germany, Greece, Spain and the UK. In over twenty years, only two Erasmus students (from Goldsmiths) in my classes could not be classified as white. Teaching issues of race thus poses the risk of talking about problems that may be perceived as distant, or foreign. Ragusa’s family memoir, however, prevents this from happening: by thematizing the tensions originated within her multiracial family, her Italian father on the one side and her African-American mother, on the other. She allows my students to experience matters of skin discrimination more intimately. “Two bloodlines meeting in me,” she begins to tell us in the “Prologue,” “A common joke among Italian Americans is that the toe of Calabria is kicking Sicily back to Africa, where it really belongs” (18), and she continues, “My skin, dark or light, depending on who’s looking” (19), to finally declare, “But it was Harlem I was thinking of, longing for … to find my own way back” (19). Her voice is that of a young woman from Harlem who is also Italian: she is no more completely “other” than my students, although she is black in New York in the 1960s and 1970s, struggling to come to terms with her own beauty, which was not the beauty of mainstream American culture then, when “mixed origin” was a derogatory term, a bad word. By showing us Italianness from the point of view of Africanness and vice-versa—one grandmother “believed, as many other black people did, that Italian Americans were nothing but mafiosi, racists, and republicans” (29), and the other “would cry to my father, Why, why? Che vergogna! The whole neighborhood knew that my father brought a nigger, a moulignan,’ into his house. Brought shame on his parents” (30)—Ragusa’s memoir equips white Europeans with some tools useful for a deeper, a little more intimate, understanding of Morrison’s Pecola. Like Kim, Pecola suffers because of the cultural imposition of one code of beauty; like Kim, she is imprisoned in her own body. One generation before Kim, though, in the segregated South and not in post-Civil Rights New York City, with neither family affiliations capable of offering an alternative to her complete annihilation, Pecola’s blackness proves an inescapable prison. Reading Morrison alongside Ragusa allows my students to feel, share, and imagine Pecola’s humiliation and alienation, instead of observing it as Other; Kim makes affiliation possible. To put it more crudely: Kim makes Pecola become fully human in my students’ eyes. This allows me to open up our discussion about racism and sexism on both sides of the Atlantic, bringing the thinking home to regard not only “their” (American) racism, but also “our” (European) racism, not only then and there but also here and now—the racism and sexism that my own students experience or perpetrate themselves. This is achieved through various steps in translation and in comparison. But without affiliation, this could not happen.

Similarly to the discussion I propose in class when we read *Imoinda* and *Oroonoko*, when we read *The Bluest Eye*, I want my students to keep in mind the alarming statistics about domestic violence in Italy. My aim is to bring home, as it were, the terrifying page where Pecola is “washing dishes” and Cholly becomes “aware that he was uncomfortable,” and feels “the discomfort dissolve into pleasure,” the moment at which Morrison lists his emotions as “revulsion, guilt, pity, then love”:

He wanted to fuck her—tenderly. But the tenderness would not hold. The tightness of her vagina was more than he could bear. His soul seemed to slip down to his guts and fly out into her, and the gigantic thrust he made into her then provoked the only sound she made—a hollow suck of air in the back of her throat... Removing himself from her was so painful to him he cut it short...She appeared to have fainted...The hatred would not let him pick her up, the tenderness forced him to cover her... So when the child regained consciousness, she was lying on the kitchen floor under a heavy quilt, trying to connect the pain between her legs with the face of her mother looming over her. (*The Bluest Eye* 163)

I am not pursuing direct identification with Pecola, of course. Affiliation is not identification. I would actually be terrified to find identification with so much suffering, so much dejection and self-annihilation. What I am pursuing is a framing of the human by which Pecola becomes one of us, not just a miserable black girl in the segregated South, there and then. I want my students to understand that Morrison’s novel is not merely a historical document but also an instrument of empowerment for a shared new humanism.

### **Textuality and Kinship**

To leave the classroom, turn to theory again, and expand my argument, I suggest that textuality and kinship are affiliated concepts, thus including the political issue of kinship, which brings theory into the social field. (I shall return to practice through my conclusive textual reading). My pedagogical efforts should not shade the ideological persuasion that leads me to emphasize again that, the Caribbean certainly is relation, but it is equally locality. In this regard, I am weary of appropriations that often deprive Glissant’s “poetics of relation” of its complexity in ways that lead it to international adoption, to a rootlessness that loses the memory of its origin. Brathwaite sharply articulates this complexity when he insists that the West Indian Voice translates the vernacular into the cosmopolitan by way of “a force, a flow of power, impetus that carries with it word, image and consciousness” (Roots 70)—the same force I experience when reading Morrison and Anim-Addo. I want to focus on this “creative friction”—a phrase Brathwaite adopts when referring to colonization and slavery, and I am here transposing in the site of cross-cultural communication for intercultural learning—to address the tension between the local and the global at the core of the West Indian Voice. This represents a mode of exchange that does not erase history in order to express poetry. Rather, by negotiating among cultural, political and linguistic forces, it constitutes a renovated vernacular culture, which is a national language continually transformed through the temporality of translation. This definition of Voice is fruitfully in conversation with Benjamin’s translated language and its temporal tendency towards a communication, which is wider-ranging than even that of the original. It is also in tune with Homi Bhabha’s considerations of the national cultures of minorities, which, he states, do not “celebrate the monumentality of historicist memory” but rather “reveal “the insurmountable ambivalence” of historical temporality (308).

As stated above, I hear Brathwaite's Voice clear and loud in Kincaid's and Anim-Addo's works. Fundamentally important in this respect, is Ignacio Infante's observation that, often, the discourse of the Atlantic as a space of transcultural mediation, for example as invoked by Paul Gilroy, ends up losing track of the concept of translation itself, thereby losing the opportunity of "properly encountering the inherent complexity and spatiotemporal ambiguity at the core of the transnational dimension of their objects of critical analysis" (178). What gets lost with the loss of the consciousness of translation, he remarks, is "the fluid and circulatory floor of relationality" (179), which is at the foundation of Glissant's notion of "poetics of relation." Following Glissant's multilingual and transcultural framework of analysis that regards the particulars, not with the aim of retrieving, Glissant would say "conjecturing," a given people, but rather with that of engaging the circulation of poetics and histories that strives to be complete through the manifold relations that it enacts, he rightfully invokes the foregrounding of such consciousness. I understand his move as being in tune with the poem "English with Salsa."

Pursuing this line of reasoning, I need to keep in mind Edward Said's humanism, which does pursue relations within textuality rather than universality. I aim to recall his accurate specification in "Secular Criticism" (1983), that criticism becomes critical thinking rather than mere obedience to the structural system/school, when the critic recognizes "the difference between instinctual filiation and social affiliation" and shows "how affiliation sometimes reproduces filiation, [and] sometimes makes its own forms" (24). Affiliation is a loose word, he further notes in "American 'Left' Literary Criticism," referring to "the implicit network of peculiarly cultural associations between forms, statements and other aesthetic elaborations on the one hand, and, on the other, institutions, agencies, classes and amorphous social forces" (174). However, he also argues forcefully for its specificity: "Affiliation mitigates the facile theories of homology and filiation, which have created the homogenously utopian domain of texts connected serially, seamlessly and immediately with other texts. By contrast, affiliation is what enables a text to maintain itself as a text," (174) related to "models of accumulation, discipline and normalization" (176). As Radhakrishnan rightly underlines in his Said's Dictionary, the Saidian affiliative intention is not to substitute filiation with affiliation but rather to allow "the human to become human in the name of the all" (4). Such relationality of the text, as I hope to have shown, is what enables the figures created by Anim-Addo, Morrison and Ragusa to become "figurations" (Haraway) to act in the world of their readers. Their agency is the agency of feminist temporal, relational, and performed subjectivity.

### **Kinship Trouble, Affects, Intimacy, Democracy and Justice Within Globalization**

Said enables me to move from translation as concept to the practice of translating a concept that is central to my feminist concerns: kinship, upon which mainstream ideas of the accepted family and the nation-state rest, through subordination of femininity. This move is fundamental for bringing my reasoning into the materiality of its object. Through an analysis of the translations, impossibility of translations, and mistranslations of "families" across time and cultures, I would like to engage the issue of intimate expression, language and communication in relation to the tension between compliance with, and resistance to power. By stretching the meanings of family, I contend, we may contribute to opening up the meanings of culture to interculturality<sup>[6]</sup> and of democracy to collective

democracy. This effort is situated in the contact zone between the word and the world, between the ideology of action and the ideology of language, in Emily Dickinson's terms: between killing and speaking, and more bluntly: between bombing and negotiating. Ultimately, it is meant to entertain the possibility in which I must believe that language can indeed change the world. Yet one knows that a change in language alone cannot produce material change. What I am talking about, with presumption but by necessity, is the old issue of the relationship between literature, the humanities, and society, or the world. Furthermore, I wish to undertake this endless question by refusing to choose between these polar opposites, and welcoming their double-bind instead. "All communicated action, including self-communicated action, is destined for errancy," declares Gayatri Spivak in her cogent invitation to think globalization through an aesthetic education. This enables us to think "an uneven and only apparently accessible contemporaneity that can no longer be interpreted by such nice polarities as modernity/tradition, colonial/postcolonial" but rather "allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable, surrounded by the lethal and lugubrious consolations of rational choice" (Aesthetic 2). Spivak's invitation to inflect the humanities as the acceptance of the double-bind, rather than its overcoming or balanced solution, is further explained: "I would rather suggest that we must know what mistake to make with a specific text and must also know how to defend our mistake as the one that will allow us to live ... as we move towards the subaltern, we can only learn through mistakes" (Aesthetic 28). It is within this space of the double-bind that I wish to further consider my material object—the family—in the various structures already glimpsed in the texts mentioned above.

Here is Said oversimplified and schematized: filiation is related to nature and biology, to reproduction—mother, father, offsprings; affiliation is related to culture and law, to politics—the legal procedure by which a mother can obtain a contribution to the child by the putative father; the belonging to a constituency, an institution; the institution of marriage. The idea of the family as a monolithic notion here and now has been replaced in the past decades by the assumption that the structure of families is fluid and changeable.[\[7\]](#) While in 1948 the United Nations defined family as "the natural and fundamental group unit of society," in 2005 the US Census Bureau considered both the concept of family and that of household, and appeared much more cautious in giving only a 'natural' grounding to the former. Clearly the idea of family is now shifting from kinship to relatedness, from filiation to affiliation, to include transnational families, international and inter-racial adoptions, same-sex parents. If we only consider time difference, the change is considerable, to the point that we might now recast Clifford's unfortunate 1988 phrase as, we are all affiliated now, living in our urban archipelagos. The contemporary picture of globalization imposes re-negotiations of power dynamics that include new definitions of family commitments at the cross-roads of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and citizenship. Gender roles in the West have been revised in many aspects at least since Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963; trans-racial and trans-national adoptions, together with new reproductive politics keep forcing new configurations of the family. Data on the web page of The USA Online show soaring figures confirming such reconfigurations; suffice it to look at the increasing number of divorced people who remarry, thus delineating more widely spread forms of affiliated kinships.[\[8\]](#)

Let me provocatively ask: Are we indeed all Caribbean now? Are we all really affiliated now? By extension, let me also recast facile academic postcolonialism and ask: Are we all truly postcolonial now? It is far from my interest to map the contemporary as the site in which we are all living indistinctly within globalized mobility, all indifferently and frantically pursuing more trendy concepts to frame academic discourse. On the contrary, I would insist on rejecting clones of the Cliffordian stance, and keep instead the focus sharply centered on the always already problematic conjugation of the Caribbean with Postcolonialism. This is a fruitful tension, a fertile double-bind that will allow us to learn through our mistakes, to err and tread aporias: local insulation vs. global subsumption is indeed the issue of globalization now as much as it was the issue of colonialism then. The tension produced by putting Caribbean literature together with Postcolonialism against their mutual opposition as national singularity and neo-colonial assimilation is interesting, because it explodes contradictions, shifting from violence and domination into social and political innovation. Put together in a Brathwaitian “tidalectical”<sup>[9]</sup> relationship between vernacular and cosmopolitan (Infante 153), instead of a theoretical subsumption of the factual, they may foster intercultural communication, make the ideal meet the historical, bring the traditional next to the iconoclast, history side by side with language, so that the rational is also the reasonable, as invoked by Paul de Man (qtd. in *Aesthetic* 33).

The focus on this double-bind forces me first into self-criticism about a then which is no longer now. In 1996, I co-authored a paper arguing that in the Caribbean it was inappropriate to talk about families, and it was more accurate to talk about households instead. The argument was based on an analysis of Olive Senior’s stories and supported by her sociological study *Working Miracles*, which give a picture of mainly women-headed households and fatherless families with a focus on the young. Our proposal to use the term household instead of family with reference to the Caribbean was then fuelled by the effort to preserve Caribbean specificity against postcolonial assimilationism, to avoid using Western categories of interpretation for non-Western cultures. Now, I want to critically reconsider the relevance of this distinction (see Beittel and Covi). First, I want to observe that household does not have a linguistic equivalent in Italian: dictionaries move around the terms family, house, home. This translation default now shows that once the concept of family is stretched beyond traditional heterosexual filiative boundaries, family and household for people living together become interchangeable. In addition, the increased consciousness I have now gained about the Caribbean diaspora, in the USA, the UK and Europe, tells me that household does not account for groups living in different places. The term silences the material reality of so many Caribbean families in which the parents are abroad to work and the grandparents, mostly grandmothers, and children are at home. Rather than linguistically translating Western family with Caribbean household, as we did then in the effort to respect local specificity, I would now let the material conditions of the Caribbean modify the concept of family itself—for the Caribbean as well as for the West. This move, I hope to show, is also a vaccine against assuming that the concept family has changed over time only because of the Western progress towards modernity, rather than being always shaped by affiliative relations across changing constituencies, especially within colonial interconnectedness. Many contrasting forces over time and across space have concurred to shape it.

Family is an elastic concept and the contemporary picture outlined above shows that it can be stretched in many directions. The idea of family as nuclear filiation—mom, dad and kids—was based on the idealized American heterosexual white family of the 1940s and 1950s staging “love” as its unit. This ideal was a transformation of the nuclear family of the nineteenth century, when romanticism, sentimentality, the ideal of domesticity, and “the pursuit of happiness” added affection to the marriage contract. In turn, this was the evolution of the family as a productive unit merely based on a contract. In colonial plantation society, the household included servants, apprentices and slaves to family as kinship. There and then, slave laws prohibited marriage and imposed separation from kinship and affects. Alternative families were thus running parallel to the colonial household/family. When slavery was finally abolished in the USA, and segregation was being enforced, the legacy of slave laws produced a new word: miscegenation. In December 1863, David Goodman Croly published anonymously a propaganda pamphlet in New York City, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, designed by the Democrats during the Civil War to assert that the goal of the Republicans was to advocate the intermarriage of whites and blacks. After that, the word became a popular buzzword in political propaganda about the myth of racial purity, and we should not forget that anti-miscegenation laws were in force in many US states until 1967. Once racism is seeded, it is hardly uprooted. Among the manifold historical meanings of creole, one is racist and is synonymous with miscegenation. Miscegenation translates into Italian as matrimonio misto, and this specific biological meaning of creole translates as creolo or razza mista (mixed race), a phrase carefully avoided and substituted by circumlocutions by non-Fascists since the effects of the infamous 1938 racial laws became public knowledge. The imperial propaganda for settling in the African colonies promised Italian soldiers that they would be seduced by beautiful creole (noun, feminine, plural), as testified by a popular 1926 tango song performed well into the 1960s. Indeed, once racism is seeded, it is hardly uprooted. The historical specificity of these terms has been powerfully captured by Michelle Cliff’s poem “Europe is Becoming Blacker” with her use of Italian and German words “bambini di razza mista” and “die Mischlinge” to describe the victims of the nazi-fascist concentration camps. Cliff’s refusal to translate the words of this shameful tragedy has the effect of bringing us, Italians and Germans, into the discourse on chromatic racism. It is a punch in the stomach to read her poem and find that there—in the Caribbean, the heart of slave history—our languages are untranslatable. Indeed, racism is not only hardly uprooted; it also comes in so many forms that we are all implicated: Italian and German languages are affiliated with the languages of the colonial domination of the Americas—Spanish, Portuguese, English, French, and Dutch—and their affiliation shows that they all concur to shaping the many forms of the racist discourse, which interpellates all cultures.

And this brings me to considerations of kinship, a categorization that needs to be put side by side with the categorization of family under scrutiny. I find it necessary at this point to put Said’s concepts of filiation and affiliation together with Butler’s articulation of kinship, in her essay “Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?”. Butler states that “it is not possible to separate questions of kinship from property relations (and conceiving persons as property) and from the fictions of ‘bloodline,’ as well as the national and racial interests by which these lines are sustained” (15). She cogently asks whether

kinship is always family, whether it can be disjoined from marriage, whether it may draw from biological as well as from non biological relations.

Control over the elastic category of family has been exercised through many forms of exclusion: of discriminated social classes through the dowry system, of ethnic groups through slavery and segregation, of nationalities through restricted citizenship and immigration rights, and of sexualities through homophobia. It should be noted that the anti-sodomy laws, that were technically in force in all states in the USA until 1962, were invalidated by the Supreme Court only in 2003, while Oklahoma, Kansas and Texas have yet to repeal such laws. These discriminatory forces empower one another, as decades of intersectional feminist analysis focused on the triad of class, race and gender have amply demonstrated. Suffice it here to recall Deborah McDowell's incisive reading of Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929), which explores the connection between passing for white and passing for straight, considering that in the novel there are two stories that force the stretching of the concept family, even though the second, "Irene's awakening sexual desire for Clare" (xxvi), is not named explicitly. Likewise, it is hard to imagine Celie in *The Color Purple* being able to turn over her complete subjugation without the affectionate relationship she establishes with Shug, the blues singer and lover of her husband who, according to traditional family relations, should be her rival enemy and becomes her loving best friend instead.

It is in this context of relational tensions that I want to consider the implications of the widespread discriminatory rhetoric of the "dysfunctional and deviant family," modeled on the fatherless African-American ghetto family; this includes the politically correct contemporary translation into "family diversity" (see Van Eeden-Moorefield and Demo). It is instructive to look at these families through the untranslatability of two terms: higgler and hustler. The first refers mostly to women, Olive Senior's miracle-working women, the backbone of Jamaica's internal market system, who manage to produce small commodities and gain advantage by their bargaining skills; such skills date back to slavery. The term does not travel into other Englishes; it is codified exclusively as West Indian English. The second has a wider usage in English across countries: it refers to the herding of cattle and to enterprising people who are always working, usually illegally, to get what they want; it may also mean prostitutes. The 1961 film *The Hustler*, with Paul Newman, made it an international word and launched a romantic glorification of the masculinity of the illegal entrepreneur. In Italian, it has been translated with the word spaccone, braggart, boaster, show-off. What is missed and lost in translations creates a hiatus that, handled with critical care, may become fertile terrain for the change of epistemic paradigms. The hustler embodies the masculine mystique on which is based the image of "baad niggers" produced by the Hollywood glamorization of the ghetto and the outlaw as a folk hero. It exalts the ability to secure wealth by means of power, violence, cunning, and lawlessness. Performatively, it manifests itself as "being cool." The black bandit derives theoretically from the presentation of the slave as a trickster figure; the badman figure in folklore and in American society supposedly gives pride, strength, and control to black men by producing an image of hustler masculinity.[\[10\]](#)

Masculine and feminine mystiques alike are fed by normative representations of the good vs. the broken family. Outside this fictional double bind, we find families that negotiate their filiative and

affiliative existence by exploiting, opposing, resisting, transforming the economics of the filiations and affiliations that norm them. Many narratives by women of African descent have focused on these negotiations and radically re-presented the legacy of slavery as family history besides public history. Joan Anim-Addo in Caribbean-Scottish Relations has painfully delved into her own “family secrets” to examine imperial Caribbean-Scottish relations in the Caribbean and has inaugurated a significant turn in our understanding of the British Empire and the Caribbean colonies that breaks the double bind colony-empire, by adding forces and tensions to a picture that cannot be contained within pre-constituted categories. By bringing the intimate into the Empire, Anim-Addo offers an epistemic frame that enables our understanding of the present local and diasporic location of Caribbean constituencies. With like forceful effects, NourbeSe Phillip has painstakingly analyzed the anger of her ancestors, lifting the silences within her descent in *A Genealogy of Resistance* (1997), where she directly states, “The how we know: sex,” to add, “the where and the who is what too often escapes me.” The lyrical narrative chases her enslaved great-great-grandmother to “a story, a tale” of “a Scottish man” in Tobago, who had children with an African slave and “before returning to England he married her off to an African … also enslaved … My great-great-grandfather.” This information is preceded by the compelling questions: “Did he rape her … Did he court her?” (13).

These are families that occupy “the contact zone” (Pratt) of transculturation where creolization is both a poetics and a political process. We need to keep asking, in each context: what establishes and what disbands the family? These questions have enabled women and men under the dehumanizing conditions of slavery to endure and successfully make kinship relations. These women and men have survived and are now writing their own history through stories that look into the silences of the public as well as the domestic that they were denied. Breaking these silences is lifting the violence of ideological representations that trap victims as well as perpetrators. As Morrison effectively demonstrates in her handling of Cholly, his sentiments must make it into the telling too, otherwise the rape suffered by Pecola can be condemned only, instead of being also understood and thus prevented. The importance of asking what establishes and what disbands the family, should not be confined to the context of slavery. Today the question calls for our vigilant attention, since conservative slogans claiming that marriage is only between a man and a woman of the same race, country, and religion are still ubiquitous even in progressive democratic countries, and as we read newspapers titles like: “Broken Families Far More Lethal to Children than Guns” (*Frontpage Mag*, January 13, 2013).

The violently racist and simplistic representation of the African-American family as dysfunctional poses the delicate issue of the burden of the tragic legacy of slavery on the one hand, and the celebration of a glorious African legacy on the other. Arguments that do not contextualize poverty, social exclusion, and cultural discrimination tend to polarize the issue rhetorically, between on the one hand criminal men, justified by a long history of racial discrimination, and on the other wonderful women, exalted for their exceptional ability to endure. Outside this binary representation is a complex reality which must be represented by liberating kinship from property and bloodline. Butler refers to Saidiya Hartman’s effective phrase, “slavery is the ghost in the machine of kinship,” to call attention to the legacy of what Nathaniel Mackey and Fred Moten call “wounded kinship” within African-American life. She aims is not only to demonstrate, through reference to Carol Stacks’s *All Our Kin*,

that urban African-American kinship functions well through a network of women, but and also to remark that African-American kinship has been at once the site of intense “state surveillance and pathologization,” which leads to “the double bind of being subject to normalizing pressures within the context of a continuing social and political delegitimation” (“Kinship” 15). It is precisely within the context of such double bind, the “the contact zone” where African-American lived lives are situated, that I insist on performing my understanding of and learning to account for relations between racial supremacy, patriarchy and homophobia.

In 1965, the Moynihan Report “The Negro Family: the Case for National Action” focused on the African American family and on the role of black men in the urban community. It declares that “the Negro family ... is in the deepest trouble,” and expands as follows: “[T]he Negro community has been forced into a matriarchal structure which, because it is so out of line with the rest of the American society, seriously retards the progress of the group as a whole, and imposes a crushing burden on the Negro male and, in consequence, on a great many Negro women as well” (75). To put it bluntly: it argues that black men fail because black women have too much power, economically, educationally and domestically. The cause of the problem of unstable families is as old as America: slavery, reconstruction, urbanization, and unemployment. Blaming powerful women is at least preposterous. As bell hooks declares, “[T]he discourse of emasculation shifted from white supremacy and accountability for black male oppression to blaming black women” (12). These interpretations hinder the construction of a shared society because they rest on colonial categories and thus reproduce a tragically violent history.

Nothing more incisively than the murder of Emmett Louis Till, at the age of 14 on August 28, 1955 in Mississippi, exemplifies the gender politics of racism and the racial politics of sexism. He had only spoken with a white woman, Carolyn Bryant, but was accused of flirting with her. Bryant's husband and his half-brother took Till, transported him to a barn, beat him and gouged out one of his eyes, before shooting him through the head and disposing of his body in a river, weighting it with a cotton gin fan tied around his neck with barbed wire. His body was discovered and retrieved from the river three days later. This utmost brutality was triggered by joint racist and sexist cultural paradigms. The vindication of Emmett's innocence was achieved by his mother, the head of a typical African American broken family. She insisted on a public funeral service with an open casket to show the world the brutality of the killing. Tens of thousands attended his funeral, which drew international attention to the problem of the lack of African American rights and thus collected forces to help start the Civil Rights Movement. This woman had largely raised Emmett by herself, with her own mother's help; she and Louis Till were separated in 1942 after she found out he had been unfaithful, and after he choked her to the point of unconsciousness, and she tried to retaliate by throwing scalding water at him. He was given a choice between jail and enlisting in the army, choosing the latter, he died in 1945. In 1951, she remarried but this marriage dissolved within a year because this second husband was also violent. It was Emmett who chased him out of the house with a knife upon seeing that the man was threatening to hurt his mother. Emmett Louis Till's sacrifice is exemplary of the brutality of racism and stands as a milestone in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. By focusing on his family instead of his murder only, I wish to show that his story imposes a compelling question: what is

dysfunctional about the only family Emmett had—himself and his mother? Clearly, dysfunctionality is detectable only outside of his family, within a racist and sexist white culture, which also nourishes the masculine mystique of the hustler.

It is sometimes useful to look into the personal to understand inequalities without using the categories that have perpetrated it. Leela Gandhi provides a philosophical paradigm for understanding globalization in terms of relations based on intimate affects, an epistemology that stands at the foundation of my interpretative effort. Her path-breaking 2006 study allows us to figure radical communities of difference based on affinities and to liberate thinking from locking individuality as well as community on self-identity. By grounding singularity rather than identity on friendship, Gandhi represents communities of non-belonging that are always in the making and thus require all subjects to be political agents of sociality (26-33). In *The Global and the Intimate* (2012), Ara Wilson argues that the intimate is a useful category of transnational analysis because “it implies relationality without specifying the form that this will take” (#). The intimate, she explains, “resists ideological reifications of family, sexuality, or community”; by “a flexible, provisional reference,” it “allows critical analyses of colonial empire and capitalist modernity” without “assigning identities based on relationship (gay or straight)” or investigating “relationships based on their categorizations (family/kinship/nation)” (48). Literature by African-American and African-Caribbean women offers powerful examples of the use of the intimate as a category of analysis, that not only denounce the conditions imposed by white and patriarchal supremacy on the category of the family, but that also break silences that dismantle the category itself and allow kinship to be irreducible to family, thereby opening a space within which socio-cultural transformations are more radical. Again, Morrison makes this paradigmatic transformation sharp in *The Bluest Eye*, a story about a shattered life and a community in shambles that does not seek pity nor offer comfort. It candidly forces us to face the fact that “love is never any better than the lover,” which implies that not only lovers are needed for love to be—if only one loves, the other is neutralized—but also a shared theoretical elaboration of the significance of love. In Rosi Braidotti’s philosophical elaboration, this position can be described as the political construction of hope. Politics must enter in our sentimental as well as in our moral sphere, for the construction of a discourse and the envisioning of communities that can share the gaps, mistranslations and flexible temporal references that liberate us from the reification of fixed categories.

### **Jamaica Kincaid’s *See Now Then***

To conclude, I am drawing your attention to Jamaica Kincaid, who has always explored family and the intimate to its roots in her books by exposing its provisional reference and thus offering articulations of subjectivities that are both subjected and agents, hence Radical Others. In *Lucy*, the protagonist refers to her natural mother at home as well as to a mother figure in her au-pair family; in *The Autobiography of My Mother*, through writing she creates a mother that cannot otherwise be known (she died by giving birth to the narrator) and has written about a subject empty of human feelings; in *Mr. Potter*, she creates through a writing act a father who otherwise did not even know himself. Her filiations and affiliations are creolized and queered to shatter from within comfortable foundations, such as family, kinship, marriage. Kinship in her stories becomes recognizable without family, and

family can be identified without marriage as in the early descriptions of childhood in the Caribbean. Her writing however does not show an alternative family, but rather shows that the family has always already been a fiction, that contingency is much more complex than the telling. Kinship relations here are presented as negotiations in a contact zone, where the sharing may happen; they are not just carried out with others, but persistently with the risking of oneself. As Agnese Fidecaro pointedly argues, in *My Garden: Book*, Kincaid displaces the domestic through the intimate by putting both creativity and resistance in her garden, which de-essentializes the house and becomes the unhomely experience of postcoloniality that accommodates the trauma of cultural displacement (see Homi Bhabha). The garden, Fidecaro concludes, stands not only for the production of knowledge with the memory of the Caribbean, but most importantly for the tension without resolution between the intimate and the family.

I have argued that Kincaid's latest novel, *See Now Then* (2013) speaks truth to power by deconstructing the mystique of the romantic happy family (see "Double Speaking..."). Indeed this narrative hits the core of the construction of the category family from within by showing that the happy husband and wife do not exist unless they are being written in, in four hands. What I am arguing here is that this story takes apart the mystique through the Radical Other's reconsideration of the past, a move from a stereotypical character into a self-conscious, critical agent. This story is not about the Caribbean; it shows how a marriage of a nuclear family in the US disintegrates, by braiding page after page with the rhetoric of the love marriage of the American nuclear family—"See now then, the dear Mrs. Sweet who lived with her husband Mr. Sweet and their two children, the beautiful Persephone and the young Heracles" (3)—with the personal rage and wrath that it takes to demolish this happy picture—"he husband, the dear Mr. Sweet, hated her very much. He so often wished her dead" (6) ... "his wife that horrible bitch who'd arrived on a banana boat" (9). The leading question is simple: How can the perfect picture of the loving happy family translate so completely and abruptly into the horror show of hate, deceit, humiliation, and scorn? Yet the story is not about abstract love and hate and the question needs the Caribbean Voice to be engaged. The story is situated in the Connecticut countryside, with an imposing presence of the Caribbean, its sea meeting the Atlantic Ocean always in the memory of the narrating voice. The Caribbean comes into the apparent comfortable domestic American situation to explode its inherent contradictions, not in the action, which is caused by the predictable behavior of the American husband falling in love with a younger woman, but in the elaboration of knowledge about the action which is performed by the Caribbean Voice of the person who had been made into the wife, Mrs. Sweet, by the fiction of the forever happy family based on eternal love. The tension blows up any certainty about love, the ingredient of the happy family. As Morrison pointedly indicates, love is what the lovers, always in the plural, make it. Feminist theory has well demonstrated that gender is what gender does, and that gender is always gendersex and also gender and its others. I am invoking this relational frame to move on with my reasoning. Love is in the doing and never in the doing alone—we all know that it takes two to tango, as it were, but we also forget this when we appeal to metaphysical romantic love. Similarly, kinship is also in the doing and relational. When husband and wife are in love, love can make the happy family. But when only one of the two falls out of love, hate replaces love and the family dissolves. The

mystique of the happy family is taken apart and the difference between husband and wife becomes an opposition. Only at this point, not before, in Kincaid's novel are Mrs. Sweet's blackness and Mr. Sweet's whiteness divisive, so is their class difference, their cultural difference, the fact that he has a powerful father and she has no father, their interests set apart between gardening and the admiration for modernist artists, between writing one's life and performing classical music, between raising the children and seducing one's student. But it is not these differences that turn love into hate. The change is only in the speech act: "I love you," which becomes, "I hate you." There is a break in the communication. Feelings, affects become totally untranslatable. The change is temporal, situated between then and now. The question that is raised without being answered is whether love can be understood and trusted universally. The happy family lives in a place "where at least three women have left their husbands for other women," a remote village "where a man left his wife to become a woman so he could marry another woman, someone entirely different from his wife" (15-16). Falling in and out of love is ordinary. What has happened to Mr. and Mrs. Sweet is conventional. Kincaid implies that it does not require a particular explanation. Their story is a common story, not even worth the telling, and the narrator Mrs. Sweet concentrates instead on the changed perception of reality through time.

It is the ordinariness of the subject matter that makes *See Now Then* paradigmatic for my assessment of the role of intimacy in the global, its focus on affects about kinship, family, home, and the interconnectedness that maps the world today, materially and discursively. In *See Now Then* there is no happy family against which to cast any "other" dysfunctional family. We are all left with the question: what effects does intimacy have on the self? When the self is temporal, what is family, kinship, marriage, home? Attachments appear to be more than either personal or political; rather, like Braidotti's articulation of hope and Morrison's representation of love, marriage here reveals itself to be a political practice. Likewise, Gandhi is crystal clear about this, affects are regarded as political practices too. Indeed, Sedgwick insists that affect is irreducibly phenomenological, attached not only to bodies, but objects as well. I would like to add that in the epistemological context of *See Now Then*, ethics is forced to become critique, a move that is cogently invoked by Butler in *Precarious Lives* as necessary to confront the question of power.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler clarifies that one must be interlocutory, when giving an account that constitutes the subject *and* must therefore be given to someone. It is this breaking of the ground that is performed by critical thinking that makes the act of politics effective, because it takes the risk of uncertain language (translated?) and tentative ontology (beings in translation?). Such uncertainty and provisionality are characteristic of subjects in transit and in translation. In her essay on kinship, Butler talks about gay marriage and says that it becomes increasingly important to keep the tension alive between maintaining a critical perspective and making a politically legible claim, because "the proposition that marriage should become the only way to sanction or legitimate sexuality is unacceptably conservative" (21). Through marriage, in fact, personal desire becomes a kind of legitimated public sex, a compulsory universal recognition. She continues by provocatively asking, whose desire might qualify as a desire for "state legitimization"? Who may desire the state and whom may the state desire—"who may desire the state's desire"? (22). "Legitimation is double edged" (28),

she cogently observes, because it norms the intimate in order to recognize it (26). There is a very important turn in her essay here, about her rejection of the relationship dictated by Lévi-Strauss between kinship and culture, where Butler points out that kinship is not an a priori structure. She argues that it is instead a kind of doing, an “enacted practice” and as such it is never always already heterosexual (34). Butler’s argument unambiguously shows that kinship can no longer be the basis of culture, when subjects and cultures are diasporic, economic movements are global, and identities are transnational. Rather, kinship is itself a site where certain displacements are already at work, where anxieties about biotechnology and transnational migrations become focused and disavowed. Thus, new kinship and sexual arrangements compel a rethinking of culture itself.

By invoking interculturality as means of staging a conversation between Euro-American and African-American/African-Caribbean cultures, performed through some fictional readings, I have attempted to offer a re-presentation of kinship and family that stands beside their categorical definition to become an elastic concept, like intimacy and affects. The stories about “family secrets” in Anim-Addo, Morrison, Ragusa, and the reflections upon the love which holds together the nuclear family presented by the most recent text by Kincaid provide examples of gender and kinship trouble, that agitate cultures too and allow us to see a translational representation of subjectivities that entail the possibility of subversion and disobedience while resting on their own vulnerability—they give voice to radical others. These cultures prevent us from falling into a regime of terror, in which crisis becomes a state of emergency—publicly as well as domestically. By pursuing the impossibility of language in general, even before translation (Benjamin 155), they show that joining poetics with politics and ethics may lead towards building linguistic, social, psychological collectivities of belonging. Indeed, they claim that this path cannot be taken without first accepting that masculinity is not for men only as much as femininity is not for women only, that relations structured outside the traditional patriarchal family unit provide fertile ground for radically reframing culture tout court. Opaque encounters, and by opacity I am clearly referring to Glissant and emphasizing the notion of creolizing, between the subject and its body as well as among the objects of relations and affects liberate identities that do not need prefigured shapes. By privileging the intimate vs. kinship as a figure of the locals within globalization, they make clear that identities—individual, national, transnational—never take shape outside of a scene, there or here, now or then. Subjects are always interpellated—they translate themselves and are translated, linguistically, semiotically, culturally and ontologically—and become themselves as they speak, translate, and always already desubjectivize themselves on the scene, within whose process inter- and intra-culturality and creolizing may occur and nourish a more just and democratic world.

By presenting subjects that trouble gender and unsettle kinship, these non-identical singularities (Gandhi) politically engaged in the making of communities yet-to-come (Derrida) liberate representations of alternative cultures which can be shared through the political construction of identifications and affiliations, rather than by ‘natural’ belonging, to generate transformative oppositional social and discursive forces. Since slavery and through racist dominations, African-Caribbean and African-American women have successfully produced transformative kinship, accepted the “lesbian continuum” (A. Rich), created networks of resistance, performed “miracles” (O. Senior)

by creolizing bodies, ideas, subjects and communities. Their legacy today may be translated into an empowering alliance for diverse subjects and groups marginalized by patriarchy, such as woman-headed households, lesbian and gay relations, international and an inter-racial adoptive families. Without a doubt, these narratives break the perverse, dominating patriarchal institution of the white good family cast against the black bad family, a breaking that the decolonization of countries as well as women and non-macho men must go through, in order to inhabit a truly decolonized culture and cast creolization as a figure/action of globalization.

The smashing of Mr. and Mrs. Sweet's family is the smashing of the idea of gender, kinship, and culture that support it. This is piercingly illustrated by the passage where Mr. Sweet's purely metaphysical question, "What is the essence of Love?", runs parallel to his asking, "What is the Atlantic? What is the slave trade?", when faced with "a monstrosity, a distortion of human relationships: The Atlantic Slave Trade" (12). This is in full contrast with Mrs. Sweet's materialistic temporality, when "looking out at her life" with a minute description of the land she sees out of her window and thinking about the rivers that merge into the Hudson, which in turn runs into the Atlantic Ocean, a flowing that makes her think about herself "now, knowing that it would most certainly become a Then even as it was a Now, for the present will be now then and the past is now then and the future will be a now then and the present and the future has no permanent present tense" (13). Coupled with her compelling inquiry, "But can love, all by itself, in isolation, be understood, or trusted even?" (64), the voice of this Radical Other, the Caribbean Voice of the narrator, forcefully engages the "decolonialization of language and thought" for the pursuit of a more evenly, albeit precariously shared world.

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## Notes

[1] The phrase "other cultures within" refers to the AHRC funded research (2011-13) "Behind the Looking-glass: 'Other' cultures within Translating Cultures." My gratitude to the coordinator Joan Anim-Addo for providing the fertile ground on which this paper originated; with her I share the conviction she has well-argued in her paper that "the West Indian woman writer in reconstructing Caribbean lives is writing for herself and with an acute sense of a widening community of 'Relation'".

[2] Relevant to my framing of translation is also R. Radhakrishnan's essay, "Is Translation a Mode?".

[3] The concept of tension is fully elaborated by Lisa Marchi in her essay in this volume. Although I do not develop this concept in my own essay, I would like to point out the fruitful affiliation between tension and my own emphasis on creolizing.

[4] I would like to underline the conversational character of the concept interpellation: Althusser defined it in dialogue with Lacan and Foucault, and feminists like Butler, hooks and Doane revised it. I have given emphasis to the concept conversation within my own feminist commitment in *Interculturality and Gender*.

[5] The Special Postgraduate Issue of Mango Season Journal dedicated to critical interpretations of Imoinda follows the essays published by Anim-Addo and myself in the collection edited by Margarete Rubik, Jorge

Fuguerroa-Dorrego, and Bernard Dhuicq, *Revisiting and Reinterpreting Aphra Behn* (2002). Mina Karavanta and Lisa Marchi in this volume have richly refurbished critical readings of Imoinda fueling not only critical appreciation of Joan Anim-Addo's writing, but also the current debate on the thematization of gendered racisms and the creolization of globalization. Deeply sound is Karavanta's demonstration that Imoinda counterwrites the history of slavery and her elaboration on Sylvia Wynter's concept or rehumanization: to this enlightening reading I am indebted for my own return to this text. Marchi's considerations on *Imoinda* in the context of Arab culture provides encouragement to pursue the unexpected affiliations I am invoking. The teaching experience elaborated by Maria Lima with Viv Golding in this collection is an essential demonstration of the necessity to practice theory in order to perform not only materialistic thinking but most importantly to nourish the materialization of thinking itself. My own teaching practice about Imoinda illustrated in this paper, I hope, is in tune with Lima and Golding's achievements.

[6] The concept of interculturality is meant here to signify all the gendered intersectionalities elaborated in the collective study Interculturality and Gender.

[7] If we glance on some data about here and now: in 2011 in Canada, children are raised by same-sex (80% female) families in 9.4% of cases; on 26 June 2013, the US Supreme Court ruling declares unconstitutional to define marriage solely between a man and a woman; one minister in the Italian government in 2013 is Cecile Kyenge, a woman of Congolese origin, brought up in a polygamous yet Catholic family of one father, four wives and thirty-eight children; in Berlin in 2013 data show more than 50% of families are of singles.

[8] For a critical, detailed analysis of the contemporary, see Teresa Chandler Sabourin's *The Contemporary American Family* (2003); Laura Briggs's *Somebody's Children: The Politics of Transracial and Transnational Adoption* (2012).

[9] Brathwaite articulates a dialectics that is alternative to classical Western philosophy dialectics in *Third World Poems* (1983). I am indebted to Infante's insightful reading of Brathwaite's poetics in his chapter "The Digital Vernacular" in *After Translation* for my appreciation of such tidalectical aesthetics as a Caribbean Poetics, a Creole specificity that places the necessary particular emphasis on the local within the global.

[10] A cultural discussion of this mystique can be found in Douglass Edward Taylor's *Hustlers, Nationalists, and Revolutionaries* (2002); Hazel Carby's *Race Men* (1998); Todd Boyd's *The New H.N.I.C. (Head Niggas in Charge): the Death of Civil Rights and the Reign of Hip Hop* (2002).

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