

CULTURAL MIGRATIONS AND GENDERED SUBJECTS: COLONIAL AND POSTCOLONIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE FEMALE BODY. Silvia Pilar Castro Borrego and María Isabel Romero Ruiz, eds. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011. ISBN (10): 1-4438-2646. 160 pp.

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This volume, edited by Silvia Castro Borrego and Isabel Romero Ruiz, bears testimony of its editors' continuous and praiseworthy efforts to study the gendered subaltern in postcolonial literatures and cultures. *Cultural Migrations and Gendered Subjects* is their latest attempt to offer an exploration of "the contributions of women to the construction of knowledge through cultural and literary representations in an ever-changing global world as migrant subjects" (1). As a collection of essays ranging from an analysis of nineteenth-century British press writings on prostitution to an in-depth study of black women's representation in popular hip hop video culture, it poses a challenge to the naturalization of gender-based experiences and histories of European, Euro-American, African and African American women. Furthermore, it attests to Castro's and Romero's claim for the need of an interdisciplinary critical method as well as for a rethinking of women scholars as "cultural workers", as bringers of "a body of knowledge which fosters self-determination and self-representation" (2).

The book includes an "Introduction" by the editors and six chapters—two of them written by the editors themselves and the rest by well-known specialists on African-American and postcolonial theories and literatures—that focus "on the historical and literary aspects which are connected with the social consideration of the female body in several academic discourses, as framed by factors such as gender, class, race and ethnicity, challenging stereotypes about women's representations and women's identities" (1). In the Introduction, "Repossessing Our Bodies and Ourselves", the editors explain the theoretical underpinnings of the essays following and chart the methodological perspectives that underlie the different approaches taken by the contributors. Grounding their research of contemporary issues on the colonial past and on the diversity of women's experiences, Castro and Romero contend that the definitions of women's identities explored here are based on

women's own experiences, "seeking the ways in which the public marking and marketing of the female body within the Western imaginary contributes to the making of women's social and personal identities" (1). The editors follow closely Jacqui Alexander's and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's call about the need to produce, in the first place, "critical tools and ways of reading our realities that produce liberatory knowledge", which "enable collective- and self-determination for colonized peoples"; and secondly, to "direct the ethics of our thinking towards producing the kind of knowledge which aims at decolonization in the twenty-first century" (2). Thus they firmly back their approach on Satya Mohanty's theory of experience (Mohanty Satya, "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity", 1993) as well as on Alexander's and Mohanty's feminist analysis (*Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*, 1997) on questions such as sexual and gender politics, marginality both in the economic and cultural spheres, and racist and colonial practices in the Western world. In fact, Castro and Romero respond to Chandra T. Mohanty's call in her *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003, xxxviii) when they declare that they would like "to break a new path, together with other scholars, towards an epistemology of anti-colonial feminist struggle" (2). Out of the three models for doing feminist theory presented by Mohanty in *Feminism Without Borders* (the feminist-as-tourist, the feminist-as-explorer and feminist solidarity), Castro and Romero align their efforts to the third model, the relational approach, which relates global and local issues under a commitment towards solidarity across women around the world. Likewise Mohanty, they weave together several thematic approaches. Firstly, they highlight the importance of experience, they address the necessity to renegotiate the politics of identity and to develop a politics of solidarity to establish a truly transnational feminist discourse, connected to the processes of globalization and alert to the connections of race, gender, class, and nation. Thus, they skillfully present the essays as part of their scholarly resistance against the dismantling of what Chandra T. Mohanty calls the politics of solidarity in a common context of struggle. In view of the latest world events, this is perhaps a utopian aim, but respectable and admirable, nonetheless.

In Chapter 1, "Toni Morrison's *Love: The Celestial Whore and Other Female 'Outlaws'*", Justine Tally presents a commendable analysis of how Morrison provides another example of her never-ending project of retrieval of the past of African American history through the present to visibilize aspects ignored by the official record. The novel tells the story of the now dead Bill Cosey and the women who loved him throughout nine chapters that trace the waning of Cosey Hotel and Resort and with it, the moral and physical decline of its family members. The man, deprived of the privilege of being the teller of his own story, is narrated about by these other characters, and thus his omnipresence is a long shadow haunting and darkening the lives of those surrounding him. In the chapters titled "Portrait",

“Friend”, “Stranger”, “Benefactor”, “Lover”, “Husband”, “Guardian”, “Father”, “Phantom”, Morrison provides readers with different pieces that help recompose the puzzle of Cosey’s enigmatic personality and identity, a patriarch who used and oppressed women in twentieth-century America.

The diversity of characters encompasses several geographical locations as well as social and interracial histories. Tally offers a detailed run-down of the history of the places that serve as background to the novel which is instrumental to comprehend the complexity of the black community and, consequently, the layeredness of the characters. In Chapter 1, for example, the focalizer is Junior Vivianne, a run-away from the correctional, who lacks knowledge about her past and relates to the story of The Ramapo Mountain people, in northwest New Jersey, a degenerate race of social outcasts—renegade Indians, fugitive slaves, Hessian mercenary deserters, West Indian prostitutes, known as the Jackson Whites—who lived in isolation and about whom tales have been told ever since the Revolutionary period. Tally sums up here the history of this community as explained by David Steve Cohen in his *The Ramapo Mountain People* (1974), as well as by William Carlos Williams’s version of their origins in his epic poem *Paterson* (1947). Chapter 2, focalized through Sandler, introduces the feelings of Vida, his wife. In contrast to the community of the Jackson-Whites, “Oceanside”, probably a seaside town in Florida, might be inspired, according to Tally, by the history of wealthy black people living at Fernandina Beach, on Amelia Island, twenty-five miles north of Jacksonville Florida. Chapter 3, “Stranger”, tells the story of the “Settlement”, Junior’s correctional, and her yearnings for her father. Chapter 4, “Benefactor”, focalizes on Heed and her devotion for Cosey as he saved her from a life of poverty, as well as on Christine and her marriage to a soldier. Chapter 5, “Lover” focuses on Junior’s affaire with Romen, Sandler’s fourteen-year-old grandson, and recalls her escape from the sexual harassment she suffered at the hands of the administrator of the correctional, which ended up with her expulsion one week before she graduated as an exemplary student. Chapter 6, “Husband”, explains the distancing between Heed and Christine as Cosey married the former at age 11. Chapter 7, “Guardian”, tells about Cosey’s protection of Junior. Chapter 8, “Father”, describes Christine’s adolescence and early adulthood as a member of a Black Revolutionary group during the 1960s, then her life as the mistress of a rich doctor and her return, once discarded by this man, to Cosey’s house. Chapter 9, “Phantom”, concentrates on the disappearance of Cosey from the lives of all the women except “L” and “Celestial”, who are also both dead.

These female characters, “outlaws” escaping from “patriarchal determination” (16), provide descriptions that conform what Tally calls “pictures of extremes” (16), and through these valuable allusions to their “disremembered’ circumstances”, Morrison presents readers with an exceptional account of “the ‘historical origins’ of a variety of black people currently in the U.S.” (15). What

matters, though, is that, Morrison's characters carry the burden of their communal past, be it one of poverty and abandonment or richness and social affluence, even without being aware of it. For Tally, *Love* is, then, a text about the Civil Rights Movement and its contradicting consequences. This is so because if, on the one hand, it was clearly a turning point in the advancement of African Americans, on the other, it increased the differences between their middle classes and the under-classes. Morrison's condemnation, Tally clearly foregrounds, falls then on those African Americans who betrayed racial communal responsibility and sold themselves out to the gilded attractions of what Zillah R. Eisenstein in *Against Empire: Feminisms, Racisms, and the West* (2004) calls "capitalist racialized patriarchy", embodied in the novel in the character of Bill Cosey.

In Chapter 2, "Women's Identity and Migration: Stead's Articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on Prostitution and White Slavery" by María Isabel Romero, analyzes William Thomas Stead's innovative journalistic work on child prostitution, published under the title of "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" in the summer of 1885 in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. These articles triggered two relevant consequences—the enactment of the Criminal Law Amendment, popularly called Stead's Law, and the creation of the National Vigilance Association. In previous articles Romero had thoroughly studied Stead's contributions to the fin-de-siècle Victorian British debates on white slavery and child prostitution and how his articles provoked an uproar that led to the final enactment of the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1885 ("An Act to make Further Provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the Suppression of Brothels, and Other Purposes"), a legal statute designed to protect women, and specially young girls, from sexual exploitation (it raised the age of consent from 13 to 16), and criminalize those profiting from prostitution as a business. Her studies on nineteenth-century prostitution and reform institutions (the London Lock Hospital, for example) are particularly instructive to an understanding of the different discourses regulating sexuality and the role of reform movements in Victorian England.

In this particular essay Romero seeks to study "issues of women's and children's identities and the role of their bodies in the construction of such identities", on the one hand, and, on the other, "issues of the effect of mass media like newspapers on society" (27). Taking into account Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (1992) and her research on Elizabeth Armstrong's case and its consequences based on an approach to working-class identities, Romero extends the exploration of what Walkowitz calls "the technologies of power" to the testimony of the women recruited for prostitution, as well as that of other individuals involved in these transactions—procurers, procuresses and traffickers, among others, as well as to an analysis of how notions of working-class and middle-class respectability informed the construction of Victorian women's sexual identities.

To fully grasp the significance of W.T. Stead's sensationalist journalistic contributions, Romero, firstly, traces the significance of two prevalent notions in Victorian society, purity and innocence, and how they referred to the lack of sexual knowledge in both women and children, as well as their relevance in the discourses related to sexuality and sexual deviancy (Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, 1851; William Acton's *Prostitution Considered in its Moral, Social and Sanitary Aspects in London and other Large Cities with Proposals for the Mitigation and Prevention of its Attendant Evils*, 1857). She presents an enlightening examination of the role of middle-class morality and how women were constructed as asexual subjects in contrast with men who were controlled by their lusty impulses. Women's traits, as defined by the Victorian cult of the angel of the house, were propagated throughout all types of literature, conduct manuals and periodicals. Men's and women's differences, articulated on these binary oppositions, affected their economic and political rights. Prostitution, the Great Social Evil, was considered to be the result of industrialization, and a great threat to the patriarchal family and social moral order. Yet, as Romero rightly explains, the attitudes in public opinion and legal status towards the prostitute or the fallen woman were rather ambivalent and she was simultaneously regarded as a threat (as a figure of contagion and disease, a criminal deserving punishment) and a social victim to be pitied and in need of help. As far as children are concerned, they were also constructed in terms of their moral innocence and lack of sexuality. Deviancy from these images was linked to social class. Moreover, whereas sexual abuse of boys was silenced, girls' loss of their innocence transformed them into polluting figures and a potential menace to other children. As Romero concludes, these two images of both figures are "contradictory" since "they are viewed as victims of corruption and seducers, as social outcasts" and "dangerous individuals" because their sexual knowledge was in opposition to the ideals of purity and innocence, predicated on behalf of their constructions as women and children (50).

These public ideas towards the moral and physical welfare of prostitutes and children explain how Victorian efforts were directed towards the reform of the legislation and the establishment of rescue movements to protect them from exploitation, even though these middle-class efforts were ridden by social hypocrisy, as she shows in her reading on W. T. Stead's articles. Stead's concern for child prostitution sprung out of engagement with reform causes. Yet they must be seen in the light of his new journalistic techniques and a style of writing embedded in Victorian sensationalism and melodrama. At a time where what Matthew Arnold described as "the New Journalism" was expanding and the liberal press was sympathetic to working-class aspirations of respectability, Stead introduced themes and voices, before unheard, that recounted their first-person narratives of sexual exploitation and abuse in his *Pall Mall Gazette*. Prostitution was regulated as far as it had consequences on public disorder, vagrancy and protection against venereal

diseases infections, that is to say, it was not regulated as a crime in itself. Yet, as Romero argues, Stead aimed his investigations under the belief that “it was not vice but crime which needed the enforcement of the law” (33) and, for that aim, he established the “Secret Commission”, a group of three or four people charged with the task of exploring “the sale and purchase, and violation of children, the procurement of virgins, the entrapping and ruin of women, the international slave trade in girls and the atrocities, brutalities and unnatural crimes” (33). Differently from other social investigators on prostitution—William Tait, William Acton or William Miller, for example—who blamed the low moral fiber of women for their own sexual exploitation, Stead, according to Romero, “did not want to criminalize vice when it was a free choice on the part of women”, but “to put an end to the recruiting of innocent girls for the ranks of prostitution by force or fraud”, and also to “the trafficking in women who were obliged to be prostitutes against their wills” (36-37).

To expose his criticism of child prostitution in his articles entitled “The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon”, Stead used the myth of the Minotaur. Romero agrees with Walkowitz’s understanding of the way Stead characterizes the Minotaur as “a feminized monster”, a characterization that “was meant to make women responsible for sexual disorder in the London world of vice which Stead identified with the Labyrinth” (35). Yet, Romero goes beyond Walkowitz’s analysis of the story of Elizabeth Armstrong provided by Stead, since she reveals that his concerns extended to other individuals implied in the process of exhibiting the criminality of child prostitution. Thus, the interviews of two brothel-keepers and other characters involved in the practice (an ex-trafficker and foreign imported girl) come under Romero’s scrutiny and she reveals how Stead’s use of dramatic language and melodramatic plots were strategies to provoke outrage and disgust in his readers, awaken their awareness of the existence of these practices that violated precisely their own ideals of Victorian femininity. Furthermore, she explores an aspect overlooked by scholarship on Stead—the trafficking of women inside British national boundaries and between England and Europe. For her, the system transformed these women into “migrant subjects in the hands of vile, heartless slave traders” (41). Unfortunately, even though she presents this concept of migration as part of the identity of women who were involved in the slave market, readers are left wondering why she does not delve into this approach more thoroughly. In fact, the language she uses becomes dangerously close to the melodramatic tones used by Stead himself in his descriptions.

In her analysis of the trials, Romero draws attention to the fact that they were conducted in a way that highlighted a moral judgment of the working classes, as they were described as elements of depravation and immorality, a conception that revealed the biased opinions reigning among the middle-class reformists. The poor were considered to be responsible for their own moral and physical debasement, and

at the same time, the figure of the Minotaur (compared to the upper-class seducer exploiting virgins) was condemned, instilling class resentment and bringing out the success of Stead's campaign. For Romero, Stead's focus on girl children and women as victims of male lust overlooked a fundamental manifestation of Victorian prostitution: male prostitution and the sexual abuse of boys, as well as the concealment of homosexuality. W.T. Stead's articles spurred the enactment of the Criminal Law Amendment Act and the National Vigilance Association, but paradoxically originated a higher degree of surveillance of women and more social condemnation for working-class mothers as unsuccessful Victorian angels of the house. As a conclusion, Romero provides new insights into "the representation of women and children through the media in terms of sexual identities, and the violation of these identities through prostitution and white slavery" (28). Thus her contribution stands as an in-depth overview of the moral, social, and medical implications of prostitution on Victorian life and its contemporary writings.

In Chapter 3, "Black Bodies in History: Bernardine Evaristo's Fiction", Pilar Cuder analyzes Bernardine Evaristo's four novels—*Lara*, *The Emperor's Babe*, *Soul Tourists*, and *Blonde Roots*—, published in the approximate span of ten years (1997-2008). As a black British writer, Evaristo can be included in the group of non-white British women writers whose way to publication only fully emerged in the final decades of the twentieth century. Evaristo's project of building a collective historical memory through the rewriting of the past of slavery and racism echoes previous and contemporary African American and black British writers' endeavors of Morrisonian re-memory. Cuder, then, studies how Evaristo rewrites History inscribing the black presence into it and places her fiction in the context of recent British fiction which is concerned with this reclamation as well as a consciousness of the constructedness of the past. Relating Evaristo's novels to other black British writers' works, Caryl Phillips's *Cambridge* (1991), David Dabydeen's *A Harlot's Progress* (1999) and Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004), Cuder argues that, similarly to these authors, Evaristo's "main aim is didactic" since "she purports to revisit the past from a fresh perspective, to lay open the workings of race in Britain throughout its history and to fill in the gaps of the official record" (57). Evaristo's literary project resituates Britain's past and present and allocates it into a transcultural relational web of cultural hybridity.

This revisiting, however, changes throughout her fiction, Cuder alerts. Her first and second books, *Lara* and *The Emperor's Babe*, are novels in verse. *Lara* is the first to deal with the historical as a source of identity. History becomes genealogy in the sense that the protagonist's access to it comes through her familial roots. As a *Bildungsroman*, the narrative traces the formation of Omilara, a woman whose lineage comes from Nigeria, England and Ireland, a fact that triggers her identity conflict and her exploration of what it meant to be black in the London of the 60s and 70s. Lara's pains of growing are ridden with racism and stereotypical

images of blackness. The death of her maternal grandmother will precipitate an eagerness to look for her roots, not in Ireland, but, surprisingly, in Africa. The quest for an identity, then, takes her to the geography travelled by her paternal family—Nigeria and Brazil, in what can be understood as a narrative of return in which she finally comes to terms with her mixed ancestry and cultural hybridity. *The Emperor's Babe* delves into the meaning of black British identity retracing London multicultural history to its root in Roman times and, thus, subverts, according to Cuder, the Windrush myth, that is, the traditional idea that the black presence in Great Britain can be dated back to 1948, the beginning of the arrival of migrants from the West Indies. A text influenced by *Antigone*, it traces the story of black Zuleika and her oppression at the hands of a patriarchal racist society. Differently from other critics, for Cuder, *The Emperor's Babe* is tragic and shows her defenselessness against the gender and race limitations imposed by British society.

Soul Tourists, Evaristo's third novel, uses prose and verse and, in contrast to the two previous ones, has a male protagonist and focuses on the constructedness of black British masculinity. Stanley Williams's journey for self-knowledge becomes thus a constant interrogation of different national official histories as he is a witness to the apparitions of eleven ghosts of color—from a black prostitute in Elizabethan London to Alessandro de Medici, the mulatto son of Pope Clement VIII—who act as mediators to awaken his sense of belonging to European history. Yet, Cuder argues that Evaristo's use of these ghostly presences evinces a didactic intrusiveness which verges on overstressed preachiness (68). This sense of didacticism can also be detected in her fourth novel, *Blonde Roots*, which has an ironic title echoing Alex Huxley's celebrated novel *Roots* as well as its film version. The narrative examines the history of the triangular slave trade, and can be classified as a neo-slave narrative aimed at young readers to examine the origins of a black Atlantic identity which transcends the borders of national and continental limitations. Yet what makes it different from previous postmodernist rereadings of slavery is the way Evaristo reverses racist categories—white people are enslaved while blacks are the slave owners—and challenges readers to rethink the past through the coinage of a new language which exhibits the structures of political oppression, echoing George Orwell's use of "Newspeak" in *1984*. As a whole, for Cuder, Evaristo's purpose in rewriting European master historical narratives bringing to light the presence of blacks including racial, gender and class categories is laudable in that it complicates the understanding of black British identity as encompassing both new Afro European and black Atlantic dimensions.

In Chapter 4, "Gender, Migration and Identity: Agnès Agboton's *Canciones del poblado y del exilio*", Mar Gallego studies Agnès Agboton's poetry as a decisive example of the impact of migration in contemporary Spain and a challenge to the homogenization of migrant identities. To counteract given identities and general assumptions, Gallego argues for the need to foreground migrant women's agency

and, specifically, their cultural contributions, since they allow us “to transcend monolithic and homogenous definitions of their subjectivity revealing their proactive role as cultural agents too” (85).

As an internationally reputed scholar on gender and migration studies, Gallego accurately places Agboton’s work in relation to the issue of migration and diasporic movements, and the public discourses’ construction of the gendered migrant subject in Europe from a multicultural and interdisciplinary perspective, and studies how this affects the constitution of new transnational subjectivities. For Gallego, there is a pressing need to integrate migrant women into the inclusive paradigm of historical femininity and, following Chandra Tapalde Mohanty, to incorporate their voices in order to draw new “cartographies of feminist struggle”, particularly in Spain, where before the beginning of the third millennium, they had remained practically invisible. Yet that invisibility, she is alert to foreground, when transformed into visibility reaffirms a hypervisibility which encapsulates a problematic category in some public discourses as they are always viewed as victims and not agents.

In the first two parts of her essay, she presents a remarkable argumentative exposition of theoretical approaches to the idea of women, migration and transnational identities. Gallego establishes the need to address the fact of migration from a gendered perspective. Taking into account the views of Paul Carter, Carmen Gregorio, Deborah Boehm and Elisabetta Zontini, among other theorists, she reflects upon the new forms of femininity and masculinity originated by these transnational movements. Migration, according to Gallego, implies three consequences: a linguistic and cultural displacement, associated with concepts of belonging, citizenship and processes of inclusion/exclusion (78). In migrant women writers she identifies two main ideas related to their role as protagonists: their new status thanks to their own sense of autonomy and empowerment, closely linked to their economic and social status as the keepers of the family both in the destination society and back at home; and their major autonomy closely linked to the transformation of traditional gender roles, both in origin and destination societies (79). At the same time, this sense of autonomy enters into conflict with the patriarchal stereotypes encoded in their communities, where they are disciplined to become keepers of culture and traditions, active agents of cultural reproduction who, at the same time, must also facilitate the access to a new culture.

From Gallego’s perspective, “the cultural consequences of transnational migration entails an invigorated reading into the territorial and cultural configurations this migration is forging” (82). She adheres to the notion that foregrounds not only “transnational communities per se” but “how they affect transnational subjectivities”. Ian Chamber’s (1994) idea of migrants’ “oblique look” and Rosi Braidotti’s (2004) “nomadic subjectivity” are, for her, two suggestive articulations of transnational subjectivities. The former confirms the crumbling of

simple dualisms between the First and the Third World and the constitution of modernity out of diasporic chronicles: The latter refers to the simultaneity of complex and multilayered identities as a continuous and endless process of transformation.

Agnès Agboton, born in Porto Novo, Benin, in 1960, arrived in Barcelona in 1978 and is the author of several books on African cuisine. She is also a storyteller and has written three books on traditional tales of Benin culture both in Catalan and in Spanish. In 2005 she published her autobiographical narrative *Mes enllà del mar de sorra*, later translated into Spanish (*Más allá del mar de arena*). In 2006 her poetry collection *Canciones del poblado y del exilio* was awarded the Villa de Martorell prize and published in a bilingual edition (both in Gun and Spanish). For Gallego, Agboton's poetry can be understood as a narrative of identity which shows the articulation of deterritorialization of identity as it is originated by the fact of migration. Defending the fact of cultural hybridization, Agboton has publicly assumed the role of cultural griot, of the preserver of African tales, as well as that of the spokeswoman for denouncing prejudiced Western conceptions on Africa and, specifically, African women. In her poetry she deals with topics such as love and death, nostalgia and love for her motherland, dreams and frustrated illusion, as well as fears of the consequences of displacement and the difficulties and loneliness involved in integration. Her poems, according to Gallego, encapsulate a formulation of conflicting tendencies within a divided identity that attest to Chamber's oblique look—the impossibility of strict classifications based on exclusions. Agboton's poetic voice embraces a multiplicity of spaces and defies differentiations between the First and the Third World. As for the point of view of Braidotti's nomadic subjectivity, her poetic voice embodies the simultaneity of multilayered identities as well as an identity in permanent transformation; as such, it is transnational, fluid and challenges hierarchical categorizations. Finally, like Toni Morrison and as Justin Tally exemplifies in her previous analysis, Agboton, for Gallego, finds that, in spite of the physical and spiritual wounds posed by migration and diasporic processes, the redemptive power of love based on equality and agency resists and reconstitutes her migrant and transnational subjectivity.

In Chapter 5, "Migrations of the Self: The Search for Identity and Wholeness in Bebe Moore Campbell's novel *What You Owe Me*", Silvia Castro studies how African American writer Bebe Moore Campbell uses ancestral spiritualism to connect the past, present and future and to merge the physical with the spiritual worlds. Like in other narratives, Campbell uses the figure of the ancestor as mediator between times who bridges the worlds of matter and spirit in a search for wholeness which is connected with the search for freedom and agency. Yet, taking into account Johnella E. Butler's perspectives on realist theory, Castro argues that, due to the historical consequences of the African diaspora, besides

ancestral spiritualism, the concepts of re-memory and double consciousness are needed to explore the self trapped between the material and spiritual worlds.

What You Owe Me tells the story of Hosanna Clark, a black woman arrived in Los Angeles from a rural area of Texas after the Second World War, and her friendship with Holocaust survivor Polish Gilda Rosenstein. Thanks to Gilda's knowledge of cosmetics and Hosanna's determination, they start to produce a line of cosmetics for black women. Yet, both are victims to the class and racial prejudices of American society and their relationship is finally eroded when Gilda disappears, taking all the assets. Hosanna is left financially ruined and emotionally betrayed and wounded. When she dies, her daughter Matriece, the novel's talented protagonist and a witness to her mother's suffering, is hired by Gilda's firm to launch a line of black beauty products and she discovers a way to claim Gilda's debt to her mother. The novel stands then not just as a story of revenge, but as a narrative of healing that, according to Castro, encapsulates a "quest for wholeness across generations" (111). Drawing on previous literary representations in the African American tradition, for Castro, *What You Owe Me* presents, however, a new approach to wholeness with the introduction of an ancestor, Hosanna, as a main influence in the life of Matriece. Castro traces the use of a ghost character in African American women's fiction, as part of their religious and cultural legacy, and analyzes Campbell's concept of the ancestor as a real living person in the novel, not as part and parcel of the writer's deployment of magic realism narrative techniques but as a reflection of "ancient African beliefs existing in afro-centric views of the world" (103). Differently from other ghost characters in black women's fiction, Hosanna becomes a guide to her own daughter as well as a catalyst for Matriece's re-memory and, thus, tries to fulfill her revenge on her friend Gilda. At the same time, Matriece's process of change from anger to understanding and forgiveness implies a journey of self-acceptance and her coming to terms with her true identity. This inner journey goes beyond her mother's spirit's demands, though, and brings about healing and forgiveness, that Castro, rightfully relates to the protagonist's reconnection with her own cultural and spiritual traditions.

Finally, in Chapter six, "'About Face', or What Is This 'Back' in B(l)ack Popular Culture?: From Venus Hottentot to Video Hottie", Mae G. Henderson dissects the manifold abuses of black racialized sexuality and offers an incisive examination of the aesthetics of the butt within black culture. Far from limiting itself to being a contemporary phenomenon, the fragmentation and fetishization of the female body implicit in the social construction of black femininity in contemporary cultures of hip hop and rap video music can be traced back to a longstanding tradition in black popular culture. However, Henderson, a traditional, "old-school" black feminist, by her own definition (128), frankly explains the disagreement between feminists like herself and contemporary hip hop feminists on the different meanings that contemporary video models and their performances of the black

body/booty inspire. She delineates the divergent responses from second- and third-wave black feminists on different questions that boil down to two approaches verging on video models' potential as the subversive parody of a hegemonic Euro-American male stereotype of the black female body, on the one hand, and, on the other, on the representation of a non-hegemonic African American male aesthetic of the female body.

Taking into account the historical exploitation of black female bodies in Western art and visual culture, Henderson aligns herself to the ranks of critics that draw an analogy between slavery's auction block and contemporary hip hop culture that stages both black and female bodies and fungible commodities in a racist economy. She is particularly critical of Nelly's music video "Tip Drill," a prime example of the way a mythical black hypermasculinity—attached to dark-skinned blackness—asserts itself through the fetishization and commodification of black women's bodies and skins (paradoxically attached to light-skinned blackness). The performance of the contemporary video model (popularly called "video vixen", "video ho", or "video honey") recalls, however, that of two of her most well-known antecedents: Saartjie Baartman (the "Venus Hottentot") and Josephine Baker (the "Ebony Venus").

Henderson delineates then a continuum of black women's bodies' exploitation that starts with Baartman's display—the exotic black female primitive exhibited as an ethnographic spectacle during the first decades of the nineteenth century, a spectacle that represented and at the same time fostered deeper constructions of the sexualized black woman, follows with black slave women's exhibition on the auction block in slavery territories, runs then through Baker's cannibalization of the tropes of stardom and necrophilia to her own ends—a performance that ended up redefining the image of the black woman as an exoticized and eroticized Other in the European imaginary, and finishes with the contemporary post-millennial emergence of the hip hop video model. Yet, Henderson draws a difference between Baker and contemporary hip hop video models' performance of black hyperfemininity since, whereas the former exerted agency and control of her image—a means to create a subject position—the latter represents the commodification and exchange of black women within an industry in the hands of black and white men who control their bodies. Moreover, for this critic, Baker's self-commodification passed through the appropriation and redirection of the fetishistic gaze of the Other in an act of self-fetishization and rendered her both fetishized object of desire and subject/agent of desire (136). Contrarily to Baker, the contemporary video model—without a face, voice or name—is a passive object used to enhance the role of black male rappers "who arguably function in the videos as surrogates, or substitutes, for the predominantly white male spectator" (138).

Despite the fact that the first hip hop feminist critiques centered on the misogyny in the lyrics of male artists and black women message rappers like Queen

Latifa, among others, achieved success and control over their images, for Henderson, it is the “video vixen” the figure that must be considered “to (re)define black female bodies in public spaces and in the contemporary cultural imaginary” (138). The construction of this image has been complicated by the rise of mega music conglomerates which, together with producers, record company directors and male artists, create and control the image of the female video model.

Like criticism of Baker, critical approaches to hip hop video models are polarized between those critics who emphasize sexual subjectivity and empowerment and those who interpret their performances as sites of sexual availability and exploitation. There is a third perspective influenced by Foucauldian thought, Henderson contends, which argues that this performative practice is both “a site of oppression as well as a space of liberation” (140). This critic, however, does not understand hip hop as a radical genre and agrees with hip hop scholar Tricia Rose who warns against the dangers implicit in its impact as a subcultural influence on young black adult self-image and identity formation. Like Rose, Henderson manifests her concern about those promoters, scholars included, of hip hop who do not assume as their responsibility to explain openly the complex dynamics between popular culture and society since the uncritical representation of sexist and misogynist practices reproduces and perpetuates them (145). Even if from an orthodox Marxist theory of representation hip hop can be interpreted as a counter-hegemonic impulse that functions to critique-dominant ideologies of class and race oppression, if gender and sexual oppression is ignored, its performers as well as its defenders can reproduce the same oppressive practices of the dominant culture. Hip hop, for Henderson, “is not only reflective of dominant and hegemonic social practices”, but “it is also constitutive of social practices and identities” (146). For her, it becomes critical to formulate a theory and a practice that does not reproduce and perpetuate gender abuse. Hence she proposes a theory that not only acknowledges the reflective and constitutive role of popular culture, but an approach that draws on the insights of classic and contemporary trauma theory (147).

Henderson firmly believes in the positive intervention of black feminist scholars in the construction and transformation of young black women’s identities. She explains how psychoanalytic scholarship studies the impact of post-traumatic stress disorder not only on war veterans, but also on individuals who have gone through extreme experiences of violence and aggression, enslaved subjects included. The effects of trauma are, surprisingly, also transmitted to the survivors and descendents of the victims—through narrative memory, family stories, bodily responses and behaviors—who may compulsively and involuntarily re-enact the originary trauma. Taking into account previous studies (Joy Degruy Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*, 2005; Omar G. Reid, Sekou Mims, and Larry Higginbottom, *Post Traumatic Slavery Disorder: Definition, Diagnosis, and Treatment*, 2005) that analyze how

these notions have been adapted to the black situation in the United States under the name of post-traumatic slave syndrome or post-traumatic slave disorder, Henderson argues that “the wounding at the ‘primal scene’ of slavery becomes imprinted on black bodies, internalized in the black psyche, and passed down to subsequent generations” (148). This transmission of trauma from generation to generation provides critical support to juxtapose the position of black women in contemporary hip hop music productions with that of their exhibition in the antebellum slave market, as they reenact the historical subjection of black women to the white male’s spectatorial and exploitative gaze. For her, “the bodily performances of the video model also bear the imprint of the marginalizing and oppressive social conditions impacting black women subsequent to the experience of slavery” (149). Yet, readers are left wondering about the implications of this homogenization of African American history that does not include the experiences of non-slave black communities. Moreover, Henderson’s perspective on the performance of the video model, which only “bears witness to the historical misuse and abuse of the black female body” (149), seems to deprive video models (perhaps black and white) of their agency and cast them in the role of victimized exploited women without taking into account not only their original social, cultural and economic backgrounds but also their own active complicity and willingness in contemporary possibilities opened to women (black and white) by the film and music industry. Consequently, Henderson’s most radical proposal that black feminist scholars from all ranks “theorize a genealogy that will enable their [video models] transformation from voiceless objects of exchange and desire into speaking subjects who can claim agency” (151) might remain as just wishful thinking.

In conclusion, *Cultural Migrations and Gendered Subjects: Colonial and Postcolonial Representations of the Female Body* is a well-researched volume that offers new interdisciplinary perspectives and a wide range of historical and literary critical research on women’s representations across a diversity of discourses.