Unbroken Photography

Towards an Ethics of Agency in Grace Nichols' *i is a long memoried woman* and "Picasso, I Want My Face Back"

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Abstract

In her book-length works *i is a long memoried woman* and "Picasso, I Want My Face Back," the Guyanese-British poet Grace Nichols uses poetry to give a voice to a particular woman in history. The lyrical subjects speaking in these works, an unnamed enslaved woman and the artist Dora Maar, respectively, bear witness to the past injustices they have endured. Through close reading, I show that both testimonial accounts address not only the historical violence suffered by these women but also the epistemic violence perpetrated by a modernist representation of them in writing and in painting. This epistemic violence presents them as non-agents, in crisis and as victims. I argue that at the heart of Nichols' two testimonial projects lies an ethics of agency which not only seeks to make these particular women's voices heard, but which also presents a mode of writing that demonstrates their agency as an inspiration for future women's voices.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Motivation

Postcolonial theory is largely concerned with the legacy of violent colonial histories and how these histories are remembered. This field has given rise to much research into narrative practices that seek to represent testimonial accounts of victims which were hidden from such histories in the present. These narrative practices have not only occupied the minds of scholars, but also propelled the imaginations of many writers and artists. A fascinating paradox hovers over their efforts to lend a voice to unheard voices of the past: in order to identify and empower victims who are literally unable to speak, it seems that the author's only option is to speak for them. This realization inevitably requires a degree of self-reflection and ethical consideration of such concepts as voice, agency, positionality and language. This thesis is particularly concerned with the last of these issues. With regard to each of these concepts, I seek to answer the following question: how to conceptualize responsibility within a narrative practice that gives a voice to underexposed historical figures who may have suffered from traumatic histories?

During my preliminary research, I realized that I was approaching the project with certain assumptions which I drew from trauma theory. Specifically, I took for granted that trauma narratives could only be respectful to the traumatized by presenting their experience in the form of a broken narrative. Trauma, or so I thought, entails the loss of speech, and as such, it would have to be represented with a narrative style that mimics this loss. I thought that essentially traumatic histories cannot be shaped into a cohesive and conventional linear narrative, that the experience of trauma could only be conveyed to the reader through narrative breaks and fragmentation, while the actual traumatic history would remain lost.

In my research in the field of trauma literature, my assumptions were largely confirmed, albeit with the addition of certain nuance. In their

work *Testimony: Crisis in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub argue that the traumatic can never truly be reached, because it lacks language or narrative to represent it. It is therefore always "other" (Felman and Laub 69). They in turn refer to Paul de Man and his discussion of a "radical departure" in his work *Moby-Dick*. In this work, de Man describes how his own displacement and immigration served as a "radical departure" which renders his past as not only other, but completely silent. He compares this "silence of the past" with the loss of a "truth" (69). Subjects confronted with such a loss of truth may therefore experience a "death of self" (69). To Felman and Laub, such a loss of self is fundamentally associated with the traumatic:

> What appears to be an erasure of the past is in fact this quasi-suicidal, mute acknowledgment of a radical loss – or death of truth, and therefore the acknowledgment of a radical loss – or death – of self: the realization that there can be no way back from what has happened, no possible recuperation. (135)

In her article "Language, Translation, Trauma," Alex Pillen affirms the link between the loss of a past and the loss of a coherent self. She explains how it is pain or aggression, which in essence cannot be transferred, that results in the "inarticulate state" of the traumatized. She relates the inarticulate state of being to a state of crisis:

> Trauma denotes the ineffable, inexpressible nature of pain or aggression. A momentary descent into humanity where pain destroys language and carnage leads to an inarticulate state of crisis. (Pillen 96)

With these ideas in mind, I made the conclusion that literary representations whose forms mimic the shattered self in crisis do more justice to the traumatized represented by them. However, I have found that

the poetry of Grace Nichols challenges my above assumption. Therefore, the focus of this thesis is on the form, meaning and consequences of the employment of the lyrical voice in the poetry collection *I am a Long Memoried Woman* and the poem "Picasso, I Want My Face Back," appearing in the poetry collection of the same title by the Guyanese-British poet Grace Nichols.

I was drawn to Nichols' work for three reasons. The first is my love for Nichols' unabashed directness, a quality apparent even in the titles of her poetry collections, *The Fat Black Woman's Poems*, *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* and *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*. The second reason relates to the overarching question about responsibility asked at the beginning of my introduction. In some of her works, Nichols explicitly lends a voice to historical figures, mainly female, who faced oppression. She lets them speak in the first person singular, which stimulates identification and an unavoidable intimacy. However, there seems to be some degree of poetic irony in the presumption that in order to do justice to an unheard voice of the past, and allow it to speak, one must speak for it.

In analyzing Nichols' ironic poetry, it will be useful to look at the underlying connection between both works addressed in this thesis, to examine the psychology of the voices within them, and to assess their similarities and differences. One obvious comparison presents a deep will to work through hardship and seek to reclaim their voices and speak on their own. In *i is a long memoried woman*, an enslaved woman demonstrates ways out of textual representations as she plays with language and literary form. In "Picasso, I Want My Face Back," Dora Maar metaphorically flies out of the frame of the painter Pablo Picasso's Cubist representation of her, which cuts her face to pieces. Her request for an "unbroken photography," or a realist representation, resists meaningfully the dominating aesthetics that presents her. This request touches upon a broader postcolonial critique on modernist aesthetics, which I discuss in this thesis. It is my belief that Nichols strategically claims agency for these women. I argue that this

positionality espouses an ethics of agency that avoids representations of these women as mere victims.

The third reason for discussing these works relates the ethics of agency with my aforementioned assumption. It deals with the tension between the traumatized self in crisis and the literary form that represents that crisis. I argue that in her work Nichols asserts a self that is not necessarily in crisis. Her female heroes strive for self-reclamation despite the poetically fragmented narrative form which contains them and mimetically imagines their experiences. It is equally pertinent to acknowledge the interconnection of the modernist formal qualities present in both works and that broader processes which strive towards self-reclamation. I will explore the relationship between the modernist literary tendencies in Nichols' two works and their representation of a self that is or is not in crisis.

Apart from the introduction, this thesis is divided into two chapters, reflecting the two aspects of my research. In chapter two, I focus on the issue of responsibility and the representation of historical figures in "Picasso, I Want My Face Back," and *i is a long-memoried woman*. I do this by examining the similarities and differences in the performance of the voice that has been given to these women. Through close-reading, I show how both works, each in their own way, evoke the process of reclaiming agency for the traumatized voice. I take a critical look at the performance with which Nichols employs a voice. Both Nichols' works show instances in which the woman's lyrical voice, by way it employs formal qualities, is questioning the ability to do justice to the women that this voice seeks to represent.

In chapter three, using the metaphor of a map, I demonstrate how Nichols' works relate and respond to modernist aesthetics. The influence of these aesthetics not only finds resonance in the poetry of Grace Nichols, but also in the work "Cubes," by the American poet Langston Hughes. Both poets play with modernist aesthetics by using modernist literary devices while critiquing other aspects of modernism, such as colonial rule. However, I

argue that Nichols, unlike Hughes, demonstrates a counterforce, namely an ethics of agency, to the modernist mindset and consequent aesthetics.

The cornerstone for this chapter is the work *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bound* by Stef Craps. In this work Craps creates a categorical distinction between the modernist and the realist aesthetics. He sees the latter as typically better suited to addressing social realities. According to Craps modernist aesthetics is too bound up with a self-referential Eurocentrism. He describes a postcolonial position that exercises a critical gaze towards modernist aesthetics as prescriptive for appreciating narratives that for example represent traumatic histories. He invites scholars in trauma theory to recognize that realist aesthetics can have greater value in addressing social issues, because of its loyalty to historical specificity. As Craps points out, a great difference between modernist and realist aesthetics is that the former is often merely affective, asking for empathy and rendering its heroes as victims of their social environments, whereas the latter allow their heroes to be agents of change. Because Dora Maar in "Picasso, I Want My Face Back" asks for a realist representation of her face, against a modernist representation, she seems to side with Craps in his consideration of the two aesthetical forms. However, looking closely at Nichols' two works, a blurring of boundaries between categories seems prominent.

The blurring of boundaries between these aesthetic categorizations can be theorized through the concept of a multidirectional memory, which I discuss in the second section of this chapter. Multidirectional memory is a term coined by the historian Michael Rothberg in his work *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization.* This notion refers to the way in which different histories relate and refer to each other during the act of memory creation, rather than acting as rivals for recognition. This section aims to demonstrate that with the help of a multidirectional memory, the seemingly opposed categorical distinctions outlined in the first section are not necessarily mutually exclusive. I will add that not only the histories but also the aesthetical forms with which Nichols'

work engages, rather than competing with or substituting each other, refer to each other in order to create a sense of connection and entanglement. I argue that Nichols' poetry applies the creative potential in the way described by the concept of a multidirectional memory. Nichols' heroes connect anachronistic forms and histories to create their own unique historiography and aesthetics. This effort serves the cause of the women's empowerment.

The third section of this chapter takes a step further in relating Nichols' poetry to the dominance of modernist literary devices. I refer to Derek Attridge's *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*. In his analysis of Coetzee's novels, Attridge also describes a categorical distinction between modernist and realist literary accounts. His reference to the post-Apartheid era is particularly relevant for discussions around narrative practices in relation with questions over justice. He explains that literature after Apartheid needed to fit social demands towards change, namely "[t]he demand that the production and judgment of art be governed by its immediate effectiveness in the struggle for change was immensely powerful" (Attridge 1). He explains that this resulted in a similar critique of the modernist literary form:

> […] and in many discussions of SA literature this demand gave rise to a suspicion of anything appearing hermetic, self-referential, formally inventive, or otherwise distant from the canons and procedures of the realist tradition. (1)

Despite this (and in contrast to Craps), Attridge does not reject the modernist literary qualities mentioned in the quote. Instead, he proposes a modernist aesthetics that is intimately connected to the question of social justice. With the tools for reading that Attridge provides, I see an opportunity to interpret the literary devices in Nichols' poetry in respect of a modernist aesthetics that discusses social issues.

Grace Nichols and the Caribbean context

Grace Nichols was born in Georgetown, Guyana. She writes from the perspective of the black diaspora which developed over four centuries of Dutch and British colonial rule. During the colonial period the local economy was based around sugarcane cultivated by enslaved African laborers. Nichols was born as Guyana was moving toward independence from the UK, which it achieved in 1966. In 1977 she moved to the UK, where she started publishing her poetry in English. Nichols' first collection of poetry, *i is a long memoried woman*, was published in 1983. This work resonates with the histories of colonial oppression and slave trading. Other poetry collections include *The Fat Black Woman's Poems* (1984), *Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman* (1989) and *Sunris* (1996).

Most of the women heroes presented in Nichols' poetry offer an insight into the experiences of women and their struggle for identity in society. Much, though not all of her work centers on the struggle of black women. Generally, the women heroes in Nichols' work go through processes of emancipation and self-reclamation. This means above all that these women resist representations that framed them in a position of powerlessness. As Nichols herself explains in "The Battle with Language," appearing in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference:*

> It is true that black women have carried much more than their share of hardships along the way. But I reject the stereotype of the 'longsuffering black woman' who is so strong that she can carry whatever is heaped upon her. There is a danger of reducing the black woman's condition to that of 'sufferer', whether at the hands of white society or at the hands of black men. (Nichols 284)

In the substantial literature about Nichols and her poetry, she is often related as a Caribbean woman's writer. Satisfying connections have been drawn between Nichols' poem's representation of the black body and

geography, the body as a site of remembrance.[1] The position of such a black body in the British society and specifically the London context has also been addressed in her works. However, I found the article "The Representation of Trauma and Trauma Coping Strategies in Nichols' *I is a Long Memoried Woman*" by Merve Sarikaya-Sen, which discusses the representation and overcoming of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Nichols' work, to be particularly useful in my research. The article discusses how the collection explores both the symptoms of PTSD and strategies to overcome it. Sarikaya-Sen's discussion of rewriting history as a form of overcoming traumatic symptoms finds resonance within memory- and postcolonial studies.

However, I am primarily interested in the relation that Stef Craps and Derek Attridge outline between poetic formal qualities and their ethical effectiveness. For a new scholar in memory studies, such a discussion in relation to Nichols' work is fascinating because she seems to challenge and respond to literary traditions that deal with memory. As an admirer of Nichols' work, I cannot deny these literary traditions that inform her poetry. Her work seems to refer directly to modernist aesthetics while playing with its traditions. Through the connections she draws to colonial processes, she hints that the dominance of modernist aesthetics and its traditions have influenced the English-speaking Caribbean as a result of colonial power. I was therefore motivated to dive more deeply into the history and meaning of the use of this form in her work.

[1] See for example Mara Scanlon's thesis on the body in *The Divine Body in Grace Nichols's "The Fat Black Woman's Poems,"* in where she analyses the meaning of black body in a foremost white British society. Another fascinating work is Isabel Hovings' *In Praise of New Travelers: Reading Caribbean Migrant Women Writers,* in which Hoving makes a fascinating reference to the use of body parts in poetry as actors of rebellion.

Research Questions and theoretical underpinning

In his work *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading: Literature in the Event*, Derek Attridge asks the following question: "is it possible to do justice to the otherness of the other in the language and discursive conventions that have historically been one of the instruments ensuring that this other is kept subordinate" (17). His question on the relation between the language, or the formal qualities of literature, and its possibility to do justice to certain histories is foundational for my thesis. In order to make this question relevant for this thesis, I will relate each part of it to the form employed in Nichols' two works.

Attridge's employment of the word 'justice' relates to the injustices done in particular social realities and their acknowledgement or repairment through narrative practices. The question of justice then asks how the narrative practice can do justice to such harmed realities or histories. I will ask how Nichols' employment of the lyrical voice seems to intend to do justice to the women represented in the two works, women who are, according to Nichols, forgotten subjects in history. However, there seems to be an irony in the deployment of the voice of these women. If doing justice means that the historical figures receive a necessary voice and a platform to speak, the voice given by Nichols' simultaneously reveals an ethical stance in giving voice as a form of justice. I look at how Nichols' two works deal with this irony.

Second, Atridges' mentioning of the "otherness of the other" gives credit to the issue of irony. Otherness could be seen here in the way that the poetry of Nichols presents the historical figures that she is represented as others. How do Nichols' poems deal with the historical figures they are representing? Does she claim voices for them, or does Nichols respect them as historical others in the sense that, as Cary Caruth explained, history is a lost 'other' and is unreachable? In what sense are the figures represented as 'other' to us?

The "language and discursive conventions" refer in the case of Nichols to the formal qualities and the languages used in her poems. In

Attridge's question a hint is made that the "discursive conventions" imply the formal qualities and language with which realities are represented. I question how the formal qualities employed in Nichols' poems are related to the social realities which are represented in the works.

To summarize the questions that I will ask in this thesis:

- Is the lyrical voice that Nichols' is employing able to do justice to the historical woman of the past as they are represented in the poetry collection, *i is a long memoried woman* and the poem "Picasso, I Want My Face Back?"
- What do Nichols' poems do with historical figures that they are representing? Do they claim voice for them, or does she respect them as historical others in the sense that Cary Caruth explained that the history is a lost 'other' and is unreachable? In what sense are the figures represented 'other' to us.
- How are the formal qualities employed in Nichols' poems related to the social realities which are represented in both works?

Chapter Two: Towards an Ethics of Agency

Introduction

In both *i is,*[2] and "Picasso,"[3] a woman is speaking to the histories that have excluded them. In *i is*, an enslaved woman shares her experiences about the hardship that she endures through her displacement and dehumanization as the enslaved. In "Picasso" it is Dora Maar who speaks to the modernist paintings by the Spanish painter Pablo Picasso that cut her face into a dramatic Cubistic presentation.

By evaluating the differences in the performance of this voice in both works, this chapter will seek to identify an ethics of agency. Both works put an emphasis on the process of emancipation for the women that demonstrates a comparative ethics and a mode of choice. This comparison critiques and proposes a counter voice to other historical representational voices that present these women and their histories. The historical contexts in which the women in the works operate differ immensely in time and place but there are links that connect the different histories to a legacy of colonial rule and oppression. For the main body of this chapter, I will close-read both works to look at how this form of voice in each work, distinctly from their historical context, propels the voices' lyrical transformation towards agency.

To analyze this transformation, I will look to current discussions within memory studies that question the meaning and consequences of the representation of subaltern voices. I believe on the one hand that Nichols' form of rewriting historical figures can serve as a functional strategy to change perceptions of those whose voices have been suppressed. Namely, this rewriting has the aim to emancipate these voices' presumed victimhood. On the other hand, the voices that speak in both works are

[2] From this moment this abbreviation refers to *i is a long memoried woman*
[3] From this moment this abbreviation refers to "Picasso, I Want My Face Back"

aware that this rewriting cannot serve as a reparation of the figure she is representing in the present. Instead, rewriting as Nichols' work performs, does not serve to repair injustices done in the past, but aims to imagine an ethical voice for the future. I demonstrate this point by locating the appearances of this self-reflexive voice in each work.

Overlaps and Differences

There are many points of overlap between Nichols' first collection of poetry and last sequential poem, between "Picasso" and *i is*. In short: both works give a lyrical voice to a historical figure and both works are identical in regard to the performance of this voice, by which I mean the transformation of that voice towards self-government. However, they both portray this voice in such an idiosyncratic way that each respects its distinctive historical context.

The differences between the two works lie in the form through which the emancipation of this voice is conveyed. This is mostly dependent on the vocalizing methods that Nichols employs. Both her lyrical subjects are centralized, allowing the reader to become an eyewitness, catching glimpses of the thoughts of the protagonist. In "Picasso," this is done more directly than in *i is*. In "Picasso" the woman is presented almost exclusively using the singular voice, which represents the historical figure Dora Maar. As we hover along the musings, feelings and perspective of this Parisian artist, we learn that her emancipation is exclusively located within her train of thought, and only once travels outside of the flow of her thinking.

In *i is*, the woman is vocalized in both the singular voice as the third person voice, as is already present in the collection's title. If the reader doesn't take into consideration the title as a Creole expression, the pronoun "I," followed by the conjugation of the verb 'to be' into the third person instead of into the first person singular, indicates that the lyrical "I" ís a figure, or a long-memoried woman being spoken for rather than a person who speaks from her own singularity. Upon reading, it becomes clear that this figure represents an unnamed enslaved female victim of the Middle Passage. Her voice envelops a mix of backgrounds and experiences, presenting the lives of several women in different circumstances, having different experiences. Rather than Dora Maar, whose individual history is put forth through a single voice, the enslaved woman's individual experience is blurred into the presentation of a shared experience. This

explores not only an adversity to recollect mere individual experiences of such a mass event, but also discusses the fact that the individual's experience necessarily partakes in collective memory, or history. However, the desire for the individual to be heard on her own is made evident by the protagonists' question "who will remember me?" (1983-16). This question reflects both poem's implicit assumption that one has a need to be heard by another. In the following section I will look at how both works aim to be heard.

First it can be said that the lyrical voice of Dora Maar in "Picasso" and the enslaved woman in *i is* speak in free verse. Rhyme sequences follow each other unconventionally. Verses are repeated and placed throughout the works. They perform different styles which seem to mimic different mood-states of the protagonist. The sequential quality of both works gives them a durational character, which has the advantage of demonstrating progression and narrative. "Picasso" consists of 20 stanzas in which the voice of Dora Maar presents her different observations and thoughts while hanging in a museum hall, reconsidering her position. In *i is*, no less than 51 individual poems collected in five individual chapters speak of the experiences the enslaved woman from the moment that she has "stumbled onto the shore" of the "new world" (6). The connections between the stanzas are, in both works, not made conventionally, through narrative build-up, but rather through fragmentation, in which assonance and repetition of sound and metaphor serve to connect and structure.

In *i is*, the relations between events are suggested by the recurrent connections between the metaphor of birthing and planting. The woman's memories of the "sea" as a "seed" for change are indicative of the collection's interest in the colonial transatlantic slave trade as an interruption of rootedness. At the same time, the assonances imply an inherently forced relation of the enslaved woman's new identity with the new landscape that she inhabits, a landscape characterized by the presence of sugarcane. Through internal referencing, the collection connects anachronistically the woman's childhood memories and the traditions from which she was

initially born with the traumatic journey and the re-birth into the New World, and, finally, with a second re-birth of the woman who claims for herself a new identity. Such recurrent images of birthing and planting also seem to present a more metaphysical interconnectedness which clings to the notions of movement and becoming. The events, the identities and the individuals in this collection are part of one and the same overarching spirit of movement, recreation and shift of power relations.

In the poem "Picasso," such a spirit of movement and connection is likewise present. The poem's stanzas demonstrate a dramatic monologue with a call-and-response effect. In this poem, Dora Maar speaks and asks questions, while she reflects on her own position within Picasso's painting *Weeping Woman*. The stanzas oscillate between tones and moods to present a variety of positions that the woman takes towards her artistic rendering. Towards the end of the poem, she grows herself metaphoric wings to finally fly out of her enframement and consequent entrapment. Rather than suggesting a re-birth, Dora Maar in this poem reclaims control over the recreation of her own self by drawing a new picture of herself in words. Like in *i is*, the woman's new identity is marked by the language that speaks of her, or in Dora Maar's case, speaks of herself.

The fragmentary quality of both works includes sudden line-breaks and repetitions. For example, in "The Days That Fell" in, *i is*, the following lines are repeated like a chorus of a song:

> And yet…..
> And yet…..
>
> the cutlass in her hand
> could not cut through
> the days that fell
> like bramble
> (11,12)

Such repetitions produce a rhythm that evokes the idea of musicality and singing. The use of such lyrical poetry, with reference to rhythm and song, resonates with the many intertextual references to folktales and rhythms drawn from the different cultures and traditions that came from or were brought to the Caribbean. These references, including those to European Christian traditions, are weaved into the collection as a consolidated Caribbean fabric. Especially in the collection *i is*, traditions and their importance for the woman's feeling of belonging to a certain community, play an important role in the creation of a new identity for her. The enslaved woman embodies but also resists the disruption caused by the slave trade which has left her cut-off tfrom her traditions and forced to adapt to colonial norms, language and aesthetics.

An important formal quality to which *i is* refers, is the culturally-specific form of mourning and remembering. Among such forms, the collection makes a reference to the English elegiac tradition to mourn that which is lost, whether it is the "lost souls" of the Middle Passage, or the spirits of the woman's past beliefs. Looking at the collection, there is a moment in which the woman acknowledges a strong awareness of those who died due to the Middle Passage whereas she herself lives. She demonstrates frustration with the limitation of reconciliation with this loss through expression. This is especially marked in the poem with the title "eulogy," in which the enslaved woman mourns the difficulty to adequately "eulogise," or "dance" the "lost souls" of the Middle Passage:

> How can I eulogise
> their names?
> What dance of mourning
> can I make?
> (17)

Far away from traditions that informs her culture's proper forms of mourning, the woman laments that there is no form of hers. She can access

neither the elegiac tradition, nor the West African spirits that have followed the nameless across the ocean. This moment of grappling with the poetic form in its failure to accurately represent the "lost souls" of the Middle Passage is particularly relevant for the argument of my thesis. The question "how" challenges many positions and debates about form and aesthetics. On another level, it seems that the woman in the collection not only speaks to the "lost souls" that died in the Middle Passage, whereas she survived, but also speaks to the limitation of the collection itself in commemorating the events to which the woman is serving as a witness. Through this moment of self-reflection, the woman is demonstrating her awareness that, through her work of remembering, she speaks for those who never were able to be a witness. It seems that it is Nichols herself who is vocalized to demonstrate her awareness and consideration with that she is speaking for others.

But, instead of rendering the past as completely lost, the lyrical voice in *i is* laments that the losses remain in "limbo," namely "condemned to the life of living dead" (Sarikaya-Sen 330). The "lost souls" in the collection are oblique like ghosts, apparent only by way of memory and traces. In the same poem "eulogy," the woman gives the "lost souls" proper names, to give them some sort of historiography:

> Dayadu, Ishiodu, Anamadi
> plunging wildly to the waters
> of your fate
> Kobidja, Nwasobi, Okolie
> swallowing your own tongues
> cold and stiff on your chains
> (18)

What Nichols presents in her works by way of speaking for and with these "lost souls," resonates with what Stef Craps (2013) calls the act of "ventriloquism" (1). This act, with which probably many were confronted as children, gives the child the illusion that a voice belongs to an object,

usually a doll-object, whereas behind the object someone else is speaking by throwing their voice. In the following section I will close-read Nichols' two collections of poetry to demonstrate how Nichols' works throw a voice to claim agency for two historical women.

Assonance, Repetition and Resilience

The process of striving towards agency is highlighted in *i is* through the metaphor of a re-birth. The collection begins with the violent and forced re-birth of a woman and ends with the re-birth of her speech. The collection starts with the woman's internal wandering over her past, contemplating the moment that she was re-born "from one continent/to another" (1983-6). As noted in the introduction, the collection's metaphor of birthing runs parallel to the metaphor of planting. Such recurrent lexical relations inherently relate landscape with the events happening on the island, which hints to the colonial (and sexual) violence to which the woman is subjected.

The cut from her original soil or soul similarly instigates a break from the woman's identity. Throughout the collection, the woman tries to grapple with this loss, while she remembers and mourns her past identity. The woman reminisces "from the darkness within her" about her arrival onto the shores of the "New World" (7). As she no longer walks on West African shores, but those of the West Indies, she considers this 'New World' as impossible of recreation, of being the source of (a) new life. The precariousness of the lack of self-hood is marked in the collection by the suggestion that she is no longer protected by the "jigida guarding the crevice / the soft wet forest / between her thighs" (7). The woman concludes that the island can in fact be a source of recreation, namely, it is essentially "fertile of brutality" (31). And as she is no longer protected by an identity of her own, she is vulnerable to such brutality.

The brutality that infiltrated the landscape is attributed by the woman to the sea. It was the "sea that lashed" that consequently created a "fire that seared" (8). This landscape, now contaminated with violence, produces "men who seed the children" (8). Such assonances as "sea" and "seed," used to mark the woman's physical transplantation, seem to function as synonyms. They refer metonymically to the historiography of the transatlantic slave trade which created a new geographical demography and epistemology. "[N]ow she stoops / in green cane fields" (8), the enslaved woman becomes an integral, but unacknowledged, part of this

history. In her new "unadorned" position, without clothes or markers of an identity of her own, she not only becomes an integral part of the colonial system but also vulnerable to "that look in their eye" (8). In other words, she is no longer protected by her jigida from the leering eye of the colonizer whose gaze and violent fantasies seal her wretched fate.

In the first poem of the collection "One Continent/To Another" the woman's transplantation is shown as a disruption that removes her from the safe grounds of her past, traditions and beliefs. The woman's separation between the past and the present and that marks the beginning of the collection, suggests that she was once someone whole, but is now broken and dehumanized. In other words, the beginning of the collection suggests that the "sea that lashed" (8) brought about a distinction between the good and the bad continent. The inherently protective shores of West Africa are presented in opposition to the inherently violent shores of the West Indies. The dichotomy of the inherently good and inherently bad landscape reflects the woman's split psyche, which can be seen as a product of her trauma. Throughout the collection, this dichotomy is reconsidered through the woman's rewriting of her new environment, and she develops a more nuanced perspective on both the new landscape and herself. She blurs the boundaries of the good and bad landscape and invents a new sense of being for herself by integrating both places and her past and present self. This process gives her a degree of agency which dissolves the clear-cut boundaries between the good and the bad of both the realms place and identity.

This integration is made tactical through the assonances and repetitions mentioned earlier. For example, the collection draws attention to the word "beads." The "jigida" to which the collection repeatedly refers, which adorns and guards the woman's "crevice," is typically made from such beads. Whereas the sea uprooted the woman, the beads seem to be markers for a reclaimed self. The collection associates the beads of her jigida with the traditions and values that guard the woman's sexuality. In the new environment, such preservation initially seems impossible to the

woman, as she is no longer “adorned” with the traditions that previously defined her. It makes her vulnerable to the sexual violence endemic to the island. In response to this loss and from her position as a nameless enslaved person, she advocates the recollection of values and traditions that came along by boat to the new environment. The woman refers to this collective of spirits, inspired from Yoruba, Carib, Arawakan, Ashanti but also the colonial Christian traditions, as the “ancestral winds” (70). She asks this wind to help her recollect the beads of her lost jigida. She expresses that she will become “a woman / charting my own futures” and can only be at peace again when she is finally “holding my beads in my hand” (79). In other words, the woman finds her identity not by merely returning to the shores of her past, but by creatively interweaving the past and the present environment into a new fabric that can ‘adorn’ and define her anew.

The woman not only finds a way of being by integrating anachronistic elements, she also demonstrates self-hood by taking control over the events happening to her. By way of indirect reference, the events in the collection explore forms of resilience that may have been in the realm of the possible for enslaved women. Merve Sarikaya-Sen argues, that during the slave trade enslaved women resisted sexual violence by means of taking control over their woman- and motherhood (Sarikaya-Sen 325). As an example, she mentions that already through the choice for abortion a certain degree of agency for the enslaved woman was demonstrated. The collection pays homage to this history by including abortion as a form of rebellion against sexual violence. In the poem “ALA” abortion is referenced as:

> then they coat her in sweet
> molasses and call us out
> to see…..the rebel woman
>
> who with a pin
> stick the soft mould

of her own child's head
(23)

In the poem "In My Name" the woman welcomes her bastard child -- a result of colonial and sexual violence. She asks the child to "command the earth / to receive you / in my name / in my blood" and tenderly acknowledges its historical relevance and interconnectedness with her fate as she calls it "my bastard fruit / my seedling / my sea grape" (56).

The act of choosing by acting out abortion or receiving the child is important for the final argument of the collection that demonstrates her agency. The act of choosing may also be found in the woman's choice for wording in describing these events. The woman demonstrates awareness that her descriptions aren't objective, but subjective to her perspective and that she can use them in favor of her. In the poem "Skin-Teeth," the woman's lack of power is a prominent issue. Nevertheless, she uses her imagination and knowledge to rewrite history to resist colonial powers. In the poem the woman describes her patience, while brooding on revenge, when there is no other option than being submissive. In the description of such seemingly submissive gestures as her smile or a bend, the woman reclaims some form of agency by rewriting the meaning of such gestures:

Not every skin-teeth
is a smile "Massa"

if you see me smiling
when you pass

if you see me bending
when you ask

Know that I smile
Know that I bend

only the better
to rise and strike
again
(50)

Memory in this poem refers not merely to acts of describing events but to the act whereby imagination transgresses the meaning of the events. The woman in the poem "Days That Fell" is aware that "all revolutions are rooted in dreams" (11). The strength of her agency, shown through the fact that she is imagining a revolution for the future instead of mourning a past, increases further in the collection. Her change in perception and trust in good beginnings, follow the rhythm of the landscape. Following the hurricane season on the island, repetition of lines accelerate throughout the collection, becoming rhythmic and hinting at her enthusiasm. The woman presents such indicators as "a signal, a small omen" and the "Wind a change" to refer to a new becoming (73,75). Whereas the sunlight indicates spiritual healing, she whispers to the "ancestral wind" to bring about change:

Wind a change
blow soft but
steadfast

ripple the spears
of sugar cane
stir slow the leaves
of indigo
(73)

Beginning with nothing more than a soft breeze, the island's hurricane season inspires the woman with the promise of not just a subtle change but a revolution, with which the collection ends. With reference to the hurricane season and wind, the woman calls out to the spirits that also inspired the

general Toussaint as he led the Haitian revolution. The woman dreams to hear the "drumprayers to Vaudoux / in darkforest clearing / Toussaint!" (70). A swirling hurricane of repetition in consequent poems recalls memories of the only successful rebellion by enslaved peoples: the Haitian revolution. In the drum-like rhythm the events of the revolution are re-called, repeated in four couplets:

> It has come
> It has come
>
> Fireritual
> and bloodfeast
> a banner of heads on spikes
> the black surge
>
> and Toussaint in
> the Fort de Jour
> dying with cold.
>
> (76-77)

The woman celebrates and finds hope from her memories, or rather her imaginings, of the rebellion. The messages of hope and the preservation of memory as a means to provoke positive change mark the woman's unrelenting struggle to retain a form of agency. She gains power by imagining alternative histories. Likewise, the stories that she tells herself and dreams of telling others are exemplary of a similar hope.

The woman dreams of sharing the memory of the Middle Passage with a new generation, sweetening it with beauty and adornments, while also reminding her offspring of the enslaved ancestors, for example, the Benin Kingdom of Dahomey:

> even in dreams I will submerge myself

swimming like one possessed
back and forth across that course
strewing it with sweet smelling
flowers
one for everyone who made the journey

and at evenings I will recline
hair full of sun
    hands full of earth
I will recline on my bed of leaves
bid the young ones enter sit them
all around me

feed them sweet tales of Dahomey.
(10)

Through this rewriting, the woman emphasizes her new relation to the new landscape which was initially considered by her as the bad landscape. As noted in the beginning of this section, most relevant to this rewriting is her identification with the possibility of a change in the landscape itself. The woman finds spiritual healing by following the seasonal weather as not only a revolution for historical change, but for a revolution in herself. She experiences the "taste of new birth" by "the benediction of the sun" (67). When the tumultuous hurricane season, instigated by the "ancestral winds" ends and the island returns to be a peaceful and sunny garden, also the woman is changing: "the sky is singing / I am singing into the day / moving / beyond / all boundaries" (67). Her own rebirth, following the island's seasonal and historical change and motivated by memories of the past, marks the potential of renewing. Expressing the possibility of such renewal is, in my reading, the ultimate point of the collection. It is particularly marked in the last poem of the collection, its "epilogue:"

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old
one
a new one has sprung
(80)

There may be a meaningful connection between the first and the last lines of the collection. The first stanza introduces the women as nameless and uprooted from her original soil. In the last stanza, the emphasis on a singular old tongue, is made by the formally separated "one" by line-breaks. The isolation seems to suggest a transformation of the woman's figurative "tongue," or in other words a transformation of something singular and original. Earlier in the collection she has mentioned that she came from a single and specific place that gave her strength: "I come from a country of strong women" (9). Her transplantation by the Middle Passage, however, created a rupture from her strong singularity and instead she became one of the many enslaved. The woman's process to becoming "a woman / charing my own futures," happens for the woman not by reclaiming this singularity, but by embracing the many elements of the memories that she carries with her as the enslaved. Instead of presenting her hybridity as a weakness, she picks the strong elements from such memories.

More specifically, in the poem "Web of Kin," the woman dreams of fueling her offspring with "sweet tales of Dahomey," the former Kingdom of Benin (10). In "Like Anansi," the woman appropriates the spirit of the spider Anansi "waiting/with a long/and naked fury" to resist her enslavement (65). In "The Return" the woman tries to recollect the "Abeng voice," which refers to the sound made with an animal horn, according to the tradition that is associated with the Jamaican Maroons and which delivers the promise for change (69). In short, the woman finds inspiration from such elements in order to create a vision on herself that finds hope and solace from the plurality of origins. The new "one" tongue, as it is not set apart from

the rest of the line, seems to indicate this plurality, incorporating all enslaved voices of the past. The plurality seems to be presented not merely as descriptive but to serve to demonstrate power as these voices, languages and cultures come together in her "new tongue."

To conclude, the transplantation of the woman into a new environment indicated her being completely uprooted. Unadorned, thus taken from her identity, the woman needs to find a new set of values, language and ethics to recreate an identity. The metaphors of becoming that the collection uses, such as birthing and planting, as well as the location of the sea between two lands and identities, refer to the geographical displacement that the woman underwent by the Middle Passage slave-trade. The anachronistic and fragmented quality of the collection mimetically refers to the broken identity that the woman experiences through this rupture. However, the effect of the recurring appearances of the words birth, beads, bean, sea and seed instigate a connection relating the different poems in the collection to each other. As the woman embryoids them into different poems, they adorn the collection to suggest a form of coherence between fragments. This could be seen as an allegory for the way the woman does not give up hope during the moment of crisis but demonstrate the power of connecting and meaning making. This last stanza serves as an overarching poem, marking on the one hand the connecting function of language and on the other hand the agency of the woman in using language to make such connections.

Such a process of emancipation and affirmation of agency is also traceable in Nichols' long poem "Picasso, I Want My Face Back." In this poem, Nichols uses an ekphrastic method. Ekphrasis is the description of a work of art by another medium. It seems to serve here as a functional tool to write back to the history of 'Western' aesthetics and its icons. It can serve to question the conventional knowledge of painting's place in 'Western' art historiography. However, not only visual aesthetics are addressed in the poem. The poetic mosaic form and free verse also touch upon literary traditions, to which I will refer in the next chapter. Nichols' poem, which gives the historical figure of Dora Maar a voice, gives this figure wings to fly out of the frame of her historical representation. She is calling out for the emancipation of the literally framed woman in paint and in biographies. Similarly, Dora Maar is flying out of the modernist tradition that holds her hostage in this frame. The duration of the poem, taking the space and time of twenty stanzas, serves as a perfect tool to transform the images and knowledge that are distributed about Dora Maar as Picasso's muse. They speak to the reader as if the words were to flow from the painting's silenced mouth.

Speaking from her position in Pablo Picasso's painting *Weeping Woman*, now hanging in the hall of the Tate Modern in London, Dora Maar positions herself in relation to her enframement. Written during a residency at the Tate Gallery, the poem resonates with popular biographies, in which Maar is immortalized as Picasso's lover and assistant while he was working on the painting *Guernica* in 1937 in Paris, close to her home. In the poem, Maar relates her relationship with Picasso to her abandonment of her independent work as an artist. In a dramatic monologue with a call and response effect, she reflects on the process by which she came to serve as an essential model for Picasso's series of grieving women. For this series, Picasso depicted her crying, meeting characteristics of the *Mater Dolorosa*, a depiction of the Virgin Mary in relation to her sorrows. Moreover, according to biographies, Picasso described her as the representation of the essence of women as suffering machines (Mac Gregor-Haste 145). The title

"Picasso, I Want My Face Back," speaks powerfully to the damage done by the famous painter in essentializing this representation of her as a crying and passive woman. In accordance with cubist aesthetics, his portrait of her deforms and fragments her face into an endless position of mourning which has taken her speech. The otherwise playful modernist and anti-realist transformations Picasso is famous for are condemned by the Dora Maar of the poem as mockery; she is rendered as a "clown." In her lamentation, she requests for a reparation from a modernist to a realist representation, according to the quality of photographic realness: "Picasso, I want my face back / the unbroken photography of it" (2009-16).

Some of the stanzas in the poem hint at a different mood-scape, reflecting a dramatic monologue in which Dora Maar considers different positions. The call and response effect, showing her from different sights and angles, mirrors her perception of herself in the painting as a "broken piece of crockery" (10). She betrays a not-so-subtle disdain for the typical portrayal by Picasso of the different angles and perspectives of a face or object. Dora Maar's critique of such fragmentation becomes meaningful when one looks at the painting by Picasso which immortalized her. According to Picasso's celebrated aesthetics, it mimetically relates Dora Maar as being shattered. The difference between the poem and the painting is that the fragmented mind in the poem challenges the link between fragmentation and crisis. The painting may suggest a crisis by the dramatic aestheticization of Dora Maar, in which she cries into a handkerchief. In the poem, the fragmented mind is put forth as one that actively considers which position among the fragmented pieces is most valid and thereby performs the process towards agency through choice.

Such a choice is also demonstrated by the metaphors and descriptions with which the Dora Maar of the poem describes herself. Stanza 4, for example, explains that her identity has become synonymous with the artistic value of the representations that exist of her, by stating that "I am" "a magnet," "an icon" and "a symbol" of art (10). In Stanza 4, however, Dora Maar similarly demonstrates that her love for Picasso and submission

to his representation created a metaphorical transformation of her from a respected wild and independent animal into a domestic one:

> from lioness to goddess
> from goddess to doormat
> from eagle, raven, swan
> into a silly duck
> flapping about all day
> in case he calls.
> (11)

Her own critique of female loyalty and self-devaluation is laid bare in these lines. The metaphoric transformation from being a respected and self-respecting wild animal into a domestic "silly duck / flapping about" reflects her shift from being an artist in her own right to the muse of Picasso. The transformation demonstrates the character Maar's awareness and self-criticism over her attachment to Picasso. Later in her poem, Nichols will repeat metaphor as a functional tool for change, but instead of using metaphorical comparisons with domestic, or perhaps seemingly less respected animal behavior, Maar transforms from a "flapping" duck to a "flying" bird or angel. This change references Maar's different imaginings of herself as possessing a fragmented and broken face, appearing as the naturalistic image captured by photography, and the mythical or spiritual form of an angel. Finally, throughout the end of the poem, she describes herself as liberated from the imprisoning cocoon, made from the silk of her spirit. Equipped with lexical tools, she can develop wings that, instead of merely "flapping" enable her to fly out of the frame. From a substitute to a cultural oppressive life she changes into a spiritual, or self-created mythical figure where she is guard herself:

> ...

I am no longer framed
imprisoned in that cocoon
that winds up
the silk of my spirit

I'm beginning to feel
Dora Maar is beginning to feel –
Her new incipient
still imperfect wings
(17)

The difference between the process of emancipation of Dora Maar in "Picasso" and the enslaved woman in *i is* is that the victimhood of the former is less evident. She is a prisoner of her situation and is presented as the cause of her own imprisonment. The solution to this form of victimhood, if it is a form of victimhood, lies in the transformation of the woman's mind herself, in the form of a therapeutic replacement of the metaphors that describe her.

The emphasis on her name, highlighted by sudden shifts from a first-person lyrical voice to a narrator's voice which depicts her in the third person, is crucial. It contains two possible interpretations. On the one hand It could mean that the lyrical woman, the narrator of this poem, by using her name, is accepting herself as a separate and self-conscious being. The shift from "I" to "Dora Maar" reminds the reader that it is her about whom this "I" is speaking. If we remain within the premise that we are following the thoughts of Dora Maar, not only have we accepted her voice to be that of Dora Maar, but it seems that Dora Maar has accepted that this voice is purely hers as well. On the other hand, if we do consider a break from the suspension, the shift from the first to the third person results in the confrontational break with the lyrical pureness of the first person singular. If we take into consideration the text as a textual construct, this sudden brake of the first person singular, moving to a narrator's voice, reminds the

reader that Dora Maar is being spoken for and does not truly speak herself. The reader is here confronted with the construction of Dora Maar as a textual representation. This implies that Dora Maar is never truly able to fly out of the frame of representation, that true escape is only hypothetical. This tension —the quest for individual voice, and the inability to escape representations— is the ultimate topic of the poem.

This conclusion brings us back to the discussion of both poems. In *i is* such a break with the suspension of disbelief was marked in the poem in the stanza with the title "eulogy," where the enslaved woman asks, "how can I eulogise their names." The emphasis on "how" is crucial here. In both poems there are moments in which the poetry itself refers to its own construction. They both refer to the power of language in remembering and overcoming events. In both poems, these methods signify the literary devices that indicate a change in vocalization, in conception and in interpretation of the figures that are presented in the poem. Nichols, I believe, is very much aware of how the form can contribute to the meaning of the poem by way of metaphors and images that have become culturally fixed. In the next chapter I will discuss how these self-reflective moments touch upon modernist literary devices.

Chapter Three: Maps of Modernity

Introduction

In his critical reply to trauma theory, in *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma out of Bound,* Stef Craps strategically suggests a categorical distinction between the modernist and realist literary form. He makes this hierarchical distinction in order to address the different ways that trauma theory appreciates the representation of traumatic histories in literature. Craps argues that it is the latter form that may do more justice to such histories but that the former form is more widely accepted to do so. He sees the modernist literary form as exhibiting all too often a Eurocentric aesthetics that has been normalized globally. The characteristics of this modernist aesthetics, as Craps describes them, often include an automatic mimetic relationship between the traumatized self and a failure of narrative. He summarizes the widespread opinion, which states that "[a]n experience that exceeds the possibility of narrative knowledge, will be best represented by a failure of narrative" (Craps 40). Craps argues that such a view on trauma narrative causes the traumatized to be understood by the reader as existing in a state of passivity rather than being an agent of change and mobility (42). In effect, trauma theory expects narrative practices to represent such a passivity. The result may be that such narrative practices participate in the victimization of the traumatized.

In opposition, Craps proposes that for trauma theory to be more inclusive, more valuation is needed for the realist novel. In contrast to the modernist literary form, Craps claims that realist narratives are "not just affective works but aimed explicitly at pricking western consciences" (43). Typically, in the realist novel the hero may reveal social relations which are discarded or obscured in the modernist novel. The hero may be presented as an agent of its social situation. Instead of presenting a failure of narrative to mimic the passive state of the traumatized, the realist novel allows the

reader to associate the traumatized with the ability to be an actor in social action and the capacity to change. With his distinction, Craps approaches the important problem of narratives merely being affective in evoking empathy. When trauma theory bases its theories mostly from such 'Western' views on trauma, this view may contribute to the victimization and othering of subjects presented in modernist novels. Aimed at evoking empathy, these works neglects offering concrete options for political action and change.

Craps states that the modernist literary form, as self-referential, ignores its own historical and political significance by mystifying it through its focus on formalism. However, he claims that many trauma theories that are rooted in modernist and 'Western' theories, such as the poststructuralists, are historically linked to the colonial legacy and as such inform postcolonial criticism and vocabularies. Therefore, "Trauma theory should thus not be abandoned, but reshaped" (37). Trauma theorists should, according to Craps, be aware of how the modernist literary form claims a universal and dominant view about how to represent traumatic realities. In addition, theorists need to focus more on local narrative practices and languages that offer different ideas and representations of the traumatic.

Craps' critique touches upon the assumption which I mentioned in my introduction. I had learned that the traumatized should be represented in a manner that respects the traumatic experience of a radical loss as a disruption from linearity. Craps is suggesting that we need to look at trauma theory in a more global context with respect to, on the one hand local theories about trauma narratives, and on the other hand, reconsider fixed (and Eurocentric) definitions about trauma (24-28). Instead of seeing traumatic histories purely as an event that instigates the disruption of a linear narrative, the linear narrative itself should be questioned. For example, questions about who is included or excluded by the supposed linear narrative, or the question about who forms the community to whom the narrative speaks. But instead of seeing this as a postmodern position

against overarching narratives, it is, in the context of trauma narratives, more relevant to look at literary narrative traditions. Craps introduces a critique of the modernist trauma narrative that is foremost affective in evoking empathy, Eurocentric and mimetically related to a broken sense of self (39-43).

Craps has not been the first to reply to the modernist literary form as being Eurocentric. Nichols' work critiques modernist aesthetics as being exclusive and supporting 'Western' imperialism. Nearly a century earlier the Afro-American poet Langston Hughes was expressing his criticism of modernist aesthetics years before Pablo Picasso painted *Guernica*. In the next sections I refer to both poets who, like Craps, comment on the modernist formal qualities and its universality and dominance over other forms of narrative practices. Instead of rejecting the modernist literary form altogether, their particular critique of this form is made through the use of modernist literary devices. In their critique they demonstrate that the modernist literary form has directories and histories of its own. As I show with the scholar Seth Moglen Hughes' poem "Cubes," also Nichols' collection draws modernist's pathways and influence globally. I argue that their work doesn't only draw a map that highlights the dominance of this form but also reveals its gaps, marking out the *terra incognita*.

As a final note for this section, I am aware that even for Craps these categories are perhaps only a temporary construction. I avoid suggesting that Craps is defining the essence of modernist aesthetics. More precisely, I agree that the categorical distinction that he sketched is helpful in analyzing how modernist literary formal qualities have been identified and addressed as dominant or harmful. I am aware that "modernist aesthetics" is merely a functional term that drew its origin from the historical practices that have defined modernist art. Helpful in this discussion of Nichols' poetry will be the dynamic Craps examines when he calls upon the "relation between aesthetic form and political or ethical effectiveness" (43). I look at the use of the poetic form in relation to the historical figures in Nichols' works that serve as witnesses of particular social realities. In this chapter I will discuss

the politics and the ethics of the literary form that Nichols is employing and, I shall claim, also critiquing.

The Caribbean and the Poetic Form

The Caribbean is a geographical space that has given birth to theory about the construction of identity based upon a mix of cultures that converge into a singular cultural space. There has been and still is much debate on how this mix should be defined geographically, conceptually and historically. Rose Rejouis discusses in *Dark Horse Poetics: Levi-Strauss, Benítez-Rojo, and the Caribbean Epistemology* how the concept of a *bricolage*, a term borrowed from Levi-Strauss, corresponds to the Caribbean cultural mix created by a process of colonial domination. In this article, published in the Small Axe magazine, the term also connotes a form of "creative self-determination," a conceptual characteristic that also fits the form of self-determination that Nichols performs in her works, as I will discuss later (Rejouis 103).

A work that conceptualizes the Caribbean and its self-determination is written by The Martiniquan poet and writer Edouard Glissant. In his *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant theorizes for the Caribbean a poetics that imagines a new self. Like in Nichols' *i is a long memoried woman*, Glissant draws a new historiography for the Caribbean that starts with the Middle Passage. For this historiography he, like Nichols, in the chapter "The Open Boat" uses the metaphor of rebirth to indicate the idea of a loss, that instead of longing for roots in Africa, thinks of identity in the form of a Rhizome (Glissant 5-9). His general argument states that the traumatic event of the Middle Passage has resulted in a Caribbean cultural identity that is not based on fixed and lost beings. Identity, in his thinking, is rather dependent on relations and interactions, resulting from the ongoing process of uprooting and rerooting.

A work that particularly relates the Caribbean identity to poetic form is *History of the Voice*, written by the Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Brathwaite. For him, the history of formal properties of poetry in the

Caribbean context is crucial for understanding of the representation of the experiences by the many different cultures and histories that are present in the Caribbean. Brathwaite suggests that the poetic form is political and related to the geographical through historical processes. For example, Brathwaite argues that the experience of someone in Britain is usually represented in pentameter, whereas the Caribbean experience could be better represented in, for example, forms of Calypso. The poet's geographical position, which includes different weather situations and experiences of everyday life, determines the rhythm of their poetry. Therefore, he claims that the Caribbean is better represented through dactyls, which "mandates the use of the tongue in a certain way" (Brathwaite 17). Historically, the oral traditions and local cultures of the different groups in the Caribbean play an important part in this "way" of poetry writing. By highlighting the "way" poetry is written, the suggestion is made that it is the formal qualities, through their conducting of the expression of personal experiences and historical events, that draw historical and geographical maps.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo, in his work *The Repeating Island*, gives, according to Rose Rejouis in *Dark Horse Poetics: Levi-Strauss, Benítez-Rojo, and the Caribbean Epistemology* a more philosophical reading and meaning of the "certain kind of way" of being of the Caribbean. He questions "normative historiography" by questioning and offering alternative knowledge for the Caribbean, by questioning the "ways" of speaking and thinking about the Caribbean (Rejouis 110). Benítez-Rojo argues, according to Rejous, that the Caribbean identity is not located in the "machine" of colonial historiography, but outside of this history. Benitez-Rojo claims that such an identity outside of the colonial machinery, or historiography, may guard them from, or defuse ongoing histories of (epistemic) violence "'organized by slavery, despotic colonialism, and the Plantation'" (109).

The writers mentioned above draw attention to the interlocking elements that relate epistemology and literary form in expressing and dominating historical knowledge. In the following sections I argue that

Nichols' works touch upon similar issues regarding forms of expression and modes of knowledge. I add that she draws attention to the reasons for the limitation of the poetic form used in her work in addressing the particular histories to which her work refers.

Modernist aesthetics and imperialist maps

In the entire collection *Picasso, I Want My Face Back,* Picasso is presented as an icon of modernist art. More precisely, he is used to bring to the surface the correlation between modernist art and colonial legacies. Nichols' collection doesn't necessarily express Nichols' personal distaste of Picasso's paintings but can be read as a postcolonial response to the wide-spread institutionalization of a 'Western' art historiography, in which Picasso was a modernist pioneer. In *The Canonisation of Modernist Art* by Langfeld and Bauduin, the process of canonization of art is considered to start with the canonization of modernist art in the USA, and specifically in MoMA in the early nineteen twenties. To this day art is foremost institutionalized in 'Western' museums. These institutions determine what kind of aesthetics set the norm for presenting and perceiving art. They thus also determine which localities get attention and which realities are therefore shown. Nichols' collection on art, *Picasso, I Want My Face Back,* responds by emphasizing the relation between the globalization of 'Western' aesthetics and colonial histories.

When there is inclusion, there is usually also exclusion. In recent exhibitions and art critique, attention is given to the exclusions caused by art historical canonization. For example, Musee d'Orsee in Paris runs a summer 2019 exhibition called *Black Models: from Géricault to Matisse*. The exhibition focuses on the relationship between modernist "artist" and 'his' "model" and put emphasis on the latter. And for the Fall of 2019 Tate Modern announces "[t]he largest retrospective of Dora Maar ever held in the UK" on their website. Again, this exhibition claims to put emphasis on Dora Maar as a respectable artist, instead of being merely Picasso's lover. Contemporary critique on the exclusive nature of canonization does seem to influence the institution's focus, but it is very modest and with respect to classical perceptions on art history. The "Black Models" especially but also Dora Maar are presented in the light of a fixed modernist tradition with its famous pioneers. Several stanzas in Nichols' collection refer to the

objectification of women and blacks as they are presented in modernist art. In stanza 3 of the poem "Guyana Dreaming" in *Picasso, I Want My Face Back*, Picasso's appropriation of others is clearly sketched:

> Your striking African-Mayan face
> that captured Picasso, old world maestro,
> whose first words by way of introduction were:
> 'You have a fine head. You must pose for me.'
> (23)

Also, in "Picasso," with which the collection begins, the objectification and sexualization of Dora Maar by Picasso is compared with colonial oppression when he is described as: "Conquistador / of the flesh" (12).

As an early example, the relation between the modernist quality of fragmentation and a shattered sense of self was suggested by the Harlem Renaissance poet Langston Hughes in his poem "Cubes" in 1934, three years before Picasso's famous anti-war painting *Guernica* was finished. An article in Callaloo journal *Modernism in the Black Diaspora: Langston Hughes and the Broken Cubes of Picasso*, written by Seth Moglen argues that modernist art was canonized in the US in the heydays of Picasso, and thus must have informed the Afro-American poet Langston Hughes. The poem starts off with the following line: "In the days of the broken cubes of Picasso." With these lines an immediate reference to the aesthetic specifics of modernism is presented, marking a periodic movement by the artistic principles that Picasso pioneered. The fragmented quality of the cubist movement is aestheticized in "Cubes" in poetic form and associated with "broken" days. In his poem, Hughes describes the men as "a little too drunk to sing" and the women as "a little too unsure of love to love" on the basis of which it appears that they are not in control over their values due to a decline of self. Moglen argues that Hughes emphasizes a relation between modernist aesthetics and an "affective crisis:"

> He suggests that the revolutionary representational technique of avant-garde modernists like Picasso is somehow related to a widespread popular crisis in self-expression and affective connection. (This crisis is evocatively figured as a mixture of desire and impotence: while the "young men" are moved to sing and the "young women" want to love, intoxication makes their songs "broken" and insecurity breeds emotional incapacity.) (Moglen 1192)

Hughes' poem describes the decline of self, symbolized in modernist aesthetics, as a disease that contaminates the world. The narrator of the poem is motivated to this thought by his encounter with "An African from Senegal" on the "Boulevards of Paris." Through his encounter, the narrator wanders over the relation between these two geographical places:

> God knows
> Why the French
> Amuse themselves bringing to Paris
> Negroes from Senegal.

He answers by explaining that it's "the old game of the boss and the bossed," stating that the Senegalese man is bossed, for French amusement, to be where he is. And contaminated by the ill Parisian modernist insecurity, the Senegalese man likewise gets affected and spreads this disease of insecurity. He suggests that it will run in families and over generations:

> Of course the young African from Senegal
> Carries back from Paris
> A little more disease
> To spread among the black girls in the palm huts.

It is telling that Hughes portrays the "African from Senegal," as seen by the narrator, as a non-agent. The illness is presented as something that comes to the Senegalese man as unavoidable. It is not opted by the poem that he perhaps has an option to act, to cure, to resist or make a choice. Moglen suggests that the inability of action for the Senegalese lies in the poem and poet's own embeddedness in modernist aesthetics, by way that it is omnipresent for him in the language, thinking and culture by which the Senegalese man can be represented. Through the way that it refers fragmentally to Cubist formalism, "[t]he poet employs linguistic repetition here the way a cubist painter employs geometric repetition in order to establish and emphasize underlying similarities, relations, and resonances among apparently disparate objects" (Moglen 1193). The form of the poem mimetically relates to the illness of a fragmented mind. Moglen states that "[t]hrough the development that I will call a black vernacular literary cubism, Hughes provides in this poem a "cognitive map" —a "figuration" in the Jameson's sense— of a system of exploitation so vast that individuals could perceive it only in fragments" (Moglen 1192). Moglen indeed places the fragmentary form as an indication of the "cognitive map" of exploitation. He creates a mimetic relation between the fragmented literary form and the cognitive experience of modernist exploitation as a disease with which the "African from Senegal" is infected. Hughes visualizes the modernist illness by the formal composition of the word "disease." It hovers the page like a wave, moving downward into the word, hissing like a snake that is ready to bite:

From the city of the broken cubes of Picasso

d

i

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s

e

References to Modernist aesthetics, both in content and form as it appears in "Picasso" could likewise be seen as a mental condition that has overpowered Dora Maar's thinking, rendering her powerless. But in contrast to Hughes' subject, "the African from Senegal" with whom the narrator according to Moglen identifies, Maar's project seems to challenge the seemingly automatic link between the modernist quality of fragmentation and the representation of crisis and victimhood. In the poem she shows agency whereas Hughes presents the "African from Senegal" as stagnant and passive.

As I have presented in chapter one, some of the stanzas in Nichols' poem hint at different mood-scapes, reflecting a dramatic monologue in which Dora Maar considers different positions. The call and response effect, showing her from different sights and angles, mirrors a mind which could be seen as a fragmented or shattered mind. At first it seems that Dora Maar simply displays disdain of the typical portrayal by Picasso that cut her face into pieces. Dora Maar's critique on such fragmentation becomes meaningful, however, when she considers the different aspects of the representation that she is put in: "I am cut but I am famous." The complex mind in the poem is put forth as one that actively considers which position out of the different fragments and representations is more valid than the other. Maar thus performs a process towards agency through choice.

Apart from choice, Maar performs control over the metaphors and frames that represent her. She proves the transformative power of description and takes up action to find empowerment through such descriptions. For example, by means of appropriating the colors in which she is represented, suggested by the repetition of the pronoun "my:"

> What is green to me?
> Green is *my* hope
> the branch of the future.

> Green is *my* growing point
> the tips of *my* sprouts.
> (18, emphasis mine)

In this play with and critical relation to form and meaning, Maar appropriates the meanings that are historically attached to colors, icons and images. It is my argument that she claims control over the fragmentary form that would otherwise represent her as a fragmented and passive being.

A similar appropriation of meaning is also happening in the collection *i is a long memoried woman.* In this collection the sugarcane is both an object in whose name colonial violence takes place, as it is for the enslaved woman in the collection a sign of weakness in the colonial machinery: "He isn't what / he seem - / indifferent hard / and sheathed in blades / his waving arms / is a sign for help" (32). Perhaps the sugarcane, the *mcguffin* around which the history of the slave trade is being gathered in this collection, is not indestructible. It is not presented as an absolute power but as one that is human and vulnerable to winds and diseases like everyone else. Instead of being presented like a disease that wins over the bodies of colonialism, the relationship between the enslaved woman and the sugarcane is one that seems more relational and social, instead of constituting mystical or even metaphysical domination, as Hughes' "Cubes" presents modernist aesthetics to do. The woman can find agency in the social relations facilitated by the cultivation of sugarcane through the minor choices that she has. Sarikaya-Sen argues that the enslaved woman in *i is* performs such possibilities of choice by exhibiting for example revenge strategies:

> When considering *i is a long memoried woman*, the cyclical nature of history is underpinned by the revenge fantasies of the slave woman who hopes and plans to take revenge on the perpetrators and, thus, to transform into a perpetrator. In other words, she imagines that she will have revenge on the white male coloniser by exerting

> violence and gaining control over him one day in the future. (Sarikaya-Sen 338)

Instead of a passive victim of the colonial omnipresent domination, the woman is presented as an agent through her appropriation of what has been taken from her. This attests to Craps' critique of the representation of victimhood in literary accounts that deal with traumatic histories.

Multidirectional Memory

Nichols' collection *i is* and poem "Picasso*"* reflect the global distribution and domination of modernist aesthetics due to imperialism. Nichols' works point out and critique a single history that excludes genres and formats from other histories, traditions and languages. Therefore, in *i is* references are made to Creole, West African, Amerindian, Caribbean and Arawakan languages and mythologies and that take part in the enslaved historiography. Nichols' two works contribute to the idea that particular aesthetical forms in general and the modernist literary form in particular, only bring about a single history. The choice to voice Dora Maar serves as a prominent example of this idea. Nichols demonstrates how Dora Maar is neglected by a patriarchal modernist art and relates this patriarchal dynamic between Maar and modernist art to colonial dynamics.

Multidirectional memory could serve here as a functional term to describe the creative force by which Nichols' poetry connect diverse histories, and refrain from acknowledging one group over another. Rothberg, who coined the term, explains multidirectional memory as an act that speaks to the way different groups remember the past and meet each other during this act. Such an act results in collective memories that are based upon the "dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance" (Rothberg 11). Instead of setting clear boundaries, multidirectional memory accepts that memories and identities are in constant dialogue and influence each other. Most important for my argument is that the concept rejects the idea that memories have clear ownership and celebrates the creative potential of memorable interacting. Although *i is'* acknowledgement for the specific history of the enslaved woman is, the collection is adorned by the "dynamic transfers" that forced different groups to interact under colonial rule. Instead of reclaiming space for the individual groups that have lost space due to this influence, her work draws a map of such transfers and shows how resilience is enacted through creative history making from the cultural transfers.

To give an example, in "Kanaima Jungle," a poem appearing in *i is*, the woman explains first-person that she "can't cut through" the "Kanaima jungle." The Kanaima in this poem refers to the Carib Kanaima, which is a Carib spirit of vengeance, part of Carib cultural mythologies, and that takes possession of people filling them with rage. Connoting that this is a jungle of affectation, the woman feels "ensnared" by this 'jungle. The meaning of this ensnarement follows by the woman's emphasis on the descriptive terms she uses and that characterize the jungle. These terms find their roots in the dominant, colonial languages with which the region has been described. In the poem the jungle is named after the South American mountain "Rorimas," which forms the border between Guyana, Venezuela and Brazil. This mountain's proper name positions the enslaved woman geographically and culturally. This very mountain has stirred the imaginations of many colonials and writers who appropriated and gave meaning and a name to it. The reference suggests a European view on the jungle, as an exotic and dangerous place for 'Western' rationalism. Nichols' descriptions seem to refer to the high landscape of Roraima in the same terms as were used by Sir Walter Raleigh on his expedition in 1596 into what would later become Guyana (Rogers 189). The jungle in the poem is similarly described as a place of "battalions", suggesting a military air; and as a "plateaux," suggesting the Roraima tableland with high altitude; similar terms are applied to the geographical "valleys," as the low areas of the mountain landscape is described. This follows by the description of the jungle as a Christian landscape, a "prey of jungle" (1983-62).

In all, the poem suggests that the landscape is known to the women through European and Christian terminology and influence. The poem suggests that this colonially connotated jungle incorporates and "ensnares" the woman's mind. These influences brought to bear on the woman are suggested to be the cause of her "vexation of mind / vexation of eye / vexation of spirit" (Nichols 44). It as if she has been possessed, like by the Kanaima spirit which possesses people. However, as noted in the previous section of this thesis, the woman in this collection, unlike the narrator in

Hughes' poem "Cubes," fights against the possession, or regular indoctrination of her mind. The woman reminds herself that there are other cultural influences that may live with her through the act of remembrance. In the collection, the woman finds solace in the recollection of ancestral and local beliefs and folklore that were part of the landscape before colonial interference, or that came with the enslaved by boat. The recollection of the Carib culture and the Kanaima reference to possession constitute a counter force to the European and colonial influences that take control over her and the landscape that surrounds her. Although in the English language, the woman is adding local traditions and meanings to the European descriptions. In the poems "Yemanji," "The Return" and "Like Anansi," the woman calls out for the Yoruba (Nigeria) Goddess Yemanji, the West Indian Abeng voice and the Ghanian Anansi spider for help to overcome the colonial influence and asks these "ancestral winds" to give her strength. This mix of forces assists the woman in creating her own form of knowledge system with which she can change the landscape into one in which she can reclaim self-hood.

The collections' English modernist poetic form seems to contrast with the woman's desire for knowledge of her own. The collection's mixing of British and Creole English decentralizes English from its geographical center. By decentralizing it, Nichols draws a map of how the language and its form demonstrate its imperial history. English can no longer be sourced to a single place. The woman is free to play with its form. This indicates that apart from drawing a map of the oppressive history of the English language, this language helps the enslaved woman in her creation of a new history and identity that is inspired by the multitude of cultures and places known to her as a result of this English reign. Rothberg argues that the creative potential of a multidirectional memory comes from "[m]emory's anachronistic quality - its bringing together of now and then, here and there-- - is actually the source of its powerful creativity, its ability to build new worlds out of the materials of older ones" (6). As noted in the first chapter, the woman's building of her own system of knowledge and

meaning production is described in Nichols' collection through the birth of a new tongue that instead of a singular language, refers to the plurality of languages, and cultures, that describe the enslaved woman's new identity. It is also another avenue of her movement towards acting as a creative agent.

The link between cultural connectedness and a colonial historiography is also present in "Picasso." The poem is similarly adorned by a variety of historical references, which connect the poem to a global context based upon colonial histories. The multiple references that speak through Nichol's poem find unexpected linkages. These directories of times and places that are stitched together to create another instance of a multidirectional memory, where transfers between "diverse places" take place to create shared memories. This explains why Dora Maar's history in the poem is not autonomous. For example, the Dora Maar of the poem makes a comparison between herself and the historical figure La Malinche. With Picasso as the "conquistador" Cortez, the key figure in the Spanish acquisition of Mexico and the fall of the Aztec empire, she compares herself to the Aztec woman known for collaborating with Cortez' endeavors. La Malinche is well-known in the Mexican context as a traitor for serving as a translator between the Spanish and the Aztec people. Maar demonstrates her compliance with the painter Picasso in the poem through her imperative invitations to abuse her sexually, which seems to demonstrate the woman's consent in such an abuse. It also seems to grant Maar a choice to be the victim of such an abusive relationship in which the suggestion is made that through her invitations she herself can be held responsible for the abuse that has overcome her:

> 7
> Conquistador
> Of the flesh
> My stallion
> My bull

My Cortez
Invade me now
With the sperm
Of your colours
Let your blue periods
And pink periods
Find my deepest red –
Conquistador
Of the flesh
I am your
New World
Your Malinche
Assisting you in
Your conquest
(12)

It is through the cultural link with La Malinche that we can understand that we must see Dora Maar not as a woman actually giving consent, but as a woman in the precarious position of being disloyal to herself by giving this consent. This implies a layer of information over Maar's own responsibility in the events that have happened to her. There are a few other important links that refer to Maar's positionality and responsibility. On the one hand Dora Maar makes the comparison between the act of representation and colonial conquering. This link dictates power relations between the one in power and the one who is not in power. The reference to La Malinche, however, makes such clear-cut distinctions more complex. In *La Malinche: the Shifting Legacy of a Transcultural Icon*, Julee Tate gives a historical account of the shifting role that the figure La Malinche play for a Mexican national identity. The sources that Tate found paint La Malinche as alternatively a hero, a traitor or a victim. The legend of La Malinche places Maar similarly beyond categories of perpetrator and victim. The link between the two women seems to blur the oppositional categories between

perpetrator and victim. Such a blurring of boundaries, of categories attests to both Rothberg's as well as Nichols' critiques on narrow representations of victimhood.

The comparison between Dora Maar and La Malinche establishes a causal relation between a personal mindset, which describes Dora Maar as a disloyal compatriot serving the sexual and artistic demands of Picasso, and the effects of such a mindset on her self-respect. In this poem it is suggested with reference to La Malinche that such an unethical disloyalty to oneself can result in large-scale colonial violence. The poem touches upon the danger of the dearth of self-loyalty, as too does Hughes' poem, in Molgen's reading, with its reference to the contaminated Senegalese traveling back to Senegal to contaminate others. Again, in contrast to Hughes, "Picasso" seems to address the ethical responsibility to resist such a mindset in the protagonist in the poem, rather than addressing resistance outside of her. The agency that is ethically preferred in Nichols' work seems foremost located in the act that she remembers herself, or in other words, in the way the woman speaks about herself. Both of Nichols' women practice memory-making through the acts of speaking and writing. Expression therefore could be seen here as a form of agency because it has the creative power to speak. In the case of the enslaved woman in *i is a long memoried woman* this is marked in the birth of a new tongue. This birth of a new tongue also indicates the birth of a new kind of woman, who embodies the awareness of her contribution to a new sense of self. Nichols herself explains this new mythical figure: "In *i is a long memoried woman*, the woman is something of a mythic figure. She breaks the slave stereotype of the dumb victim of circumstance. She is a woman of complex moods who articulates her situation with vision. Her spirit goes off wandering, meeting women from other cultures. She is a priestess figure and employs sorcery when necessary" (Nichols 228). In "The Divine Body in Grace Nichols' *The Fat Black Woman's Poems,"* Mara Scanlon argues that "Nichols recognizes both the potential power to be drawn from the stories of mythology and the events of history and the urgent need for those myths and histories to be

recast by the Afro-Caribbean artist in order to banish the silence that is traditionally hers" (2). Scanlon calls this way of self-creation "Mythopoiesis". Mythopoiesis touches upon the concept of a multidirectional memory, in the sense that it creates a mythology and a new history. It refers to the creative potential of memory making through fact that memory is an act, which includes choice and selection.

Gaps in the Map

In the introduction of this chapter I referred to the categorical distinction that Craps draws between the modernist and realist literary form in relation to social reality. In *J.M. Coetzee and the Ethics of Reading,* Derek Attridge similarly refers to and critiques such a categorical distinction, and argues that instead of discarding social issues, Coetzee's use of modernist literary devices actually points the reader toward the flaws in the textual politics. Attridge sees this critique or revelation of flaws manifested in the way language is employed and descriptions are made in Coetzee's novels. Whereas Moglen describes Langston Hughes' poem "Cubes" as a modernist map of the way the poem mimetically refers to the exploitative nature of imperialism, Attridge defines a modernism that refers to itself as unable to address certain political issues, since it is itself part of the political. He writes:

> My argument, briefly, is that what often gets called the self-reflexiveness of modernist writing, its foregrounding of its own linguistic, figurative, and generic operations, its willed interference with the transparency of discourse, is, in its effect if not always in its intentions, allied to a new apprehension of the claims of otherness, of that which cannot be expressed in the discourse available to us -- not because of an essential ineffability but because of the constraints imposed by that discourse, often in its very productivity and proliferation. (Attridge 4)

Attridge argues that through the process of otherness, the literary form can be regarded as being exclusive. By reading carefully, Attridge claims, the reader may identify where such exclusions are located in the text. Both Nichols' works discussed in this thesis performs, I claim, a similar form of exclusion. For example, by close reading both works in the first chapter, I have identified how both works present moments that refer to their own textual construction. Through such moments in the text, the text presents

an irony that states that although the text gives a voice to women in history with the suggestion to repair damage done to them through misrepresentation, this voice similarly states that this voice is not fully accessible, only through a degree of representation through the act of ventriloquism.

Attridge argues that figures in novels may "make claims" about the dominant culture —or language— they are subordinated to. Attridge argues that these figures do not make such claims through the contextual descriptions about their exclusions, but that the language and literary devices with which they are described in fact excludes them. He refers in particular to the textual construction and literary devices that are operative and result in such exclusions. Form, as Attridge argues, is related to the historical and political through the claim that these figures make: "[t]he demands these figures make upon the culture which excludes them are also demands made upon all these familiar discourses" (1). The familiar discourses in Nichols' case refers to the discussion of the forms in which the women in her works are historically represented. As we have seen earlier, in *i is a long memoried woman* the enslaved woman mourns the loss of the languages with which she used to define herself. Attridge argues that

"The novel can succeed in making these claims felt only if its representational methods convey with sufficient force and richness that alterity, an alterity that makes demands on us not by entering into dialogue with us -- something which is ruled out in advance -- but by the very intensity of its unignorable being-there." (Attridge 13)

Attridge's statement that alterity can only speak of itself as being completely altern, thus other according to Attridge, relates to Nichols' occupation with the subaltern voices of colonial histories. As discussed in the previous chapter, in the poem "Eulogy" in *i is*, the enslaved woman questions the validity of the (very English) literary elegiac tradition as an accurate form to describe the losses suffered from the Middle Passage. The woman who asks the reader how to eulogize holds up a mirror to the reader that a proper form of eulogy is not available within the discourse available

to the woman, since her displacement instigated a cultural gap between her voice and the subjects that she mourns. The nameless subjects of the middle passage, displaced and deprived of cultural identity, are mourned in this poem as other, or altern.

In "Picasso," I have shown how the first-person singular leaps out of the lyrical voice and describes herself in the third person, indicating her fictionality. Critically, the effect of such modernist literary devices as self-reflective moments is that such devices not only reveal what the text is saying, but also functions as an index of what it is suppressed. Michael Rothberg explains this by referring to Sigmund Freud's theory of screen memory. According to Freud, suppressed history is presented behind screen that serves as a substitute for that which is not available to us. By means of modernist literary devices and references to modernist poetic forms, as well as play with other poetic forms, cultures and languages, Nichols allows herself to critique the form with which she is describing the relationship between the traumatic histories that appear into the present through representation and remembrance and the formal qualities that determine the quality of the way that these histories can be represented.

From Derek Attritge's description of Coetzee's work, who is often discussed in the social context of a South-African Apartheid and post-Apartheid, it can be seen that the modernist literary form offers tools that make claims about its own limits. It can therefore be transparent about its own possible exclusionary or inclusionary powers. This suggests that it can show what it is suppressing behind the surface screen of language. Attridge's claim is that the process of in- and exclusion results in a process of othering, something that I see happening in Nichols' work as well. The modernist literary form, as Attridge describes it, not only creates this gap between histories and language that is unable to account for it, but also states how language is responsible for this gap.

It is important to mention is that Attridge does not claim that the modernist literary form refers mimetically to what is ineffable in essence. It shows merely that which is not reachable through "the constraints imposed

by that discourse" (Attridge 4). With "that" discourse, Attridge refers to the dominant discourse with which the historical is represented. According to Attridge the quality of the modernist literary form is that it is able to exactly show that gap. In other words: the modernist literary form can be ethical or political, since it shows, to those who read into it, its own inclusionary and exclusionary limit as a form. On the basis of Attridge's argument which sees value in the modernist literary form, I argue that Nichols' work, through its use of modernist literary devices, blurs the categorical distinction between the modernist literary form as inadequate to present social and political realities and the realist literary form in its representation of traumatic histories.

Attridge calls for an ethics of reading that is attentive to the ethics of the text, attentive to where the text is actually being inclusive and where it is being exclusive. The ethics of agency that I have located in Nichols' work is partly inspired by Attridges's idea of an ethics of reading. In Nichols' poetry one finds moments where the literary form being employed is referred in terms and a context which highlights its own limits in referencing or accurately dealing with issues of doing justice to the voice that is being presented, the marginalized voice. For example, the tension between colonizer and colonized, as it is exposed in *i is,* is referred to through suggestion and fragmentation but never concretely. Additionally, the roles of domination between the male and female figures in her works are exposed through suggestion but explicitly explained, located or assessed. I wish to argue that the fragmented way of exhibiting events in this collection is not utilized to show the incomprehensibility of the suggested violence, but to show the limits of the particular form and language to do justice to the events in history. To substantiate my claim, I will close-read the sections that led me to this insight.

The discourse surrounding colonialism can be ascertained by looking at the description of the enslaved woman who is "unadorned", dressed in cloth and lacking any identification but her status as slave. In order to cope with this form of dehumanization, the woman "tried very hard

/ pulling herself erect" (1983-14). The reference to the phallic erection of men is not accidental. Not only does the woman try to erect herself like a man, she is trying to perform this with a similar strength, by "pulling herself together / holding herself like / sugar cane" (14). The comparison of sugarcane to the movement and maintenance of an erection seems to indicate a variety of meanings. It might associate the erection with male dominance and strength. It also seems to suggest that such strength is related to imperial and colonial domination. Sugarcane is presented in the collection as an object that serves as a motivator for the colonial system, for the enslavement of the woman and her fellows was undertaken in order to gain profit from the lucrative, West Indian sugarcane plantation industry. The sugarcane thus serves as the metonymic substitute that signifies large-scale colonial processes and violence. Throughout the collection the individual sugarcane is anthropomorphized into an image of the colonial male figure and as an actor in relation to violent acts, which I will discuss further in this section.

To visualize and mimic the movement of erection, Nichols' poem "Sugar Cane" presents the growing of sugarcane in the form of a vertical poem. In this poem the sugarcane is appearing from the soil. It seems to be also visualizing a phallic erection. Stanza 4 indicates similarly that with the process of erection of the sugarcane, there seems to be a growing awareness of its symbolic function as colonial perpetrator. The image of the erection of the sugarcane, together with indications of sexual violence throughout the collection, creates a link between the colonial violence hinted at in this stanza and the sexual violence that is suggested throughout this collection:

4
Slowly
pain-
fully
sugar
cane

pushes
his
knotted
joints
upwards
from
the
earth
slowly
pain-
fully
he
comes
to
learn
the
truth
about
himself
the
crimes
committed
in
his
name
(34)

The slow rising of the sugarcane into its violent and erect position doesn't happen without consequence in the stanza. As a column, the words are presented one after the other, reducing the pace of its readability while also visualizing the shape of an erection. The reduction of reading pace together with the indication of "painfully" growing physically and "painfully"

becoming aware mentally, indicate that the sugarcane pays a price for the painful process of becoming the full-grown erect being that he is. Such control over form and pace in the entire collection informs the reader through suggestion about the links between colonial processes, sexual violence and male domination. However, the precise nature of these relations, the matter of who is doing what to whom, remains obscure and speculative. Like the relationship between Dora Maar and Picasso, which is presented as both subversive and as compliant, the enslaved woman's position is also presented as ambiguous in this collection. Although that throughout the collection the enslaved woman is unadorned and the sugarcane is erect, the sugarcane in "Sugar Cane" is presented as helpless. He "shiver / like ague / when it rain." He is also dependent upon the women "who groom and / weed him" (33).

I will now attempt to more clearly demonstrate the collections' speculative and ambiguous position. Throughout the collection there are poems with little references to particular places or particular events. For example, in the consequent poems "Among the Canes", and "I Go to Meet Him," a tragedy unfolds that is not fully comprehensible. It suggests the coexistence of rape, love and murder with colonial powers. In the poem "I Go to Meet Him" an enslaved woman is attracted to a man: "Tonight / I go meet him / like a flame" (37). In the following lines we read glimpses of jealousy from a man that is described as a "black man," emphatically referred to as the "kin of my skin." In the following lines we come to believe that the black man is the "trembling star / of murder," who is choked by jealousy toward the colonizer as well as the "grip of the throat of cane." In "Among the Canes" another crime in the name of sugarcane is described as the woman is "holding her belly / stumbling blindly / among the canes" (27). It appears that she is either pregnant or has just had a secretive abortion about which she is silent. The reader has to judge for him or herself what is happening.

Prefaced with the notion that "[m]aybe the thing is to forget / to forget and be blind / on this little sugar island," the next poem "Among the

Sugar Cane," highlights memory through the lamentation "who will remember me?" The act of memory is put outside of the actor of remembrance. While the woman questions if it is better to forget, she acknowledges that the event itself does not need to be forgotten. As a form of remembrance, the lamentation "who will remember me?" is specific. This is notable given that events in the poem are illusively abstract and fragmented. The one who is presented as having the wish to testify seems to lack the ability to narrate personally and conventionally in a linear and comprehensible form. Instead, the words of the woman in the poem are built from fragments and connections are suggestive, not complete. One cannot confirm that it was the black lover of the enslaved woman who gets jealous. Or whether the black man allegorically refers to the black man's jealousy for the love that the white colonizer holds for the black servant. Indeed, her true and complete story is not remembered in this poem, at least not as a conventional narrative. We cannot truly know what specific crimes are made in the name of the sugarcane, but we do learn that entire situation was troublingly ambiguous, traumatic, and based upon an unequal dynamic between colonizer and colonized, between the one in power and the servant.

I wish to claim that the histories presented to us in Nichols' poetry are presented as 'other' described by Attridge. The specific historical events are in the collection not presented as something that cannot be spoken for in essence but cannot be unproblematized spoken for in the discourses available for these histories. The memory of the enslaved woman may not only be a "lost past," in de de Man's terms, due to a lack of elements in the collective memory about the enslaved her experience (such as written documents and testimonies) or because there is a distance in time that creates distance between the collection's reader and the enslaved woman. Her memories may also be presented in the collection as unreachable because of limitation in form and language used in the poem. As presented in "eulogy," the woman in *i is* is not only disrupted from her original shore, but also disrupted from the many languages that allow her to accurately

describe or mourn her losses. She may also be fundamentally unreachable because in this thesis she is analyzed within a particular 'Western' academic discourse, and this discourse may lack the understanding of other localities, histories and languages.

The texts demonstrate a clear awareness of their own limits to ethically describe the events of the women who once lived in history but who are no longer able to speak for themselves. Stef Craps praises this quality of self-awareness as an "Ethics of Love" (2009-1). His ethics of love seems to suggest an answer to the seemingly rhetoric question posed by Attridge: "is it possible to do justice to the otherness of the other in the language and discursive conventions that have historically been one of the instruments ensuring that this other is kept subordinate" (17). Craps' ethics of love suggests that when justice is limited in the available languages and discursive conventions, the best option is the acknowledgement of this limitation. Craps says that such an acknowledgment of the other as other, because it is unreachable in literary form, serves to demonstrate a "non-appropriative encounter with the other which calls the self into question" (2009-1). Attridge proposes methods or an ethics of reading that respects this limitation in the representation of historical others. The power of such a self-reflective stance of limitation in a text he claims to be associated with the modernist literary form, as elaborated on earlier.

To conclude, Craps' Ethics of Love might be read to imply a strong critique to the (literary) practice of giving voice to another, a practice which dominates Nichols' poetry as she gives voice to and appropriates the voices of historical subjects. However, I see a surplus value in the blunt nature of this ventriloquism. Even if she appropriates historical voices, Nichols demonstrates their fictional character by showing the gaps in the modernist map that purports to represent them, gaps that refer to the limitations of the modernist aesthetics that represents them. She thus respects the discourse through which she is representing her characters and operating her critique and is honest in the limited possibilities of her endeavor to accurately portray the voiceless. Instead of claiming full reparation for

them, by means of truly giving them a voice, Nichols' figures demonstrate the limitations of this act of giving voice. In addition, Nichols' figures demonstrate the importance of an exemplary empowerment in literature. Nichols' figures demonstrate, I claim, on the one hand resistance against forms of representation that claim to represent unheard female voice in history in general and on the other hand an ethics that specifically avoids representations that victimizes them.

Conclusion

Only after writing this thesis have I come to realize how widely Nichols' work responds to the effects of the self-evidently canonized European aesthetics. I better understand the categorical distinction that Craps made to look critically at this particular aesthetics. I also better understand how this distinction addresses the ethical responsibility of narrative practices that deal with social realities and conflicts. Craps' categorization proves itself necessary, because the comparison between the two aesthetical forms can address operations that result in the misrepresentation of subjects as victims or in the exclusion of them altogether. The importance of addressing aesthetics in relation to ethics is brought about by Dora Maar, who in "Picasso" requests a representation of her that is not broken according to modernist fragmentation but demonstrates an "unbroken photography." I read this image as a plea for a realist representation that allows her to be respected as both a photographer on her own and to be seen independently and 'neutrally', instead of being colored by Picasso.

The scholars discussed in this thesis take the necessary position that reflects their positionality as scholars of world literature. They propose strategies that allow them to locate the forms of misrepresentation and othering of subjects in both the objects of their studies and in the work that they do. To make use of their views in relation to Nichols' works which seek to give voice to suppressed voices of the past, it is important to not just take the works as demonstrations of the importance of giving voice to oppressed people, but also to look at the form this voice takes and its consequent effects. Upon close-reading Nichols' work, the following conclusions can be made about the form of ventriloquism performed in Nichols' work.

Nichols' work touches upon the problem sketched by Craps, the problem that in trauma and memory studies representation of traumatized subjects is blindly valued even if it renders the individuals in question as victims rather than possible agents. Nichols' employment of voice challenges the notion that a traumatized subject is better represented through a form that mimetically represents their trauma. Instead, Nichols'

heroes, despite a mimetic representation of their colonial trauma, demonstrate a lexical transformation by which they claim agency. I have focused on the figures of speech such as metaphor and such poetic devices as assonance and repetition in order to find the formal strategies that evoke the women's agency. Despite the modernist formal qualities, such as free verse and self-referentiality that Nichols employs in her works, her work challenges the necessity of Craps' clear-cut distinction between modernist and realist narrative practice. Instead of emphasizing which form does more justice to victims of past atrocities, I have claimed that her works demonstrate an ethics of agency that is conducive to productive engagement with the problem of victimization in narratives. This ethics proposes a more inclusive view on the notion of trauma within trauma literary studies and forces upon both text and reader a claim of responsibility through self-reflection.

Such an ethics is brought about by the woman heroes in Nichols' work, who propose ways to decentralize the conception of the modernist literary form by showing creativity to play with this form. In this play, her female heroes define their own history and draw the images that identify and represent them. In this way they take charge over the memories that exist of them. The women do this not by creating a dichotomy that others them from the dominating structures that represent them, but by weaving together anachronistic elements coming from diverse places and times and embroidering them into their own created fabric.

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