

**“Voices in the Noises of the Isle”:
Marina Warner’s *Indigo* and Re-Visioning Shakespeare’s *The Tempest***

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“The position which a text occupies...at its originating moment of production is ...no necessary indicator of the positions which it may subsequently come to occupy in different historical and political contexts.”

Tony Bennet

Abstract

Marina Warner’s *Indigo, or, Mapping the Waters* (1992) joins the tradition of "writing back" to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, but distinguishes itself by moving beyond the well-trodden Manichean division of Prospero/colonizer and Caliban/colonized. This paper argues that Warner’s re-visioning consciously shifts the narrative perspective from Prospero's presiding consciousness to the "noises of the isle"—the voices of the silenced and marginalized. It focuses on her construction of a matriarchal trinity—Sycorax, the original ruler; Ariel, reimagined as an Arawak girl; and a swarthy Miranda—whose intertwined stories, bridged by the Caribbean nanny Serafine, explore the displacements and dislocated identities resulting from British colonialism across the 17th and 20th centuries. Central to Warner's narrative is the concept of hybridity, depicted as a spectrum of colors that challenges rigid binaries. The novel's fairy-tale atmosphere is intentionally deployed to "speak for hope against despair," an emancipatory wish embodied in the newborn Serafine. However, the paper also critiques this very choice, suggesting that Warner's "magical" resolution to political crises—such as a terrorist coup and the subsequent pro-World Bank governance—risks a romanticization that loosens her grasp on the gritty realities of post-independence politics and neo-colonialism, ultimately jeopardizing her own skeptical historical reading.

Keywords: Marina Warner’s *Indigo*, Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, Post-colonialism, Revision, Hybridity, Fairy Tale.

Introduction

Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* has been the site of elaborate analyses and reinterpretations. More than any other play in the Shakespearean corpus, it has been revisited critically and creatively by writers from widely various places along the geopolitical and cultural spectrum. It has been one of the most contested and debated texts in the English canon to the extent that “it has been classified as every genre and no genre, located in every place and no place, and enlisted in support of colonial, anti-colonial and apolitical views” (Hulme and Sherman xi). During its almost four centuries of existence, *The Tempest* has inspired many rewritings and various stage productions that go as far back as Dryden-Davenant’s 1667 adaptation (Griffiths

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130-151). But most important in this respect is the various uses to which the play has been put in relation to colonialism and anti-colonial resistance. As Howard Felperin remarks, the colonial allegorization of *The Tempest* witnessed two waves: “The first corresponded to a series of divisions within British imperialist policy in the late nineteenth century, the second to its total collapse in the two decades after the Second World War” (176).

The Tempest was written in 1611 during the time of British imperial expansion in the so-called New World. With Prospero and Caliban, as metaphors for the colonial encounter, and the isolated Caribbean island, as the locus of an early imperial excursion, the play has come to be seen as a formative element of colonial discourse and colonialist practices. The various work done on Shakespeare from various critical perspectives such as New Historicism or cultural materialism, has helped us, as Michael Neil argues, to understand the complex ways in which Shakespeare’s writing was entangled from the beginning with the projects of nation-building, Empire and colonization; and by its uncovering of the processes through which Shakespeare was simultaneously invented as the “National Bard” and promoted as a repository of ‘universal’ human values, it has shown how the canon became an instrument of imperial authority as important and powerful in its way as the Bible and the gun. (168-169). Hence, in the second half of the twentieth century, the play has stirred a vast body of responses, ranging from the vehement anticolonial writings of the 1960s to the postcolonial and feminist appropriations of the last two decades of the twentieth century. It has come to be the target of post-colonial “writing back” from both the ex-colonies and the imperial metropolises. Writing back to, or revisionist appropriations of, canonical Western texts has been one of the most common strategies in that criticism that comes under the controversial rubric of “post-colonialism”.

Along with its obvious feminist perspective, Marina Warner’s *Indigo or, Mapping the Waters* (1992)¹ falls within the broad boundaries of post-colonial writing as elaborated by Bill Ashcroft *et al* in *The Empire Writes Back*:

We use the term ‘post-colonial’ ...to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day....This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression. In this sense this book is concerned with the world as it exists during and after the period of European imperial domination and the effects of this on contemporary literatures. (2)

Both thematically and structurally, Warner’s appropriation of *The Tempest* seems quite conscious of that liminal space marked by the hyphen between the colonial era and an age that has not totally emerged from colonialism. Warner’s task in *Indigo* is not only to bridge the gap between the two histories on both sides of the hyphen but also to salvage the memory of the colonized that has been erased in the colonial historical archives. As she puts it:

With *Indigo* I chose to rework *The Tempest*, a *locus classicus* in current re-visionings of imperial encounters;my reason-my excuse-was that it seems to me that if people who are descended from the wrong side, as it were—the colonial side—don’t examine what that inheritance holds, that if speaking is left to those who are justified by oppression in the past and in memory, then in one sense one part of the story has been written out of it. It is as important to tell the ugly story as it is to tell the reparatory tale.

To sit in judgment on oneself, perhaps, not only on others. (*Signs*: 264)

The complex narrative of *Indigo* weaves various strands from the post-colonial tradition of critical writing to rework the Shakespearean drama in an attempt to demythologize the history of European colonialism in the New World with its effects of displacement, exile and dislocated identities as the common condition in our contemporary world.

¹ Marina Warner. *Indigo; or Mapping the Waters*. London: Vintage, 1993. Further references are to this edition and henceforth parenthetically documented in the body of the text.

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Another related strand that goes into the weaving of the tapestry of *Indigo* is the feminist task of rehabilitating the silenced terrain of women characters. Shakespeare's drama has been marked by a notorious absence of women. Even the female characters that make their way into the text are recorded only in terms of absence. Miranda seems to be the only exception; however, she is offstage or fast asleep while her father engineers his tempests or oppressively manipulates Caliban and Ariel for his service. Ferdinand's sister Claribel, who is married to the King of Tunis, and Sycorax, Caliban's sorceress-mother, are talked about but never seen onstage. This female absence has been noticed by several critical studies of *The Tempest*, as well as of its anticolonial appropriations, in terms of colonialism, race and gender. For example, in his "Caribbean and African Appropriations of 'The Tempest'", Rob Nixon remarks that the play has somehow lost its relevance to post-independence circumstances in the "Third World" or the ex-colonies, where we are in an era of "imperialism without colonies". And this declining pertinence of the play is exacerbated "by the difficulty of wrestling from it any role for female defiance or leadership in a period when protest is coming increasingly from that quarter" (577).²

In her "'Miranda, Where's Your Sister?': Reading Shakespeare's *The Tempest*," Ann Thompson has remarked the same female absence in contrast to the proliferation of female roles in Davenant-Dryden's adaptation of Shakespeare's play entitled *The Tempest*, or *The Enchanted Island* (1667) (234-242). Moreover, Miranda's presence, with her traditional feminine virtues of docility and submission to Prospero's patriarchal dominance, has not been inspiring for feminist engagements. In view of this dilemma, Lorie Jerrell Leininger, in "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*," calls for reinventing a twentieth-century counterpart for Miranda who will join forces with Caliban and create a utopian "brave new world" free from the sexist and racist divisions (285-294).

Indigo seems to be properly a response to these criticisms. In an article on witchcraft in *The Tempest*, Warner shows that the demonization of Sycorax as the only witch in the drama obfuscates Prospero's magic domination as benign and strips Sycorax of any potential power. As she remarks, Prospero "embodies the presiding consciousness of the drama, and his perspective provides the moral viewpoint and the emotional colour." ("Foul Witch" 98). In contrast to the multiple restoration of patriarchal orders that underlies the text of *The Tempest* (through Prospero's restoration of his dukedom and through the marriage of two daughters, Miranda and Claribel, to royal figures), Warner restores the matriarchal order through which Caliban claims his right to the island: "This island's mine,/By Sycorax my mother,/Which thou tak'st from me...." (*Tmp.* 1.2.333-4). She seeks to disrupt the colonial patriarch's monopoly of voice and history writing; and from the "noises of the isle" she chooses the voices of the hidden and silenced female characters to populate her island. Thus, Sycorax is brought to the foreground and dominates the part of the narrative that roughly corresponds with the time of *The Tempest*. Her permeative presence becomes commensurate with the revival of the indigenous history of the island.

Sycorax is depicted as a completely independent, labouring, childless woman in contrast to her ancillary maternal status in *The Tempest*. She figures as a foster mother for both Caliban and Ariel. In addition, in her complex series of inversions and mutations of *The Tempest*, Warner takes advantage of the ambiguous gender identity of the "airy spirit" Ariel and renders him as an Indian Arawak girl. The mythological sphere of Shakespeare's drama, where "ungodly metamorphosis flouts the order of sex as well as break[s] the borders between human and beast, natural and unnatural," ("Foul Witch" 103) is re-deployed in *Indigo* to dig

² See also Abena P. Busia. "Silencing Syocrax: On African Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female." *Cultural Critique* 14 (Winter, 1989-1990): 81-104.

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out another submerged layer of violent colonial history. Rather than Prospero's obedient and grateful servant, Warner's Ariel reveals another aspect of the native diasporic history produced by earlier colonial intervention in the New World. Warner's Ariel is a foundling left behind by her parents who were brought by colonial settlers from the mainland to farm the island. After the father's death, the mother is abducted by one of the white settlers, "the tallow men," as the islanders refer to them (*Indigo* 99).

As far as Miranda is concerned, *Indigo* seems to respond to Leininger's call by creating a twentieth-century counterpart. Miranda is rendered as a swarthy descendant of the English family of colonial pioneers, living in twentieth-century London. And in line with Dryden-Davenant's adaptation of *The Tempest*, Warner gives Miranda a foster-sister in the character of her young aunt Xanthe, or Goldie, as she is nicknamed by her father Anthony Everard. Both Miranda and Xanthie are symbolically motherless, for their mothers are somehow too preoccupied with themselves to bear their motherly duties. It is Serafine, the old Caribbean nanny, who takes over the role of the mother, along with her role as a story-teller who frames the double temporal and spatial setting of the narrative. Besides, she replaces Prospero as Miranda's main guide and source of knowledge concerning the past history of the island. Through her fairy-tales, she provides another *alter-native* version of colonial mythological fabrications. Warner's Miranda is intended to be subversive both of her traditionally feminine Shakespearean icon and of her often condemned, complicitous role in dehumanizing Caliban.³ As Warner puts it, "I wanted Miranda to extricate herself from her father's plot. My Miranda is very muddled, but with the help of Serafine she has glimmerings" (*Signs* 268).

What Warner presents in her narrative is the "Daughter's plot", to use Chantal Zabus' phrase (81). In spite of her limited role in the historical texture of the novel, Miranda's importance has been remarked by critics. Tobias Döring sees that, in contrast to the little critical attention paid to Ariel, who performs a key function in the story that *Indigo* relates, "the narrative is predominantly concerned with Miranda and her story" (2). In the structural arrangement of the novel, Miranda's significance is almost comparable to that of Sycorax. As Angeles de la Concha remarks, "she is also given centrality by being made the focaliser of the second part of the novel" (87). However, such criticism does not account for Miranda's significance, which is extremely subtle and does not come to the foreground till the end of the novel. My interpretation is that Miranda can most likely be identified with Warner herself in terms of their sense of postcolonial guilt about their families' colonial legacy. Warner herself makes it explicit in her own account of her novel:

Because our family was involved in an enterprise that so resembles Prospero's theft, that foundation act of Empire, I felt compelled to examine the case, and imagine, in

³ In her critique of white feminism's claim to universality, Sylvia Wynter remarks that "if, before the sixteenth century, what Irigaray terms as "*patriarchal discourse*" had erected itself on the "silenced ground" of women, from then on, the new primarily silenced ground (which at the same time now enables the partial liberation of Miranda's hitherto stifled speech), would be that of the majority population-groups of the globe-all signified now as the "natives" (Caliban's) to the "men" of Prospero and Fernando, with Miranda becoming both a co-participant, if to a lesser derived extent, in the power and privileges generated by the empirical supremacy of her own population; and as well, the beneficiary of a mode of privilege unique to her, that of being the metaphysically invested and "idealized" object of desire for all classes (Stephano and Trinculo) and all population-groups (Caliban). "Afterword "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'". In *Out of the Kumbia: Caribbean Women and Literature*. Edited by Carole Boyce and Elaine Savory Fido (Africa World Press, 1990), p. 363.

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fiction, the life and culture of Sycorax, and of Ariel and Caliban, whom I cast as her foundlings; I wanted to hear their voices in the noises of the isle (*Signs* 302).

Indigo seems to be partially a post-modernist female *Bildungsroman* whose main actant and ultimate goal is Miranda, her education and reconciliation with her sense of shame and with the different other: as she watches the black actor, George Felix, playing Caliban in the last chapter of the novel, she thinks to herself: “Oh God, how I’d like to learn me a new language. Beyond cursing, beyond ranting” (*Indigo* 388).

So far I have tried to delineate the general framework within which *Indigo* stands in an intertextual relation to *The Tempest*. It is a framework located in the intersecting interests of both “post-colonialism” (in the controversially broad sense outlined above and mainly as a discursive practice) and feminism (from the perspective of Warner, the Anglo-European daughter of empire, or what Linda E. Donaldson terms “the Miranda complex” (68)).⁴ My argument here is that *Indigo* shows some of the pitfalls of “intertextuality” at the points where it diverts from the original concept coined by Julia Kristeva to denote “a politically transformative practice” (Mai 41). In other words, in its dependence on postmodernist parodic techniques, as well as on the allegorical figurations of *The Tempest*, *Indigo*’s politics appear elusive and skeptical of any radical politics of resistance and liberation. *Indigo* reveals some of the drawbacks of what John Thieme terms “textual hybridization”, a process in which “texts subsume parts of other texts, reconfiguring them to produce their own distinctive discursive formations” (115). However, texts that adopt an adversarial attitude to, rather than collude with, their sources still run the risk of being incarcerated within the boundaries of their binary relation to the canonical origins which they engage with or write back to. As a result, their attempt to produce a counter-discourse or to achieve separation from the dominant discourse, reproduced and solidified by canonical texts, proves equivocal and elusive (116).

Indigo reveals such a split consciousness in its rendition of the Shakespearean drama. In the first plot of the novel that covers the island of Liamuiga in the seventeenth century and in which Sycorax occupies center stage, Warner secularizes and “re-worlds” the empty island, restoring the pre-history distorted and suppressed by Prospero and giving voice to the native woman. In this respect, Warner comes close to the post-colonial feminist critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s project of “re-worlding” *Jane Eyre* by reclaiming Bertha Mason, the native Caribbean wife of the English plantation owner, through re-reading it intertextually with Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (“Three Women’s Texts” 175-195). The voices of Sycorax and Ariel provide a positive answer to Spivak’s question about the ability of the subaltern, particularly women—“the doubly colonized”—to speak and retrieve a subaltern history (“Can the Subaltern Speak?” 82-83).

However, in the second plot which takes place on the mother island, England, in the twentieth-century and revolves around Miranda, it transpires that the narrative is strategically deployed to set the native scene at the service of Miranda’s self-reconciliation and achievement of happiness with a Caliban figure. At this stage, *Indigo* leaves its secular historical project behind and very consciously adopts the fairy-tale framework of *The Tempest*. At this juncture, *Indigo* emerges as an appropriation of the narrative of the colonized other in the interests of a postmodernist ideological perspective that overemphasizes hybridity, particularly sexual

⁴ Laura E. Donaldson finds Miranda analogous to Caliban in terms of being victims of colonial “Prosperity”: “Miranda-the Anglo-European daughter-offers us a feminine trope of colonialism”. However, she uses Miranda’s blindness of her cognate subaltern Caliban as a metaphor for many white feminists who are blind to the “native” female in their reading of women’s texts. She terms this phenomenon “the Miranda complex”. “The Miranda Complex: Colonialism and the Question of Feminist Reading” *Diacritics* 18. 3 (1988): 68.

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hybridity, as a solution for the disruptions and ravages of neocolonialism. Fairy-tale politics of forgetfulness and redemptive endings becomes a substitution for politics of liberation.

Warner's politics manifests itself in a remarkable marginalization of the Caliban figures in the novel, as somehow challenging and threatening the Western structures of power. This aspect to some extent functions in a similar way as Shakespeare's supremacist discourse. Thus, the agenda of "postcolonialism", as "a politics and philosophy of activism" that contests the disparity between the Euro-American West and the three non-western continents (Africa, Asia, Latin America) and "so continues in a new way the anti-colonial struggles of the past" (Young 4) is obfuscated, if not outright denigrated, in the narrative of *Indigo*. Strategies and objectives linked to national liberation are excluded in the service of a European feminist consciousness and Warner's personal reconciliation with her family's tainted past. This ambivalence in *Indigo*'s vision (or re-vision) can be attributed to a political stance that condemns radical politics of resistance and liberation (the most obvious representation of which in the narrative is the coup d'état of the Islamic group the Shining Purity) and unabashedly reproduces the discourse of the clash of civilizations. It can also be attributed to the politics involved in the postmodernist form the novel adopts. Postmodernist theory, as Linda Hutcheon maintains, "has no effective theory of agency that enables a move into political action"; it only "works to de-doxify' our cultural representation and their undeniable political import" (3).

Now we need to examine how the intersecting lines and the ambivalences summarized above work in the narrative of *Indigo*. The novel proceeds along a postmodernist line of parodic representation that doubles, splits and repeats with difference the main elements of the play. It is this "rhizomatic quality," to use Concha's description, that opens up the text of *The Tempest* in "a multiplicity of centrifugal lines" (84). We have two islands, two ages, two plots and various avatars of Prospero, Caliban, Sycorax and Miranda. However, these lines are polarized around the binary oppositions of colonizer/colonized, man/woman and white/black and the attempt to bridge the gap between them.

Indigo, interestingly enough, is prefaced with a map of the island of Liamuiga and its smaller twin island Oualie, where the plot corresponding to Shakespeare's play takes place. Shakespeare's island as we are told at the very beginning of the play is "not honour'd with/A human shape" (*Tmp.* 1.2.284).⁵ Even Caliban, the only inhabitant of the island, is excluded from the realm of humanity to the inferiority of bestiality and monstrosity (in the *dramatis personae* he is listed as "savage and deformed slave"). As Warner herself argues: "The fantastic poetic invective of his [Caliban] description defeats visualization, or indeed historical or geographic context" ("Foul Witch" 99). Prospero's empty island is such a paradigmatic setting in colonial discourse, for, as Octave Mannoni maintains in his *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonialization*, the colonizer shares Prospero's lack of awareness of the world of others (97). The *Tempest*'s island is textually constructed in what Edward Said designates as "imaginative geography and history." In terms of space and time, its location obfuscates positive knowledge of geography and history and in consequence "help[s] the mind to intensify its sense of itself by dramatizing the distance and difference between what is close to it and what is far away" (*Orientalism* 55).

The map at the beginning of *Indigo* secularizes that phantasmagorical island, providing in a sense the pre-history of *The Tempest*. It locates it at the heart of European colonial history in the Caribbean. This history is traced through the various names the two islands took over their history of colonial invasion: from Grand Thom' and Petit Thom' in the time of Columbus

⁵ William Shakespeare. *The Tempest*. Ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan. London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2003. Further references are to this edition and henceforth parenthetically documented in the body of the text.

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to Everhope Island, as Kit Everard the first English settler calls it, to *Enfant Béate* under French occupation, and the landmarks of the tourist industry that appear in the island's modern history in the 1980s. This map seems to be an ironic comment on cartography as one of the means by which European travellers and explorers used to contain and control what they viewed as discovered lands. For Steven Conner, the map makes visible "the myth of the colonized land as a *tabula rasa*, an empty field of possibility, where men may start anew, like the sailors on Alonso's ship in the play" (189-190). It also suggests how the Caribbean is not only a geographical or historical entity but also a European-manufactured "discursive entity," as Peter Hulme maintains (5). It is one of the primary locations where the encounter between civilization and savagery took place and where one of the definitive tropes of colonial discourse, "Cannibalism," was "physically and etymologically" installed (3).⁶

The name-shifting on the map echoes to some extent the shape-shifting magic Prospero exercises as a sign of absolute power mainly over and through Ariel and Caliban. It also illustrates the polyglot palimpsest inscribed by the conflicting colonial powers in the New World. In this context, nomenclature, as Julie Sanders argues, acts as "an unreliable signifier throughout—a process which confirms Caliban's assertion about the intimate relationship between colonial and linguistic power" (133). In his famous speech to Prospero, Caliban says: "You taught me language, and my profit on't/Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you/For learning me your language" (*Tmp.* 1.2.364-366). This process is best highlighted in the novel through the naming of Sycorax's adopted son: Dulé/Caliban. He is delivered by Sycorax from the womb of a dead slave, who was cast on the shore of Liamuiga after being thrown overboard a slave ship on its Middle Passage from Africa to the West Indies: "The baby had come from far away; he was the first African to arrive in the islands, and he came to be known later, to the settlers from Europe, as Caliban. But Sycorax gave him the name Dulé, meaning grief, after his birth as an orphan from the sea" (*Indigo* 85).

But under the colonizer's gaze, he is relegated to the realm of monstrosity, the demonized other, linguistically transformed from a human being defending his people and land into a cannibal. After arresting and maiming him for leading the rebellion against the English settlers, Kit Everard writes to his fiancée in England, "it diverts me to teach him our language as he serves me. He has already learned how to curse. Some of our men call him 'cannibal', seeking to undo the power of his monstrosity by naming it, like conjuring. 'Tis to my mind a false notion, I prefer the lisping of the children, Caliban" (*Indigo* 201). Warner here registers the moment at which the secular history of the colonized is mythologized and how the savage acts of colonialism are discursively recycled for consumption and circulation back home in the metropolis. This process of changing names will be repeated with the other Caliban figures, George Felix/Shaka and Jimmy Dunn/Abdul Malik, in the second plot but this time they themselves choose their names as a decolonizing gesture.

The moment of Dulé's delivery from the drowned slave at the hands of Sycorax marks the beginning of her story and inaugurates her life of exile on a deserted part of the island. Her almost miraculous rescue of Dulé's life also signals the beginning of her own long death which even extends across the borders of time to the twentieth century. This scene of extensive death, which opens the first plot and subtly links it to the temporal framework of the second, is mainly embodied in the noises that haunt the island and whose main source is Sycorax:

Sycorax speaks in the noises that fall from the mouth of the wind. It's a way of holding on to what was once hers, to pour herself out through fissures in the rock, to exhale from the caked mud bed of the island's rivers in the dry season, and mutter in the leaves

⁶ In her "Acknowledgements" in the novel Warner pays tribute to "the inspiring insights" of Peter Hulme's *Colonial Encounters: Europe and the Native Caribbean 1492-1797*.

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of the saman where they buried her, which now stands in the cemetery of the Anglican church, St Blaise Figtree, adjoining the spacious amenities of the same five-star hotel. (*Indigo* 77)

This unending death symbolizes the past memory of the indigenous land that Warner tries to salvage from erasure. Sycorax's voice haunts the island in the twentieth century, challenging neocolonialism in the form of the tourism industry with its five-star hotels.

Warner subtly weaves the beginning of the heinous history of slavery in the New World with the native patriarchal treatment of women in order to counter Prospero's account of Sycorax in *The Tempest* as a "foul witch" banished to the island for "mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible" (*Tmp.* 1.2.257, 264). As presented in *Indigo*, Sycorax is not a witch but a wise woman, "filled with *sangay*, preternatural insight and power" (86), with a knowledge of herbs and a skill for healing and interpreting dreams. However, the villagers find her delivery of the child unnatural: "It was pure witchcraft. Sycorax had cast a spell and brought the dead to life" (85). Significantly, it is her husband who declares her magical powers and refers to deep sorcery in Dulé's origin. This becomes a pretext for him to get rid of her and take a new, younger wife. Sycorax's status as a witch will be solidified later on with the arrival of Kit Everard, the Prospero figure and colonial adventurer, and his fellows. She thus comes to be identified as an object of victimization "in two intersecting stories of oppression, one marked by her status as a woman, the other characterized by her racial difference" (Cakebread 228). A caveat is in order here since the islanders' superstitious minds collaborate with the native patriarchal order in demonizing Sycorax. Ania Loomba reminds us that the European colonialists introduced new forms of patriarchal domination in the lands they colonized. Spanish rule, for example, "grafted Christian notions of female purity and pollution encoded in the opposition between virgin and witch" (170). *Indigo* hints at the islanders' belief that Sycorax had herself borne Dulé secretly through an illicit affair and invented the story of his delivery from the drowned slave (86).

Sycorax, however, willingly accepts her banishment with her adopted child and takes up the trade of making the dye of indigo from which the novel takes its title. The color of indigo not only harks back to *The Tempest*—in Prospero's description of Sycorax as "this blue-eyed hag" (1.2.269)—but also symbolizes the rehabilitative principle at the heart of *Indigo*. As Warner herself comments: "indigo sounds related to 'indigenous' (though this isn't so) and is the original colour used in 'blueprints'. It's the colour of the ink used for the first pattern. I wanted the novel to look for the story or scheme that lay beneath the visible layers" (*Signs* 265). Thus, Warner links the island, as a feminine space, to the restoration of the colonized history and the excluded female.

Moreover, the colour of indigo becomes a signifier for the counter discourse the novel attempts to provide against the principle of racial difference and the linear concept of history that inform the European colonial project. After Kit Everard usurps the island and cripples Sycorax by burning her out of her tree house, she thinks to herself:

The blue I used to make.... was the culmination of a sequence. It marked the end of the long process of transformations—starting with the seething leaves of the plant, then the reeking green stage of the first steepings, and the sulphurous yellow stage of the liquor before it was exposed to the air, then binding with the air, it gradually turned to blue.

The emptiness in which all things revolve is blue, she went on, in her half-waking state. Time was no other colour but blue, since distances were blue and water too.....

The people who are seizing and occupying *the present time* cannot belong in my colour, they're like the bits that leap out of a spinning bowl, too heavy, too separate and distinct

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to be blended in with the other substances; red-hot stones, flung out and setting on fire the place where they land. (*Indigo* 147-148; italics mine)

I quote this passage at length because it marks the beginning of ambivalence in the portrait of Sycorax, an ambivalence that reflects the contradiction of *Indigo*'s politics. The various colours through which the indigo plant goes till it takes on its blue colour suggest a linear process unlike Sycorax's circular chromatic concept of time. Earlier, the third-person narrator comments that the marks Sycorax makes on a tree trunk to help her in her observation of weather and in her prophecies match this concept of time;

the marks reflected the concept of time and direction Sycorax shared with her people; for as yet, they did not know time as a straight line that can be interrupted, even broken, as the people did who were arriving in their archipelago, the slaves from Africa, the adventurers from Europe; *they did not possess a past*, for they did not see themselves poised on a journey towards triumph, perhaps, or extinction. (*Indigo* 121; italics mine)

Warner uses and conflates both concepts of time at will to serve different purposes. The mythical chromatic concept of time provides some of the postmodernist, formalist aspects of the novel. For example, we have various colours, in pairs, as subtitles for the different parts of the novel; the narrative progresses from "Lilac/Pink" through "Indigo/Blue", "Orange/Red", "Gold/White", "Green/Khaki", and finally to "Maroon/Black". The rearrangement of the sequence, as well as the restraint from using one pure colour, functions as a trope for the principle of hybridity which basically informs Warner's post-colonial politics. It also accounts for the circular process that haunts *Indigo* as a whole in the form of doubling, rehearsals and resurrections that link the generations across time and space. Thus, a critic like Julie Sanders finds it quite convincing that "a closer inspection of the colour sequence destabilizes linear certainty.... What might have been presumed the endpoint of our sequence in a linear reading—indigo—instead surprises us early in the sequence, presaging Sycorax's entrance on to the historical stage" (142-143). On the contrary, Sycorax's entrance on to the historical stage signals the linear logic underlying the structure of the novel. Sycorax is ambivalently lodged between lack of recognition of a past, which relegates her and her tribe to a pre-colonial mythical history, and an acute consciousness of a present that does not belong to her chromatic concept of time. Her presence on the stage of history becomes linked to a Eurocentric concept of history that progresses from pre-colonial, through colonial to post-colonial with interracial hybridity as its telos. Sycorax herself has become a site for such hybridity as she and the saman tree, where she was buried and whose location in the twentieth century is next to the St. Blaise church, become an object of a cult that mingles native beliefs with Christianity.

Hence, with the arrival of Ariel and later on of Kit Everard and the English settlers, Sycorax's all inclusive colour spectrum begins to be differentiative and exclusivist. She identifies the white European adventurers by their skin colour which sun and heat turns into "pink" and "red". In a prophetic way, when her brother first assigns Ariel as a child to her care, she identifies white people as "kin to Manjiku" (*Indigo* 99), the mythical sea monster who swallows native women. Later on, in the fairy-tales Serafine tells Miranda, "Manjiku's pale, pale, he can't bear the light of the sun, it burns his pale skin, his pale flesh..." (*Indigo* 219). Then they are identified with the "red-hot" fire that Kit Everard sets to her tree and her body.

Once Sycorax's role as rehabilitation of the female indigenous voice and subversion of Prospero's account is exhausted, she becomes a more ambivalent and even sinister figure. She acquires a domineering matriarchal status as far as her relationship to Ariel is concerned, particularly vis-à-vis the latter's affair with Kit Everard. On the one hand, this echoes Prospero's patriarchal protection of Miranda's chastity. On the other, it reproduces Prospero's image of Sycorax as a malicious jailer of Ariel in *The Tempest*. This view is surprisingly enough voiced by Dulé when Ariel refuses to accompany him and leave the island: "You should

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stop her holding you prisoner, in her tree, up there with her on guard over you. You should be out in the world, with the women and the women-to-be. Learning another way of life” (*Indigo* 116). Sycorax’s sinister image reaches its acme in her denunciation and cursing of the baby Ariel conceived by Kit. Her curse is rendered in the same discourse of racial differentiation and monstrosity Prospero uses in describing Caliban: “The child in your belly isn’t a human child. I have changed him-your son, I know it is a son. For it will be a whelp you carry, a small, red-furred beast with sharp teeth and sharper claws that will grow up a bear, a fox, who knows? Some kind of savage creature. Like its father, and he will mangle you” (*Indigo* 170-171). As a way of deflecting the curse, Ariel names the baby Roukoubé which means Red Bear cub. But what complicates Sycorax’s discourse of cursing more is that her denunciation of the child is shared by Kit, the Prospero figure: “for Kit too, Roukoubé was a mongrel whelp, the reminder of his weakness and Ariel’s strangeness” (*Indigo* 172).

Thus, Sycorax, as well as Dulé, shares in the colonizer’s politics of racist difference and consequently falls within the trap of his linear concept of time. Kit thinks that he both civilizes the island by claiming it for Christendom and discovers an Eden or a point of origin on earth. Earlier Sycorax finds Dulé’s concept of the originary past strange to her; “it was a lost country for him which he wanted to discover” (*Indigo* 95). However, with the end of her reign and the beginning of an era of slavery on the island, her cyclical concept of history that resembles the “churn” she uses for processing indigo acquires a linear twist. Buried in her saman tree, she shares Dulé’s desire for a return to a pre-colonial past:

Over and over she utters her lament:

-Oh airs and winds....HEAR ME NOW, now that I only hear groans and Dulé hobbles on slit ankles as he rails and Ariel is captive again and croons over Roukoubé and does not speak. Turn back your currents in their course, the stiff breeze and the gentle wind, pull back the tide and send the sun, the moon, and the stars spinning in the churn of the heavens—*so that we can return to the time before this time.* (*Indigo* 212; italics mine)

In one way, Sycorax’s long death and her continuous hearing of the islanders’ voices and pains might be read as a sign of the continuity of native memory, a continuity that is highlighted by Serafine in twentieth-century London. In the process of doubling and repetition, Serafine can be viewed as an extension of Sycorax. She, too, from her location in London, can hear confused noises coming from the far island of Liamuiga which she can decipher to turn into stories. However, Connor’s astute remark about her extensive death reveals another side: “Sycorax’s long unconcluded death is also seen as a kind of deathly constriction of the present. Sycorax, confined within the tree...., seeks to arrest the unfolding complexity of history” (194). In other words, the ambivalence surrounding Sycorax’s picture and her internalization of her own demonization render her negative and unredeeming in Warner’s perspective of history as a complex process of cross-cultural hybridity.

It is Ariel who bears the whole brunt of the colonial encounter with its concomitant interracial hybridity. Her position as a complete outsider on the island makes her more open to what Connor calls “the unfolding complexity of history”. In the narrative, her presence on the island as “a foundling” is the result of an earlier colonial incursion that led to the disruption of her Arawak family. Like Dulé, she grows up in a state of exile as part of Sycorax’s adopted family. She becomes the heir proper to Sycorax’s herbal knowledge and healing skills. She identifies the island as her sole home and refuses to go to the village upon Sycorax’s suggestion to “be with girls of your own age, normal young women with normal desires” (*Indigo* 114). She also shrugs off Dulé’s offer to accompany him as his woman away from the island. As the narrative presents Ariel, the issue of the past or of her roots does not press itself upon her even

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when Dulé confronts her with it: “You don’t remember anything either about where you come from. Doesn’t it matter to you? Maybe no” (*Indigo* 117).

Since both of them are strangers, the juxtaposition of them in this way is telling. For while Dulé is conscious, by virtue of his colour, of his transatlantic roots and is deeply concerned about the lost past, Ariel does not give any expression to her consciousness. As Tobias Döring rightly remarks, “the narrative gives little insight into her consciousness....Her perspective largely remains occluded and her precise position obscure” (14). Döring’s remark has another implication here; it is strange for a narrative that has the activation of female indigenous voices as its object to silence one of its main voices. Ariel retains only singing, the one characteristic trait she carries over from *The Tempest*. And the space that is assigned her by the narrative after she and her child are repudiated by Kit is wordlessness:

she had lived in privacy, which was a kind of speaking silence....Ariel herself made almost no sound: she choked on speech, for nobody could return an answer. Sycorax would not reply except to rasp her curses. Kit’s language was bitter in her mouth. She sometimes pulled herself into a corner of the cabin with Roukoubé across her knees on his stomach and patted out a tune softly as she rubbed his back after feeding him, but she no longer made up words: she had no more words, indeed it seemed to her she no longer owned a voice, but only a hollow drum for a head on which others beat their summons. (*Indigo* 173)

Indeed, Warner herself uses Ariel as a drum to play her own political tune of sexual hybridity. Ariel’s world is mostly marked by the body and the vague sexual pleasure that Sycorax instructs her in by talking about her own extra-marital sexual adventures when young. However, Ariel gets upset when Dulé talks to her in the “language of women...the language of food and animals and colours” (*Indigo* 117), i.e. the language of love and desire. Ariel will not fill the most significant female absence in *The Tempest*, i.e. the absence of “Caliban’s woman”. Sylvia Wynter finds this absence very significant as a trope both of Western global expansion and appropriation of the colonized, as well as of white feminism’s claim to universality (360-362). Ariel’s desire is to be enkindled only by Kit’s red skin and at the most violent moment of the colonial encounter when he burns Sycorax and injures her and takes both of them as hostages. While she treats Kit’s wound, the narrative voice renders her thoughts as follows: “The red man’s skin was dappled, rather like the scales of a river fish, only the fine coating of red hairs made him more like a kind of pale and hairy fruit. She wondered what he was like—below; she wondered if he were pink and golden-haired there too, and, incongruously, almost chuckled” (*Indigo* 139). In contradiction to her turbulence at Dulé’s language of desire, the narrative voice soon reproduces the same language of food and animals in response to Kit’s body.

Characteristically, Kit’s ultimate usurpation of the land is coupled with his “rape” of Ariel, which figures as a dramatization of that common metaphor in colonial narratives where “female bodies symbolise the conquered land” (Lomba 152). However, the scene of their first sexual encounter, which is contextualized within Kit’s religious compunctions about sin, is depicted in an ambivalent way:

He caught hold of her hand and pushed it between his legs and ground his mouth against hers. The dullness she had felt in her exhaustion became a kind of sickness now, as for the second time that day she once again flew from her own body and split into two. Two Ariels, one outside the other, each watching the other, curious, inert, from the other side of consciousness, in the country where the souls wander. She was curious, about the whey in his mouth and the shaft of his cock under her palm and the paired kernels of his balls; about the possibility of pleasure her mother Sycorax who was dying now beside her had talked of so often. She would kill him later, but for the present, she was

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thinking of Sycorax, who had instructed her in love, and wondering if it would please her that there she was, filling a man with desire just as Sycorax had always said she should. (*Indigo* 149)

In spite of Kit's violent behaviour and objectification of Ariel's exhausted body, the scene is depicted as an act of mutual pleasure. The brutal fact of rape of both the land and the native body is muffled under what is depicted as Ariel's crisis of identity, her double consciousness.

The politics of that sexual encounter becomes very elusive to the extent that leads Döring to argue that "we do not see her as a victim". Her final remark about killing him later "implies even that he, the colonizer and rapist, is the potential victim here" (14). The narrative strains to show a sense of mutuality in the power coordinates of this love-hate relationship: "Ariel tasted a certain triumph in his weakness; she found cruelty a reward, now that she was penned in, her customary lightness fettered, her speed reined....she wanted punishment, hers and others" (*Indigo* 167). However, the sense of the sexual power she holds over him through her body seems to be an aspect of the pathology of colonial sexual encounters which is fully embodied in the male character of Mustafa Sa'eed in Tayeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1968).

In this context, Loomba's admonition about the celebration of transgressive sexual practices in contemporary European commentary is in order here:

For most European travellers and colonialists...the promise of sexual pleasure rested on the assumption that the darker races or non-Europeans were immoral, promiscuous, libidinous and always desired white people....we should not forget that colonial sexual encounters, both heterosexual and homosexual, often exploited inequities of class, age, gender, race and power. In colonial fictions and travelogues, however, they are often embedded within a myth of reciprocity (158).

While the narrative of *Indigo* partly reproduces this myth in terms of sexual attraction, it complicates it in two other ways. First, Ariel appears as a collaborator with the colonialists. As a result of her close relationship with Kit, she becomes the first islander to learn the English language and guides the English settlers to the resources of the island. Besides, it is her confusion of purpose and identity that makes her final attempt at killing Kit appear as an act of betrayal of the natives. Her affected tenderness with Kit unwittingly warns him against the imminent native insurrection led by Dulé, which leads to the massacre of the islanders and the loss of the island. Thus Ariel comes closer to the role of the "airy spirit" in *The Tempest* as a docile, obsequious servant of Prospero. This role also echoes the portrait of the informer and spy, or at best the non-radical evolutionary reformer, ascribed to Ariel in a lot of anti-colonial appropriations of *The Tempest*. (Döring 15).

Second, in line with the postmodernist parodic style of inscribing multiple versions of history, the last we hear of Ariel in *Indigo* is in the temporal framework of the twentieth century. In the context of the fairy tales Serafine narrates to Miranda and Xanthe, Ariel takes her final canonical shape in the archives of empire-building: "There's another story with a happy ending they know, not just from Serafine; it's traditional in their family, and in the history books in which the Everards have a mention. How the first Kit Everard won the love of an islander and how she saved him and his brave band of pioneers" (*Indigo* 224). Ariel enters the history books as "Mme Verard," the concubine of Kit Everard. As a French missionary priest, one Père Labat, who wrote a comprehensive history of the new world of the islands, depicts her: "Mme Verard was in her hundredth year or more when I was fortunate enough to take in mine the hand that proved the loyal instrument of God's will for this pagan place and its people. She was the last person living to speak the language of the native islanders..." (*Indigo* 226).

Thus Ariel becomes the bridge to a new history marked by the transition from paganism to Christianity, from the native language to the language of the colonizer. Her love story

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becomes a myth whose major feature, as Hulme's analysis of that famous myth of Pocahontas and John Smith reveals, "is the ideal of cultural harmony through romance" (*Caribbean Encounters* 141). In the world of *Indigo*, Ariel sets the prototype for a cross-cultural relationship that is to be reincarnated in the twentieth century in various shapes. While Ariel's union with Kit Everard was not "blessed in God's sight," as the French historian states, Anthony Everard, his descendant and Miranda's grandfather, legally marries a Creole from the island. That is why our contemporary Miranda is "swarthy," for her father Kit Everard, "had 'a touch of the tarbrush' from his mother's Creole blood" (*Indigo* 22). However, Kit the son alludes to his father having Serafine as a concubine, or an "island wife" after the death of his first Creole wife (*Indigo* 55). The final consummation of the Ariel pattern, though in a reversed form, is Miranda's marriage to the Caliban figure George Felix.

The ambivalence of Ariel's affair results from Warner's attempt to imprint that cross-cultural sexual encounter with the stamp of hybrid transgression, a process that opens up history to the potential of transcending the divisive racial and national categories. In her study of the historical/mythical antecedents of her Ariel in the European colonial archives, "Siren/Hyphen; or the 'Maid Beguiled'", Warner assigns such women the role of mediator between two cultures. And in spite of their suspect position as translators or informers, denounced by both parties of the colonial encounter, Warner argues that "the historical and mythical part they play in the inauguration of new histories, new societies, new families demands a fresh taxonomy. Women through their bodies, become the hyphen between the forest/*morne* and the *habitation*/house/plantation, either by force or by choice" (*Signs* 312). The fresh taxonomy Warner refers to implies constituting such women as female Uncle Tom figures, the *conteuses* or story tellers as versus the radical, or the "incendiary maroon, that ultimate male hero figure of the Caribbean" (*Signs* 311). However, Warner does not see both the story-teller and the incendiary maroon as two complementary figures in the process of resistance and decolonization. Rather, she remains faithful to her vision of post-colonial politics as a mere discursive practice rather than a philosophy of activism. As she puts it: "Quiet storytelling works as a fifth columnist, while rebel sloganeering burns itself up in its own heat" (*Signs* 312).

In identifying with Ariel as an indicator of a utopian future, Warner seems to be, consciously or unconsciously, harking back to the Latin American *modernismo* movement of the early twentieth century with its focus on Ariel rather than Caliban (a tendency known as *arielismo*) (Gordon 212-219). For example the Uruguayan philosopher and writer José Enrique Rodó (1872-1917) adopts Ariel (in his *Ariel*, 1900) as an expression of a Latin American future characterized by noble and spiritual ideals and free from the sensuality and materialism of Caliban, who stood at that time for the expansionist greed of the United States in Latin America (V. and A. Vaughan 325-331).

This might account for the marginalization of the Caliban figures in *Indigo* as they stand for the politics of cursing and militant resistance which contradicts Warner's project of cross-cultural politics within what I would characterize as the Western feminist narrative of Miranda. As women have been excluded from the language of power politics shared by Prospero and Caliban in both *The Tempest* and its anti-colonial appropriations, Warner's reclamation of them has in turn circumscribed them within the sexual politics that make them victims of both native patriarchy and colonial desire. In contrast to Warner's feminism, a Caribbean feminist like Carole Davies calls for more effort to restore the role of Caribbean women in the anti-colonial struggle for liberation. In this respect, she refers to a legendary Caribbean woman, Grandy Nanny, who offers a radical counterpart to Warner's Sycorax: "

Nany was one of two sisters who were captured in Africa and transported to the Caribbean as slaves. Once in Jamaica, Nanny rebelled and fled to the mountains from where she waged war against the British. Her children 'Nany Yoyo,' became the

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Maroons. She is described as an *obeah* (conjure) woman *par excellence*, a healer, one who could create food magically and a military leader (Davies and Fido xii).

Thus the prioritization of gender issues at the expense of anti-colonial resistance leads to curtailing the history of the rebellious indigenous population. Ariel, along with her son, escapes after the massacre of the natives to Oualie, the smaller island, where there is an increasing number of maroons, “some of them women,” as the text tells us (*Indigo* 205). But we never hear of her again except in the European archives. Dulé ends as the laughing stock of Kit Everard and the other European settlers. The unburied bodies of the men who died in the natives’ fight for the island become a source of a sorrowful memory for the living: “For without burial of the flesh, the victims would become phantoms and speak to the living without ever finding rest. Though the ghost army would also persecute their murderers by their chatter, their relatives would have preferred that they find quiet” (*Indigo* 203).

The implication of the text’s registering of this local belief is a language of forgetfulness of history, which will become quite explicit by the end of the novel.⁷ For the alternative would be a language of victimization and revenge that does not suit Serafine’s fairy-tales or the pastoral atmosphere that wraps the novel’s closure. Cakebread is the only critic of *Indigo*, to my knowledge, who touches on the issue of Caliban and his descendants in the context of gender. Subscribing to the narrative’s Eurocentric feminist perspective, she argues:

As Caliban-like characters in the novel, both Dulé and his descendants in the form of the Shining Purity are circumscribed by their unwillingness to relinquish the language of entitlement that fuels the expanding empire. Caliban’s cursing takes the form of a struggle centred upon the futile assertion “This island’s mine”....as the language of modern politics becomes a nationalistic language that still necessitates the same demeaning roles (226).

⁷ In an interview with Warner and David Dabydeen, she subscribes to Dabydeen’s view of “creative amnesia” or “the desire to forget history”. For Warner this amnesia implies the “ultimate freedomto be free of the past”. See Heike Härting and Tobias Döring. “Amphidian Hermaphrodites: A Dialogue with Marina Warner and David Dabydeen.” *Third Text* 30 (1995): 39-45.

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In an all-equating and all-inclusive phrase, Cakebread equates the colonized and the colonizer, the acts of resistance and the acts of rapist dispossession, as “male territorialism”. And the colonial experience for female characters like Sycorax and Ariel becomes “merely a transition from one colonial mode to another” (228)! In Warner’s narrative, as in Cakebread’s report of it, history thus becomes essentialized around the binary opposition of male-female without any class, racial, cultural or temporal differentiation. The jump is made from Dulé, in the seventeenth-century of settler colonialism, to Abdul Malik, the leader of the Islamist group, the Shining Purity of the One God Liberation Movement, in the twentieth century of neocolonialism, with the easiness of fairy-tale ahistoricity. The link between the two characters is achieved by assimilating the Shakespearean Caliban figure to a postmodernist political allegory in which radical resistance corresponds to the early modern Elizabethan concept of savagery.

Among the three Caliban figures that surface in the temporal framework of the twentieth century (the other two being the black guard in the underground station and George Felix, the black actor who plays Caliban), Abdul Malik seems to be the most virulent threat to Warner’s “New World” order both on the island and worldwide. The Everards, (represented this time by Anthony Everard’s daughter Xanthe/Goldie and her husband Sy Neabris, the neocolonial entrepreneur, and Kit Everard, Miranda’s father) launch their neocolonial project on Liamuiga (now *Enfant-Béate* after independence) in the form of the tourism industry, with all its paraphernalia of gambling, prostitution, and menial jobs for the natives. Abdul Malik represents a threat to the neocolonial project on the island. At the news of the coup d’état which badly affects Sy Nebris’ hotel business, he declares almost in self-parody: “It was a blight. Banana republics” (356). He is practically unaware that he has been setting the basis of one such republic on the island for more than a decade.

In the logic of the novel, Abdul Malik embodies, even more than Sycorax, the politics of difference as an atavistic trait incompatible with the Eurocentric view of history. On their first visit to the island in the late 1960s, Xanthe and Miranda bathe naked in the pools where Sycorax and Ariel used to swim and near which Abdul Malik’s family and community now live. Abdul Malik’s attempt to explain away his children’s throwing stones and mud at the naked women invokes the progressive concept of history through the voice of angry Xanthe. To his “My children are strictly brought up....We have standards for our women, and when they see others who live ...differently...they do not like it,” she replies: “Stoning people went out with the dark ages where we come from” (*Indigo* 334). Later, as we come to see Abdul Malik again during his attack on the Liamuigan parliament, he is associated with terrorist Islam, or at best “his version of Islam” as the narrative puts it (*Indigo* 354). We see him this time from the perspective of Atala Seacole, the liberal leader of the opposition in the Parliament and the first female prime minister of the country after the coup d’état. In spite of Atala Seacole’s partial sympathy with him, all the accessories of Orientalist Islam as presented in Western media (such as polygamy, religious intolerance and sexual exoticism) are associated with his portrait (*Indigo* 352).

Moreover, he and his movement serve as a warning to the capitalist world and emerge as a threat to the world order. In Seacole’s elusive politics, Abdul Malik can turn a place like the sunny Caribbean Liamuiga into “a rogue virus in the immune system of world politics” (*Indigo* 367). And Seacole, who used to be a Marxist-Leninist activist, turns now to the American paymasters and to the World Bank to support her political regime, for as she puts it: “We have the vaccine you need against the disease you bring on yourselves!” (367). The horror that Abdul Malik strikes in the American financiers and statesmen is the possibility, in the words of the intervening narrator, of “a Middle Eastern foothold in the Caribbean? An embryonic Colonel Gaddafi or Saddam Hussein?” (*Indigo* 367). Here, Warner breaks what I

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might call the narrative compact between text and reader by taking her/him beyond the fictional history or the fictionalized history of the narrative (marked by the dates attached to the beginning of each chapter) to putative future threats from other Caliban Middle Eastern figures, or “rogue states” commonly found in the discourse of contemporary American administration.

Abdul Malik’s assault on the Liamuigan Parliament takes place during the preparations for the independence of Liamuiga in 1983 as the text indicates at the beginning of chapter twenty nine. This is the actual date of the independence of St Kitts, the island that the real Christopher (Kit) Warner colonized in the name of Britain. And Warner’s fictional account of that Islamist armed assault seems to depend in most of its details on a real attack on Trinidad’s national parliament on July 27 1990 by Jammât al-Muslimeen (Muslim Group) headed by their leader Abu Bakr, who surrendered after a few days like Abdul Malik. This incident is cited in an article that traces the origin of Islam in the Caribbean basin in relation to putative operations by Bin Laden’s Al Qaeda organization (Zambelis 5). Moreover, Saddam Hussein had not yet come on the scene of world politics as a threat to world peace except after the first Gulf War in 1991, a date that is beyond the temporal framework of the narrative. What we have here is that postmodernist play with history which; as Fredric Jameson puts it: “either “expresses” some deeper irrepressible historical impulse (in however distorted a fashion) or effectively “represses” and diverts it, depending on the side of the ambiguity you happen to favor” (Jameson ix).

In contrast, Warner overlooks the stormy British invasion of the Falkland Islands in 1982, just one year before the independence of Liamuiga, which is so close to South America. Warner also winks at the most tempestuous event associated with Saddam and which ushered in the era of American imperialism in the nude, i.e. General Norman Schwarzkopf’s *Operation Desert Storm* (1991). Warner’s postmodern narrative game of fusion of times and settings is meant to correspond to the shape-shifting and gender-shifting structures of *The Tempest*. But it also seems to be a function of her political double standards. It may also be *Indigo*’s political unconscious, popping up to the surface to expose the neocolonial aspects of a text disguised as a fairy-tale.

We meet the other two Caliban figures in the second plot during their diaspora on the mother island, England, after the decline of the British empire. Generally speaking, they are depicted in a diametrically opposite way to the earlier Calibans. They are the migrant Uncle Toms who accommodate themselves to the hybrid cultural life of postwar London. The first one is the black Caribbean guard in the tube, whom Miranda and her parents meet during a London winter storm, another parodic invocation of *The Tempest*. The black guard meets Kit Everard’s burst of fury and racist cursing with great patience and tolerance: “I’m a Negro, sir. But British too” (*Indigo* 70). They make up as Kit apologizes, realizing that he is like him from the islands. They end up in the guard’s office room for tea and intimate conversation about the Flinders, the fictional game that corresponds to cricket. They reconcile over a game the history of which runs parallel to the history of empire itself. As Anthony Everard, who was a national hero of the game and one of its later reformers, declares: “The Game is a game, not a display of national might. It’s Flinders, the game that united all colours and creeds—when there was an empire worthy of the name” (*Indigo* 326). The brief episode between Kit and the black guard provides an example of what Susan Friedmann terms “the utopian aspect of ‘companionship’ and ‘play’ in the space between racial difference....which fuels the drive for a better world” (Friedmann 73).

It is this utopian aspect of love and play that veils the presentation of the last Caliban figure, George Felix/Shaka Ifetabe, and his romantic union with Miranda. George Felix first appears briefly as a supernumerary in Miranda’s small sexual odyssey and her quest for love and identity as a novice artist. She meets him for the first time in the late 1960s, in the circles

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of radical leftists who are depicted with no little sarcasm. At the time, he is an actor in an agitprop movie, playing the role of a radical fighter in the Black Panthers, described in the text as “freedom fighters in terrorist gear” (*Indigo* 259). A scene of quarrel and reconciliation ensues between George and Miranda. As she takes some photos of him for her sketches, he rages at her in characteristic rebel sloganeering fashion: “Some bitch exploiting me, joining in the fucking imperialist adventure, selling my image...” (*Indigo* 263). However, George’s fury is contained by mutual apologies and his “sloganeering” burns itself up in Miranda’s bed, as they have a one-night affair.

Then George Felix disappears from the narrative scene completely and shows up again in the late 1980s under the name of Shaka, having changed his name during the high days of African nationalism. But he appears disillusioned with the idea of a motherland, or origins and ends up, as he declares, as “the Unnamable”. That is why he finds himself able to play the role of Caliban in a fringe London production of *The Tempest* when Miranda runs into him again while on a job for a charity programme of African famine relief and development. But in that production, Warner reconfigures the scene of Caliban’s attempted rape of Miranda and makes the young actress taunt him “with smiles, with seductive looks which then turned to scorn” (*Indigo* 387). Miranda watches the scene, yearning for her former lover. In her “post-sexual” state, as she puts it, she has misgivings about her own white sexual fantasies (*Indigo* 389). Now in her late thirties, she cannot think of him as an object of desire for this would make her look like “a new colonist” (*Indigo* 389). She somehow faces her family’s colonial history within herself. The liberal ideals she embraced in the 1960s do not help her now: “I am such a fucking racist, she was thinking....Self-hating and denying my links. But it felt like a fraud when I used to pretend to pass for black in those days” (*Indigo* 389).

Thus, Warner’s reproduction of that scene works again at dislocating racist politics of identity. Both Miranda and George/Shaka become stranded on the colour spectrum; old identities or languages do not rescue them. She thinks to herself as she watches him in the famous scene of cursing Prospero: “Oh God, how I’d like to learn me a new language. Beyond cursing, beyond ranting” (*Indigo* 388). And he likens their state to that of the early maroons: “we’re maroons together now” (*Indigo* 394). But the name that was associated with militant resistance is emptied of its original significance and historical agency in resisting colonialism. For they become maroons from history itself, which must be forgotten for the sake of the happy ending:

“We’ll forget the Middle East, forget Aids, forget famine, the war, the hole in the ozone, torture death rape and murder, forget Save the Children and the disappeared, forget forget, forget South Africa even, forget the mean-spirited Eighties....Because I’m so tired, as the poet said, of our fucking envy and your fucking guilt” (*Indigo* 394).

Warner, in a kind of self-irony about its pastoral closure, makes Miranda skeptical about the possibility of a happy ending with Shaka, for the turbulent and oppressive reality of the 1980s is not “one of Shakespeare’s sweet tempered comedies, nor ...one of his late plays with their magical reconciliations” (*Indigo* 391). However, they end up in the world of play and companionship by rehearsing the scene of the game of chess between Miranda and Ferdinand, “crossing the lines, crossing the squares, far out on the board in the other’s sea” (*Indigo* 395). In the epilogue narrated by Serafine we learn that they have married and got a baby girl named Serafine. The process of remapping the waters comes to its conclusion in the realm of cross-cultural hybridity and productive exchange.

The problem with this discourse of hybridity is that it works towards the containment of the category of the radically different other within the racist system that first produced it. As Jonathan Friedmann maintains: “the hybridity celebrated in cultural studies has little revolutionary potential, since it is part of the very discourse of bourgeois capitalism and

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modernity which it claims to displace” (qtd. in Freidmann 92). Caliban/George/Shaka’s potential for cursing, for radical activism, even through the theatre, is contained in Miranda’s bed and in the text’s reference to Shaka’s subscribing to bourgeois society by going into the restaurant business to make a living.

Warner, unlike Prospero who abjures his magic arts at the end, handles her postmodernist narrative wand to erase the neo-colonial history in the interests of her post-colonial utopia of mutual acceptance of difference and casting off the politics of identity, even if these are part of strategies of liberation. Warner has constructed *Indigo* along the lines of a classic fairy tale: “I wanted it to speak in the way fairy tales do, for hope, against despair” (*Signs* 265). In this respect, she falls under the mantle of the Bard and follows the redemptive recipe with which *The Tempest* ends. Prospero takes ambiguous responsibility for Caliban: “This thing of darkness I/Acknowledge mine” (5.1.275-276); and Caliban, in his turn, declares his will to “be wise hereafter/And seek for grace” (5.1.295-296). What begins as an alternative historical re-reading of Shakespeare ends up being a derivative discourse, or at best a mere “supplement to the conventional” as she puts it in her elaboration of the concept of re-visioning (*Signs* 268-269). From our vantage point in the Middle East, in the era of post-American invasion of Iraq and of Israel’s colonial ravages and massacres in Palestine, we cannot afford Warner’s “creative amnesia” or her world of romance when it brushes history aside. The spirit of romance, characteristic of Disney productions and against which Warner herself often warns, undercuts her subversive historical re-visioning of Shakespeare and threatens to storm her post-colonial utopian islands.

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