

The Hispanic Post-Colonial Tourist

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The Transnational Subject as Post-Colonial Tourist

In this paper I want to bring together my critical interests in the fields of Feminism, Hispanism and Cultural Studies.¹ More specifically, I want to argue the creation of a new narrative figure, what I will term the “transnational subject” which, if seen from the perspective of post-colonial studies becomes a new site to articulate the historical and narratological tension between the old metropolis and new decentered cultural locations. I will focus on the ongoing trend among women writers from the Hispanic world to deconstruct popular narrative genres which have been traditionally dominated by male authors. This trend constitutes a parodic rewriting of some of the “foundational fictions” that established the (male) national subject, as Doris Sommer has so persuasively argued.² My goal in this essay is to contextualize this new Hispanic feminism and its textual politics against the patriarchal consolidation of those national subjects. Quite consistently, these writers create characters who are “travelers,” who are separated, both factually and/or imaginatively, from their desired others. It is this “travelling condition” that is central to my study since it produces a new narrative figure, that of the “post-colonial tourist” or the “transnational subject.” To analyze this figure requires a critical shift from the ongoing process of textual decolonization of traditional

travel narratives and colonial chronicles in order to focus our critical gaze on the most important form of travel today: tourism. In the Iberian and the Latin American contexts, the role tourism has played in the socio-economic transformation of society is an obvious one. Much less obvious, however, is the significance of tourism as an important factor in the process of (trans) national refiguration in our countries. A different and yet quite relevant question is to ask if tourism, both intellectual and recreational, becomes a multicultural practice of ideological and narratological significance. Or, to say it in Homi Bhabha's terms, if our transnational narratives are not destabilizing the traditional "location of culture."³ The work of Carme Riera, Mercedes Abad and Ana Lydia Vega constitutes an illustration of such "an innovative site of collaboration and contestation" (Bhabha 2) In what follows I will study the parodic gestures of these three leading voices in the new Hispanic feminism, as a contestation of the foundational romantic fictions of their patriarchal predecessors.

Before beginning my textual analysis, however, I would like to establish more clearly the theoretical connections between tourism as a social practice and its narrative construction in the context of other post-colonial strategies. Interestingly enough, tourism has already generated a considerable amount of analytical literature in the social sciences. And yet, it has received far less attention from the fields of post-colonial and Cultural Studies. Most studies on the subject have been devoted to early travel writings, from the Spanish so-called "conquest" of the Americas to the British "imperial travelogues" of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Instead, I want to suggest that tourism has become the contemporary privileged scenario of the "colonial encounter," or, as Mary Louise Pratt has it: of "the contact zone."⁴ Briefly put, my contention is that tourism constitutes the most salient aspect of a neo-colonial situation, that is, the massive exploitation of natural and/or cultural resources of the so-called Second and Third Worlds by members of the so-called First World. This consideration is both highly contested and widely echoed by many statements coming from sociological and anthropological studies of tourism. Dennison Nash's essay on "Tourism as a Form of Imperialism" offers one of its clearest formulations:

If productivity is the key to tourism, then any analysis of touristic development without reference to productive centers that generate tourist needs and tourists is bound to be incomplete. Such metropolitan centers have varying degrees of control over the nature of tourism and its development, but they exercise it—at least at the beginning of their relationship with tourist

areas—in alien regions. It is this power over touristic and related developments abroad that makes a metropolitan center imperialistic and tourism a form of imperialism. (Nash, 39).

What if the touristic transaction occurs between members of the so-called First World? Does the imperialistic structure still obtain? Again in Nash's words:

The terms of tourist-host transactions are defined not only by the condition of strangerhood but by the nature of tourism itself. As a tourist, a person is at leisure, which means that he [sic] is not bent on shaping the world, only experiencing or toying with it.... To put it more succinctly, others must serve while the tourist plays, rests, cures, or mentally enriches himself. Accordingly, he finds himself separated from those in the touristic infrastructure who serve him by the different, if complimentary, nature of the activities specified in the touristic contract.... Even if they come from the same cultures and understand each other perfectly, the basic attitudes they bring to their relationship with each other are distinguished along lines specified by the differences between work and leisure. (45-6)

Nash's formulation offers one of the clearest theoretical connections between tourism as social practice and its textual construction, namely, "the condition of strangerhood." It is this condition, I would argue, that is at the heart of the historical and narratological importance of tourism. Or, to put it differently, this condition produces the narrative and historical opportunity to negotiate the dialectics between "strange" and "familiar" or between "estrangement" and "belonging." Ultimately, it is this opportunity that turns tourism into a complex, contested, and, at the same time, appealing cultural (dis)location. Beyond the traditional fixed positions of the Hegelian dialectics, there appears a world of shifting subject positions. Julia Kristeva has described it persuasively in *Strangers to Ourselves*:

Dialectics of master and slave? The amount of strength changes the very balance of power. The weight of foreigners is measured not only in terms of greater numbers... but is also determined by the consciousness of being somewhat foreign as well. On the one hand, because everyone is, in a world that is more open than ever, liable to become a foreigner for a while as a tourist or employee of a multinational concern. On the other hand, be-

cause the once solid barrier between 'master' and 'slave' has today been abolished, if not in people's unconscious at least in our ideologies and aspirations. Every native feels himself to be more or less a "foreigner" in his "own and proper" place, and that metaphorical value of the word "foreigner" first leads the citizen to a feeling of discomfort as to his sexual, national, political, professional identity. Next it impels him to identify—sporadically, to be sure, but nonetheless intensely—with the other. (19)

Kristeva's point concerning the "identity discomfort" that impels the modern citizen to "other" himself/herself is further elaborated by Frances Bartkowski in her *Travelers, Immigrants, Inmates. Essays in Estrangement*, where she writes:

Identities are always mistaken. The mistakenness of identities must be taken very seriously; I mean by this assertion to bring into some relational dynamic both the psychoanalytic, specifically Lacanian, resonances of this statement, while simultaneously asking my reader to think also of how mistaken identities are at the center of our global politics at this very moment.... My aim is to read the merge of psychoanalysis and politics in the question of domination and its instantiation in dislocated subjectivities. And the site of their merging can be read only in textuality, and in narratives, whether poetic, journalistic, or theoretical. (xvi-xvii)

It is in textuality, indeed, that I want to trace the historicity of the touristic subject as one of the most significant instances of "dislocated subjectivities." And yet, as Iain Chambers suggests, tourism may indeed be conceived as a resistance to such cultural dislocations inasmuch as its aim is to perpetuate the "domestication of space" as opposed to the migrant subject's leap onto uncharted territory. Chambers' observation is central to my own argument in his textual construction of the "impossible homecoming":

For to travel implies the movement between fixed positions, a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary. It also intimates an eventual return, a potential homecoming. Migrancy, on the contrary, involves a movement in which

neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming—completing the story, domesticating the detour—becomes an impossibility.... Discoveries and conquests, and the subsequent Eurocentric domestication of space, reach their furthest point in modern-day tourism and the “neutral” gaze of knowledge. (5-31)

Contrary to early formulations, therefore, the cultural critique of the touristic subject should not rest on its inauthenticity or gregariousness but on its compulsion to repeat the same, to bring his/her homebound certainties to the touristic location. Ultimately, it is the willingness to accept one's own location as a tourist in the eyes of “residents;” or the acceptance of being the object instead of the subject of the touristic gaze that may eventually displace the fixed cultural and textual roles surrounding the touristic subject. However, one question remains: does self-consciousness subvert the narrative of tourism as commercial commodification? Can the self-conscious, post-colonial (and transnational) tourist overcome the neo-colonial strictures of today's “contact zone”? The narratives that follow illustrate some of these ideological contradictions while providing a textual embodiment of the touristic double bind.

Broadly speaking, the feminist narratives that revisit that “contact zone” may be divided into two categories. On the one hand, there are those texts that reappropriate the traditional “return home” topos and deconstruct it in order to show what Chambers terms the “impossible homecoming.” These texts aim at decolonizing the native subject by establishing a narrative consciousness of the colonial gesture. Quite paradigmatic, in this category, is Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988), the vitriolic travelogue about her native Caribbean island of Antigua. The second textual category is that of the transnational or transcultural parodic text, one in which Pratt's “interlocking understandings and practices” become a textual parody of the contradictory position of the post-colonial tourist.⁵ It is within this category that I propose to study the work of Riera, Abad and Vega as a powerful illustration of an entire generational mode. Indeed, as I have mentioned elsewhere,⁶ I think that one of the most interesting narrative developments in the fiction of feminist writers from the Hispanic world is their parodic deconstruction of many stereotypes attached to popular genres. It is my contention that this gen-

erational gesture may be read as a displacement of ideological resistance from the direct level of political action to that of aesthetic subversion. When, for instance, the Argentinean Luisa Valenzuela proposes her paradigmatic “cambio de armas,”⁷ what she is calling for is a feminine redeployment of those “weapons” traditionally wielded by males, and especially of language, that most ritually and ideologically charged of weapons. Martha Morello-Frosch has recently emphasized this aspect of political resistance through the displacement and/or subversion of ritualized language: “Ritual, in Valenzuela’s fiction, is subverted and refashioned and finally reinserted in a considerably modified social context. Thus processed, it becomes a veritable window into another cultural landscape: that of the decolonized feminine subject.”⁸

To decolonize the feminine subject is indeed the goal of feminism everywhere. To achieve that decolonization on cultural grounds is perhaps even more urgent in the Hispanic world, where significant practices have been mostly monopolized by patriarchal voices. That is indeed the political significance of the new Hispanic postmodern feminism, a movement that crosses national boundaries. Thus, besides Luisa Valenzuela, there is already a great number of Latin American women writers, such as the Puerto Rican Rosario Ferré and Ana Lydia Vega, the Chilean Diamela Eltit, the Cuban Mayra Montero or the Mexican Angeles Mastretta and Carmen Boullosa who, among many others, contribute their efforts to reach that new “cultural landscape.” In the Spanish Peninsular context, this process of cultural subversion, although present in most geographical areas, as is obvious in the work of the Madrid-born Almudena Grandes or Rosa Montero, and in that of the Basque Arantxa Urretavizcaya, seems to have blossomed in Catalonia, where a large number of women writers, both in Castilian and in Catalan, are currently engaged in that deconstructive gesture. The names of Carme Riera and Maria Antònia Oliver, in Catalan, and those of Mercedes Abad and Cristina Fernández Cubas, in Castilian, constitute the clearest illustration. That is why I want to focus my analysis on a comparative reading of Carme Riera’s “Sorpres a Sri Lanka,” from her last collection of short stories, *Contra l’amor en companyia i altres relats* (1991) and Mercedes Abad’s “Mío para siempre (En siamada)” from her volume *Felicidades conyugales* (1989) and Ana Lydia Vega’s “Puerto Príncipe Abajo,” from the collection *Virgenes y Mártires* (1981). It is appropriate, at this juncture, to mention the names of Mercè Rodoreda and Carmen Martín Gaité, who constitute the most illustrious forerunners of the current trend. Biruté Cipliauskaitė, in her otherwise remarkable study *La novela femenina contemporánea (1970-*

1985) claims that the fantastic, as a popular narrative genre, appears as a new tendency among young Spanish women writers. She obviously forgets Martín Gaité's *El balneario* (1955) or *El cuarto de atrás* (1978) and Rodoreda's *La meva Cristina i altres contes* (1967), which establish the most obvious link in that tradition of cultural subversion. In my view, what is truly new in this Hispanic postmodern and post-colonial feminism is the incorporation of parody and eroticism, two elements only vaguely present in the narrative worlds of Rodoreda and Martín Gaité. It is under the guise of the transnational touristic subject, as I pointed out earlier, that this new literary discourse is undertaken.

Carme Riera, Mercedes Abad and Ana Lydia Vega
or the Hispanic Post-Colonial Tourist

The touristic subject has always intrigued Carme Riera, who included it even in *Tè deix, amor, la mar com a penyora* (1975), the first book that made her lyrical intersubjective voice so well known.⁹ What I want to stress in bringing together the stories by Riera, Abad and Vega is the creation of a new discursivity, a generational narrative mode that finds a common aesthetic and ideological platform in their cultural dislocation of the patriarchal “foundational fictions” that are parodically deconstructed in/by the transnational touristic subject. Who or what is this touristic subject, anyway? Perhaps the clearest and most devastating formulation is the one given by Jamaica Kincaid in *A Small Place*, the book that chronicles her “impossible homecoming”:

The thing you have always suspected about yourself the minute you become a tourist is true: A tourist is an ugly human being. You are not an ugly person all the time; you are not an ugly person ordinarily.... An ugly thing, that is what you are when you become a tourist, an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that, and it will never occur to you that the people who inhabit the place in which you have just paused cannot stand you. (14-17)

Many of the stories included in Carme Riera's *Contra l'amor en companyia i altres relats* (1991), in Mercedes Abad's *Felicidades conyugales* (1989) and in Ana Lydia Vega's and Carmen Lugo Filippi's *Virgenes y Mártires* (1981) may be read against this formulation, both in contradic-

tory and in complimentary ways. In fact, as I suggested earlier, I contend that the touristic subject in our post-colonial time is always trapped in the double bind of becoming both a colonizer and a colonized. S/he is both the touristic subject and the subject of tourism. In other words, by distancing herself/himself from the position of the unself-conscious tourist, s/he partakes of the guilt ascribed to the neo-colonial realities which tourism, in fact, creates.

Ana Lydia Vega's short story "Puerto Príncipe Abajo" (1981) is paradigmatic in this sense. The story chronicles a short visit to Haiti and is narrated from the viewpoint of a Puerto Rican history teacher who, from the start, adopts a critical and self-conscious position in contrast to that of her compatriots, who are condescending and look down upon the Haitians. Ana Lydia Vega's text shares a common plot and locale (a trip to a Caribbean island) with Kincaid's *A Small Place*. Both texts, therefore, contribute to the narrative refiguration of the Caribbean as a multicultural space in their common deconstruction of a homogenous vision of the Caribbean as a privileged touristic commodity. And yet, they are radically different in the ways they articulate the connections between tourism, isolation and exploitation. Kincaid's case constitutes, in the words of sociologist David Harrison, an exception to the rule of the returning migrant: "However, not all returning migrants are impressed by tourism and its effects. Temporarily leaving Vermont, USA, to revisit the island of Antigua, Kincaid saw tourism as the successor to colonialism" (Harrison 23). In fact, and to return to Iain Chambers' characterization, Kincaid's textual gesture embodies the contradictory position of the post-colonial critic who is the one capable of crossing borders, of becoming a migrant subject for whom there is no possible homecoming: "For migrancy and exile, as Edward Said points out, involves a "discontinuous state of being," a form of picking a quarrel with where you come from" (Chambers 2). Kincaid's text is one of the most powerful illustrations of such a quarrel. Ana Lydia Vega's text, on the other hand, is a compelling embodiment of the mistaken identities or dislocated subjectivities that Bartkowski so eloquently constructs in her reading of the travelling subject. Vega's work relies heavily on the notion of "estrangement," both in its political and psychological dimension, as Diana L. Vélez has shown:

It is clear from even a cursory reading of her four collections of stories that Vega has taken the hard look prescribed by Fanon. It has been said of Ana Lydia Vega that "no perdona a nadie":

she forgives or excuses no one. Her writing is located in that contradictory space opened up by the word of the split subject. Irrationality, desire and the imaginary are her stock-in-trade. Her ambivalence and estrangement from her characters is figured in their contradictory utterances and in those of her preferred narrative voice—a smart-aleck, less than likable know-it-all who gives the term “omniscient narrator” a new meaning. (827)

Ultimately, in bringing these texts together, I am producing a “narrative site” (Bartkowski xvii) where the merging of traveling (mistaken) identities may be represented in a new discursivity that arises, precisely, from cultural dislocations and historical displacements. Tourism, in this sense, may be seen as a historical (and narratological) subject that attempts to (re)present itself. As Dean MacCanell puts it: “The tourist is an actual person, or real people are actually tourists. At the same time, “the tourist” is one of the best models available for modern-man-in-general” (1). The difficulty in historically and textually inhabiting that overarching metaphor is at the heart of the touristic representations of Vega, Abad and Riera. In fact, as I have already pointed out, their texts are themselves produced as a resistance to the ritual process of self-commodification implicit in the touristic transaction.

True to its touristic subject, Ana Lydia Vega’s “Puerto Príncipe Abajo” is organized as a narrative slide show. The first of the ten slides already points the reader/viewer in the direction of a cultural dislocation in the chorus-like report that the narrator does of her co-travellers’ reaction upon arrival to Haiti: “Entonces rompe el coro de las lamentaciones: qué lástima pobrecitos parte el alma ay bendito qué miseria Dios mío. Y el inevitable He ahí la cosecha amarga de la Independencia, final como un *Ite Missa Est*” (91). Thus, the Puerto Rican tourists attribute the backwardness they see to Haiti’s independent status while, at the same time, the “omniscient narrator” in the guise of the post-colonial tourist wants to establish her own independence, her own transnational position, by distancing herself from the group and their “touristic” reaction. Obviously, the fact that Ana Lydia Vega is a Puerto Rican writer who is quite conscious of the neocolonial status of her own island-country provides a political subtext that adds historical specificity to a highly critical statement. It is the question of status, precisely, that is immediately elaborated in the story as the reader witnesses how the “omniscient narrator,” after having spelled out even more clearly her difference from the rest of

the group, exclaims: “Perdón: pero cómo no sentirse vedette en medio de esta delegación de matronas urbanizadas.... Hoy querían saber mi signo del zodiaco. Espulgar mi afro en busca del antepasado fatal. El status está en issue: desafiar la amabilidad boricua, virtud entre virtudes nacional” (92). This (self)questioning of the narrator’s national and racial status places her in that area described by Kristeva as characterized by a productive “identity discomfort.” It places her at a historical and textual distance from the group, which can scrutinize her as an “other.” The group’s “othering” gesture is accepted and replicated by the narrator who insists on isolating herself in her historical and narratological self-consciousness:

Los demás han ido a la caza de vudú como turistas gringos sedientos de sangre de pollo.... Insistes en aislarte con Haití. El de la Historia. El que pone la piel de gallina y timbales en el pecho. Poseída por Ogún con todos los ejércitos dessalinianos cabalgándote en el cráneo, quieres nada menos que violentar la cuerda del tiempo y ver germinar en flashback el árbol mentado de la libertad. Romanticismo intelectual de ligas menores, proclama sonriente el veterano mutilado de tu ser. (95)

Such an intellectualized romanticism, however, cannot be sustained in the midst of Haiti’s harsh reality and, especially, given the fact of the narrator’s own predicament, that of being a tourist, “an ugly thing.” It comes as no surprise, therefore, that she ends up being reminded of that inescapable condition:

Y estás una vez más en el mercado con ese deseo de tomar una foto que te cabalga como un loa malcriado. Te dices beata que la miseria no es folklore. Recuerdas que te falta un botón y preguntas cuánto cuesta el primero que te salta a la vista. Cinco dólares, dice. Es un hombrecito de mirada inquieta. Te fichó: TURISTA. A pesar del color, a pesar del amor. TURISTA: como ellos. Le dices que no, tristeza del gesto. (98)

Vega’s “omniscient narrator,” despite her displaced subjectivity and critical self-consciousness, is forced to admit the inevitable: she has been repositioned as the touristic other to be exploited in return for the historical exploitation of the colonial powers. In the end, she will assume that contradictory position by finding relief in returning “home”: “Mea culpa. Haití es una bofetada a tu bondad sintética. Un país que no perdona.

Todo acto es culpable y la pena un lujo que se paga a precios de turista” (98). Unlike Kincaid’s narrator, Vega’s history teacher is still finding personal and narrative resolution in her “homecoming.” She has not been able to become a true migrant subject, her cultural and linguistic border crossing is ultimately insufficient. It undoubtedly contributes to undermine the “foundational fiction” of Caribbean (trans)national conciliation. And yet, it finally repositions Vega’s post-colonial tourist as a national subject, albeit a “disenchanted” one.¹⁰

Mercedes Abad’s short story “Mío para siempre (En siamada)” (1989) shares with Ana Lydia Vega’s story the figure of an “omniscient narrator” who wants to distance herself from the anonymous group of oblivious tourists with whom she is visiting the Far East. Like Vega’s, Abad’s story constitutes a social parody that both relies on and transgresses a particular linguistic and cultural border, that of the Catalan bourgeoisie sociolect. Finally, like Vega’s self-conscious position regarding Puerto Rico’s neo-colonial status, Abad seems fully aware of the fact that a Catalan woman writing in Spanish in order to parody the stereotypical gestures of petit-bourgeois urban Catalans may be in and of itself an inscription of a cultural (and national) dislocation. Moreover, in the context of this study, Abad’s text stands out as the most blatant parody of the social construction of sex and love as reductive forms of touristic self-commodification.

Abad’s satire of petit-bourgeois erotic and touristic fixations appears inscribed in the verbal play of the story title, or better, its subtitle: “En Siamada,” where we can see how the old name of Thailand, the kingdom of Siam, is (con)fused with the notion of siamese or twin brother and with the traditional souvenir of the stereotypical Catalan touristic trip: the Majorcan “ensaimada” (a sweet angel hair pastry). With that verbal game, Abad is merging two historical times into a single erotic and touristic imaginary: the eighties and the fashionable trips to the Far East (especially to Thailand) and the fifties, when the prescribed honeymoon trip for petit-bourgeois Catalan couples was to visit Mallorca: the romantic island of Georges Sand and Chopin. The common thread tying together these touristic fantasies is indicated by the “mine forever” of the title, that functions like an aprioristic slogan describing the amorous contract, that is, the “conjugal bliss” against which the whole satire of the book is directed.

As we will see, Abad’s parody, like Riera’s own, begins with the reversal of a historical fact. Instead of the male bachelor groups that trav-

eled to buy the sexual favors of Thai women in the singing bars of Bangkok, the reader is presented with a respectable Catalan bourgeois widow who “acquires” or, if I may play with Abad’s own word play, “adheres” herself to a handsome young Thai man who becomes both her siamese twin and her wedding souvenir.¹¹ Like the narrator in Vega’s “Puerto Príncipe Abajo,” and also like Aina Maria Sureda, the narrator of *Epitelis tendrissims* (1981), Carme Riera’s collection of erotic short stories, the protagonist of “Mío para siempre” begins her narrative stating her wish to detach herself from the gregarious group of tourists. Unlike Vega’s or Riera’s “omniscient narrators,” however, Abad’s protagonist will immediately try to establish “contact,” a gesture that recalls Marie Louise Pratt’s notion of the “contact zone” and my contention that tourism is the contemporary scenario where the neo-colonial encounter is reenacted. In fact, Abad’s story reads like a direct parody of those “interlocking understandings and practices” described by Pratt, as seen in this passage that represents the very moment of “contact”:

Agotada por el largo viaje desde Singapur pero ansiosa, sobre todo, de un soplo de independencia que me permitiera hacer lo que me viniera en gana durante unas horas, improvisé una despiadada jaqueca y abandoné el grupo para dirigirme al hotel.... Plenamente reestablecido de este modo mi habitual buen humor, me dejé arrastrar, dócilmente y sin objetivo alguno, por la multitud.... El movimiento del gentío me llevó hasta uno de los numerosos mercadillos instalados junto a las márgenes del río; ... Estaba sacando de mi monedero la suma necesaria para comprar una hermosa túnica destinada a mi hijo, cuando sucedió algo completamente inverosímil que, al principio, me divirtió sobremanera: al intentar alargar mi brazo hacia el vendedor, algo tiró, primero con suavidad y luego con creciente fuerza e insistencia, de mi muñeca. Sumamente desconcertada, me volví y descubrí a mi lado a un hombre muy joven que contemplaba, con una sonrisa imperturbable, algo muy extraño que acababa de ocurrir entre nuestras respectivas muñecas. Miré a mi vez, y descubrí, todavía de excelente humor, que nuestros cuerpos parecían haberse soldado por mi muñeca izquierda y su muñeca derecha; la ilusión no podía ser más convincente; nuestras carnes se habían unido de forma inexplicable. (41-43)

Thus, with a simple narrative pull, Mercedes Abad manages to inscribe the most extreme and amusing parodic figuration of that interlocking gesture that typifies the touristic contact, while, at the same time,

deconstructing one of patriarchy's dearest "foundational fictions." By this I mean the traditional erotic fantasy of the "regressum ad uterum," sex-textually encoded as the utmost figuration of the "homecoming" fantasy: the patriotic, "national conciliation" (Sommer xi), the happy taming of or return to the (mother)land. With a single pull, therefore, the fusion between this Catalan mother and her Siamese lover-son becomes a narrative fact. Besides the obvious parody of the Oedipal master narrative (a parody which is reinforced when the reader finds out that: "[t]ras la muerte de mi querido esposo—hacía ya tres años de esto—, habíamos viajado juntos a la India, mi hijo se había revelado como un compañero de viaje hartamente estimulante") (41); the ironic treatment of the notion of "independence" is highlighted again. In fact, Abad creates a humoristic caricature in that "forced birth" of a mutual interdependence between the Catalan touristic widow and her Siamese souvenir-lover, a caricature that chastises the neo-colonial process of touristic commodification and appropriation. In a final ironic twist, Abad will have the mysterious union sanctioned by patriarchal science:

Arrastré al soñoliento muchacho hasta el hospital más cercano, donde un médico, incrédulo al principio y seriamente alarmado después, nos sometió a un examen exhaustivo; ... no sólo se habían unido nuestras carnes sino también inexplicablemente nuestras venas. En aquellas condiciones, manifestó el doctor, la operación destinada a devolvernos la independencia era terriblemente complicada y podía costarnos la vida.... Nos aconsejó vivamente que nos resignáramos a nuestro destino. (49)

The bond has been sanctioned and is, therefore, final: "mine, forever." The touristic interlocking in the "contact zone" of Thailand or Siam has effected the birth of a new culture, of a new dependence or, perhaps not a new one, if we recall, as Abad's verbal allusions invite us to do, the other "dependence" of patriarchal master narratives, such as the Oedipal one; or of patriarchal official stories, such as the Chronicles of the New World that represented the first colonial encounter. Were not those stories representations of a "forced union" that forged "our destiny"?

Finally, I want to analyze Carme Riera's "Sorpresa a Sri Lanka" (1991), another short story that recreates the figure of the post-colonial tourist and the encounter in the "contact zone."

Pel seu aniversari, el vint-i-nou d'agost es regalà un viatge a Sri Lanka. Se'l mereixia.... A més, tenia el pressentiment que el viatge no sols la descansaria, sinó que, com li anunciava l'horòscop, li hauria de proporcionar una agradable sorpresa que ella intuïa més seriosa i perdurable que un vulgar acoblament d'hotel amb un turista de sèrie.

For her birthday, on August 29th, she gave herself the present of a trip to Sri Lanka. She deserved it.... Besides she anticipated that the trip would not only give her a rest but also a nice surprise, one that she felt would be more serious and lasting than any random one-night stand in a hotel with an anonymous tourist. (147)

This is the beginning of Riera's "Sorpresa a Sri Lanka." The protagonist, a famous journalist whose heyday followed the publication of her in-depth study of men's underwear, is now facing a midlife crisis.¹² She is no longer constantly in public demand while being much more demanding in private. She is ready to give herself a break. The horoscope reinforces her desire to find herself elsewhere and in somebody else's desire. In short, she has decided to be a romantic tourist beyond the limitations of her native city and those attached to the gregarious condition of "tourist." She will avoid the pitfalls of such a condition, her "encounter" will be a meaningful one. As readers, our initial textual encounter is indeed a significant one:

Durant la primera setmana no succeí res d'interès. ... Restaven encara cinc dies i tot era possible, encara que s'anava mentalitzant per tal d'acceptar que el més probable era que res no passaria. La vida havia estat prou generosa amb ella i més li valia enfrontar-se d'una vegada amb els miralls i la soledat de la seva maduresa, desterrant per sempre més la fosca i secreta tendència als somnis d'una carrinclona *felicitat conjugal*.

Nothing interesting happened during the first week. ... She had still five days left and everything was possible, although she was beginning to tell herself that most probably nothing would happen. Life had been generous enough with her. It was much better to face once and for all the mirror and the loneliness of her own maturity. To reject for ever the dark and secret tendency to dream about that ridiculous *conjugal bliss*. (150-151, *emphasis mine*)

Riera's protagonist, unnamed like those of Ana Lydia Vega and Mercedes Abad, begins her narrative with a verbatim repetition of the two words that are both the title and the leading motif in Abad's *Felicidades conyugales*. This intertextual allusion underscores the common ground shared by the two writers and their blatant parodies of the postmodern conflation of love, sex and tourism. It will indeed be this conflation of sex and tourism that is awaiting Riera's protagonist in her orientalist escape to Sri Lanka:

Fou dues tardes abans de marxar, a la "boutique" de l'hotel, mentre comprava regals, quan va notar uns ulls fixos en el seu clatell. En tombar-se li va paréixer que tenien la brillantor dels tions encesos i li va somriure amb complicitat. Després, quan ell se li plantà al davant barrant-li el pas, va saber que era aquella, i no cap més, l'oportunitat que havia estat esperant, encara que ell no devia tenir més de vint anys i hauria pogut ésser el seu fill.

It was only two days before leaving, at the boutique of the hotel, while she was shopping for presents, that she noticed two eyes glued to her neck. When she turned around, she thought those eyes had the shine of burning logs and she smiled with complicity. Later, when he stood in her way, she knew that that and no other was the occasion she had been hoping for; even though he must have been under twenty and could have been her own son. (151)

The similarities to Abad's "Mfo para siempre" are striking. The "contact" happens when the protagonist is about to carry out the most emblematic of touristic gestures: shopping for presents. Like Abad's Catalan widow, Riera's divorced journalist feels herself physically attached (glued) to her souvenir-lover. And, like Abad, Riera's protagonist's encounter is filled with Oedipal overtones. Soon, the newfound lover's profession will be revealed both to the reader and to the protagonist: "T'he vist tots aquests dies tot sovint perquè sóc guia i recullo turistes de l'hotel.... També sé que ets periodista." (I've noticed you often these days because I'm a guide and come to pick up tourists from the hotel.... I also know you're a journalist) (151). The guide himself, we are soon to learn, is also an aspiring journalist. And that is why he has chosen her, because of her profession: "T'he escollit jo, ets la meva candidata." (I've chosen you. You're my candidate) (152). It was all written in the horoscope, will be Riera's protagonist's response, playing again, as Abad did, with the notion of a forceful union and/or that of a romantic destiny. Riera's final

narrative twist will rest on that very notion of a “written surprise.” At the end of their passionate romance, after the lovers have promised to keep in touch, the happy protagonist decides to fill in the questionnaire of the hotel where she notices a small envelope addressed to her. This is what she reads in it:

L'atzar l'havia feta mereixedora de figurar en un sorteig que l'establiment hoteler de cinc estrelles realitzava entre els seus clients més distingits. El premi consistia en un guia privat a la seva disposició durant dos dies i dues nits per fer-li més agradable, encara, la seva estada a Sri Lanka.

By chance she had been chosen to take part in a raffle that the five star hotel had established to honor its most distinguished guests. The prize consisted of a private guide at her service during two days and two nights in order to make her stay in Sri Lanka even more pleasant. (153)

Like Vega's “omniscient narrator,” in “Puerto Príncipe Abajo,” Riera's protagonist has to pay the touristic price. Her perfect surprise is to find out that she has become herself the chosen sexual commodity of her orientalized other, that she has indeed become, at the same time, the touristic subject and the subject of tourism. In the final analysis, the three stories by Vega, Abad and Riera appear to be textual constructions of failed and/or faked encounters. In fact, they speak of impossible encounters. They chronicle the arrival of the Hispanic post-colonial tourist to the new world of cultural dislocations. And yet, their transnational subjects appear to be still a bit too anchored in the old world of familiar homecomings.

Ultimately, what Ana Lydia Vega, Mercedes Abad and Carme Riera share is a common impulse to deconstruct the (patriarchal) dream of belonging in the conjugal and patriotic bliss of the (mother)land, and a common goal to inscribe that new “location of culture” in the uncertain position of the postmodern and post-colonial global village, wherein tourism becomes a narrative metaphor that articulates the precariousness of any claims to (in)dependence.

Notes

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this essay. An early version of this article was published as Martí-Olivella 1997. All the translations, unless indicated, are mine.

²See Sommer for an extended discussion of the concept of “foundational fictions” and its role in the representation of the national subject in many Latin American countries. Of particular interest to my discussion here is the following passage: “[I]n the modern world everyone can, should, will “have” a nationality, as he or she “has” a gender” (Anderson 14). Said inversely, everyone not only “has” a nationality and gender in the same imagined way, but these imaginings constitute us as modern subjects” (40).

³See Bhabha. Quite relevant to my discussion of the “transnational subject” is his assertion that “[w]hat is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These “in-between” spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself” (2).

⁴See Pratt, especially the following passage: “I use ‘contact zone’ to refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and untractable conflict..... A ‘contact’ perspective emphasizes how subjects are constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizers and colonized, or travelers and “travelees,” not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understanding and practices, often within asymmetrical relations of power” (6-7).

⁵I have borrowed the concept of the post-colonial tourist from the title of Sarah Harasym’s *The Post-Colonial Critic*, an anthology of interviews and dialogues with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. In this book the reader witnesses Spivak’s “impossible homecoming” to India. As is the case with most intellectual exiles, her return “home” imposes a double reality of insider/outsider, or of native/tourist. It is this double perspective and its inherent contradictions and tensions that set out a very specialized discourse, a discourse one may characterize as producing the figure of the “post-colonial critic” as “impossible tourist.” Spivak herself is very careful in her attempts to find a secure position beyond the troublesome exploitative aspects of tourism, as this passage illustrates: “I really am here because I wanted to learn a little more about how objects of historical investigation are made when there is not enough evidence, and what consequences that has for cultural explanations. Being an Indian by birth and citizenship, I find that this inquiry and the terms of this inquiry somehow get articulated into a place from which I can speak to others. I have never travelled anywhere without a job because it seems to be one way of finding out what the problems with one’s space might be, and of involving oneself in the place one visits” (68-9). Thus, in unequivocal terms, Spivak rejects the position of tourist. She does not travel

without a job. Her job, one might add, is to try and avoid the process of self-commodification inherent in the very act of tourism. And yet, doesn't this position entail a degree of subjective privilege? Or, in the words of the Nehru University students who interviewed Spivak: "Are you privileging exile as a vantage point for a clearer perspective on the scene of post-colonial cultural politics?" (67).

⁶See my (1992) review of Mercedes Abad's *Felicidades conyugales*, where I first argued the emergence of a new generational mode of parodic deconstructions of traditionally male-dominated popular genres.

⁷See Valenzuela's *Cambio de Armas*.

⁸See Morello-Frosch.

⁹See, for instance, the story "No fou la passatgera dos milions" (She Wasn't the Two Millionth Passenger), where Riera already problematizes the touristic subject with a clear implication of Majorca's own role in its economic and cultural colonization. "What would happen if that Two Millionth tourist was actually a Majorcan?" is the sarcastic question asked by the story's narrator.

¹⁰I borrow this term from Sommer. Specially relevant to my comment is the following passage: "In general, differences in evaluating nationalism may have less to do with which position is right or wrong than with the positionality one occupies: as an aspirant to national identity, for example, or a disenfranchised national" (x).

¹¹The appalling historical reality of sex tourism in Thailand is well documented. Perhaps less known is the fact of the forced labor migrancy that it entails, as C. Mitchell Hall reports: "The number of Thai women involved in sex industry activities outside of Thailand is substantial, although exact numbers are difficult to ascertain. Tourists visiting Thailand may obtain 'rented wives' (*mia chao*) who often return to tourist-generating regions, where they may suffer linguistic and social isolation while often being forced to perform sexual services. From a series of case studies of Thai women working as prostitutes in Europe, Sereewat (1983) concluded that the majority had already been working in the sex industry in Thailand, motivated mainly by the need to provide family support, and with a background of failed marriages and a lack of self-esteem. However, their reason for travelling to Europe need to be seen within the social and structural context of sex tourism and prostitution in Thailand rather than as a form of escapism" (72).

¹²With this reference to men's underwear, Carme Riera seems to inscribe her own ironic commentary to the postmodern gesture of national and sexual commodification, that has been so pervasive among Catalan and Spanish writers and film makers. See, for instance, Marvin D'Lugo's study: "Bigas Luna's *Jamón Jamón*: Remaking the National in Spanish Cinema" where he writes: "*Jamón* may be read as the story of the Spanish male's self-deluding fantasy of his own sexual and social potency in an age of radical economic change.... This male assembly line, an obvious parody of the traditional phallogocentric placement of women as the object of a male glance, reiterates the displacement of men within

the visual and social economies of contemporary Spain.... That he [Raúl] should work for a meat packer named “Los Conquistadores” merely reinforces the notion of commodifying historical culture as product while replicating phallic imagery” (70-76).

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