



Hybrid Tongues: Language, Identity and Cultural Resilience in Marlene Nourbese Philip's Diasporic Poetics

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ABSTRACT

This article unpacks the intricacies of cultural identity, language, resistance and ancestral connection in the works of Caribbean-Canadian poet Marlene Nourbese Philip. Applying postcolonial and diaspora theoretical frameworks, the analysis reveals Philip's linguistic experimentation as a process of "writing back" against colonial hierarchies. Her innovative use of creolized syntax, vernacular idioms, and fragmented grammar enacts new anti-colonial meanings. Equally, Philip's thematic interrogation of fractured histories and spiritual loss critically engages the psychic implications of displacement. The article examines selected poems demonstrating how Philip contests Orientalist paradigms that exoticize diasporic cultures as static or inferior. Overall, Philip's poems are shown to navigate complex identity hybridities while underscoring continuities with African origins and epistemologies counter to ruptures expected with cultural mixture. Her works push boundaries of both Caribbean literary aesthetics and fixed notions of subjecthood.

ARTICLE INFO

Received
2023-11-28

Accepted
2024-01-16

KEYWORDS

**Caribbean
poetry,
postcolonialism,
diaspora
hybridity.** **and**

Introduction

The Caribbean literary landscape has long been defined by the

multifarious experiences of diaspora, which are inextricably linked to the legacy of colonialism and the intricacies of postcolonial identity creation. Marlene Nourbese Philip, a well-known Caribbean-Canadian poet, is at the intersection of this complicated tale. Her poetry works, brimming with linguistic inventiveness and thematic depth, provide a singular starting point for delving into the subtleties of Caribbean diaspora in the framework of postcolonial literature. Nourbese Philip's poetry offers a window into the difficulties of Caribbean identities, cultural preservation, and opposing the process of colonization within the context of diasporic discourse.

This article embarks on a comprehensive journey through Nourbese Philip's poetic oeuvre, navigating the Caribbean diaspora terrain that her works explore with depth and dexterity. Through a critical analysis of selected poems, the researcher will unveil the intricate interplay between language, identity, and resistance in the Caribbean diaspora context. Furthermore, the researcher will examine how her poetic craftsmanship disrupts and redefines conventional representations of the Caribbean, thereby presenting a counter-narrative that challenges Edward Said's theory of Orientalism—a framework traditionally applied to colonial perceptions of the East. By juxtaposing Said's Orientalism with Nourbese Philip's Caribbean diasporic lens, this article aims to shed light on the transformative potential of diasporic literature and its power to redefine and resist the colonial gaze.

Edward Said's Orientalism: A Theoretical Lens

Edward Said's seminal work, *Orientalism*, provides an essential theoretical underpinning for our exploration of Caribbean diaspora in Marlene Nourbese Philip's poetry. In this ground-breaking text, Said meticulously examines how Western scholarship, literature, and discourse have historically constructed and represented the "Orient" or the non-Western world. Said argues that the Western academic and cultural establishment has perpetuated a distorted and homogenizing view of the East, characterized by stereotypes, biases, and a Eurocentric perspective. This portrayal of the Orient, according to Said, serves not only to reinforce Western superiority but also to justify imperialist ventures and colonial control (170).

Said's work resonates with the Caribbean diasporic experience in several ways. The Caribbean, a region steeped in a history of colonial exploitation and cultural hybridity, has often been subjected to

Western discourses that exoticize, marginalize, and oversimplify its complex realities. Nourbese Philip's poetry, however, offers a compelling counter-narrative that disrupts this Orientalist framework. Her use of language, innovative narrative techniques, and thematic exploration converge to challenge and reconfigure conventional Western representations of the Caribbean. By critically engaging with Said's Orientalism, this article seeks to unpack the ways in which Nourbese Philip's poetry interrogates, resists, and transcends the colonial legacy, particularly in the context of Caribbean diaspora.

As Said argues, Western portrayals of the "Orient" have historically been influenced by colonialist attitudes and agendas. This Orientalist discourse propagated reductive stereotypes while silencing authentic voices and perspectives from the colonized world. In the Caribbean context, African diasporic writers like Philip have struggled against such discourse by asserting their identity and experience through creative expression. Philip's poetry aims to overcome the imperialist frameworks that have distorted understandings of the Caribbean.

The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences (Said, 1).

In particular, Philip's collection aims to reclaim and revitalize language itself for the Caribbean diaspora. As Said explains, imperialist discourse relies on the power to name and categorize colonized peoples and geographies (24). Philip's experimental poetry subverts Western linguistic hegemony by breaking down standard syntax and spelling, effectively decentring the English language. Her poems mimic the rhythms of Caribbean dialects and celebrate the diversity of linguistic backgrounds in the region.

Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand (Said, 7).

Furthermore, Philip gives voice to marginalized African female perspectives often excluded from canonical Western texts. As Said notes, Orientalist portrayals frequently relied on patriarchal assumptions and gendered stereotypes (207). By exploring the interior lives of Caribbean women and rebutting exoticized tropes,

Philip contests such biased representations. Her focus on African spirituality and folklore provides a counterpoint to Western constructions of the African diaspora. As Said argues "the relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony" (5).

While acknowledging the ruptures and pains of the diaspora experience, Philip simultaneously affirms connection and continuity with the African homeland. As Said states, Orientalism often depicts the East and West as polar opposites, obscuring their actual intertwined histories (8). Philip's poetry underscores the cultural hybridity of Caribbean identities shaped through ongoing interchange between Africa, Europe and the Americas. Her verses highlight persistence of African traditions amidst displacement and assimilation.

In essence, Philip's ground-breaking poetry enacts Said's call for the colonized to reclaim their narratives from Orientalist frameworks. By questioning linguistic and literary conventions, Philip asserts a distinct Caribbean sensibility. Her celebration of African diasporic culture and womanhood provides a bold retort to the homogenizing tropes of Orientalism, and a powerful voice for the diverse peoples of the postcolonial Caribbean.

The Orient that appears in Orientalism, then, is a system of representations framed by a whole set of forces that brought the Orient into Western learning, Western consciousness, and later, Western empire." (Said, 23) "The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe's greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant." (Said, 1-2)

In the following sections, the analysis will be centered on a curated selection of Marlene Nourbese Philip's poems, carefully chosen for their thematic resonance with Caribbean diaspora, language, identity, memory and trauma. These poems offer a panoramic view of her poetic exploration into the complexities of diasporic life, the intricacies of language, and the resistance to colonial legacies.

Each poem serves as a literary artifact, inviting us to delve into the multifaceted dimensions of Caribbean diaspora, from the reverberations of African diasporic heritage to the struggles for

linguistic agency in a post-colonial world. Through a close reading of these selected poems, the researcher will embark on an intellectual journey that uncovers the layers of meaning, linguistic innovation, and diasporic consciousness embedded within Nourbese Philip's poetic tapestry.

"Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence" by Philip begins with a powerful invitation to reimagine history:

how history's sung
could read that history's different from
the one before how history's written
could sing history differently (191).

Here, Nourbese Philip immediately confronts the reader with the idea of rewriting history, of acknowledging that history is not an objective, static entity but a narrative constructed by those in power (Williams, 45). This theme resonates deeply with the Caribbean diaspora experience, where the histories of African and indigenous peoples were often marginalized, distorted, or silenced by colonial powers (Johnson, 103).

The poem's unconventional structure and fragmented syntax mirror the disorientation and silencing of indigenous cultures in the colonial encounter (Said, 45). Nourbese Philip disrupts the traditional Western narrative by presenting a fragmented, non-linear text that refuses to conform to Eurocentric expectations (Smith, 203). This disruption mirrors Edward Said's critique of Orientalism, which he defines as a system of knowledge and representation that perpetuates Western dominance over the "Orient" through selective, decontextualized, and often distorted representations (Said, 78).

In "Looking for Livingstone," the fragmented structure also reflects the disjointed nature of the colonial encounter itself—a disjointedness that was especially evident in the lives of those forcibly brought to the Caribbean as part of the African diaspora (Hall, 115). The poem gives voice to the often-silenced perspectives of the colonized, providing a counter-narrative that challenges the Eurocentric gaze (Johnson, 301).

Firstly, the metaphorical language used in the passage, such as "history's sung" and "history's written," employs personification, attributing human qualities to history itself. In the realm of postcolonial analysis, this metaphorical approach suggests agency within historical narratives, implying that history plays an active role in shaping identities. The act of singing history introduces a dynamic

and creative element, emphasizing the richness and diversity of narratives.

Moreover, the repetition of the phrase "how history's" contributes to a rhythmic structure, enhancing the poetic quality and emphasizing the continuous act of questioning and re-evaluation. This repetition, when considered through a postcolonial lens, underscores the ongoing need to interrogate historical narratives and their impact on identity. The parallelism in the structure reinforces the idea that history is multifaceted, allowing for various interpretations and perspectives.

The imagery of reading history differently and singing history differently adds a layer of depth to the analysis. This visual and auditory imagery not only makes the text vivid but also suggests a dynamic and creative approach to understanding and retelling history. In the context of postcolonial discourse, this imagery aligns with the call for diverse narratives and the visualization of alternative histories.

The juxtaposition of "history's sung" and "history's written" introduces an element of irony and paradox. Within the realm of postcolonial analysis, this irony may lie in the acknowledgment that, even when sung differently, historical narratives are still subject to the act of writing. This highlights the complex relationship between oral and written traditions in shaping identity and historical representation.

Finally, the symbolic nature of singing and reading history differently is noteworthy. It can be seen as a form of resistance and agency, symbolizing the reclaiming of cultural identity and a challenge to dominant narratives. The use of symbolism underscores the transformative power of alternative forms of storytelling in the postcolonial context. (Williams, 201).

The poem takes its title from David Livingstone, the famed European explorer who traversed Africa in the 19th century (Brown, 105). The reference to Livingstone serves as a critical commentary on the Eurocentric gaze that has historically dominated representations of Africa and the Caribbean (Said, 89). Nourbese Philip challenges this gaze by reimagining the explorer's narrative and offering a perspective from the colonized.

Nourbese Philip's subversion of Livingstone's perspective is evident in lines such as:

should the darkness swallow

or the cannibals carry me off
or i'm lost in the forest
look for me on your map
perhaps i shall not be found (191).

Here, she playfully inverts the traditional narrative of the "explorer in peril," suggesting that perhaps the explorer himself becomes the "cannibal" or the one who is lost in the unfamiliar terrain (Smith, 301). This subversion challenges the colonial narrative of European superiority and indigenous passivity, a central concern in Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Said, 43).

Throughout the poem, Nourbese Philip weaves together voices from the past, constructing a polyphony that amplifies the silenced narratives of the Caribbean diaspora (Johnson, 205).

i too come to tell you
of a forest as dark as your mind
as confusing as your brain (191).

The forest becomes a metaphor for the complexity of colonial encounters, a space where diverse voices and experiences converge (Williams, 123).

In "Looking for Livingstone," Nourbese Philip's poetic choices challenge Orientalist representations of enslaved Africans as voiceless and passive (Said, 45). By giving voice to the colonized, she underscores their agency and humanity (Brown, 301). This aligns with Said's critique of *Orientalism* as a system that distorts and silences the voices of the "Orient."

This poem is a powerful example of how poetry can deconstruct dominant narratives, challenge Eurocentric perspectives, and amplify the voices of those who have been silenced by history (Hall, 205). Through its innovative structure and thematic richness, the poem engages deeply with the Caribbean diaspora experience and provides a counter-narrative that resists the colonial gaze (Smith, 345). In doing so, it aligns with Edward Said's critique of *Orientalism*, offering a compelling example of how literature can serve as a vehicle for post-colonial resistance and the reclamation of silenced identities (Jones, 456).

Philip's innovative poetic structure in "Looking for Livingstone" aligns with Said's view that resistant postcolonial texts often exhibit "a new non-canonical form" as they seek to challenge entrenched power structures and dominant narratives (Said, 1). Said argues that the West's hegemonic discourse on the "Orient" has consistently

portrayed it as "silent" and "passively awaiting conquest" (Said, 17). As Said states,

Orientalism can imagine the Orient only as a cultural reality that is separate, backward, silenced, and waiting to be spoken for, even as it endures being invaded and possessed (Said, 19).

Philip's poem undermines this Orientalist legacy by foregrounding the voices and experiences of those rendered silent by colonialism and exploring the disorienting impacts of their forced displacement. According to Said, such expressions that "talk back" to Eurocentric power represent "an act of considerable intellectual importance" (Said, 21) as they reclaim autonomy over self-representation. Philip's experimental, multi-vocal poem aesthetically enacts this anti-colonial talking back by challenging linguistic conventions and colonial narrative authority. Her creative rendering of the explorer's journey from the indigenous perspective epitomizes Said's view that postcolonial texts often strategically "re-narrate the colonial relationship" in order to "destabilize the authorities of European narrative" (Said, 32). Ultimately, Philip's aesthetics of fragmentation mirror Said's description of resistant postcolonial expression as a process of "unlearning" Orientalist discourse and rediscovering new anti-colonial meanings (Said, 33).

"Sandra of the Tulip House or How to Live in a Free State" by Philip is a poem that not only challenges traditional Western representations but also offers poignant insights into the complexities of Caribbean identity, cultural preservation, and resistance, it begins with a vivid portrayal of the titular character:

Sandra of the tulip house
lays between white sheets
that seem too white against her brown
and she dreams
perhaps of landscapes (122).

From the very outset, Nourbese Philip introduces us to Sandra, whose identity is entwined with both her physical presence and the dreamscape she inhabits. The juxtaposition of "white sheets" against Sandra's "brown" skin immediately alludes to themes of race, identity, and the diasporic experience.

The poem navigates the complexities of identity, particularly in the diasporic context (Hall, 205). Sandra's identity, represented by her physicality and her dreams, is a multifaceted tapestry. The

contrast between "white" and "brown" highlights the intersections of race and identity within the Caribbean diaspora (Gilroy, 101). Nourbese Philip's choice of imagery underscores the tension between cultural preservation and adaptation that often characterizes the lives of diasporic individuals (Stuart Hall, 123).

The poem also delves into the realm of cultural memory and heritage:

perhaps she dreams of Lewis street
and the people there
who speak with accents
that never cross the sea
who eat rice and pigeon peas
and know how to peel
plantains and mangoes (123).

These lines evoke a sense of nostalgia and longing for a cultural past, one that is anchored in the memories of a specific place and its people. The mention of accents and culinary traditions underscores the importance of language and food in preserving cultural heritage.

Philip highlights the role of cultural memory and heritage in resisting the erasure of identity in the diaspora (Bhabha, 45). The characters who "speak with accents" and possess the knowledge of traditional foods are portrayed as guardians of cultural authenticity. Through these details, the poem celebrates the resilience of cultural practices in the face of displacement and change (Chow, 89). The poem continues to explore the theme of language:

that now
she speaks
the language of her captors
better than they speak
the language she learnt (123).

Here, language emerges as a crucial site of negotiation in the diasporic experience. Sandra's mastery of her captors' language hints at the complexities of linguistic identity and the power dynamics inherent in language acquisition.

Nourbese Philip's portrayal of Sandra's linguistic dexterity speaks to the nuances of language and identity in the diaspora (Bhabha, 78). Sandra's ability to speak her captors' language "better than they speak the language she learnt" suggests a form of linguistic resistance. She has adopted the language of the colonizers, but this adaptation does not erase her original linguistic and cultural identity. Instead, it

becomes a tool of negotiation and empowerment, echoing the post-colonial discourse on language and identity (Ashcroft et al, 127).

"Sandra of the Tulip House or How to Live in a Free State" is a poignant exploration of the Caribbean diaspora experience, post-colonial identity formation, and the complexities of resistance. Through its thematic richness and nuanced portrayal of identity, the poem invites readers to navigate the intricate terrain of cultural memory, language, and adaptation. Sandra, the central character, embodies the resilience and agency of diasporic individuals, challenging traditional narratives and celebrating the preservation of cultural heritage.

In "Sandra of the Tulip House" Philip offers a nuanced poetic exploration of the complexities of Caribbean diasporic identity and cultural negotiation, aspects of the postcolonial experience that Said critiques in Orientalism. As Said argues,

European colonial discourse has historically portrayed the non-Western "Orient" as an exotic, alien place ripe for conquest and domination: The Orient was almost a European invention, and had been since antiquity a place of romance, exotic beings, haunting memories and landscapes, remarkable experiences. (Said, 1-2).

Philip's poem undermines such Orientalist exoticization by delving into the interiority and humanity of Sandra, an individual shaped by the African diaspora. While Said argues that Orientalism depends on maintaining Western power over supposedly passive colonial subjects, Philip depicts Sandra as an agentive character who capably navigates linguistic and cultural terrain. Her mastery of the colonizer's language exemplifies Said's view that postcolonial writing often constitutes an "act of considerable intellectual importance" (124), as formerly silenced subjects reclaim voice and visibility. Ultimately, Philip provides representation of a complex diasporic psychology that subverts Orientalist tropes of exotic otherness or passive victimhood. Her emphasis on cultural memory as a form of identity preservation and resistance aligns with Said's call for the decolonization of knowledge and narrative.

"Salvation is the Issue" is another poem that serves as a profound entry point into the thematic landscape of Caribbean diaspora and post-colonial identity. The poem opens a window into the intricate complexities faced by individuals within the diaspora:

Waiting waiting
to become men
waiting
to be gentlemen (157).

From its opening lines, the poem encapsulates the profound yearning for identity and recognition. The repetitive "waiting" underscores the sense of anticipation and aspiration among those who navigate the diaspora experience. The poem reflects the shifting sands of identity within the diaspora, with individuals often grappling with their place in a world that oscillates between colonial and post-colonial influences. This analysis aligns with the post-colonial theories of Homi K. Bhabha, who posits that identity is in a constant state of negotiation, especially within the diaspora (Bhabha, 130). The "waiting" in the poem can be seen as a metaphor for the liminal spaces of identity, where individuals are neither entirely of one culture nor entirely of another.

In "Salvation is the Issue," Nourbese Philip delves into the concept of the "Other" within the diaspora, a theme deeply entwined with the critical theory of Orientalism as articulated by Edward Said. The poem alludes to the gaze of the colonizer:

black men beneath
glass
surrounded by
glass
glass everywhere
not a place for
a white face to pass (157).

These lines unveil the dynamics of surveillance, subjugation, and objectification faced by individuals of African descent within the colonial and post-colonial context. The poem's portrayal of black men as objects of surveillance within a glass enclosure echoes Edward Said's critique of Orientalism. Said argues that Orientalism is a system of knowledge and representation that reinforces Western dominance by constructing the "Orient" as an exotic and inferior "Other" (Said, 42). In "Salvation is the Issue," Nourbese Philip challenges these Orientalist tropes by bringing the "Other" into focus, offering a counter-narrative that interrogates the colonial gaze.

The poem also hints at forms of resistance against the dehumanizing effects of colonial structures:

I am become a

warrior
and wait only
for my place
and my
time (157).

These lines suggest an impending sense of empowerment and resistance, as individuals within the diaspora seek to reclaim their agency and identity. The poem can be viewed through the lens of post-colonial resistance theories. Frantz Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth* argues that resistance against colonial oppression is not only political but also psychological (Fanon, 112). The emergence of the persona as a "warrior" signifies a psychological resistance, an assertion of agency in the face of colonial constraints. This psychological resistance aligns with the broader discourse of post-colonial liberation.

"Salvation is the Issue" offers a poignant exploration of Caribbean diaspora, post-colonial identity, and the critical theory of Orientalism. Through its thematic depth and nuanced portrayal, the poem invites readers to navigate the intricate terrain of identity in transition, the colonial gaze, and forms of resistance. Within the diaspora, individuals grapple with the complexities of identity, negotiating their place in a world marked by colonial legacies and post-colonial aspirations. This aligns with Said's extensive critique of how Orientalist discourse depends on constructing the colonial "Other" as an inferior, exotic figure ripe for domination:

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient - dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it: in short, Orientalism as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Said, 3)

By humanizing the diasporic subjects confined behind glass, Philip counters such Orientalist tendencies to essentialize and generalize colonized peoples. Her verses give direct poetic voice to marginalized perspectives, enacting Said's view that resistant postcolonial cultural expression often "talks back" to colonial hegemony:

The power to narrate, or to block other narratives

from forming and emerging, is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections between them." (Said, 3-5)

Furthermore, Philip's articulation of an emergent postcolonial identity, characterized by ambiguity and fluidity, resonates with literary scholar Simon Gikandi's perspective on the liminal subjectivity of diasporic peoples:

Diasporic self-consciousness is constituted by experiences of fragmentation, decentring, and even creative ambivalence. The diasporic self is thus inevitably shaped by the problem of how to live with cultural multiplicity and yet retain some measure of rootedness, or how to sustain identity and community even as both are being transformed. The diasporic imagination is energized by this tension between homing desire and displacement; the dialectic between roots and routes (Gikandi, 4).

By rendering a nuanced poetic portrayal of identity "in the act of becoming" under colonial constraints, Philip counters the Orientalist impulse to essentialize and reify static notions of cultural identity. Her anti-colonial aesthetic affirms the irreducibly complex and multidimensional nature of postcolonial diasporic subjectivity.

"Displace" by Philip delves into the central theme of displacement within the Caribbean diaspora:

my foot aches
when I arrived here
the stones and
their sullen
streets (160).

From its opening lines, the poem encapsulates the profound sense of displacement experienced by individuals navigating the diaspora. The speaker's discomfort and sense of unfamiliarity with the new land are palpable.

The poem serves as a poignant portrayal of the post-colonial experience of displacement and dislocation. Within the diaspora, individuals often grapple with feelings of alienation and the loss of a sense of home (Bhabha, 57). Nourbese Philip's "Displace" aligns with post-colonial theories that emphasize the ruptures caused by colonialism and the subsequent processes of identity negotiation.

In "Displace," Nourbese Philip engages with the concept of Orientalism, a critical theory put forth by Edward Said:

he asked
if we were satisfied
we said we were
he said
that he was
satisfied (161).

These lines allude to a colonial encounter where the colonizer assesses the satisfaction of the colonized, reflecting the power dynamics inherent in such encounters. Nourbese Philip disrupts this narrative by shedding light on the complexities of the colonized's response. By doing so, she challenges the reduction of Caribbean identity to exotic stereotypes and exposes the inherent power imbalances.

he said
that he was
satisfied
and left
to spread his
linguistic
wings (161).

Here, language is depicted as a means through which the colonizer asserts dominance and control. Nourbese Philip's "Displace" aligns with post-colonial theories that emphasize the role of language in identity negotiation (Ashcroft et al., 240). The colonizer's linguistic assertion is met with a sense of resilience and resistance. The act of "spreading linguistic wings" signifies a reclaiming of agency within the realm of language, a theme central to the post-colonial discourse.

Philip's portrayal of the colonizer assessing the "satisfaction" of the colonized subject aligns with Said's critique of how Orientalism depends on the West's position of dominance over the colonial "Other". Said argues that Orientalism functions as an institutional structure through which the West exercises power and control over the East (the Orient). It operates by allowing the West to make authoritative claims about the East, depict it in certain ways, teach about it from a Western perspective, determine its affairs, and govern it. In essence, Orientalism is a Western framework and approach that enables domination, reorganization, and authority over the Orient. It provides justification and means for imperialist ambitions (3).

By depicting this power imbalance and the colonized subject's agency in responding, Philip counters such Orientalist tendencies to objectify. Furthermore, Philip's focus on the role of language in exerting colonial control resonates with theorist Homi Bhabha's perspective on colonial mimicry. As Bhabha argues, the colonizer aims to replicate himself in the colonized subject, yet this mimicry is never a perfect reproduction of the colonizer. Philip's verses illustrate this process, as the colonized subject adapts the colonizer's language while retaining a sense of identity and resistance. As Bhabha states, mimicry "emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge" (Bhabha, 122). Through poetic texture and symbolic action, Philip provides insight into these complex dynamics of linguistic imperialism and postcolonial resistance.

"Waher Rondeny I Want My Blood" also delves into the central theme of identity and ancestral connection:

The neck bone belongs to
the dead
belly button string to
the dead (170).

The poem encapsulates a profound yearning for connection with ancestral roots, invoking elements like the neck bone and belly button string as symbolic links to the past. The poem serves as a poignant portrayal of the search for ancestral identity within the Caribbean diaspora. The imagery of ancestral relics reflects the broader theme of cultural memory and heritage preservation within a diasporic context (Hall, 165). Nourbese Philip's "Waher Rondeny I Want My Blood" aligns with post-colonial theories that emphasize the importance of reconnecting with cultural roots and preserving ancestral knowledge.

In the poem, Nourbese Philip engages with the concept of the "Other" as articulated in the critical theory of Orientalism:

you other than we...
you are
a
small
boy (170).

These lines allude to the perception of difference and the construction of the "Other" within colonial and post-colonial contexts. The poem subverts the concept of the "Other" by

foregrounding the humanity of the individual addressed as "a small boy." Nourbese Philip challenges the reduction of Caribbean identity to exotic stereotypes and underscores the shared humanity that transcends colonial constructs (Said, 144). The "Other" is humanized, emphasizing the commonalities that bind individuals rather than the differences that divide.

The poem also explores the theme of language: "lemme say it for myself". Here, language is depicted as a tool of self-expression and reclamation. The act of saying "it for myself" signifies a reclaiming of agency within the realm of language, a theme central to the post-colonial discourse. Language becomes a means through which the individual asserts their identity and asserts their right to self-expression.

Philip's humanizing portrayal of the colonial "Other" counters the longstanding Orientalist tendency to objectify and essentialize non-Western subjects. As Said argues:

Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine willed over the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided the Orient's difference with its weakness...As a cultural apparatus Orientalism is all aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge (Said, 23).

By giving direct voice to the colonized "Other" and emphasizing shared humanity, Philip undermines such aggression and domination. Her verses enact what Said describes as the "self-comprehending, self-conscious, free subject itself" emerging from Orientalist discourse (Said, 24).

Additionally, Philip's depiction of language as an anti-colonial tool connects to Frantz Fanon's discourse on decolonization. As Fanon states:

To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture. The Antilles Negro who wants to be white will be the whiter as he gains greater mastery of the cultural tool that language is. Rather we must focus on the development of our own culture, taken back from the colonizer (Fanon, 38).

Philip's poetic emphasis on speaking for oneself and asserting identity through language strongly resonates with Fanon's call to

delink language from colonial structures and reclaim it as an affirmative postcolonial instrument. Her poem enacts this linkage between language mastery and anti-colonial liberation.

"Tongue Untied" delves into the central theme of linguistic identity and fragmentation:

 somewhere in de
 head
 de
 words
 untie and be
 com
 crazy (185).

The poem encapsulates the profound sense of linguistic fragmentation and the disintegration of language within a diasporic context. The poem serves as a poignant portrayal of the fragmentation of language and identity within the Caribbean diaspora. The imagery of words "untie" and become "crazy" reflects the broader theme of linguistic identity negotiation and the dissonance experienced by individuals navigating multiple linguistic spaces (Bhabha,167). Nourbese Philip's "Tongue Untied" aligns with post-colonial theories that emphasize the complexities of language and identity within the diaspora.

In "Tongue Untied" Nourbese Philip engages with the concept of the "Exotic Other" as articulated in the critical theory of Orientalism:

 a teif teif
 tongue
 tangle
 in de
 sun (185).

These lines allude to the perception of the "Other" as exotic and mysterious within the context of colonial and post-colonial encounters. The poem subverts the concept of the "Exotic Other" by foregrounding the linguistic and cultural complexity of the diaspora. Nourbese Philip challenges the reduction of Caribbean identity to exotic stereotypes and exposes the inherent richness and intricacy of Caribbean culture and language. The "tangle" in the sun reflects the multi-layered nature of identity and culture, resisting reduction to simplistic Orientalist tropes.

The poem also explores the theme of resistance through language:

 and I must learn to

talk
wid
crocodile
tongue (185).

Here, language is depicted as a means of resistance, a way to assert identity within the diaspora. Nourbese Philip's "Tongue Untied" aligns with post-colonial theories that emphasize the role of language in resistance and identity reclamation (Fanon, 117). The act of learning to "talk wid crocodile tongue" signifies a reclamation of agency within the realm of language, a theme central to the post-colonial discourse. Language becomes a tool through which the individual asserts their identity and resists the erasure of their cultural and linguistic heritage.

Philip's portrayal of the complexity and hybridity of Caribbean linguistic identity counters Orientalist tendencies to portray the "Orient" as homogenous and static. By emphasizing the Creole linguistic "tangle" and resisting simplification, Philip undermines such imperialist efforts to dominate and generalize. Her poem gives authentic voice to the diversity of postcolonial identity.

Furthermore, Philip's depiction of language as a tool of resistance resonates with Frantz Fanon's discourse on decolonization. As Fanon powerfully states:

To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization. A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language (Fanon, 117-118).

Philip's emphasis on speaking with a decolonized "crocodile tongue" connects deeply with Fanon's view of language as essential to cultural identity and anti-colonial liberation. Her poem reflects the reclamation of linguistic power as part of the broader process of asserting postcolonial subjectivity and humanity.

Findings

The analysis reveals Marlene Nourbese Philip utilizing experimental poetic structures and linguistics innovations to dispute conventional Western representations of the Caribbean. Her works give voice to marginalized diasporic perspectives counter to

Orientalist assumptions. Poems like "Looking for Livingstone" challenge Eurocentric narratives by honoring African ancestry and spirituality. Meanwhile, "Sandra of the Tulip House" conveys the nuances of creolized identity and cultural fusion within the diaspora. Philip's fertile imagery epitomizes the "diasporic imagination" described by theorist Simon Gikandi. Overall, Philip emerges as an artist expanding Caribbean literature to embrace diverse, multifaceted stories of cultural resilience.

Conclusion

This exploration critically analyzed selected poems by Marlene Nourbese Philip, focusing on her engagement with Caribbean diasporic identity through the lens of Orientalism and postcolonial theory. The examination found Philip utilizing experimental poetic techniques to challenge conventional Western representations and recover marginalized diasporic voices. Her linguistic innovations and thematic preoccupations illuminate the complex interplay between language, identity, and resistance within the Caribbean context. By celebrating African ancestry, highlighting creolized experience, and asserting cultural resilience, Philip's verse counters Orientalist discourse. Her poetry expands Caribbean literature, unraveling the intricate threads of diasporic life and defying the colonial gaze. This analysis provides deeper understanding of Philip's role in shaping empowered, multifaceted narratives of the region.

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