PAULE MARSHALL'S FEMALE PROTOTYPES

Smaranda Ștefanovici
Associate Professor, Phd
"Petru Maior" University of Tg. Mures, Romania

Introduction

The Post War period allowed newcomers from diverse cultural spaces that had long been denied recognition to enter America. The two decades after the WWII appeared to be full of great progress for the colonized people of the world. Many colonies received their independence. It was the period when increasing numbers of migrants, such as those from the Caribbean, went to the USA. The migrants were of many colors, ethnicities, nationalities, religions and cultural backgrounds. The period saw a significant rise in female employment, and there were ambiguous debates about the proper limits of a woman's place in an increasing materialistic, but also patriarchal society. The mid-90s third wave of feminism militated against patriarchy, stereotyped gender roles, sexual oppression and labor division. Women were fighting for the right to be treated as human subjects, and not as sexual objects in a sexist patriarchal world. It was an age when the agendas of Civil Rights Movements and feminist groups coincided with the literary responses of the time. These groups wanted their voices to be heard, voices that up until then had been silenced by race, ethnicity, and gender inequality concerns. Race was not an issue that white women needed to address until then. Therefore, postcolonial feminism and writing emerged as part of third-world wave of feminism and fought against the legacy of socio-cultural and racial oppression of the non-white women in the USA.

For oppressed peoples, cultural memory engenders the spirit of resistance. The pride in the "Other's" cultural legacy was neither respected nor valued after the colonies became independent and the people started to immigrate to the USA. The novels of the period became representative of Third World people in the way they redefined literature as cultural memory. As postcolonial subjects they took pride in their history, and resisted cultural assimilation. Evoking the struggle of postcolonial societies, these narratives healed the postcolonial traumas and restored the dignity of the culturally different Other.

The Other as opposed to the Self refers to the state of being different from the social norms of a social group or society. The cultural distinction Self-Other allowed for unequal imperial relations that justified the existence of colonial powers. In postcolonial terms, the Other refers to minorities, to subordinate, invisible weak groups, whom the colonizers want to dominate, educate, and convert culturally. Such deviants, who do not fit the historical, social and cultural norms include the immigrants who went to the USA from formerly colonized countries, the non-white, ethnic groups, the elderly, the women, the disabled, etc.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) equated the master-slave opposition with the man-woman relationship throughout history. The western culture is a patriarchal, male-dominated culture that treats woman as the Other in relation to man.

My analysis is of Paule Marshall's triple invisibility: born of Barbadian parents in Brooklyn, she was brought up in a West Indian/Afro-American environment in New York. As a black female writer from Barbados, a former British West Indies colony, she explores the cultural encounter between the white male and supremacist patriarchy of the North America and the black, inferior, woman from the West Indies.

America is a multiethnic, hybrid ground where different races, classes and cultures meet and clash. Barbados, where Paule Marshall was born, was a place of intersection of many cultures and languages. Historically speaking, this western culture of colonization maintained its hegemonic character in the way it continued to think in irreconcilable binary oppositions between the colonizer/colonized, white/black, the trader/traded, man/woman, etc. In this culture, ethnic, non-white cultures, their history, traditions and values, were still marginalized by imperialistic powers.

The main focus of Marshall's fiction is on feminist issues related to the interaction between the white, male dominated class and the non-white, female, subordinate class. More specifically, she deals with the relationship between the colonizing white male and the colonized black woman, and with the decolonization of the black woman's body and mind in a white, patriarchal, foreign land.

The literary works of Paule Marshall and other black female writers in America are rooted in Black cultural history. They emphasize their personal attempts as marginalized individuals to establish an identity in a foreign land. They fight against neocolonialism and the continuation of cultural imperialism and hegemonic dominance. These writers, mostly coming from the West Indies and South America, wanted to prove that the white, dominant people were not set apart from the non-white, ethnic minority people by contrasting ideologies, cultures and interests. In Coser's view, these matters have to be redefined in connection to the OTHER, as well as to the past and the myths surrounding the ethnic minorities. (1995 p. 22)

Marshall's fiction, as both Afro-Caribbean and Afro-American, reflects what she sees as a common bond in both cultures. To do that, she invites us, the readers, to a voluntary spiritual return to her origins in Africa. According to Moira Ferguson (2016), Marshall focuses on the inconsistency of the post-colonial identity and the method by which an identity can be reconstructed for the former colonized body. Reversing the traditional effects of colonization, her optimistic vision is of a postcolonial black female, who, instead of being defeated, is empowered by the white men's colonizing attempts. In her celebration of the African-Caribbean female character, Marshall subverts the traditional role of the European male colonizer; and by truly accepting her identity as a female, black, postcolonial individual, she sets forth to reclaim her life at the end of a symbolic journey.

The colonized, invisible, woman of color, once considered unimportant in the literary history of the United States started to gain attention in the post-war period. Writers like Paule Marshall, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker and Zora Neale Hurston, rescued these marginal and silent women from oblivion and invisibility.

Marshall revisions Africa's colonial past from the perspective of the dominated one. Coser, referring to Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Paule Marshall as Afro-American writers, considers that: "The fiction of these black women writers in the US attempts to recapture and reorganize the fragments of collective history into a new type of narrative. […] Rooted in culture and community, this narrative is an attempt to counter the versions of facts and truth presented by the colonizer of yesterday and today with the view from the dominated. The recognition of the exploitation and invisibility of the African Other throughout history may hurt, shock, and yet liberate." (Coser, 1995 p. 16)

Paule Marshall deals with formerly exploited people, flawed individuals coming to terms with themselves and with their ethnic origins. This entails, first, the recognition of colonial exploitation, and, second, the measures that have to be taken in order to end

neocolonialist forms of exploitation. Things are little different for women. They are still seen as subordinate and as sexual objects, as they were in colonial times. History has not changed. Formal slavery has ended but sexual exploitation and harassment still continue.

How is history to be changed for these women? The first step towards such a change in society is that formerly colonized people must not forget their history and must turn their formerly colonized status to their own good.

How do we remember the past so as to transform it and make it usable? How do an oppressed people survive spiritually in a world where their race is despised and where their history is not acknowledged, recognized or understood?

Paule Marshall sets these questions and these spiritual dilemmas in her portrayal of her black heroines whose colonized status as black immigrant women - victimized, marginalized, alienated, and silenced - made them invisible. Her uprooted, disoriented, and apparently voiceless African females use the Middle Passage (the transatlantic voyage from Africa to the Americas) as a springboard for reinventing themselves as African Americans by appropriating the territory and learning to cope with the people they encounter in the New World, transforming the unknown into their home. (Diedrich, 1999 p. 99)

Paule Marshall has complex constructions of post-colonial black female identities. Her stories of marginality, of the pain of immigrants with no sense of history and identity place characters of different races in an American postcolonial society. There she sets forward her Afrocentric vision about her own cultural ties to Africa. Pettis (1996) explains this vision in terms of a reintegration of what has been lost, a reinvention of the image of people of African descent. It is a vision of the liberation from the inferiority complex imposed by the colonial system and by segregation.

Remembering the past with its pain and failures can be a subversive act against the white oppressor, resulting in his weakening. Marshall's stories deal with the relationship between the 'enslaved' black woman and the white male oppressor. Drawing on enslaved women's life stories, Paule Marshall offers strategies of resistance to combat sexual oppression and cultural stereotypes about black women; she also examines indigenous practices and rituals employed by such women who seek freedom and to recreate themselves. The female black characters tell the stories of their enslavement, giving their own interpretations in order "to allow the stories to speak collectively". (Harrison, 2009 p 8)

In her dialogue with the psychological white oppressor, the black heroines in Marshall's stories use manipulative questions to make the oppressor admit his past failures and hence act as a catalyst in her process of liberation and future change. In Harrison's view, Marshall's stories are "ways to express the necessity of reversing the present order". (2009 p. 9)

The American construction of gender is different from the African one. While the former sees woman, especially the Afro-American one as a commodity or as a sexual object, the latter does not assume an inferior or subordinate role for the woman. African women are seen as preservers of the past, they honor traditional values; they are good traders of racial and cultural traditions, passers down of cultural history and commodity values: they have a clear-set role in the black community, acting as negotiators of a psychological space and of survival skills in an American sexist and gender-based society.

They also act as catalysts for change, negotiating the African identity, integrity, self-worth, and pride in a white, patriarchal America. The black women from Marshall's stories are complex women who are threats to the white American colonists. They are catalysts for

change for themselves and for their black community. While they can promote action and psychic healing for the oppressed people, they are agents of destruction for the colonizer and the oppressor.

While not herself an immigrant, Marshall grew up in an immigrant community in Brooklyn. In interviews she speaks about the role of the African female ancestor, the dualism of the African thought and her mother's kitchen community, which influenced her writing and facilitated her access to an African past and heritage:

> An oppressed people cannot overcome their oppressors and take control of their lives until they have a clear and truthful picture of all that has gone before, until they begin to use their history creatively. This knowledge of one's culture, one's history, serves as an ideological underpinning for the political, social, and economic battles they must wage. It is the base upon which they must build." (Marshall, 1973 p. 107)

Her mother, a native of Barbados, together with her mother's West Indian friends, 'the kitchen poets', as she used to call them, trained her in the art of language and taught her the rich legacy of language and culture. They taught her the lesson of pride and anger, rebellion and tears, to search for identity and to make her way in the white-dominated world. Through her characters, she flies back to the security of her mother's home by means of a spiritual journey back into those childhood times.

For these native women from Barbados, who were not immigrants, the language was a powerful tool, which gave them a sense of home. Marshall's decolonizing texts "instilled a profound respect for the female intellect and illustrated the necessity of creating [physical and emotional] spaces [within the white patriarchy] in which black women could dialogue with and disseminate information to each other". (Brown, 2010 pp. 69-70) In Marshall's view, black women can only rediscover lost identities by means of an honest confrontation with their African descent and past. Repairing bridges of communication with people that share a common heritage, the same loneliness, fears and hopes, can trigger a healing of a fragmented self, and foster the will to survive and triumph.

Joyce Pettis in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography* writes that the "history and community shapers of the past and the present are vital subtexts in the lives of Marshall's characters, just as important as the notion of cultural continuity through identification with African heritage and culture as a means of healing the psychic fragmentation that has resulted from colonization and segregation." (Davies, 1929 vol. 157)

Grant subverts the hegemonic ideology and redefines the identity of Paule Marshall's heroines. He believes that the ruling ideology is a patriarchal one, which "has obtained and retained its power through an effective ideological discourse". (2010, p. 33); this ideological discourse divides individuals into voiced and voiceless.

Marshall intentionally undermines this hegemonic ideology, which depends on the bipolarity of voiced/voiceless, good/evil, white/black, male/female, beautiful/ugly, etc. "On the one hand, Marshall deliberately constructs female characters of surprising strength, in an effort to subvert the symbolic codes of society, while, on the other, even when her characters do stumble and many times fall, they keep fighting for their rights, making use of their *silence* as an effective discursive weapon." (Grant, 2010 p. 33)

Grant also believes that Marshall creates women of flesh and blood who do not fit the pre-established patriarchal division into white or black, good or evil, saints or demons. Her

female characters make their own choices, which causes a change in their social status from traded, colonized bodies to independent human beings: "Selina in *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, Ursa in *Daughters*, Avey in *Praisesong for the Widow*, Merle in *The Chosen Place: The Timeless People*, and Reena in *Reena and other Stories*, in different moments of their lives, all act on their own behalf with independent criteria, instead of reacting as "male-constructed stereotypes". (Grant, 2010 p. 34). Indeed, these black women, classified as voiceless by patriarchal western norms, never quit the search for a dignified, positive identity.

Paule Marshall considers that the forces of colonialism have deprived both the oppressed and the oppressor of a sense of identity and purpose. Her backlash against neocolonialism takes shape through the creation of a new prototype of black womanhood that challenges "society's hegemonic, negative definitions of black womanhood" in an age dominated by passive, "white dolls". (Marshall, 1984 p. 79) She learns that she has to survive as black, as Barbadian, and as a woman.

The main goal of my analysis is to prove that Marshall's heroines - Miss Williams from the novella "Brooklyn" in particular - evolve from the position of "Otherness": enslaved / oppressed / voiceless / weak to that of "Oneness": enslaver / oppressor / voiced /independent by taking a physical and/or spiritual journey back to their roots. Marshall emphasizes both the potential and the limitations of her African community. She uses the African dualism of thought to turn Miss Williams from an oppressed, literally traded woman into a trader of personal and communal liberation.

Marshall's Dual Female Prototypes of Black Cultural Identity

Several studies have suggested that black women are perceived as more masculine than white women. According to Thomas, they are labeled as expressing stereotypically masculine emotions, i.e. anger, contempt, pride. (cited in Connerley, 2015 p. 219)

Laura Miller thinks that "mainstream culture always reads the black female body as a sign of sexual experience." (2006 p. 34); hence we tend to forget about the cultural nature of their beauty.

Paule Marshall's black female literary prototypes are upwardly mobile and well – educated. They embody the need for black Americans to reclaim their African heritage. They are seen as both victims of colonial oppression as well as catalysts for action and reconfiguration of this role of victims. They shape African cultural traditions, bear the folk wisdom of her African people, and mold the individual psyche of elderly, weak, marginalized men in American regions heretofore barred to them. They reflect the personality types engendered by the 1960s and represent the creation of a new personality with an independent existence. Besides Marshall's dual prototypes of black females seen as sexual objects and as postcolonial colonizers, American literature boasts a wide range of other female prototypes: the woman as victim, as sexual object, as slave, enslaved, enabler, pioneer, leader, fallen woman, etc.

We can speak about traditional or non-traditional female literary prototypes. Paule Marshall's dual cultural prototypes start from traditional roles of sexually traded objects; they all start as the victims, "of a dislocation that resulted from an experience traumatic enough to destabilize the individual's view of self and his or her position in society". (Hamilton, 1999 p. 100) Then, a need for black Americans to reclaim their African heritage through their female ancestors turns these female victims into non-traditional, independent human subjects, who trade their own destiny and future. Marshall's black women grow into womanhood by

experiencing conflicts between cultures and they have the freedom to accept or deny the dependency that results from these cultural stereotypes.

Marshall emphasizes black women's experience and provides a prototype for the way they should empower and live their lives. She records the process of reconstructing this new prototype of empowered black womanhood: "She explores interracial contact and the very meaning of 'blackness' in America. Herself, a New Yorker born to Barbadian parents, Paule Marshall's novels focus on the relationship between Africa and a larger America that embraces the Caribbean, the US, and Brazil, characterized by a diversity of colors and cultures." (Coser, 1995 p. 14)

The cultural memory is restored through the oral traditions of storytelling inherited from her mother and grandmother. "Storytelling is a communal practice that frees history from the constraints of the dominant narrative, creating the possibility of a future outside the hegemonic social practice." (Coser, 1995 p. 14)

Miss Williams, the black student, recalls stories about her childhood, which she compares to the white childhood experiences recounted by Max Berman, the Jewish teacher. She creates a narrative in which the privileged white male, Max Berman, is perceived as equal with the oppressed non-white female, Miss Williams.

Identity, history and culture become fluid identities, and Paule Marshall, through the power of the myth, recreates a postcolonial, ambiguous reality, where there is no distinction between the colonizer and the colonized, between the male oppressor and the oppressed female. She is ambiguous, ambivalent and complex in the way she criticizes neocolonialism, and indicts neither African Caribbean nor American.

The city is not a favorable place to reclaim cultural memory and history. It is associated with the breakdown of culture and not seen as a site for cultural renewal. Hence, the stories are usually set in the countryside, where the black female characters connect to their African past through rituals and memories.

The subversion of the dominant male ideology and the reconstruction of a new identity for the black women from all times and places requires the use of three myths: "time, the role of the Ancestors, and the journey back to the roots". (Grant, 2010 p. 34)

Denniston emphasizes the role of these three myths in the African tradition and in Marshall's works: "Through the oral tradition, Africans look back to their origins, … make use of various myths to explain… the existence of God and other deities, the creation, etcetera. The immediate and remembered past, which goes back several generations, affirms that the rhythms of life remain continuous and intact." (1995 p. xviii)

I will use these essential considerations for the analysis of Marshall's heroine in the short story entitled "Brooklyn". Although Miss Williams cannot be compared with the other female characters (Avey Johnson, Selina, Ursa, Merle, or Reena) from Marshall's novels, I have chosen her to show that, although restrained by the narrative space, Marshall manages to embark Miss William on the same mythical journey, supported by time and her ancestors and journey back to her roots, and to transform her from a traded object into a trader of her own destiny. In a few pages, and with the power of oral language, we witness the same fragmented psyche of an alienated black heroine who struggles hard to connect the fragmented pieces of her African colonial identity; paradoxically, her frustrations and humiliations as a black female student and woman, instead of defeating her, empower her: "you let me know how you and most of the people like you – see me… how could you harm me?" ("Brooklyn" p 288) She regains her confidence and is ready to further transmit her wisdom to future generations.

Frantz Fanon elaborated on the complexity of the relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, and the illusion of creating myths of a homogeneous (Pan-African) Third World. Fanon, in Coser's book, emphasized "the continuous reinvention of culture" (1995, p 17). He believed in the fluid character of history, in the reinvention of the alienated and colonized self by rejecting the present as definitive. In other words, people are not prisoners of an immutable past. Reevaluation of past tensions and contradictions between the colonizers and the colonized is the path to changing the present. Fanon stressed "the need to unveil and overcome the absolutism of colonial thinking still at work". (cited in Coser, 1995, p 18)

Coser speaks about the criticism produced by black scholars during the 1980s that has specially praised the Pan-African quality of Morrison's and Marshall's works for their visionary sense of renewal through the recovery of culture. (1995, p 18)

"Brooklyn" is a novella from *Reena and Other Stories* (1983). The volume comprises six stories: "The Valley Between", "Brooklyn", "Barbados", "Reena", "To Da-duh, In Memoriam", and "Merle". All the six stories approach the same theme of postcolonial reality. Likewise, all have old men, of different backgrounds and cultures, with empty lives, who failed to commit themselves to anything in life. The men try to find a meaning in life, to reconnect to life and make up for the losses and failures in their lives through their relationships with young black women. The old, white men in the stories represent outdated, static, patriarchal hegemonic ideologies, while the young, black females defend the dynamic character of history, ideas and ideologies.

In the short story "Brooklyn" Max Berman is a sixty-three-old Jewish male professor, a former Communist Party member, with a father who rejected him because he did not want to become a rabbi. He has two wives whom he never loved, and a son who was a "bad" Jew, who was never interested in his father. He is a teacher who teaches from the same pack of notes each semester.

He meets Miss Williams at an evening course in French literature in a summer school at a college in Brooklyn. Miss Williams is a fair-skinned, middle class, Southern black girl who enrolls in his French literature class.

In the beginning, Max Berman represents the oppressor, the symbol of white patriarchy. As a male white teacher, he sees in Miss Williams a possible sexual attraction that can bring him back to life. She represents to him the lost connection to the soil of his birth. They are two marginal individuals (he because of his Communist beliefs, she because of the color of her skin) who apparently do not understand each other. He is cynical, she is innocent. They both represent the OTHER, the colonized, although they both belong to wealthy families and are educated.

However, while in the classroom the teacher is the victimizer and the oppressor and the black female student is the victim of his sexual harassment, when they finally meet at the chalet, a few weeks later, the roles are exchanged. Here Marshall intervenes and turns the colonial past to her own use and reverses the historical traditional roles of the white male colonizer and the black female colonized. Miss Williams, from a traded woman, a victim of his postcolonial powers, will become his tormentor and an independent trader of her own future in America. Miss Williams threatens him with memories of his lost youth. Gradually, she starts acting as a catalyst and provokes her teacher's memories of guilt and humiliation. For the first time in many years of frustrations and lack of love (he has lost his faith in God, his family, his place in the community, his jobs, etc.), years in which nothing has mattered, he finds someone that matters to him again. They start being important to each other, important

in perceiving the truth behind the appearances. He sees a strong human being taking shape in front of him. She sees his age, his coldness, his marginality, loneliness, humiliations and profound alienation.

The more he tells her about his failures, the stronger and more courageous she becomes. It seems like she is empowered as he grows weaker: "Maybe in order for a person to live, someone else must die." ("Brooklyn" p. 288) Her rage for all those whom he has wronged with his indifference is the catalyst that pushes her towards an optimistic future. She leaves Berman to pursue of her own life with "an ironic, pitiless smile". (p 288). She believes that she has learned from Berman "how you and most people like you – see me" (p 288) and therefore she is no more afraid. She is no longer a traded woman anymore, she is now trading her own decisions and future: "I feel almost brave today […] I can do something now […] I believe this […]". (p. 288)

Both Berman and Miss Williams help each other to promote a balance between Euro-American culture and African-American heritage. He is the motif of her psychological and spiritual journey back to her African heritage that helps her move onwards. She is humiliated by Max Berman but regains her honor after readjusting her own set of values.

Both recall the family ways of living, their parents, the education they received, the love stories and the marriages they had, etc. Because Max rejects his Jewish past and heritage for the sake of social acceptance in an imperialistic world, he ends up with a negative attitude that leads to cynicism, selfishness and a search for empty material values. Although an immigrant himself, he wants so much to be accepted by the American society that he comes to despise his own Jewish people and adopts American alien values and beliefs.

Miss Williams chooses to remember the history and culture of her African ancestors. There are constant flashbacks to important events in Miss Williams' and Max's childhoods and adult lives. While Max tries to forget where he comes from and tries to find a solution in the present time, Miss Williams believes that the only way to interpret her present ambiguities is by returning and making peace with her African heritage: "The African American women's future depends on a re-evaluation of their past and a return to the values and traditions that they can inherit from the Ancestors after they undertake the journey-quest in search of their roots." (Grant, 2010 p. 41)

Miss Williams needs to rediscover herself and her homeland before she was exiled to the USA. A black student from the Caribbean, who has come to study in New York, she has to reestablish solid ties with her black people, in order to move self-confidently into the American society and be acknowledged by its people. She retraces the journey back from the USA to the West Indies, where her African ancestors were enslaved, and then back to the USA. She needs to make this psychological return to her African, slave roots; she needs to recall the painful memories of her slave past to make sense of her fragmented psyche and regain her psychic integrity. She needs to negotiate a new identity for herself, a meaningful identity which stops her from being a victim of a white, dominant, patriarchal world.

She is able to create a new identity. This process of cultural decolonization and the establishment of an independent cultural identity can be built, in Marshall's view, on the same old order: "In order for someone to live, somebody else has to die." ("Brooklyn" p. 288) She becomes a psychological oppressor of Max, reminding him repeatedly of his failures in life. Marshall uses various narrative techniques such as repetition ("Did you hear my question?" – Miss Williams in "Brooklyn" p. 286), and overlapping of patterns of domination and circularity to prove this exchange of roles between the oppressor and the oppressed: "I will do

something … because for the first time in my life I feel almost brave" (Miss Williams in "Brooklyn" p. 287).

In "Brooklyn", the recognition of continuing African traditions is achieved through the swimming ritual, which completes Miss Williams' connection with her own people and culture. Miss Williams responds to the call of her African ancestors while participating in a swimming ritual that prepares her cultural and spiritual reawakening. She reconnects to her African cultural heritage on a neutral ground, in a lake near Max Berman's countryside chalet. The ritual washing in the lake allows Miss Williams to delve into issues of colonialism and achieve a transgression of traditional roles for black women as subordinate and sexual objects. Lakes have a strong association with symbolic aspects of the feminine archetype. The literal immersion into the lake - "Her head was bent as if she listened for a voice" ("Brooklyn" p. 285) - stands for her acknowledgement of her black female legacy. Also, the circular structural swimming patterns signify continuity, unified resistance to oppression and collective African cultural heritage. It provides a transition from submission to violation of ethnic and gender laws, from colonizer to colonized, enslaver to enslaved, from the superficial to the profound. It is an image of self-consciousness and revelation. The waves suggest a cyclical pattern of return. Miss Williams repeats the fate of other women of her color and race who were defeated by patriarchal domination. The water is like a baptism of rebirth that opens her mind to the beauty of her African heritage. In that transgressive moment, time and space, colonizer and colonized, old and new are reconnected due to the same African and Jewish struggle and resistance against colonialism.

Her spiritual dilemmas are now solved: she now knows the answers to the questions of her origins so she can return to her home. The physical journey to Max Berman's countryside chalet helped her restore her spiritual ties with her African ancestors whom she had until then neglected due to her search for the fulfillment of the American dream.

Connecting to aspects of her homeland culture and heritage proved psychologically empowering. As the story ends, Miss Williams looks forward to a brighter future: "I wasn't confused any longer … Her head lifted, tremulous with her new assurance. 'I can do something now!' […] Her head lifted as though she carried life." ("Brooklyn" pp. 288-289) It is not her victory alone: she is the emblem of all Caribbean women who were under colonial power.

The dual and ambiguous nature of African thought is also visible in the way Marshall combines Western, linear time with African, mythic time. The first deals with the story line while the second allows for the cyclic returns to the characters' origins, which places the story in an eternal present.

Paule Marshall uses the chronological, diachronic time to tell the story of the meeting between the Jewish teacher, Max Berman, and his black female student, Miss Williams. Max Berman invites Miss Williams to his chalet in the countryside to make her recommendations about a paper she has to write for her French class. In fact, he dreams of sexual favors from his black student. The invitation is rejected by Miss Williams as she guesses the real intention of her teacher. After missing some weeks from school, she reappears and, without even knowing why, she accepts his invitation. They finally meet at the chalet where they start remembering their past experiences connected to their childhood, family, job, marriage, etc. Miss Williams takes a swim in the lake, and then gets the train back to New York, while Max Berman remains lonely and sad on the train platform.

To this western chronological time is added African synchronic time with its mythic dimension, which allows both Miss Williams and Max Berman to recount through flashbacks their past experiences of important events from their childhood and adult life. Mythic time for African people "does not move in a linear fashion, but in a cyclic continuum. [As opposed to] change and progress, [it involves] recurrence and duration". (Denniston, 1995 p. xviii)[1] The story, in other words, takes place in a perpetual 'present'. It is the ahistorical, reversible time used in myths, with no logical, linear progression of past, present, future, or beginning, middle and end.

As Miss Williams cannot find a solution to her present dilemmas regarding her race and gender, she struggles to solve them by relating to the mythic time and its cyclical nature. "Synchronicity permits the reconstruction of the past while highlighting the present and preparing the future." (Grant, 2010 p. 39) By reconstructing the world of the past, she ensures the survival of the past in the present and the future, which will allow her to find fulfillment and empowerment.

Paule Marshall's cyclical return is similar to Mircea Eliade's "perpetual return"[2] to one's origins through myth, considered as circular. Mircea Eliade speaks about the mythic structure of the sacred time and its importance in transgression. Myth and ritual, in his view, are vehicles of "eternal return" to the mythic age. Time flows in a closed circle, limited to one year, which repeats itself indefinitely. These ritual cycles do more than give humans a sense of value. Traditional man identifies reality with the sacred; he periodically revives sacred time through myths and rituals in order to keep the universe in existence. In certain cultures, the world must be periodically renewed or it may perish in other cultures. According to Eliade, traditional man sees the eternal return to the starting point as something positive, even necessary, where past and present mingle to emphasize the continuum of past injustices in the present time. Traditional African societies explore this cyclical nature of time by reconstructing the past, which highlights the present, and prepares the future.

In her search for identity, Marshall manipulates the historical past with this circular, cyclical return to the African values and traditions in order to overcome the present dilemmas. In this sense, the physical journey to her teacher's chalet in the countryside is also a spiritual return back to Miss Williams' African roots, which "constitutes an archetypal symbol of self-knowledge". (Grant, 2010 p. 41)

Miss Williams is determined to go in search for her roots in Africa. The story represents a going back and forth in time and space, according to traditional African culture. Whereas in the case of Miss Williams Marshall uses the cyclical time of myth, which is round and recurs as an eternal return to her African origins, Max Berman's perception of time is chronological, according to western standards of living.

Miss Williams needs "a rite of passage that includes confession, cleansing, and confirmation". (Denniston, 1995 p. 137) To liberate herself from the trauma of non-identity, prejudices and alienating values she needs that physical journey beyond patriarchal control, in a neutral, liminal space, where she, as an alienated subject, will go through the metaphorical and psychological ritual of baptism that allows her to be reborn and restore her original state

[1] http://faculty.georgetown.edu/bassr/heath/syllabuild/iguide/marshall.html
[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_return_%28Eliade%29

of worth and dignity. In this initiation process she is helped by her female Ancestors and by Max Berman.

Conclusion

Grant mentions Denniston's belief in Marshall's heroines as a "campaign to establish firmly the self-value of African-American and all black women, their contribution to the community, and finally to humanity in general: However, as an artist, she [Paule Marshall] prepares her readers for a reevaluation of the African presence in the Western hemisphere. Most importantly, she offers a discursive model for change and possibility. As her artistic vision expands to include all peoples, Marshall develops a sensibility that is faithful to her African heritage. She figures a cosmogonical wholeness by valuing cultural difference even as she celebrates the triumph of the human spirit." (Denniston, 1995 p. xxii)[3] However, according to Grant, Marshall's discursive model can be achieved through the rejection of the white, patriarchal cultural domination and the proclamation of the rights and independence of the "Other".

It is clear that, despite being aware of multiple choices, not all black women have the same opportunities, so the experience cannot be generalized to all black women. However, the first step, which, however, can be generalized, is to "re-appropriate their identity through the knowledge of the self […], the need to take control of their future and to make their own choices, whether right or wrong". (Grant, 2010 p. 52), One of these choices is "to share their rich cultural heritage not only with the present but also with the forthcoming generation" (p. 52), that is, to become a female prototype Ancestor.

Paule Marshall, in Grant's words, "gives an enriching portrayal of her black heroines, one of fullness and authority. She has made visible black women's progress towards autonomy and self-esteem, a self-esteem that is intimately bound up with their understanding of the need to make the very act of survival a statement of re-affirmation of their identity, which also means the unfolding of the complex heritage of black female experience." (Grant, 2010 pp. 52-53)

African descendants have been viewed, according to Grant, "as a people devoid of any cultural heritage or historical record worth mentioning". (2010, p. 52) Black women have been victimized by a world designed and devised by men". (p. 51) Miss Williams has no maiden name, which indicates her lack of identity.

Paule Marshall "has infused her works with blackness and feminism. She draws her subjects, symbols, traditions, rituals, and language from Black culture throughout the world; and she focuses on – or at least emphasizes – Black women growing in strength as they develop consciousness of themselves." (Turner, 1988 pp. xiv-xv). Indeed, as Turner believes, Paule Marshall is a black woman writer who created female characters that are strong enough to regain their original esteem and worth, as well as to renew their female identity through a mythic journey. They share their past to achieve an optimistic future. They achieve spiritual wholeness by combining Barbadian heritage with the American background. They choose to make this change, to find a dignified space for the new generation of black women. This dignified space needs to break with a past of submission and to re-anchor into the future with positive empowerment and the proclamation of the 'Other" (black and woman) as equal with the "One" (white and man).

[3] Cited in Grant, 2010 pp 22

Marshall's feminism is different in the sense that she "presents not a dismissal of the male but an affirmation of the female". (Denniston, 1995 pp. 86). In other words, she favors harmonious gender relationships.

According to Denniston (1983), the traditional African view of the world is "composed of dualities and opposites that work together to constitute a harmonious moral order"[4]. As a black woman and writer, Paule Marshall wondered how she could live in a society that weakened her sense of self. Her answer invoked African cultural dualism, the balance between the American culture and the African heritage, and an optimistic belief in a postcolonial female colonizer. Contradictions make up the whole.

Contrasts do exist but should not hinder peaceful coexistence. Beauty stands in contrasts and differences: black is beautiful, darkness and light, past and present, life and death, etc. This is the lesson of life Paule Marshall was taught by her Barbadian ancestors. Black women are isolated by color, class and patriarchal ideas. The North is perceived as white and privileged and opposed to the South, which is perceived as shelter for primitive cultures, such as the Third World of the Caribbean. These normative binary oppositions between the colonizer/colonized, past/present, transgression/submission, old/new, male/female, white/non-white, North/South, were, are, and will always be reflected in literature. However, empowerment and historical awareness of (neo)colonial exploitation for oppressed black women lies in the recreation of the colonial past, of the oppressive history that carried their colonial legacy of racial prejudice.

Female characters like Miss Williams, even if contradictory, ambiguous or undecided, all embody salvation and rebirth, "through cultural bridges that crisscross and touch, they connect races and cultures, and approximate geographies and histories." (Coser, 1995 p. 171) Although marked by ambiguities and contradictions in the terms of white First World America, Paule Marshall's fictional bridges unite North and South America. By having that swim in the lake, Marshall adds a cultural bridge that connects the Barbadian community to the American community. Storytelling and mythic memory helped her regain her psychological wholeness.

Marshall represents both the literal passage of the slave trade and the passage into new identities through a unity of site and time. Repeatedly, Marshall stresses the importance of memory, of remembering, of using history, of not forgetting, but always looking backward to the African, colonial past. As a postcolonial female writer, she believes in the creative character of history due to the African oral traditions: remembering can be a dynamic act, she tells us, and not a static one.

Max Berman, the Jewish teacher gives Miss Williams the power to remember the past, challenge its oppressive quality and turn it to her own benefit. Her appearance at the beginning of the story shows her enslavement by the American male and her fragmented identity. At the end, her new 'limbo' position (Diedrich, 1999 p. 259) between the cultural traditions of Africa and America makes us remember the passages that not only separate but also link the opposing sites. She negotiates sex, race, class, and generation: "Sometimes, a person has to go back [says Merle…] to have an understanding of all that's gone to make them – before they can go forward." (Marshall: "Merle" 1983, pp 206)[5] This transoceanic,

[4] http://faculty.georgetown.edu/bassr/heath/syllabuild/iguide/marshall.html

[5] In Marshall, P: *Reena and Other Stories*, 1983, pp 206.

metaphorical passage of Africans to the New World will make Marshall's female put together "the disparate pieces of her self, to form a coherent identity". (Dietrich p. 468) At the end, she manages to overcome the absolutism of colonial thinking and turn it to her own acclaim in a white, male-dominated world.

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