

MONIQUE WITTIG RECONSIDERED

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RESUMEN

Una de las figuras más influyentes y sólidas, tanto del feminismo como de la escritura experimental y de la teoría social desde los años sesenta, Monique Wittig, ha jugado un papel esencial en la reflexión sobre la política de género y sexual, tanto en Europa como en Estados Unidos. Tras su reciente muerte en 2003, conviene llevar a cabo un examen de los diversos contextos político-culturales en los que se leyó su obra desde los años setenta hasta los noventa, atendiendo a los cambios experimentados a partir de las novedades disciplinares resultantes del declive de la literatura y la teoría francesas como premisas intelectuales de los estudiosos norteamericanos. Mi propuesta es que la mayoría de las interpretaciones, así como las propias teorías de Wittig, ignoran o abiertamente descartan aquellos elementos de sus textos literarios, especialmente los de fines de los sesenta, que vinculan el feminismo blanco del primer mundo con cuestiones globales de subordinación racial y sexual, así como con los movimientos de liberación tercermundistas; cuestiones que hoy resurgen de diferente manera, dado el interés por la escritura de minorías y los flujos transnacionales del capital, la cultura y los seres humanos.

PALABRAS CLAVE: género, sexualidad, políticas gays, estudios postcoloniales, feminismo, raza blanca.

ABSTRACT

«Monique Wittig Reconsidered» An accomplished and influential figure in feminism, experimental writing, and social theory since the 1960s, Monique Wittig has played a crucial role in shaping reflection on the politics of gender and sexuality, both in Europe and in North America. In the wake of her death in January 2003, it seems fitting to undertake a broad examination the varied cultural-political contexts in which her provocative work has been read from the 1970s through the 1990s, and to consider the changes in those readings in relation to disciplinary shifts that have resulted in the near demise of French literature and theory as intellectual concerns of U.S. scholars. My basic argument is that most readings, as well as Wittig's own theoretical writings, ignore or explicitly disavow many elements in her literary texts that, especially in the late 1960s, link white first-world feminism to questions of racial and sexual subordination worldwide, as well as to third-world liberation movements —questions that, today, come to the fore once again, in new ways, given the recent concern with «minority» writing and transnational flows of capital, culture, and human beings.

KEY WORDS: gender, sexuality, gays politics, post-colonial studies, feminism, whiteness.



All of the interpretive frames for reading Wittig that I discuss here can be construed as «minoritized» if that category includes Euro-feminist writing that was long considered by the academy to be of minor significance and was marginalized precisely to the degree that it was feminist; if it includes feminist critics interested in philosophical questions of universalism versus antifoundationalism and the political implications thereof; if it includes writers and critics concerned with the lesbian postmodern and early queer studies in the U.S. What distinguishes my approach is its emphasis on the need to read Wittig alongside writers other than the pantheon of so-called French feminists, or lesbian feminist writers such as Jeanette Winterson, who are also «minoritized» (that is, neither mainstream nor canonical) but who occupy Wittig's own geopolitical sphere. This essay encourages critics to read Wittig in a transnational frame that does not simply attempt to universalize white feminists' experience, as Wittig and most of her critics did in the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. A wider transnational frame allows figures like André Schwarz-Bart and Mohammed Dib to come into view as writers whose work echoes Wittig's influential novel *Les Guérillères* in registering a concern with the linkages between sexuality, gender, race, and anticolonial/antiimperial politics across countries, continents, and various historical periods.

A related concern in this essay is that the erasure of Wittig's status as a French writer, and the near erasure, in the U.S. in the 1980s and 90s, of the significance of the fact that she wrote mainly in French, not only indicated the decline of French literature and cultural theory, but also obscured the ties that I wish to highlight, that is, transcultural flows, mediated by the French language and by anticolonial politics in the former French empire—flows that link Wittig to writers like Dib and Schwarz-Bart. Another way of talking about this is in terms of the gradual substitution of «world literature» read in English translation for «foreign language» study, and a concomitant disregard for the materiality of language, not just in the post-structuralist sense of *écriture*, but in the sense of a historically-grounded cultural medium that binds disparate groups to one another. It is the French language, for example, and the cultural-political debates that are articulated in French, that tie Wittig, a French lesbian feminist of the postwar period, to the Negritude poets of the 1940s and 50s. To my knowledge, this important relation has never been analyzed. I hope to show here that such an analysis opens an avenue for addressing the systematic effects of worldwide imperial domination, which are at once gendered and racialized.

It would be hard to overestimate the impact of Monique Wittig's literary and theoretical writing in European and North American reflections on the subjection of women. Wittig is widely known in France as a leading figure in the *mouvement de libération des femmes* of the 1960s and 70s and as an experimental writer and feminist thinker. In the U.S., she was a major figure in feminist theory and literary studies for more than twenty years. Here in the States, Wittig's work has generally been considered within the frame of two overlapping sets of debates. On one hand, there are the discussions, in the 1970s and 80s, of the theoretical and political significance of the various «new French feminisms», which address the function of language in structuring desire, sexuality, subjectivity, and relations between men



and women, as well as homosocial and homosexual bonds. On the other hand, in the wake of Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality*, Wittig's writings have been central to many debates in gay and lesbian studies focusing on a wide range of sexual practices and technologies of the body that call for new ways of theorizing the relations between language, sexuality, gender, and feminism.

Initially, in the 1970s, much of the work of Derrida, Lacan, Althusser, and Foucault, like that of Wittig, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, and Julia Kristeva, was unavailable in English, so readers of French, such as Gayatri Spivak, Jane Gallop, Elaine Marks, and many others played a key role as translators and cultural intermediaries. Because of the importance of structuralism and poststructuralism on the U.S. intellectual scene, French was an exciting discipline that intersected in provocative ways with feminist studies in a variety of other domains. However, by 1990, when Judith Butler published her enormously influential *Gender Trouble*—a book that powerfully engaged various French theories of sexuality and included a compelling reading of Wittig—French, as a discipline and a cultural field, seemed barely relevant to Butler's discussion; the early studies of Wittig's novels by French scholars such as Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, Namascar Shaktini, Diane Griffin Crowder, and Elaine Marks were not cited at all. How had Wittig's Frenchness become such a minor issue, even if one allows for the fact that she had been living in the U.S. since the 1970s? And why had French literary scholarship become merely one arena among many in which French feminist theory and experimental writing were being examined?

One factor was that as cultural studies gained ground, and as Foucault's work in discourse analysis shifted attention to the diffusion of power and resistance throughout the social field, high-cultural (and mainly European) «poetic language» lost the privileged status granted to it by French intellectuals, if not its distinctiveness. Canonical literature began to be examined in relation to a range of discourses, including minority literatures, popular fiction, film, television, popular music, performance art, and the electronic media, as well as medical and legal discourses. As disciplinary boundaries became more flexible, the work of writers like Wittig was taken up in a number of different academic contexts (as well as non-academic ones), once it had become widely available in English during the 1980s and had been incorporated into a broad spectrum of discussions of sexuality, feminism, and post-modernism.

From the 1970s into the 90s, Wittig's writing continued to be considered in relation to the *nouveau roman*, contemporary French fiction by women and men, feminist utopias, women's autobiography, and the *Bildungsroman*, alongside writers as diverse as Claude Simon, Marguerite Duras, Mary Shelley, Christa Wolf, and Joanna Russ. But as feminist theory in the U.S. was increasingly challenged by women of color and by lesbians for its unacknowledged, exclusionary white middle-class bias and its heterosexism, some of the most interesting readings of Wittig emerged in queer theory, gay and lesbian studies, and a growing body of work on lesbian narrative. A number of important theoretical essays of the 1980s and early 90s linked homosexualities to race and class in their consideration of differences within feminism, most famously in Donna Haraway's «A Manifesto for Cyborgs»,

Teresa de Lauretis' «Eccentric Subjects», and Biddy Martin and Chandra Talpade Mohanty's «Feminist Politics: What's Home Got to Do With It?» All of this work drew implicitly on earlier insights of writer/critics like Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich. However, in the last decade, Wittig's writing has been discussed mainly in terms of sexuality, postmodern subjectivity, and a politics of representation detached from the issues of social class, race, ethnicity, geopolitical location, and historical specificity that have become central in Asian American, African American, and Chicano/Latino literary theory, as well as in colonial and postcolonial studies and much work in gay and lesbian studies.

From the standpoint of many U.S. critics of the 90s, the early studies of Wittig by Shaktini, Marks, and Crowder seem to have made exaggerated claims regarding Wittig's displacement of phallogocentrism. Particularly in light of Butler's critique of Wittig's «foundationalist fiction» (118) of autonomous lesbian subjects who stand completely outside the heterosexual matrix, Wittig now appears to many critics to be more modern than postmodern, more structuralist than post-structuralist, more committed to the notion of a pre-social, pre-discursive unitary subject (which she calls «lesbian») than to a subject in process. In the criticism of the past decade—I'm thinking of essays by Penelope Engelbrecht, Judith Roof, and Leigh Gilmore, for example—Wittig is often seen as an important precursor to contemporary lesbian writers such as Jeannette Winterson, whose *Written on the Body* formally and thematically echoes Wittig's *Le Corps lesbien*. However, Wittig is faulted for presenting heterosexuality as a closed system of oppression from which lesbianism provides the only escape. The desirable alternative expressed or implied in these essays is to acknowledge the interrelatedness of heterosexuality and homosexuality, the inherent contradictions and instabilities of both, and the possibilities for emancipatory change within and between these internally differentiated forms of sexuality and sociality. Nonetheless, the readings of Engelbrecht, Roof, and Gilmore discuss sexuality and representation without reference to the particular historical contexts in which they are embedded.

Taking a very different tack in this same period, Linda Zerilli ventures a reading of Wittig's universalism, particularly as it is deployed in her fiction, both as a political strategy that is in no way foundationalist, and as a trope that is potentially useful for feminism. Zerilli begins by reminding readers that Wittig speaks of her fiction as a «Trojan horse», a «war machine» («The Straight Mind», 68) and goes on to argue that, as a war machine, Wittig's fiction effects «a radical decentering of the subject as it has been conceptualized by the straight mind» («Universalism», 162). She contends that *L'Opoponax*, *Les Guérillères*, and *Le Corps lesbien* accomplish this through their ingenious use of pronouns that do not refer to individual speaking subjects, and their defamiliarization of language as a means to reconfigure the subject and «explode the real, the referent» (165). In Wittig, according to Zerilli, the strategic universalization of the minority position does not rely on Enlightenment notions of autonomous subjectivity; rather it stages the processes by which subjectivity continually changes form and takes on new social meanings: «the lesbian subject is a thoroughly political subject, a provisional subject, an invented «epic» subject, which is created in Wittig's writings as a universal subject without a

name, without an Other, and with no recourse to a pre-social, pre-discursive identity» (166). Still, in Zerilli's reading, as in the others mentioned above, Wittig's universalism is divorced from the historical context of its emergence, and the gender/sexuality nexus is viewed almost as a world unto itself.

In a sense, in the 1990s, the readings of Wittig's literary and theoretical figurations of lesbian desire, sexuality, and politics all but eclipse her Frenchness, that is, the language in which she usually writes, as well as the literary, cultural, and historical contexts from which her writing emerged, and with which it continues to resonate. In saying this, my point is not to revalorize French as a discipline but instead to make a case for paying greater attention to language, history, materiality, and global politics in reading Wittig and assessing the significance of her writing in today's world. It is no coincidence that Wittig's emergence as a major literary and political voice in lesbian feminism more or less coincided with the decline of French as a discipline centered on male-authored canonical literary texts, not to mention the decline of French *tout court*. Her writing was part of a world-historical shift in which second-wave feminism, anticolonial wars, and anticapitalist/antiimperialist struggles had begun to decenter the Western masculine subject. The coherence and power of that subject depended not only upon sexual domination but upon the economic and political hegemony of Europe and the U.S., as well as the success of those regions in subjecting much of the rest of the world to their colonizing or imperializing projects. Once the colonial empires had collapsed and peoples the world over were openly revolting against imperialism, it was no longer tenable, even in the West, to consider the masculinist expressions of European high culture as beacons to which the entire world must look for guidance.

By the 1980s, political theorists, feminists, and activists of various stripes were calling attention to the racialization and ethnicization of class differences in the industrialized Western world and to the ways in which many minority cultures were challenging the hegemony of the dominant European ones. Subjectivity could no longer be accounted for in terms of abstract theories of language, but had to be thought in terms of the interaction between dominant languages and devalued minority languages —the languages of subjected peoples all over the world. In the wake of these developments, I believe it could be illuminating to read Wittig in the transcultural, transnational frame of present-day French Studies —for example, in relation to other texts from the French-speaking world of the 1960s and 70s, to speak only of one domain that lies beyond the borders of Europe and the U.S. Aspects of Wittig's work that have become familiar to U.S. critics may appear in a new light and may suggest new ways of thinking about feminism and global politics.

Rosemary Hennessy's consideration of queer theory in a reading of Wittig's *The Straight Mind* offers a point of entry into the discussion I would like to undertake. Calling for a materialist feminist approach to sexuality, Hennessy expresses her concern with social totalities and asks «whether postmodernism's critique of the master narratives and stable identities that have undergirded modernity since the Anglo-European renaissance necessarily requires relinquishing attention to the continued, though reconfigured, operation of social structures like capitalism, patriarchy, or heterosexuality» (965). Taking issue with the assumption that sexuality is primarily a





cultural issue, an assumption that informs much of the early 1990s work in queer theory, Hennessey warns against framing the issue of sexuality «so exclusively in terms of representation —discursive shifts, tropes, rhetorical axes, narrative strategies... Lesbian and gay sexualities, even as they claim a marginal status as «queer», cannot be divorced from the colonization of the unconscious, the commodification of bodies, and the recruitment of pleasure into an informatics of domination, as well as the reliance of these psychic and corporeal markets upon a global sexual division of labor and an exploited multinational work force. At what cost to the emancipatory aims of a queer politics is this other narrative of sexuality suppressed?» (969).

Hennessey goes on to underscore the implications of Wittig's definition of sexual difference in terms of class oppression rather than in terms of individual subjectivity or culture. Wittig, she says, manages to appropriate a Marxist problematic in order to critique Marx's inability to come to terms with women's oppression and the formation of subjectivity. At the same time, according to Hennessey, Wittig uses this problematic to critique liberal feminism and cultural feminism: «For women to answer the question of the subject in materialist terms is... to show, as lesbians and feminists did, that supposedly 'subjective', 'individual', 'private' problems are in fact social problems, class problems; that sexuality is not for women an individual and subjective expression, but a social institution of violence» («One Is Not Born a Woman», 19). Citing Wittig's famous statement that «Lesbian is the only concept I know of that is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated subject is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically» («One Is Not Born a Woman», 20), Hennessey cautions against dismissing Wittig's conception of lesbian as essentialist on the grounds that it excludes particular sexual identities. Instead, Hennessey suggests, we should consider the question of becoming queer as «a 'new subjective definition' that has to be undertaken by every one of us. This is not a subject position based upon biology or sexual object choice or issuing from a utopian 'elsewhere' so much as a critical perspective that opens up systematic ways of thinking about sexuality in both straight and gay culture» (971-2).

There is no question that Wittig's deployment of the concept of class inaugurates a radical reconceptualization of sexual oppression. Yet if we look back to certain passages in *Les Guérillères*, we see that her concern with class is not just a means to the end of reconceptualizing sex. It is also bound up with more classically Marxist aims, namely the seizure of the means of production and the definitive overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat. Consider, for example, the reference to Flora Tristan's phrase, «*les femmes et le peuple marchent la main dans la main*» (189) and the figure of rebels who are said to «*s'emparer des cités industrielles*» (137). Consider, too, the very last sequence in the novel, which evokes the euphoria of victory after the final struggle, in the image of «Alexandra Ollontai» sobbing upon hearing «*l'unisson exaltant de l'Internationale*» (207-8). It seems clear that, in 1969 at least, Wittig envisions not only the abolition of sexual oppression but also the abolition of class oppression as it was theorized by Marx.

Taking the matter of social class and geopolitical location into account, we can return to Zerilli's insight that the lists of women's names in texts such as *Les Guérillères* have an incantatory quality and that they do not refer to individual

subjects, much less subjects who are assumed to be members of the ruling class in the first world (165). In today's context, we may infer from Zerilli's reading that the names evoke transnational feminism —women, as a class, engaged in class struggle on a global scale. I think this is so despite the fact that some of the names are ancient, some are literary (such as «Cunégonde» (198), a character in Voltaire's *Candide*), and some are fanciful inventions. Many of the names are modern and come from cultures throughout the world. The lists of names interrupt the narrative and punctuate the text as a whole, but also resonate with the sequences that evoke proletarian struggles —struggles that, because of the context of *Les Guérillères*' publication in the late 1960s, recall those in Cuba, Vietnam, and the Paris of May 68, as well as the Chinese revolution of 1949, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the insurrections of 1871 and 1848 in France. Wittig's many references to socialist revolutions are hard to miss, but it is worth noting that they dropped out of discussions of *Les Guérillères* for a long time. These references are significant in terms of the political scene that shaped Wittig's writing in the 1960s; people were still thinking in terms of total revolution, albeit not only in those terms. Instead of interpreting Wittig's concern with social totalities as evidence that she is insufficiently postmodern, as some critics have done, it might be well to follow Hennessey in considering the continuing usefulness of that line of thought and thinking of ways to revise it in light of today's global politics. In a world in which the corporations, governments, and military forces of a few wealthy countries control and exploit weaker societies to an unprecedented degree, not only economically but politically and culturally as well, we need political theories and strategies that take account of the vast networks of power that enmesh populations across the globe.

Wittig's references to proletarian struggles are important, too, in relation to the context of the novel's initial reception in the U.S. As Gayle Rubin points out, Marxism was a key concern in U.S. feminism in the 1960s and 70s; «Marxism enabled people to pose a whole set of questions that Marxism could not satisfactorily answer» («Sexual Traffic», 63). Another point about this context is that feminists of the 1970s were fascinated with Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* and with the question of women's oppression deriving from the overthrow of matriarchy and the invention of private property. Rubin remarks that «in retrospect some of this [feminist literature on Engels] seems quaint, but at the time it was taken very seriously. I doubt people who weren't there could begin to imagine the intensity with which people fought over whether or not there was an original Matriarchy, and whether its demise accounted for class differences and the oppression of women» («Sexual Traffic», 64). *Les Guérillères* sparked the imagination of so many U.S. feminists partly because it engaged issues such as this one, which were important in New Left politics. (Of course, the novel also pleased the goddess worshippers of the day, who read it in their own way.)

From today's vantage point, I would say that what is missing in *Les Guérillères* is a serious consideration of the particularities of women's struggles with (and within) Marxism and anticapitalist movements in different times and places. Despite allusions to an array of specific struggles, those particularities are generally passed over in favor of a figuration of universal feminism, or lesbianism, as the most fundamen-



tal form of class struggle. It is problematic for Wittig or her critics to assume that the notion of a universal feminism or lesbianism has the same emancipatory possibilities for everyone in all parts of the globe. However strategic they may be, Wittig's articulations of a universal lesbianism establish a hierarchy of oppression—sex over class, race, and geopolitical location—that is untenable for most women in the world. Yet the totalizing impulse in Wittig's writing does have a potentially liberatory dimension. For as Hennessy points out, there is still a compelling political need to go beyond local struggles in order to address the systematic forms of social and economic exploitation that are at work all over the world. The viability of a more encompassing political strategy will depend on the ways in which links are forged between struggles and the ends that the linkages are made to serve.

In addition to having a strong Marxist bent, *Les Guérillères* insistently calls attention to feminism's relation to anticolonial and antiimperial struggles. The novel's title of course recalls guerilla warfare, as do a number of narrative sequences: «*Elles disent qu'elles sont concernées par la stratégie et par la tactique. Elles disent que les armées massives qui comprennent des divisions des corps des régiments des sections des compagnies sont inopérantes*» (134). Evoking the inadequacy of traditional forms of warfare, Wittig writes: «*Elles disent que dans cette conception de la guerre les armes sont difficiles à déplacer, les effectifs ne peuvent pas s'adapter à toutes les situations, la plupart du temps ils combattent en terrain inconnu*» (135).

The *guérillères* are at once feminist guerilla warriors, or *guerilleras*, and combatants in struggles that resemble those in Bolivia in the 1960s, led by one of main theorists of guerilla warfare, Che Guevara. Guevara had borrowed and transvalued the terms *guerrilla* (a diminutive form of *war*) and *guerrillero* (warrior) from an earlier historical context in which Spain, having no army, devised alternative means to fight Napoleon in the second decade of the nineteenth century. More broadly, Wittig's invented term *guérillères* recalls antiimperial struggles in Latin America, Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Arab world in the 1950s and 60s, real-life struggles of the postwar period. Yet while feminism is presented as being imbricated in anticolonial and antiimperial struggles, the particularity of the latter—that is, the way they shape gender, sexuality, and subjectivity in specific peoples, places, and times—is not articulated in the mythic «Amazonian» narrative that purports to lesbianize and universalize third-world rebellions.

Wittig's treatment of race and ethnicity basically follows the same logic, but is given fuller and more complex elaboration than her treatment of third-world liberation struggles. Her writings frequently point to the connection between sexual and racial domination, both of which are said to involve economic exploitation through an institution of slavery. Despite the myriad references to ancient Greek culture in *Les Guérillères*, *Le Corps lesbien*, and *Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes*, it is not the slavery of the ancient world that interests Wittig, but the enslavement of Africans in the colonial era and, to a lesser extent, that of Jews under fascism. In *Virgile, non*, she refers to the enslavement (12) of the lost souls encountered by the protagonist, Wittig, in her journey through hell, observing that «*[e]lles portent un sourire sans éclat mais permanent car il est leur étoile jaune*» (51). And in «The Straight Mind» she states that «as classes and categories of thought» (29), the

terms *women* and *men* have the same status as the term *slave*: «Can we redeem *slave*? Can we redeem *nigger*, *negress*? How is *woman* different?» (30). Citing the work of Colette Guillaumin in another essay, Wittig observes that «before the socio-economic reality of black slavery, the concept of race did not exist, at least not in its modern meaning, since it was applied to the lineage of families. However, now, race, exactly like sex, is taken as an ‘immediate given’, a ‘sensible given’, ‘physical features’, belonging to a natural order» («One Is Not Born a Woman», 11).

Both racial and sexual domination, then, are presented as the result of social processes that institute economic, cultural, and psychic forms of subjection that are neither natural nor inevitable. Moreover, the analogy between sexual and racial oppression enables readers to imagine a time when women were not subjected, since there clearly *was* a time when Africans were not systematically enslaved by Europeans and European Americans. As one speaker says in *Les Guérillères*, «*il y a eu un temps où tu n’as pas été esclave, souviens-toi... Fais un effort pour te souvenir. Ou à défaut, invente*» (126-7). But, as with anticapitalist struggles and anticolonial wars, Wittig ultimately folds antiracist struggles into feminist ones rather than giving voice to some of the myriad ways in which race and sex intersect in particular social configurations. For example, she writes in *Les Guérillères*: «*Elles disent, oui, ce sont les mêmes oppresseurs dominateurs, les mêmes maîtres qui ont dit que les nègres et les femelles n’ont pas le coeur la rate le foie à la même place qu’eux, que la différence de sexe, la différence de couleur signifient l’infériorité*» (146). However helpful it may be in calling attention to the links between racism and sexism, the claim that women and blacks are oppressed by the same masters obscures the reality that the masters placed white women above black men and black women on the evolutionary and socio-cultural scale. It also occludes the oppression of black women by white women, or serves to excuse it as a by-product of male domination. Finally, it ignores the different ways in which black and white women’s sexualities are imbricated with race in various historical situations.

A related issue is that some of Wittig’s most striking evocations of blackness suggest that it lies completely outside subjectivities and societies structured by racial determinations. For instance, in *Le Corps lesbien*, where the destruction of the category of sex goes hand in hand with a narrative strategy of bodily disintegration and reintegration, the category of race seems to lose its social meaning as well; color becomes a floating signifier that has nothing to do with race. Wittig’s *j/e* speaks now of the whiteness of the lover’s body («*l’éclat blanc de ton ventre*», 39), now of its blackness (or darkness): «*Le désir m/e prend d’entrer dans le noir de ton corps de ta face de tes members*» (46). One passage transvalues Freud’s association of women and blacks with the «dark continent»: «*gloire à Sappho pour aussi longtemps que nous vivrons dans ce continent noir*» (58). Equally noteworthy are the phrases that resignify skin color by evoking it in startling new ways, for instance, in the image of Sappho’s *seins violets* (151) and in a fervent entreaty to the beloved: «*Sois m/a chérie puissante... que ta poitrine soit verte et brillante de même consistance que l’envers des feuilles d’arbre, que ton buste soit d’acier trempé, tes épaules de cuivre, que tes seins soient de fer*» (78-9). As beautiful as these passages may be, however, it is crucial to question the usefulness of their suggestion that we have moved «beyond» race, mythically or otherwise.

In this connection, it may be instructive to examine a passage in *Les Guérillères* that also seems, at first glance, to take us beyond race by transporting us (back?) to a mythic realm where the categories of race and sex seem to be nonexistent. A retelling of the story of the garden of Eden features a serpent named Orpheus and, in place of Eve, a nameless black woman, a Gorgon hungry for knowledge and pleasure:

Une femme nue y marche. Son beau corps est noir et brillant. Ses cheveux sont des serpents fins et mobiles qui produisent une musique à chacun de ses mouvements... a femme goûte du fruit de chacun des arbres... [D]ès qu'elle aura mangé le fruit, sa taille se développera, elle grandira, ses pieds ne quitteront pas le sol tandis que son front touchera les étoiles. Et lui Orphée et les cent mille serpents de sa chevelure s'étendront de part et d'autre de son visage, ils lui feront une couronne brillante, ses yeux deviendront pâles comme des lunes, elle aura la connaissance (72-3).

In many respects these lines seem to body forth «a universal subject without a name, without an Other» (Zerilli, 166), a world divided by neither race nor sex. There is no evil, ugliness, or inferiority associated with blackness, only beauty, enjoyment, and knowledge. Similarly, there is no Perseus petrified by a monstrous Medusa, no Eurydice waiting for a man to lead her out of the underworld to which Man has banished her, no hell devoid of music, light, and love.

Yet this is one of the rare sequences in *Les Guérillères* where the word *femme* appears, a word that reminds readers of the historical conditions of the text's emergence in the course of the *mouvement de libération des femmes*, and that mediates the relation between the gendered social hierarchies of the present and the fabulous vision of their abolition. Similarly, the figure of the black woman and the phrase «Son beau corps est noir» refer us to the U.S. of the 1960s where, in the wake of the Civil Rights movement, the struggle against racism spawned not only the Black Power movement and the affirmation that «black is beautiful», but also black feminist challenges to male hegemony. In this context, readers are reminded, too, of the African independences of the 1960s, which in turn are linked, through the figures of Orpheus and the beautiful black body of a woman, to the poets of Negritude whose *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache de langue française*, edited by Léopold Sédar Senghor and published in Paris after World War Two, had as its preface Jean-Paul Sartre's «Orphée noir».

I believe Wittig's writing is most powerful when it evokes a web of associations such as the one sketched out above, a metaphorical network that articulates the social tensions of the here and now while simultaneously conjuring images of alternative worlds. In today's political context, the passage I have cited implicitly raises the question of how different readers (as well as millions of illiterate people across the globe) are positioned within global networks of power and within the entwined histories of feminist, antiracist, and anticolonial struggles. It invites a consideration of how their position might shape their interpretation of Orpheus and the black woman in the garden, as well as their subjective and social experience of the entanglement of sex, race, economic exploitation, cultural imperialism, and other forms of domination. The social subtexts and literary intertexts of these lines



of *Les Guérillères* suggest the possibility of inventing languages that can link these different positions in politically effective ways without effacing their singularity. And in so doing, they accomplish much more than to strategically posit a universal subject or a society that is not structured by hierarchies of gender, race, or class.

Unlike *Les Guérillères*, Wittig's first novel *L'Opoponax* does not explicitly take up issues of worldwide domination, but it is centrally concerned with the ways in which language may function to encourage identifications across the boundaries of gender and other social differences. *L'Opoponax* is her most powerful evocation of sexuality's imbrication in other dimensions of psychic and social experience, and of the particular forms this can take in childhood. I disagree with Wittig's view that the critical force of the novel lies in a use of the pronoun *on* that allows her to universalize the lesbian subject. (As evidence of her success in universalizing the lesbian subject, she cites Claude Simon's review of her novel, in which he says of the main character, a little girl: «I see, I breathe, I chew, I feel through her eyes, her mouth, her hands, her skin... become childhood» [«The Mark of Gender», 84].) To me, what is crucial is another aspect of the function of the pronoun *on*, which Wittig discusses in these terms: «[H]ere is a subject pronoun which is very tractable and accommodating since it can be bent in several directions at the same time. First... it is indefinite as far as gender is concerned. It can represent a certain number of people successively or all at once —everybody, we, they, I, you, people, a small or a large number of persons— and still stay singular. It lends itself to all kinds of substitutions of persons... One, *on* has been for me the key to the undisturbed use of language, as it is in childhood when words are magic, when words are set bright and colorful in the kaleidoscope of the world, with its many revolutions in the consciousness as one shakes it» («The Mark of Gender», 83-84, my emphasis). In *L'Opoponax*, more than in any other text, Wittig succeeds in articulating a singular subjective and social position in a way that allows a wide range of readers to identify with it across generations and across differences of gender, sexuality, and culture. She manages to give voice to the unique experience of a little girl, a French child in the 1940s and, at the same time, to enable readers to imagine «all kinds of substitutions of persons», as well as to experience language as a means of revolutionizing consciousness and shaking «the kaleidoscope of the world». To my mind, this is a very different matter from using the pronoun *on*, as Wittig says she does, to convey «the unique experience of all locutors who, when saying I, can reappropriate the whole language and reorganize the world from their point of view». (The Mark of Gender, 84).

I move now to a consideration of two other novels about women warriors written in French in the 1960s and early 70s, one by an Algerian, Mohammed Dib, the other by a Frenchman, André Schwarz-Bart¹. I want to suggest that although

¹ My discussion of *Qui se souvient de la mer* both draws on and revises my analysis of this same novel in *Transfigurations of the Maghreb*. See my «Mohammed Dib and the French Question» for an assessment of the ways in which a consideration of the writing of third-world peoples completely



these writers share many of Wittig's political concerns regarding subjectivity and social relations, their focus on the situation of non-European women necessarily leads them to write differently about gender and sexuality. Rather than ultimately collapsing class struggles and anticolonial struggles into feminist ones, or subordinating the politics of race and ethnicity to that of gender and sexuality, as Wittig often does, Dib and Schwarz-Bart explore the complex and irreducible imbrication of gender and sexuality in other social determinants of ever-shifting identities. I begin with *Qui se souvient de la mer*, Dib's first experimental novel, which, like Wittig's *L'Opoponax*, was influenced both by feminism and by the French new novel. Published in 1962 when the Algerian War was just ending, *Qui se souvient de la mer* marks a new phase of Dib's literary production, for until that time Dib felt compelled, for political reasons, to write realist fiction that dealt with French colonialism in Algeria. (He also wrote articles on the war in the communist newspaper *Alger Républicain* until 1959, when he was expelled from Algeria by the French authorities and took up residence in France)².

In a sense, *Qui se souvient de la mer* is «about» the war in Algeria, yet it does not contain a single reference to Algeria itself. Instead, it reads as a postmodern science fiction novel structured by an opposition between the «underground city» and the «new constructions», which seems to allegorize the relationship between the Algerian revolutionaries and the French armed forces. Like the bewildered inhabitants of the labyrinthine city depicted in the novel, readers experience a profound disorientation as familiar urban spaces turn to rocks, water, and black holes. The male narrator/protagonist is deeply disturbed by changes that he finds unfathomable, whereas his wife Nafissa seems to move confidently and happily in the new social spaces that she has been actively working to create.

The figure of Nafissa evokes the Algerian women who participated in their national liberation struggle, sometimes without their husbands' knowledge or consent, or without their husbands understanding that women's liberation was at stake

alters the terms of debates about avant-garde literature and social realism, and raises new questions regarding their ideological stakes.

² In addition to Dib and Schwarz-Bart, there are a number of other gifted francophone writers who deal with similar concerns, notably Simone Schwarz-Bart and the Algerians Kateb Yacine and Assia Djebar. Also of interest is the Lebanese writer Etel Adnan, who examines the shared histories of Arab and European cultures as they are shaped by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Adnan looks at these histories through the lenses of gender, language, and war in *Sitt Marie Rose*, an innovative text set in Beirut in the 1970s. The protagonist is a woman who risks her life crossing the boundaries of her culture and society. Culturally Christian, Marie Rose directs a school for deaf children in a Christian neighborhood, but lives with her own three children and her Palestinian lover in the Muslim quarter. She is kidnapped, tortured, and murdered by European-identified Christian militiamen who are infuriated by the presence of Muslim Palestinians in their country. Marie Rose's captors are shown to be threatened by the multilayered, contradictory, historically-shifting identities that Marie Rose both embodies and publicly defends in a political discourse that, in the minds of the militiamen, is off-limits for women. Born in Lebanon, Adnan has lived in France and the U.S., and writes in both French and English.

in the war as well as national liberation. But Nafissa also embodies a process of social change that completely unsettles the public/private distinctions and the other gendered social arrangements of colonial Algeria. The old «private» arrangements are brought out into the open; they are shown to have been reduced to refuse encumbering the streets, rubble blocking new avenues of psychic and social organization: «*L'air sent le charnier de pierre décomposée, une odeur qui imprègne toute chose*» (159). When the narrator presents Nafissa with two stone figures he has found, effigies of Nafissa and himself in an earlier incarnation, Nafissa forbids him to hold onto them, tacitly demanding that he join her in the effort to invent new modes of being: «*Je lui lance des regards traqués. Ravalant mes remords, j'obéis à sa demande*» (162).

Dib's Nafissa not only *symbolizes* the profound transformations wrought in the course of historical upheavals like the Algerian War, but is clearly identified as a political activist in her own right and a maker of social meanings, a woman who *effects* those transformations. At every point, the gendered and sexual dimensions of Nafissa's identity are indissociable from her aspect as a member of an ethnic and national group that is remaking itself during a violent war of liberation. In my view, though, Dib's revolutionary figuration of a third-world woman warrior is limited by the fact that Nafissa disappears at the end of the novel (possibly because she has been killed), leaving it to the male narrator and unspecified others to spell out «*tous les noms de Nafissa*» (168), that is, to explore the uncharted territory that now lies before them. In other words, Dib stops short of making Nafissa a key actor in the project that lies ahead, that of continuing to remake the world after the war's end. (And unfortunately, Dib's fictional rendering of Nafissa's disappearance anticipates the marginalization of women in post-independence Algeria.) Nonetheless, Dib's narrator says that, for him, the project of remaking the world is unrealizable without a belief in Nafissa, even if he doesn't know what, in her, he believes in: «*Je chante avec force dans l'intention de ramener Nafissa des rives incertaines d'où elle me fait face*» (136).

Recent work on sexuality has generated new readings of *Qui se souvient de la mer* such as the one offered by Jarrod Hayes in *Queering the Nation*, a book that deals with the role of marginal sexualities, sexual dissidence, and gender insubordination in Maghrebian narratives about nationalism, anticolonialism, neocolonial domination, and the corruption of post-independence political regimes. Hayes examines a range of novels whose recurring themes of unveiling sexual secrets and bringing skeletons out of the closet disclose the violent suppression of difference that founds the nation in the Maghreb. His analyses show that similar literary strategies are deployed in queering the nation and making it feminist, and that the two efforts have many common political goals. Hayes' reading of *Qui se souvient de la mer* makes the interesting claim that Dib's novel sets «sex on fire» and depicts the demise of male privilege not only as a development that induces panic in the narrator, but also as one that gives him sexual pleasure and brings him joy. Both the narrator's joy and his pleasure are conveyed through figures of fire and heat: «*Toutes les serres qui étaient plantés en moi me lâchèrent... [U]n sang chaud, électrisé, irrigua mes veines. Sans fin... Je tentai de me ressouvenir de quelque chose d'analogue et n'y*

parvins pas, mais mon coeur tressaillait de joie. D'un geste lent, Nafissa m'alluma la cigarette que j'avais gardée à la bouche» (103).

In Hayes' interpretation as well as my own, questions of gender and sexuality in Dib are inextricably entwined with other social processes, even in a text that so insistently avoids direct reference to the Algerian War, just as Wittig's *Les Guérillères* avoids direct reference to Vietnam and other sites of antiimperial struggle in the 1960s. If Dib suppresses allusions to his native country, it is not because of government censorship or the psychic repression of guilt and pain associated with memories of France's colonial wars —forces which, according to Lynn Higgins, explain the silences and indirect evocations of Algeria in the writing of Alain Robbe-Grillet and other French new novelists of the 1950s and 60s. Instead, Dib's avoidance of references to Algeria in 1962 has to do with his refusal to be reduced to the role of a cultural representative of his nation, an *ex-colonisé*, an *Arabe de service*. His implicit claim to be a *writer* who publishes in France, and in French, undermines the view tacitly advanced by Higgins, namely that in the literature of the 1960s, Algeria can adequately be understood as that which France represses, that which lies on or beyond the border of France's national consciousness.

Dib's presence in France, as well as his writings, attest to the fact that Algeria cannot be interpreted merely as an effect of France's repressed guilt about colonial war and anxiety about loss of empire. His writings, like those of Kateb Yacine, Assia Djebar, and many others, show that Algerians have their own subjectivities and their own struggles with national identity, whether in Algeria or in France, where millions of people of Algerian descent live. Because of the power differential between France and Algeria, Algerian writers such as Dib always consider Algeria, as well as the challenges posed by feminism, in a transnational frame. Dib's refusal to remain within the contours of a pre-given «colonized» or «third-world» Algerian identity is analogous to Wittig's refusal to identify herself as a woman, a member of a natural (and inferior) group. However, Dib's reconfigurations of gender and cultural identity in *Qui se souvient de la mer*, like his search for new literary forms and his futuristic evocation of a mythical «elsewhere», clearly retain their historical ties to the cataclysmic events of the Algerian War and the women who fought in it. Unlike Wittig, he does not single out one arena of struggle as the most fundamental or «final» one, but instead keeps in view the irreducible interconnection of sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and culture in struggles against domination.

Another writer of this period who interestingly contrasts with Wittig while sharing her concern with feminism and anticolonial struggles is André Schwarz-Bart. A French Jew of Polish descent whose parents were killed in concentration camps during World War Two, Schwarz-Bart fought in the French Resistance as a very young man. He later married the black Guadeloupean writer Simone Schwarz-Bart, who co-authored *Un Plat de porc aux bananes vertes* with him and published *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* in the same year that her husband published *La Mulâtresse Solitude*. As André Schwarz-Bart freely acknowledged at the time, Simone had a hand in writing *Solitude*, a novel that grew out of the Schwarz-Barts' research in Guadeloupe in the 1960s and that testifies to the transnational cultural, racial, and sexual politics of that period. In the course of the Schwarz-Barts' efforts to

collect oral histories in Guadeloupe, André had become interested in antislavery revolts in the Caribbean, particularly because of the history of slavery shared by new-world Africans and old-world Jews. Schwarz-Bart was aware that enslaved Africans had often drawn parallels in their stories and songs between their situation in the Caribbean colonies and that of the Jews in Egypt, whose fate had been made known to them through the process of forced Christianization on the new-world plantations. The recent enslavement of European Jews and their subjection to genocide by fascists intensified André Schwarz-Bart's interest in Caribbean slave revolts, especially the one that was said to have been led by Solitude, a mulatta slave born in late eighteenth-century Guadeloupe. In *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, the historical novel he would eventually write, Schwarz-Bart would link the history of slavery and resistance in colonial Guadeloupe to that of twentieth-century Jews and, implicitly, to that of third-world peoples of his own day as well. Moreover, his fine literary rendering of these histories would explore the changing configurations of racial and sexual identities that inform them.

Schwarz-Bart's protagonist is born to a West African (Diola) adolescent, Bayangumay, who was gang-raped by white sailors during the Middle Passage. The plantation steward gives the newborn girl the name Rosalie, which he takes from the register listing the slaves who have died on the property. Rejected by other slaves, including her mother, because of her light skin color and the circumstances of her conception, Rosalie is isolated and starved for affection. Especially after Bayangumay runs away with her lover, a pегleg African amputated by the master as punishment for a previous flight, Rosalie becomes increasingly rebellious and mentally unstable. As a house slave in the service of the master's young daughter, Rosalie engages in series of ambiguous acts that testify both to her rebelliousness and to her growing psychic fragility. For instance, she poisons the chickens she is charged with nourishing, thereby expressing her hatred of the masters as well as the anger and pain caused by her mother's abandonment and the slave community's refusal to nurture her. The girl's growing alienation is figured by her bizarre behavior, which includes barking like a dog: «*elle craignait maintenant de devenir autre, elle le craignait et le désirait, ... mais surtout elle le craignait atrocement: quelque chose de terrifiant, un chien, par exemple, comme on dit que certaines personnes mauvaises tournent*» (73). She ends up turning into a «zombie» (74) and going back to the fields, where she is repeatedly raped. It is at that point that she begins calling herself Solitude.

A novel based on the life of a historical personage who resembles the legendary Nanny of Jamaica, *La Mulâtresse Solitude* follows its central character from her initial state of slavery and abjection, through her brief assertion of her human dignity in her life as a runaway, to her death at the guillotine. After a considerable time as a field slave, Solitude is purchased, dressed in finery (but, like all slaves, left barefoot), and given voice lessons by Dangeau, an «enlightened» French philosopher-planter. She serves as an object of amusement and sexual exploitation for Dangeau and his guests, even as they loftily debate the morality of the institution of slavery. Slavery is abolished during the French Revolution in 1794, and when abolition is implemented in Guadeloupe the following year, Solitude joins other ex-slaves in forced labor for the planters, who have now been dubbed *agriculteurs*. As

the narrator comments wryly: «*Le régime y était doux, les fouets s'ornaient de petits rubans tricolors... Et puis ça n'était pas tout à fait l'esclavage.. on portait toujours le titre de citoyens, et l'on travaillait sur l'air de la nouvelle Marseillaise*» (85).

It is at the point where Solitude runs away and joins a group of maroons that the *mulatta*, previously reviled as an «*espèce de fiente jaune*» (88), finds companionship and manages to redefine herself as black. In the company of African women of many different cultures whose languages, dress, and gait she initially tries to imitate, she successfully negotiates her ambiguous identity as a mixed-race «fresh-water slave», that is, one who was born in the new world and has never known Africa. In a richly textured narrative to which I cannot do justice here, Schwarz-Bart shows that Solitude shares with the other maroons an inescapable condition of exile and displacement: no Africans in eighteenth-century Guadeloupe truly have a homeland to which they can return except symbolically, after death. Their Africa can never be anything more than a mythical «*île à Congos*» (117). In the course of the novel, the maroons come to terms with their condition of irrevocable displacement, abandoning fixed notions of identity in favor of flexible ones that must be rethought again and again. Their fantasies of returning to a homeland that they would find intact, their dreams of being reunited with a family and a community that speak their language, their identification of themselves and others in terms of race, color, and place of origin—all of these features of life under slavery are gradually given up as the runaways embrace an ongoing process of collective identity construction based on the shared experiences of slavery and *marronnage*. In Schwarz-Bart's text, «African» identity and the identity of black women come to be seen as being politically determined. Further, these identities are shown to be continually reconfigured in relation to changing historical circumstances.

Solitude becomes a sword-wielding warrior who is an inspiration to her band, but the text never presents her as a hero who has discovered «who she really is». Her greatest act of heroism is irreducibly ambiguous, since it doubles as a suicidal act of desperation committed by a woman who is perilously adrift, floating between identities and communities: «*Elle se levait, observait les gestes admirables des négresses, les imitait avec une sorte de frénésie, dans la joie ou dans la douleur; mais sans que ce doute sur elle-même ne se dissipât entièrement...*» (104). When Solitude rushes at an enemy soldier shouting «*Tuez-moi, tuez-moi*» (105), surprising him so much that he stands motionless as she runs him through with her sword, her act is retrospectively interpreted by her companions as a brilliant ruse. However, the text never provides a firm basis for accepting that interpretation, except as an enabling fiction generated by runaways in need of a figure who inspires hope and gives them strength.

The impossibility of establishing a stable identity is driven home when Solitude conceives a child with an African man, Maïmouni, who had run away upon arriving in Guadeloupe and had lived in complete solitude for many years, until the wandering maroon band stumbled upon his little house and garden. The act of conceiving the child, that is, of producing a new African Caribbean body, is at once physical and symbolic. Following his African custom, Maïmouni urges Solitude to join him in trying to imagine the child they might conceive as they have sex. «*[I]l voulait... qu'elle se représente tel organe, tel ligament précieux, afin de parachever*



l'action nourricière des esprits... Cependant, il ne sut jamais quel coeur attribuer à l'enfant. Il ne lui voulait pas un coeur d'Afrique, qui ne servirait de rien en terre étrangère, et non moins se résigna-t-il à un coeur de blanc, de nègre ou de mulâtre, un coeur battant au rythme obscur de la Guadeloupe» (120). This child remains an «*enfant inachevés*», not only in the sense that every human subject does, but more specifically in the sense that its parents never manage to invent a suitable symbolic network or construct a political identity that can survive in colonial Guadeloupe, because historical conditions prevent them from doing so.

Forced higher and higher into the mountains as they are pursued by the national guard, which is charged with returning them to their owners when slavery is officially reestablished in 1802, Solitude and the other runaways seek out an existence on the edge of a volcano. They take their last stand at the abandoned Danglemont plantation, occupying a position that formerly belonged to the masters, and confronting an army far more powerful than their small band. Here is Schwarz-Bart's rendering of the massive explosion that the slaves engineer in order to die in defiance rather than resubmit to slavery: «*l'Habitation Danglemont venait de sauter toute entière, projetant dans le même espace les hommes blancs et les autres, dans le même enchantement d'azur, dans une même défaite*» (131). However aestheticized it may be, this description clearly does not enact an explosion of subjectivity and sociality «in general», one that could be welcomed in a celebratory postmodern spirit; the historical event represented here rules out such a reading. Nor does Schwarz-Bart's description momentarily pulverize the social differences of colonial Guadeloupe in order to body forth a universalization of the slaves' subject position, achieved at the cost of their lives. The repetition of the word «same» offers a cue that this passage figures instead the deadly consequences of restoring the social and discursive order of the French Enlightenment, an order that subjects African Caribbean peoples to the abusive rule of white planters who withhold recognition of the blacks' humanity on the grounds that they are fundamentally different from them, «other» rather than the «same».

Solitude does not die in the explosion at the Danglemont plantation as she wished to do, but is captured and imprisoned until her child is born. At that juncture, her child is returned to the «*propriétaires de droit*» (132) and Solitude is executed at the guillotine. Before she dies, however, a black woman does her the honor of publicly acknowledging that she has just given birth by offering her «*une herbe dite de l'enfant Jésus et que l'on remet par brasses odorantes, agrémentées de pointes mauves, aux nouvelles accouchées*» (135). The black woman who honors Solitude in this way is an «*énorme négresse*» (136) who recalls the African women who had earlier helped Solitude to redefine her identity when she had escaped enslavement and joined the maroons. The black woman gives Solitude the strength and determination to perform a final act of defiance, which consists in announcing, in excellent French, to the large crowd that has assembled that she will not refresh herself at the fountain before walking to her death, as condemned prisoners traditionally do. «*Et, renversant la tête en arrière, laissant aller les globes somptueux de ses yeux —faits tout bonnement par le Seigneur, dit une légende, pour refléter les astres— elle éclata en un curieux rire de gorge... une sorte de chant très doux et sur lequel s'achèvent toutes les*

histoires, ordinairement, tous les récits de veillée, tous les contes relatifs à la femme Solitude de Guadeloupe...» (136).

These lines in Schwarz-Bart echo certain evocations of Nafissa in Mohamed Dib's *Qui se souvient de la mer*, where Nafissa's bright gleam is compared to a thunderbolt, which is in turn associated with the star-bombs exploding around the narrator (181). They also recall Wittig's *Les Guérillères*, where a black woman who touches the stars, «ses yeux... pâles comme des lunes», takes on immense proportions that signal her world-historical significance in a variety of cultural-political struggles across the globe. Like Dib, Schwarz-Bart focuses on the figure of a non-European woman whose historical and geopolitical location is constantly in view. Solitude's gender and sexuality are shaped at every point by the African, Caribbean, and European languages, cultures, and racialized social hierarchies of her world, even as she and her companions imagine other worlds and struggle to bring them into existence. Schwarz-Bart's Solitude certainly has a greater affinity with the black woman in *Les Guérillères* — a woman who has ties to Negritude, to African independence movements, to the Civil Rights and Black Power movements, and to 1960s feminist struggles — than to the «timeless» Amazons who appear again and again in Wittig's fiction, or to a lesbian subject who is understood to be «both global and particular, both universal and unique» («The Mark of Gender», 88).

In the epilogue to *La Mulâtresse Solitude*, Schwarz-Bart's narrator likens the human figures that may be imagined today by visitors at the Danglemont plantation to phantoms from another time who appear to travelers in another place, «*les fantômes qui errent parmi les ruines humiliées du Ghetto de Varsovie*» (140). His final words suggest one important interpretive frame for the novel and remind us that the journeys of the imagination are always rooted in histories that are often ugly, even murderous. But they indicate, too, that myriad identifications are possible and that a vast web of politicized connections such as the one between African and Jewish slaves, or between African slaves and their descendents in the Caribbean third world, can and should be woven across cultures throughout the world.

When considered alongside texts like *La Mulâtresse Solitude* and *Qui se souvient de la mer*, Wittig's writing can be seen to participate in a historically-grounded cultural politics that addresses the systematic effects of worldwide domination even as it engages readers in reflection on the continuous process of identity construction and reconstruction. To my mind, the aspects of her writing that speak to us today are those that call attention not just to the colonization of *the* unconscious (as if there were only one), but also to the commodification of bodies in a variety of historical contexts, the global sexual division of labor, and the forms of class exploitation that affect the multicultural work force. In some respects at least, Wittig's texts lend themselves «to all kinds of substitutions of persons» that suggest ways to forge links between many different kinds of struggles. Simultaneously, they remind us of the transformative power of «words... set bright and colorful in the kaleidoscope of the world, with its many revolutions in the consciousness as one shakes it» («The Mark of Gender», 83-84). To me, this is the most moving and valuable feature of her literary legacy.



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