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Márcia Cristine Agustini

CRACKIN' THE CODE OF POST-RACE: POST-1980s NOVELS AND POST-RACE DISCOURSES

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Prof.ª Dra. Eliana de Souza Ávila

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Márcia Cristine Agustini

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_____
Prof.ª Dr.ª Viviane M. Heberle
Coordenadora do Curso

Banca Examinadora:

_____
Prof.ª Dr.ª Eliana de Souza Ávila
Orientadora
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

_____
Prof.ª Dr.ª Susana Bornéo Funck
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

_____
Prof.ª Dr.ª Cláudia Junqueira de Lima Costa
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

_____
Prof.ª Dr.ª Magali Sperling Beck
Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina

_____
Prof.ª Dr.ª Cláudio Roberto Vieira Braga
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

_____
Prof.ª Dr.ª Peônia Viana Guedes
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

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ABSTRACT

The last decades has seen a shift in racial thought in the U.S. The discourses vary from the statement that the U.S. has moved beyond race to the post-racial neoliberalist discourse in which 'essential' identities are fragments of the social past and its continuance has the function of renewing race and racism. As these discourses gain ground in the U.S. society, the issue of fighting racism becomes more slippery. The present investigation analyzes the meanings attached to the rebirth of novels that deal with the concept of passing for white in this period and its relation with the fragmentation of the color line. More specifically, the aim of this dissertation is to unveil the forms through which *No Telephone to Heaven, Caucasia,* and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* respond to the discourses of racial liberalism and Critical Realism. Drawing upon Santiago's concept of in-betweenness and Butler's concept of performativity, this dissertation sought to analyze the novels chosen as rich sources of insight about the changing racial thought in the U.S.

Keywords: Post-race discourses. Abstract liberalism. Critical realism.

RESUMO

As últimas décadas registraram uma mudança no pensamento racial nos Estados Unidos. Os discursos variam da afirmação de que os Estados Unidos transcendeu a questão racial ao discurso neoliberalista pós-racial que considera identidades 'essenciais' como fragmentos de um passado social e sua continuação apenas renova os conceitos de raça e racismo. A medida que esses discursos se tornam dominantes nos Estados Unidos, a questão do combate ao racismo se torna mais incerta. A presente investigação analisa os significados ligados ao reaparecimento de romances que lidam com o conceito de 'passar por branco' neste período e sua relação com a fragmentação da 'color line'. Mais especificamente, o objetivo deste estudo é investigar a forma que *No Telephone to Heaven, Caucasia,* e *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* respondem aos discursos de liberalismo racial e Realismo Crítico. Com base no conceito de 'entre-lugar' de Santiago e o conceito de performatividade de Butler, esta tese procurou analisar as novelas escolhidas como fontes ricas de compreensão do pensamento racial nos Estados Unidos.

Palavras-chave: Discursos de pós-raça. Liberalismo Abstrato. Realismo Crítico.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. *CHAPTER ONE: THE HETEROGENEITY OF POST-RACE DISCOURSES ……..……01*

1.1 THE CONTEXT OF PASSING ……..…….. 03
1.1.1 Passing as performativity…….……..……...09
1.1.2 Passing and post-racialist discourses….……..…….14

1.2 THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT: INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THREE POST-1980S NOVELS..……...…..18
1.3 CONCEPTUAL PARAMETERS: THE HETEROGENEITY OF POST-RACE DISCOURSES….19
1.3.1. Abstract Liberalism…….23
1.3.2 Critical Realism…….…….…….29
1.4 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK ……..……..35
1.4.1 Hypotheses……..…….38
1.4.2 Chapter Outline…….……...……39

2. CHAPTER TWO: CONTEMPLATION AS RESISTANCE……...41

2.1 *NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN by Michelle Cliff*….…….42
2.1.1 Parents are destiny (?) ……..…….……42
2.1.2 London: contemplation …….....48
2.1.3 Clare and Imperial Icons – understanding her 'role'…..51
2.1.4 Returning to Jamaica ……...…..61
2.1.5 Closure…..…….....……..64
2.2 CONCLUSIONS…….……68

3. *CHAPTER THREE: TAKING A STAND…….……..……..71*

3.1 *CAUCASIA: A NOVEL by Danzy Senna.*……...…….…....71
3.1.1 Birdie's identification with blackness…….…...…...72
3.1.2 Passing for Black……...……76
3.1.3 Passing for White…….…….....84
3.1.4 Reencountering blackness – (dis)identification.……90
3.2 PERFORMANCES……..……..93
3.3 CONCLUSIONS…….……..……..95

4. *CHAPTER FOUR: BOUND TO U.S. CITIZENSHIP?*.....……...99
4.1 *THE GIRL WHO FELL FROM THE SKY by Heidi W. Durrow*.....99
4.1.1 Learning to be racialized…….……..…100
4.1.2 Rachel's 'whiteness'…….…….……....105
4.1.3 An in-between identity……..……..….109
4.1.4 Rachel and a changing perception of blackness.…….115
4.2 PASSING AND PERFORMATIVITY, REVISITED…...121
4.3 CONCLUSIONS……..…….125

5. CHAPTER FIVE: FINAL REMARKS....……..……..…..…129

5.1 MIXED IDENTITIES OR WHITEWASHING?.....130
5.2 PASSING IN A POST-RACE WORLD…….135
5.3 BLOOD AND BONES…….……..…...…..138

***6. REFERENCE LIST*……...……...……...141**

CHAPTER ONE

THE HETEREGENEITY OF POST-RACE DISCOURSES

Reginald G. Daniel, (a mixed race) Professor of sociology, writes about the 'discovery' of his blackness in his book *More than Black?: Multiracial Identity and the New Racial Order* (2002). Confused about his first grade teacher's insistence in classifying him as black, he asks his mother about it, and she confirms he is black. He insists, "But, Mommy, when you mix brown and white, you don't get brown or white, you get tan". He then concludes, "I could not understand how I could have Asian Indian and African and Native American and several European backgrounds and be 'Negro'" (2002, x).

Some elements stand out from this conversation. First, we notice performativity at work (see topic 1.1.1). It is through the act of reiteration of a norm – in this case, the one-drop rule – that Daniel is interpellated into constructing his racial identity against the U.S. discourse of racial binarism. The confirmation of the discourse of the one-drop rule by his mother and his teacher performs the reiteration of the cultural knowledge of the one-drop rule. Finally, Daniel's reasoning shows his disassociation from this knowledge.

The report of Daniel's 'doubts' about his racial status points to a changing perception of race in the U.S. These doubts comply with current narratives of the U.S. as moving 'beyond race' and towards an inclusivist global and multicultural citizenship (Melamed 2011, 141-142). Following this change in the perception of race, the term 'post-race' started to appear frequently in the media to describe Obama's U.S. (Cantiello 2011, Crenshaw 2011, Mitchell 2012). In fact, Obama's election in 2009 and his reelection in 2013 have brought about the hope that racism in the U.S. is declining. The issue of a liberalist thought and its connections with post-racialism will be examined in topic 1.3.1.

The general context of this investigation is the crisis installed in the concept of race by the dominant racial liberalist discourse. In this sense, it becomes meaningful to define what discourse means in this dissertation. I follow Michel Foucault's understanding of discourse as historically bounded. Foucault argues that discourse is constituted by a close relationship between language and social practice, the interrelation that allows for certain knowledges and practices to be perceived as permissible and desirable whereas others are perceived as reprehensible

and inappropriate. Hence, 'truths' and 'knowledges' are contextually and historically produced through discourses. Following Foucault, I define discourse as a system of thoughts that limits what can and what cannot be done, said, and thought regarding a specific issue.

This view of discourse rejects a humanist centered subject that expresses his will through language and draws instead on "a specific modality of power as discourse" (Butler 1993, 139). Language is one of the vehicles of power but this vehicle reinscribes its power as it is replicated in discourses that constitute subjects as such. As truths and knowledges are constituted, they constrain the subject to comply with them. That is, "the 'subject' is *produced* within discourse" (Hall 1997, 44). In this sense, the subject is an effect and propagator of discourse.

The specific context of this investigation regards the revival of the trope of passing for white in this so-called post-race period. 'Passing for white' refers to the social practice of mixed race[1] individuals who cross the racial border by 'pretending' to be white[2]. The existence of the trope of passing for white is related to the one-drop rule system. This set of rules punished individuals who had one drop of black blood and sought to cross the racial barrier by denying having black ancestry. The issue of passing is further examined in topic 1.1.

The reformulations that the trope of passing has faced in American literature after the 1980s reveal the maintenance of oppositional views of the phenomenon of race. I propose to investigate the theme of passing for white in narratives post 1980s and seek to unveil how they respond to the changing racial thought. The novels are *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff (1987), *Caucasia: a novel*[3] by Danzy Senna (1998), and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* by Heidi W. Durrow (2010). The guiding question regards whether current passing narratives represent a new discourse of whiteness (inclusivist whitening processes of racial liberalism) or question essentialist discourses of identity (based on a Critical Realist view of identity).

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[1] Even though the terms biracial and mixed race may implicate in different meanings, they are used interchangeably in this work to refer to people of white and black ancestry.

[2] I am aware of the fact that this definition of passing encloses an essentialist view of identity. Nevertheless, I use it here because this was the first meaning attributed to the trope of passing and it is still in vogue. See a more accurate definition of passing and the implications of the term in topic 1.1.

[3] For the sake of abbreviation, I will refer to this novel only as *Caucasia* from now on.

1.1 THE CONTEXT OF PASSING

Passing refers to identity traits that, not so obvious to the bare eye, can be consciously or unconsciously manipulated to convey different meanings. Pamela Caughie, however, adds that in the USA, "passing has historically denoted the social practice of light-skinned people of African descent assuming a white identity" (1999, 20). This initial meaning of passing, nevertheless, has soon been extended from the racial to other frontiers of identity such as gender and sex.

According to Steven J. Belluscio, two definitions of passing are still in vogue. The first definition is associated to the idea of identity as essence. In this definition, "passing means to conceal a unitary, essential, and ineffaceable racial identity and substitute it with a purportedly artificial one" (2006, 9). Still according to Belluscio, this conception is based on the idea that the individual who passed was, in fact, faking his/her 'true identity', and executing, for this purpose, acts of betrayal and deceptiveness towards the truthfulness of his/her genuine identity. The second definition associates passing with performance: identity in postmodern contexts cannot be seen as fixed or as an 'essence,' "but rather as a process-oriented performance drawing upon a seemingly infinite number of cultural texts, 'ethnic' or otherwise" (Belluscio 2006, 9). These cultural texts are, in Butler's theory of performativity, reiterative discourses that produce the subject as an effect of the very same discourse (see topic 1.1.1).

In the context of the one-drop rule and its legacy, the reiteration of racial identity produces the subject as either black or white. These identities are effects of the regulatory norm, which thus produces its subjects while purporting to reveal their essential traits. It is ironic, then, that the regulatory system makes way for its own disturbance – namely, the cultural construct of black-identified individuals passing for white. Once the binary logic denies the existence of in-betweens as a racial category, it also forces individuals with 'mixed blood' to pledge their allegiance to one or another racial group or seek some other form of racial identification. In addition, as in the dominant discourse of whiteness, the 'racialized other[4]' is any group but the white; these individuals are ultimately understood and classified as black. Advancing such a rigid classification, the racial binary system seeks to maintain its

[4] I follow here the distinction between *self* – usually attributed to a White European unified subjectivity; and *other* – as referring to the racialized fragmented subjectivity.

closed borders. Processes of cultural and racial integration are denied and reduced to disintegration instead. Thus, the system advocates its maintenance while ironically creating room for its own dissolution[5].

The rigidness of the one-drop rule, along with current economic and racial politics, made way to movements of multiracialism. To pass or not to pass was complicated by discussions regarding racial classification in the US especially after the change that occurred in the 1970 census. Differently from the previous census, in which individuals were racially classified by the enumerators, the census of 1970 permitted individuals to declare their color. These changes were already part of organizations' claims that pledged, among other things, for the inclusion of the option 'multiracial' in the 'race' section (McCarroll 2009). The inclusion of diverse categories in the census suggests that its purpose was mainly to prevent the US from becoming a non-white nation (Lomas 2005). The fact is that 'in-betweens' (which were previously identified as impure) have "only begun to 'count' in a more legitimate way in the past few decades as shifts in public identity and governmental classification have taken place" (McCarroll 2009, 205). These changes generated several debates, and even the attempt to 'return' to the one-race identification as opposed to the possibility of indicating ones' multiracial origins.

Even though the 2000 U.S. Census inaugurated the possibility to choose more than one race (Phillips et al. 2007), these changes in the U.S. racial constitution did not mean the end of racism. As Mary Romero puts it: "41 years after President Lyndon Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act, racial inequality and social division continue to be evident throughout our courts, schools, media, corporations, and neighborhoods" (2005, 608).

F. James Davis points out that this repressive system of racial differentiation has been regarded as one of the most important springboards of passing (in Belluscio 2006). Historical facts attest this reality. After the end of slavery, the dream of freedom soon turned into scenes of racial hatred that included segregationist laws, lynching scenes and attacks from Ku Klux Klan[6]. These events culminated in a legal

[5] This issue is further complicated with the effective insertion of liberalist ideas on race (see topic 1.3.1).

[6] The fear of rape of white women by black men came to institutionalize the practice of lynching black men for any crime. Between the years of 1876 and 1965, several laws (that came to be known as the Jim Crow laws) established racial segregation in the USA. Among them, there were segregationist laws that regulated the use of public facilities such as schools

sanction to segregation in 1896. Under the epithet of Jim Crow laws, segregation extended to several public facilities such as schools and public transportation. In practice, these laws prevented blacks from the South to access facilities of a higher standard that would eventually help them reach a more egalitarian status to that of white citizens. These tight measures of mobility and access not only worked in favor of passing (Belluscio 2006) but also converted this act into the only readily accessible mechanism to trespass the unfairness of these acts.

Siding with prejudice over racialized bodies, the law guaranteed the inaccessibility of higher income or any type of socio-economic advance. The rigidness of the racial system and the difficulties it created for economic advancement led the issue of class to appear in narratives of passing from the 1970s on (Belluscio 2006). Still according to Belluscio, among the reasons the passer finds to pass for white in these narratives is the aim of acquiring economic privilege.

The economic issue, however, is not the only one that propelled individuals to pass. Blacks had been considered inferior from the colonial period to the early 20th century. In this period, eugenic methods sought to legitimize the hierarchical classification of human beings according to racial characteristics. Scientific studies and 'discoveries' in North America were used to 'confirm' the inferiority of Afro-descendants by placing them "at the bottom of the racial totem pole" (Belluscio 2006, 42). One of these 'discoveries' declared, for instance, that this racial group had a lower mental age in comparison to other groups in the United States (Belluscio 2006). The purpose of these statements was very clear: to justify slavery in the consciousness of whites, and to inflict upon blacks the notion of essential limitations that would justify their exploitation.

Elaine K. Ginsberg states: "[o]ne of the assumed effects of a racist society is the internalization by members of the oppressed race, of the dominant culture's definitions and characterizations" (Ginsberg 1996, 9). Ginsberg argued that this persistent and constant campaign into diminishing the value of blacks also raised the need to repudiate this identity and thus to welcome the idea of passing.

The contradictions raised by the act of passing has led narratives that deal with this trope to adopt a resolution to the passer. Even though

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and public transportation by blacks and whites (Kawash 1997). Ku Klux Klan was an organization that fought for the white supremacy and, according to Maria Giulia Fabi, became more "active after the Civil War" (2001, 50).

passing represents an identity *in-between* the black and the white identity, passing narratives have inclined to find a resolution to the in-betweenness of this identity. The tendency has been to 'embrace blackness' and/or to 'return to experiences of authenticity'. This 'choice', nevertheless, reflects the "master narrative of the one-drop rule, which dictates that the protagonists of these fictions must inevitably embrace a 'black' identity as a condition of narrative closure" (Wald 2000, 33). This way, these narratives become "sites where antiracist and white supremacist ideologies converge, encouraging their black readers to 'stay in their places' through the cultural opposition of passing with norms of racial authenticity and health" (Smith, qtd. in Wald 2000, 33). Anti-racist interventions are thus co-opted, absorbed, or assimilated into white supremacist discourse – their contestatory effects, neutralized.

Steven J. Belluscio analyses the novels *An Imperative Duty* (William Dean Howells) and *Iola Leroy*, or *Shadows Uplifted* (Frances E. W. Harper). According to him, these novels present the question 'to pass or not to pass?' for the first time as a central issue. Both were published in 1892. The closure portraying a negative or an affirmative answer to the question of passing poses that the solution to this dilemma was perceived as "an act of perceived cultural betrayal or an act of perceived racial allegiance" (Belluscio 2006, 55).

In her analysis of *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Johnson 1912), "The Sleeper Wakes" (Fauset 1920), and *Passing* (Larsen 1929), Gayle Wald also points to the issue of closure. According to Wald, in these texts racial passing "is shown to be a highly unstable means of transcendence, as each of the protagonists pursues a project of social and economic protection or 'betterment'" (Wald 2000, 28). The occupation of a 'white and dominant' culture – that is, passing for white – forces the black subject to disregard his black identity and, in this process, to constrain part of his being. The contradictions this process originates make the act of passing a source of angst and anxiety which is eventually resolved "with the passer's rejection of passing" (Wald 2000, 28). That is, the passer's internal anxiety with the denial of an important and battered element of his or her identity will eventually force this individual to take a stand towards blackness.

Assuming a black identity became more and more plausible as narratives of racial pride and civil rights proliferated. By viewing the act of passing as betrayal, these narratives interpellated the mixed race

individual to 'choose' a black identity in order not to be rejected by his or her community. The elements of this 'return to blackness', however, include narratives of rejection by the black community regarding the denial of blackness that these individuals' skin represents. There is no possibility of resolution in these novels without belittling one or another discourse. While black discourses have pledged a return to a communitarian identity, dominant discourses have claimed the fragmentation of the identity and, in this account, reinforced the value of the individual. In universalizing discourses of identity, this construct is seen as dispersed and unique, and the group becomes secondary.

As we can see, the destiny of the passer is closely related to his 'choice'. Following the logic of the critical realist postulation that individuals cannot (easily) transcend their spatial and temporal location, Spickard (2003) points out that mixed individuals' 'choice' of a multiracial identity seem to be related to middle-class and connections with whiteness. Spickard then cites Kerry Ann Rockquemore's (1998) research in which biracial individuals raised in middle-class white neighborhoods identified mostly as biracial whereas biracial individuals raised in black communities had a tendency to identify themselves as black. Elam further argues that mixed race individuals who claim to be oppressed by monoracial communities "indeed have the racial profile of white people to the extent that they do not fully recognize themselves as racialized and thus are oblivious to color hierarchies from which they benefit socially" (Elam, 2011, 55).

In spite of diverging types of closure passing narratives have tended to adopt, the contradictions originated by the mixed-race identity raised the tradition of the 'tragic *mulatto'*. The "tragic *mulatto*" refers to mixed-race characters in literature who, due to their in-between racial situation, face difficulties to fit in either the 'white world' or the 'black world'. In this scenario, "[p]assing is oftentimes presented as the solution to this dilemma" (Radtke 2006, 19).

Nevertheless, this solution brought about several difficulties for mixed race individuals such as the anxiety of being constantly performing an identity other than their 'real one'. In addition, the fear of being discovered in their disguise requested mixed race individuals to be apart from black family members that would denounce the mixed nature of the passer (Rummell 2007). These difficulties led to a tragic ending. The fate of these characters often enclosed madness and the death of the passer (Pilgrim, 2000, Raimon 2004).

The first passing stories appeared in American literature in the 19th and 20th centuries (Pilgrim 2000). They invariably dealt with the figure of the *mulatto* as tragic. The author Lydia Maria Child is usually credited with introducing the literary character that we call the tragic *mulatto* in two short stories: 'The Quadroons' from 1842 and 'Slavery's Pleasant Homes' from 1843 (Pilgrim 2000). Other foundational writers that dealt with passing narratives and the figure of the tragic *mulatto* are William Wells Brown with the novel *Clotel* (1853), Harriet Beecher Stowe with the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and Harriet Wilson with the novel *Our Nig* (1859). Even though appearing quite a while later, Larsen's *Passing* (1928) has often appeared as a symbolic work in the 'tragic *mulatta'* tradition.

An important advertence regarding the trope has to be made, however. Even though called by the generalizing male epithet 'tragic *mulatto'*, the gender of the passer was often female (Fabi 2001, 10; Raimon 2004, 5). Maria Giulia Fabi (2001, 10) argues that, while the black man engages in more combative acts of resistance, the women are most often alone in their endeavor. That is, whereas women are represented as dealing with the injustice of the U.S. binary racial system by distancing themselves from the black community in order to 'pass' for white, men are represented as engaging in a communitarian form of resistance.

In this binary racial system, the visibility of the mixed race individual was seen as a problem to be solved. In order to confer authority to the racial system, any uncertainty regarding an individual's racial classification had to be erased. One instance of this attempt at reinforcing the strength of the color line was the development of "a complex typology of visual markers that would assure classifying observers that they would know one when they saw one". These visual markers worked as a guarantee of racial identification, and they were extended to *mulatto* fiction in which "there is always a telling mark that reveals the truth of the drop of black blood" (Kawash 1997, 133). That is, the precariousness of 'first appearances' found in the establishment of visual markers a guarantee that the binary system was not seriously threatened and the order was reestablished. At least initially, the possibility of contamination that the existence of these individuals represented could be contained within these markers.

In her book *Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African-American Literature* (1997), Samira Kawash

analyzes the perpetuation of the ‘color line’ in the U.S. imaginary. Analyzing Chesnutt novels, Kawash concludes, “[r]ace is supposed to be the truth of the body; but the narrator’s continual passing reveals that the body can neither be nor have such a thing as race” (Kawash 1997, 148). The racial instability raised by this ‘revelation’ threats the color line and frees racial identities of essentialisms. As we can deduct, passing novels deal with the limits of the color line. That is one of the reasons passing novels are rich sites to analyze the construction and perpetuation of racial issues.

Having dealt with the meanings raised by the concept of passing and its historical context, we now turn to current views of passing as performativity.

1.1.1 Passing as performativity

Narratives of passing and their endeavors into the ‘black’ and ‘white’ world bring several issues to the matter of race and lead us to the theory of performativity. The term performativity comes from J. L. Austin’s speech acts theory, but it has been enhanced by Butler’s work. A performative produces an effect through naming it. For instance, the baptism of a child brings into being the relation between that baby and that name. Similarly, performativity is a discursive practice that constitutes itself by reiteration and citation (Butler 1993).

In this equation, identity is subjected by culturally determined performatives. This process occurs when the reiteration of norms constitutes the subject as its effect. In other words, there is no subject of performance, only the effect of a subject constituted by performativity. Performatives and its reiterational aspect work as a “regulatory apparatus” that constrains the acts of the subject. Performatives regulate behaviors to the extent that agency is “conditioned by those very regimes of discourse/power” and, therefore, “cannot be conflated with voluntarism or individualism” (Butler 1993, 15).

Agency in this scenario is restricted. The law produced by the citational act “mobilize[s]” the performance of the subject, even though the subject does not necessarily act “in compliance with the law” (Butler 1993, 12). The interpellations that subject the individual are received by the subject that, empowered by the misrecognition of the call (and Butler argues, following Louis Althusser, that there never is an exact match between the performative and the subject it names), may question

it. The call is not deterministic; rather, the subject that perceives the call can question it.

Butler argues that there is no identity subscribed in the body. The repetition of performative 'acts' are what constitute gender as we come to know it. Hence, what we come to know as the male and female gender, for instance, is an *effect* of the reiteration of culturally constructed acts. The knowledge of the performative in the making of gender discloses the instability of these performances and opens the possibility of interpretation and re-signification of these performances.

The space between the citational act and the performance of the subject is where the theory of performativity helps in the understanding of changing racial configurations. As the citational act is reiterated and constitutes the subject as its effect, it also gives space for detours and the questioning of established norms. As established norms of 'blackness' are questioned by passing mixed race individuals, new propositions are brought about. The repetition of these 'deviated norms' along with the interpretation given to them may either install or discard new discourses on racial configuration.

Hence, identity cannot be reduced to *an effect of discourse*, constructed in discourse. Agency is produced by the misrecognition of the call *but also in the interrelation between the agent and the social structure* (Hall, 1994, Carter and Verdee 2008). As pointed out in the introduction to this study (topic 1), language and social practice are in a continuous dispute to establish the knowledges perceived as permissible and acceptable. Being the act of an individual often alone in their endeavor, the concept of passing becomes a fruitful terrain on which to observe the construction of knowledges and *Truths* regarding race.

Critics and writers such as Kawash (1997), Belluscio (2006), Pamela L. Caughie (1999), Fabi (2001), Ginsberg (1996), Wald (2000), among others, have extensively discussed the concept of passing. The first debates emerged at a moment when discussions about identity linked the self to essentialist ideas. Individuals were said to have inherent characteristics, which would define their beings. Nevertheless, the postmodern concept of identities being fragmented and unstable challenged this conception of the self and, consequently, the notion of an essential self.

The act of passing, seen as an act of unfaithfulness to one's *true* self, was then reviewed into a notion of performativity. With performativity theory, identity (and any identity trait such as race)

comes to be understood as a response to cultural discourses. In this sense, reiterative cultural texts of 'white superiority' along with the one-drop rule produce the effect of mixed race subjects that do not 'declare' their blackness as *passing*.

The interrelation between the concept of passing and performativity brings the fluid aspect of identities to the fore. According to Anoop Nayak, racial identity is a 'project' that is never totally completed (2006, 414). The interpellation of the subject as racialized is always a process of reification. The consideration that racial identity is an 'incomplete project' has to be inevitably expanded to include all processes that are informed by this cultural construct. This view permits passing to be seen in a malleable way that encloses the cultural text, but it also allows for the contestation of customary ways of reading these narratives.

In her article called "Slippery Language and False Dilemmas: The Passing Novels of Child, Howells, and Harper" (2003), Julie Cary Nerad works with narratives in which the characters are unintentionally passing[7]. With this study, Nerad starts by questioning the use of the term passing that for her "wrongly presupposes an essential being that would come before this one" (2003, 817). The importance of this conclusion is elided, she argues, by studies that inadvertently seek to find the 'true self' of these individuals in their allegedly first identity allegiance: the black race. According to Nerad, reading these performances of racial identity as passing endorses the racist discourses offered by society regarding race. One of the stronger facets of the discourse of passing is, obviously, the fact that individuals have to choose a side of the racial binary and not doing so consequently invalidates their identity. Nerad disagrees with this view and foregrounds that it is exactly the instability of these individuals in relation to binary categories that should be regarded as central to their identity, not the dilemma of choosing to pass or not to pass.

The strength of Nerad's conclusion is in the realization that the undefined and unstable self should be seen as the actual identity of these individuals. That is, these individuals are not black individuals pretending to be white; they are individuals seeking to compose the understanding of their identities. From these considerations, Nerad develops radical politics by stating that the common sense view of these

[7] These characters are not aware of having blood connection to a black ancestor.

characters as passing should be rejected. In other words, Nerad's position is that these individuals are not passing in the sense of betraying one or another racial group; they are instead living the experience of being irreducible to categorical identities. This understanding reinforces the use of the term post-race to acknowledge the development of new forms of perceiving racial performances without automatically labeling them as dispersing racial struggle.

John L. Jackson and Martha S. Jones's concept of passing is similar to that of Nerad. For these authors, passing constitutes identity through routine and repetition. The passer is not faking an identity, he is "demanding appreciation of the idea that all identities are processual, intersubjective, and contested/contestable" (in Elam 2007, 750). This view of passing is in contrast with notions of passing that nominate it as deceiving or contestatory. That is, passers are neither faking a new identity (hence denying their 'essence') nor have they moved beyond their historical time and sought to contest their 'given' identity (Elam 2007).

Kawash (1997) discloses the logic of the common sense in the understanding of acts of passing. According to this logic, the passers are dealing only with the visible, hence, hiding their 'true and unchangeable' identities. That is, Kawash takes issue with the conventional interpretation of passing that assumes that 'being' comes before 'appearance' and that appearance should coincide with being. This assumption understands the racialized individual "as the bearer of a racial being" (1997, 136). According to Kawash, 'commonsensical interpretation' complies with the first view of passing in which the passer is someone who 'fakes' his true being.

Kawash proposes a form of seeing racism based on the color line. She argues that "the modern epistemology of race posits a distinctive being, an essence if you will, as the basis for racial distinction, and yet at the extreme this essence is revealed to be nothing more than the distinction itself" (Kawash 1997, 148). She complements her reasoning by adding that the only measurable difference between black and white is in the color of their skin. With this reasoning, Kawash displaces the notion of essence connected to racialized identities and approximates the view of race and racism as performative acts grounded on cultural information. This view of race complies with the post-race view I want to consolidate. The instability of the concept of race along with the Critical Realist view of identities as non-essential but as a source of

common knowledge become the central features to be taken into consideration when analyzing race and racism.

Following this reasoning, debates regarding 'essence' and 'authenticity' become displaced. The blood boundary, nevertheless, exists since its effects are real (Kawash 1997). Kawash cites the case of the narrator in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (Johnson 1912) who is constantly referred back to his racial blood connections: "Even as his body cannot be located as the truth of his race, it becomes the site and the source of racial discipline and racial subjectification" (1997, 149). In this regard, the author continues, cultural discourses aiming at maintaining the color line take issue with any character who 'passes', for it is the 'natural order' established by the racial system that is being questioned through this transgression.

The first cultural view of passing that implicates in a notion of truth or falsity presents the problem of the passer's authenticity as a dilemma. This dilemma is, nevertheless, epistemologically false. We may wonder if the passer is black or white, but this questioning can only come from the assumption that appearance and essence are somehow connected. Authenticity can only be an issue if passing is conceived as "a mask or persona, or the appropriation or theft of another group's identity papers [. . .] maintaining the belief (politically if not theoretically) that there is a 'true' or 'given' identity beneath or behind the performance of the (in)authenticity" (Caughie 1999, 24).

Passing, therefore, cannot be seen as a 'choice' in the sense that it refers to the passer's reading of his political, social, and cultural possibilities brought about by narratives of race (Caughie 1999). The effects of this so-called 'choice' are the questioning of established privilege and the destabilization of identity (Ginsberg 1996). It is at this moment that identity becomes an issue. Ginsberg argues that the identity crisis originated by this destabilization allows for the inquiry of established truths and the realization that they are not as truthful and stable as thought.

The anxiety originated by the glimpse of this conclusion may arouse different kinds of response. One of them is fear. Passing threatens the status quo since it establishes identities as fluid. The perception of identities as fluid disrupts established cultural views of blackness and whiteness. It questions the existence of identity boundaries and hence the attributes given to each race within the binary (Caughie 1999). According to Daniel, passing complicates the stability

of whiteness because it "attests to the fact that whiteness can be performed or enacted, donned or even discredited if not convincingly performed" (2002, 83). Similarly, Ginsberg (1996) argues that passing becomes a threat to the supremacy of the white identity as it mocks the fragility of the color line. The impossibility of identifying races by the *Truth* of the body not only questions the validity of black identity but of white identity, as well.

Meredith McCarroll, however, observes that passing does not necessarily provoke changes in the racial system as a whole simply by denouncing the arbitrariness of the color line (2009, 2004). Stemming from the view that race is performative; this criticism is reviewed by the notion that discourses of race are highly effective in producing and reproducing race. Narratives of passing and its criticism may help maintain or disrupt cultural concepts such as that of race depending on how they are presented.

The instability of the concept of passing has been further complicated by the emergence of a post-race scenario. The next topic will discuss the theme of passing in light of post-race narratives. That is, the connections between post-race discourses and passing are acknowledged.

1.1.2 Passing and post-racialist discourses

Novels that dealt with the trope of passing abounded particularly in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Well known examples are short stories and novels such as "The Wife of His Youth" (1899), and *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900) by Charles W. Chesnutt; *An Imperative Duty* (1892) by William Dean Howells; Iola Leroy, or *Shadows Uplifted* (1892) by Frances E. W. Harper, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) by James Weldon Johnson; *The Sleeper Wakes* (1920) by Jessie Redmon Fauset; and *Passing* (1929) by Nella Larsen.

From the second part of the 20th century to most of the 21st, narratives of passing practically disappeared. The rebirth of narratives of passing coincided with the 1980s intellectual movement named Afrocentrism[8]. Afrocentrism was, in fact, partially responsible for the

[8] According to Molefi Kete Asante, Afrocentrism "is a theoretical and philosophical perspective [. . .] based on the idea that interpretation and explanation derived from the role of the Africans as subjects is most consistent with reality" (in Cashmere 2004, 16).

reenacting the 'forgotten' narratives of victimization (and passing) in the 1990s (Early 2008). Gerald L. Early argues that the recently acquired power to express 'blackness' conquered through the U.S. Civil Rights Movement gave voice to these dying narratives. The visibility reached by the black community through these movements and the consequent interest in studying this phenomenon recuperated the narratives that dealt with the black experience. It seems, in fact, that the renewed interest in Africanity should work as a propeller of these narratives, recuperating old ones.

From the first narratives of passing to those published after the 1980s, the trope of passing has undergone intense reformulations. If, on the one hand, the black community claims the value of a united racial group, on the other hand, mixed race individuals claim for the need to acknowledge the existence of multiracial categories.

The claim to acknowledge the existence of multiracial categories has brought about a new prism through which passing is seen. Whereas previous passing novels dealt with the rigid discourse of the one-drop rule and an overtly marked whiteness, current passing novels deal with the promotion of 'multicultural identities' and an assimilationist notion of whiteness. The tone of the narrative is allowed to move from the tragic *mulatto* motif to a celebration of mixed race.

Indeed, in the wake of the twentieth century, the figure of the *mulatto* inspires different readings. This once tragic figure becomes a celebratory figure and symbol of a presumed racial equality in the U.S. Elam argues that this movement has changed the perspective through which the tragic *mulatto*[9] has become a symbol for national integration: "If once *mulattos* stood as testimony of racial inequity, now they are frequently invoked as fleshly confirmation that racial equality has arrived and, thereby, fulfilled part of the nation's providential destiny" (Elam 2011, 7).

The quintessential novel of passing that dealt with the one-drop rule and an overtly marked whiteness is Larsen's *Passing*. Even though the story does not conform to the stereotype of this type of narrative[10] (Tate 1980), some elements are notoriously similar to other passing stories. The similarity is in the passer's need to conform to the rigidity

[9] Indeed, the term *mulatto* – which has been associated to tragedy, has currently been replaced by other terms such as mixed-race and biracial.

[10] Kendry does not suffer with the expected anguish at the betrayal of her black identity and her socialization with blacks is not based on solidarity but search of excitement (Tate 1980, 142).

of the one-drop rule. Clare Kendry's passing encloses the need to keep her racial origin an absolute secret. In order to do so, she needs to avoid her black family and friends. Only by following these rules, Clare is able to access the privileges of whiteness by marrying Jack Bellew, a wealthy and *racist* white man. The 'discovery' of her 'true racial identity' would inevitably mean rejection and the loss of privilege.

Current passing novels disclose a residual one-drop legacy. The possibility of being discovered does not necessarily encompass rejection and the loss of privilege anymore. In addition, passing is associated with 'choosing' a side of the binary more than 'hiding' one's 'true self'. Kaylen Danielle Tucker (2008) points to an intrinsic difference between choosing and passing. According to the author, the former practice of passing had the element of pretense and hide foregrounded whereas choosing reproduces the post-racialist logic of race as a lesser element of one's identity.

In fact, what has happened in this so-called post-race era is an 'upgrade' in relations of passing. As we have seen, the politics of multiculturalism has promoted a view in which racialized individuals can be accepted as long as they show their availability to integrate the social environment without representing a threat. Following Melamed and Mitchell's perception that race has been disconnected from phenotype, racialized individuals have been able to 'pass', not necessarily as corporeally white but as culturally white (in Melamed's denomination, as U.S. universal citizens). As these individuals absorb the white culture (in Crenshaw's denomination, acknowledge the preferences of the majority) (see topic 1.3.1), these individuals experience the shift from the one-drop rule of blackness to the one-drop rule of whiteness. The racist strategy of whitewashing welcomes new 'members' and replaces the former racist strategy of stigmatization.

The replacement of the former racist strategy of stigmatization redresses the trope of passing. The novelty of this new form of passing is that it was otherwise a 'privilege' of mixed race individuals and, in this 'post-race' age, it accounts for any racialized individuals that seek to integrate the U.S. mainstream whiteness. In this sense, passing comes to mean not the denial of the one-drop of black blood but accepting the white dominant culture.

In fact, this form of passing creates a schism between old forms of passing. Even though it has been argued that the act of passing for white of a single individual does not necessarily disrupt the status quo

(McCarroll, topic 1.1.1), the act of recognizable racialized individuals passing for 'white' – that is, performing whiteness in order to be accepted – seems to be more potentially disruptive. That is so, because this form of passing encourages a wider number of racialized individuals to escape blackness and exclusion. Secondly, the 'promotion' of some once racialized individuals into whiteness works for the argument that individual success is available for everybody. Hence, it reinscribes racism by addressing (most) blacks' difficulty to progress as personal failure instead of pertaining to a racist societal structure.

This logic transforms former 'tragic *mulatto'* narratives into narratives of personal quest. The traditional discourse of the one-drop rule of blackness seen in Larsen's *Passing*, for instance, is substituted by a neoliberal discourse of the one-drop rule of whiteness. By focusing on the fact that mixed race individuals are black *and* white, these narratives allow for the re-racialization of blacks who do not manage to assimilate into a renewed U.S. citizenship. The whitewashing of the mixed race identity nullifies attempts at pursuing this identity as non-essentialist and challenging racial dichotomies and borders. The predominance of this neoliberal narrative of race is combated in this study, as we will see subsequently, by a Critical Realist view of race. Even though current narratives of race point to the fragmented aspect of these identities (as a form of acknowledging their universal multicultural character); this does not need to mean the end of anti-racist politics.

Finally, the resurgence of the concept of passing in literature as well as its continual reproduction in the daily lives of 'black' U.S. citizens confirms the fact that the U.S has not moved beyond race (Elam 2011, Mitchell 2012). It seems that current forms of passing overlap old forms and constitute an intricate post-race scenario. These forms and the meanings they bring about will be taken into consideration in the analysis of the novels proposed for this study. Subsequently, the corpus is briefly examined.

1.2 THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT: INTRODUCTORY NOTES ON THREE POST-1980S NOVELS

These initial debates into the meanings of passing have not remained in the past. They are found in novels that are more

contemporary and will be examined in this dissertation. From various post-1980s novels that deal with the theme of passing for white, I have selected three. As pointed out in the introduction, the novels chosen are *No Telephone to Heaven* (Cliff 1987), *Caucasia* (Senna 1998), and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* (Durrow 2010).

Besides dealing with the trope of 'passing for white', the choice of these novels was also related to the moment they were published. Starting in 1987 and ending in 2010, a period of a little more than 10 years sets each publication apart. The intention was to enclose a wide range of time through which opposing issues such as individualism and communitarianism, universalism and particularism, colorblind and race-conscious discourses came through[11]. As discussed previously, these issues are related to the ascension of racial liberalism and the emergence of the view of the U.S. as post-race.

Besides the theme of passing, other issues in common among these three novels are the fact that the main passing figure is female and that they were written by women. These facts lead to the next similarity – the relation between these authors' life experiences and their writing. Following a tendency among novels that deal with multiracial identities, these three novels present an autobiographical vein.

Spickard (2001) observes that there has been a boom in biracial biographies in the U.S. This engagement with autobiographies, especially in twentieth century female African-American writing, sprouts with the need to value "the experience of growing up black in a racist world, as writers both chart and resist victimization while moving beyond protest narrative to autobiographically bear witness to the costs of their psychic and political survival" (Smith and Watson 1998, 25).

In autobiographical African-American narratives, writers engage in identity issues. Cliff's, Senna's, and Durrow's writings are the result of their engagement with their own personal and social stories and their reflection upon the meanings of being interpellated as black. In an interview, for instance, Cliff informs us that she was engaged with racial politics at the time she was writing the novel. She recognizes that some elements in her narrative refer to her personal historical moment – that is, her experience. Nonetheless, she states, "the novel isn't completely

[11] Further research on the theme, in fact, could expand on the corpus by bringing either present novels or other novels from the past to make up a more thorough study of the historical meanings perpetrated by post-race passing narratives.

autobiographical because I'm more of a survivor than she is" (Cliff 1993, 606).

Caucasia, by Danzy Senna, is also "decidedly autobiographical" (Edwards 1998). For Brian Edwards, even though Senna has not personally acknowledged it, in *Caucasia* author and character reflect upon the contradictory meanings brought about in the life of a biracial child. Senna talks about her life and lets us glimpse at the topics brought about by her novel:

> [I]t was the contradictions in my own life that most confounded me: the experience of 'looking white' and identifying as black. My mother, a white poet and novelist, and my father, a black scholar of race and history, were both smitten with the black power politics of the 1960s and 70s and believed that a strong black identity was the way to help my siblings and me survive the racism of the world (in Edwards 1998).

The autobiographical aspect in Durrow's novel, on the other hand, is less evident. Durrow herself clarifies that the facts of the main character's life are not hers, but the experience with biracialism is. She says: "The story of *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* is not my story, but I have borrowed from what I know – my own life experiences to make the characters richer" (Durrow 2012).

The concept of passing and current changes in the perception of race (and more specifically blackness) make up the core of this study. This analysis will be carried out in the intersection between the emerging (and prevailing) post-racialist discourse and the tools Critical Realism offers us to combat its presuppositions. The intersection of these two discourses leads us to the theoretical framework and the guiding hypotheses to be pursued in this dissertation.

1.3 CONCEPTUAL PARAMETERS: THE HETEROGENEITY OF POST-RACE DISCOURSES

The changes in the discourse of passing are related to the current post-race period. As the discourse of race changes, so does the practice of passing. As discussed in the topic about passing (topic 1.1), master narratives associated race mostly with essentialism, authenticity, the one-drop rule, and the color line. Nevertheless, the changes in the perception of race disrupt these narratives and bring about different

discourses on race. These discourses produce differing forms of perceiving and acting upon the constructs of race and racism.

As we will see subsequently, the current and dominant discourse of race is that of racial liberalism. In this discourse, the term post-race is used to advance the master narrative of the end of race and racism – an end taken for granted on the basis of the successful debunking of racial essentialism. Race is thus mistakenly reduced to racial essentialism. In order to confront this simplistic view, I use Critical Realism, which appropriates the notion of race as a historical reality which still needs to be contended with. Race is a construct rather than an essence – yet a construct which performs real effects in the ongoing constitution and reconfiguration of reality. Critical Realism recuperates the notion of racial identity and redresses the term post-race as accounting for the crisis in the discourse of race. The analysis of these differing post-race discourses will be followed by a brief presentation of the theoretical parameters and the research framework designed to investigate these changes.

First, and in order to understand the interdependence between current race discourse and practice and the fact that race and racism remain fundamental features of racial relations in the U.S., a brief examination regarding the historical and economic issues behind them will be taken into account.

For quite a while now, black identity has been largely associated with ‘belonging’ to the black community. Belonging, in turn, has meant complying with the reiteration of normative racial divisions. The consistency of black identity, however, reinforced the perception of blacks as a unified group with either essential or cultural characteristics. The result is that blacks have been constituted as an entity apart from whites and other racial groups in U.S. history.

As Jennifer L. Hochschild and Vesla Weaver tell us, the one-drop rule of blackness was one of the forces in this direction. This rule has functioned as a model of racialization and prescribes that having any blood kinship with a black person automatically classifies the individual as such. It is not physical appearance, therefore, but ancestry that has been the main criterion for racial classification in this system. Laws enacted in the 1920s and 1930s reinforced the binary view of the racial system. The laws worked in both fronts: whites came to fail to notice cultural, ethnic or other differences among these heterogeneous groups and those affected by the one-drop rule sought to identify with

predominant forms of black expression "because engagement with colorism[12] would war with a strong sense of racial identity" (Hochschild and Weaver 2007, 656).

The one-drop rule and the binary system of race started to change after the end of World War II until at least the 1990s (Hochschild and Weaver 2007, Melamed 2011, Mitchell 2011). World War II helped this change because black U.S. citizens who fought in this war became more aware of their participation in the U.S. state. At the same time, politics to end racism started to be sponsored from state powers. In the U.S., this politics was associated, among other things, to the contradictions originated in World War II and Cold War. World War II because the U.S. "claimed to be fighting an antiracist and antifascist war, while practicing racism and fascism against people of color in the United States"; and in Cold War, "racism in the United States [. . .] became one of the chief propaganda weapons in the Soviet Union's arsenal" (Melamed 2006, 4).

This contradiction was understood to be hindering the U.S. advancement. The apparent elimination of racism was then pursued through the reinforcement of the egalitarian status of the 'American' citizen. In this scenario, the color line is disregarded. This disregard for the color line allows blacks to ascend to 'American citizenship' but also reassigns the stigma of race. The stigma now changes from phenotype to the ideological, economic, and cultural making of identities (Melamed 2006, 2).

W. J. T. Mitchell points out that the need to reinforce the internal U.S. border has produced the figure of the 'enemy of the U.S. nation' in which "[a]nyone, it seems, is now a candidate for racialization" (2012, 29). In this sense, Jodi Melamed continues, "traditionally recognized racial identities – black, Asian, white, or Arab/Muslim – can now occupy both sides of the privilege/stigma opposition" (2006, 2-3). In this reorganization of racial discourse, new categories ascend to privilege whereas others become overtly racialized. The former enclose the white liberal, the multicultural 'American', and the multicultural global citizen whereas the latter enclose the monocultural, terrorist, the overtly race conscious, and illegal immigrant (Melamed 2011, 18).

[12] Colorism is "the tendency to perceive or behave toward members of a racial category based on the lightness or darkness of their skin tone" (Maddox and Gray 2002, 250, in Hochschild and Weaver 2007, 646).

This process of ‘reassignment of race’ has led to the formation of two opposing groups among blacks: those “aligned with idealized American cultural norms and nationalist sentiment” and those in which “[b]lack politics, culture, experience, and analysis” are “incompatible with American cultural norms and nationalist sentiment” (Melamed 2006, 8). Devon W. Carbado and Mitu Gulati (2013) confirm Melamed’s reasoning, in which, not being ‘too black’ for instance, works favorable for the bearer of such lucky identity. This realization shows the reiteration of blackness as being essentially ‘incompatible’ with U.S. citizenship. The ‘promotion’ of blacks into U.S. citizenship seems to obliterate racism while reinforcing it. In this view, blacks’ conquests become part of the capitalist project and their discourses of equality are co-opted and recast to supply U.S. national capitalism.

These reflections are relevant for several reasons. First because it performs a return to racism by whitewashing social mobility and blackening those who remain at the bottom of the social ladder. Secondly it is also problematic because it implies a denial of a ‘space’ in which these individuals, which by definition are in-between, attempt to find their own narratives disconnected from white or black groups.

This denial of a space of self-determination along with the discourse of post-racialism (see topic 1.3.1) have produced a view of the U.S. as moving beyond race and towards an inclusivist multicultural citizenship. Nevertheless, racism persists in the U.S. in different and institutionalized ways that this study seeks to address. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (2012) draws on several studies to state that racism persists today in educational and economic inequity as well as in the disproportionate numbers regarding criminalization and incarceration. In fact, the huge number of blacks incarcerated in the U.S. and the effect of this system upon racialized individuals are the most evident proof of the permanence of racism (Alexander 2010, Papachristou 2011).

The result of mass incarceration has been to make room for the creation and maintenance of a permanent racial underclass (Alexander 2010). Michelle Alexander’s study (2010), for instance, has revealed the effect of racism upon the poor black man that is unable to escape the vicious cycle of being continuously arrested and released. Crenshaw (2012), in her turn, has demonstrated that institutional racism also affects black women. Drawing upon diverse sources, Crenshaw shows that the incarceration of black women is not only much higher than that of white women but that it also has increased at a pace superior to that

of black men. This process occurs because black women are more prone to surveillance and punishment than black men and the white population in general are. Their aggravation is underscored in a multiple intersection that has race, gender, and class as the primary establishers of this complex system of racial oppression.

1.3.1 Abstract Liberalism

The need to produce an image of a race-free U.S. brought a 'permanent crisis' to the white supremacy (Melamed 2011, 87). This crisis reinforced liberalist discourses of egalitarianism, individualism, meritocracy, and universalism. Apart from these discourses, the current form of racial liberalism – neoliberal multiculturalism (Melamed 2011, 3) – has reinforced two main issues: the disregard of the notion of race and the celebration of the multicultural character of the U.S. nation. The disregard of the notion of race recreated the discourse of colorblindness into a discourse of post-racialism whereas the celebration of multiculturalism has helped to produce an image of the U.S. as free of racism.

The main argument of the racial liberalist discourse regards the 'fairness' of racial, social, and economic disparity. This discourse installs a new form of colorblindness. Broadly speaking, colorblindness is the politics through which everyone should be treated 'equally' regardless of one's racial characteristics. That would mean that race, for instance, should not interfere in any type of activity selection such as for work, or study (Wells et.al. 2009). In public administration and law, the argument that race does not, or should not interfere in one's economic and social chances limits the actions towards redressing the injustice of racism (Crenshaw 2011). In the academic environment, this reasoning has brought about the 'conclusion' that social scientists' [and consequently race scholars'] "liberatory objective should be to empty such categories [race, for example,] of any social significance" (Crenshaw 1991, 1241). The conclusion that race is not a valid construct, in fact, argues against any type of action in this realm.

The problem with colorblind racism is that it naturalizes economic and social disparities as "the result of race-neutral economic or cultural factors" (Wise 2010, 17) instead of racial discrimination. This practice perpetuates racial discrimination as it denies how race is responsible for the way society is organized (Leonardo 2010).

According to Tim Wise (2010), this politics is prone to failure since it cannot address the particularity of race discrimination.

The doctrine of liberalism has propelled forward the ideology of colorblindness and racial democracy. As liberalist doctrines of freedom asserted the individual as the autonomous promoter of his wealth, they leveled up individuals based on their personal capacities and not their skin color. In this doctrine, the free capitalist marketplace became the economic regulator displacing historical and personal experiences of oppression as preponderant in one's economic and social future.

In his book, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and Racial Inequality in Contemporary America* (2010), Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues that abstract liberalism is 'the foundational ideology' of colorblind racism. Abstract liberalism co-opts basic notions of liberalism which are "individualism, universalism, egalitarianism, and meliorism (the idea that people and institutions can be improved)" (2010, 26). These notions replicate in state politics, which, advocating equal opportunity for all, avoid interfering in individual freedom.

As racial liberalism co-opts the notion of colorblind racism (Crenshaw 2011 below), it also welcomes the doctrine of abstract liberalism. Abstract liberalism poses that the experience of the black individual is similar to that of any other individual. Racial liberalism co-opts this principle. In the line of thought of abstract liberalism, strict identities are understood to be remnants of a social past and its continuance has the function of renewing race and racism. It is argued that it is not the 'particularism' of race struggle that can bring better social conditions; this resolution is instead placed upon 'universal solutions' – that is, that apply for 'all' – regardless of race, gender, social class, etc. In this sense, egalitarianism reinforces this idea. Egalitarianism puts forth the argument that all humans are equal – hence, race should not define a different treatment by the law and the state, for instance.

Another element pertaining to the current form of colorblindness is the concept of meritocracy. This perspective feeds from the individualist notion of a free, independent self. The belief is that, with an 'extra effort', anyone can reach success. Following this logic, (racial) differences should not be accounted with regard to personal success or failure (Cresnshaw 2011, 1332). As racialized individuals accept the argument of meritocracy, they tend to perceive their failure as an individual enterprise and not a result of restricting racial conditions.

The emergence of a liberalist politics based on individualism and egalitarianism poses on minorities who seek to express their oppression, the mark of 'segregationism'. That is, any form of minority expression is understood as illiberal and against universalism. As Alana Lentin (2011, 167) and Bonilla-Silva (2010) point out, the burden of the maintenance of racism is shifted to the minorities that are criticized 'for playing the race card'. This compositional form of racism is what Bonilla-Silva calls the 'new racism' era. Most whites will claim to be antiracist but will also argue that everybody has access to the same opportunities.

Scholars have pointed out that the colorblind perspective has become predominant in the US (Delgado and Stefancic 2001, Gallagher 2003, Wise 2010, Bonilla-Silva 2010, Melamed 2011). Current racial thought, however, differs from earlier narratives of colorblindness and approximates the discourse of post-racialism (Crenshaw 2011, 1330). According to Crenshaw, the greatest difference is that the colorblind perspective focuses on merit and post-racialist thought focuses on pragmatism. Post-racialist pragmatism still recognizes the value of colorblind merit, but it has its core on the preferences of the *majority* – the white U.S citizen (Crenshaw 2011, 1331). Post-racialist pragmatism, Crenshaw continues, replaces the notion of meritocracy as a personal conquest with the capability of the racialized individual to adapt to the U.S. universal citizenship (to use Melamed's term). That is when color loses meaning upon racialization processes.

The closeness between colorblindness and post-racialist discourse "broaden[s] the latter's appeal and complicate efforts to imagine a sustainable alternative" (Crenshaw 2011, 1313). Hence, the effort of race scholars has to be on unveiling the forms through which post-racialist discourse may work for or against racial struggle. Post-racialism's pragmatism represents the abandonment of race consciousness and the embrace of a colorblind stance whose greater feat is to deny the importance of racism at the same time that it celebrates racial progress (Crenshaw 2011).

As disclosed previously, the celebration of racial progress comes in the form of the celebration of the multiracial and multicultural characteristics of the U.S. population. This celebration co-opts the notion that the U.S. population is changing and becoming more and more multicultural. It is a fact that the U.S. racial configuration is changing with the increasing immigration (mostly from Asia, Latin

America, and Africa) and interracial marriages (Logan 2011). Nevertheless, these changes do not necessarily mean that racism is declining.

According to Lawrence D. Bobo, one view of post-racialism is anchored in the rapidly changing racial face of the United States as "rendering the traditional black-white irrelevant" (Bobo 2011, 13-4) and making the mixed subject more and more mainstream. Bobo, however, argues against the mainstreaming of mixed race by pointing out that only 1.9 percent of the U.S. population has chosen to mark more than one option in the 2000 Census (15-6).

In fact, Anthony Daniel Perez and Charles Hirschman (2009) observe that there are different projections regarding the racial and ethnic composition of U.S. people. Some scholars point to the continuing racial mixing as a proof that race and ethnicity are in a process of disintegration; whereas others point to the 'accommodation' of racial divisions in which populational groups are 'promoted' to whiteness whereas others are maintained as racialized (Melamed 2011, Mitchell 2012, Lomas 2005, Roediger 2008).

This accommodation of otherwise racialized groups into whiteness inverts the logic of the traditional discourse of the one-drop rule of blackness. Whiteness welcomes racialized individuals that assimilate the culture of the majority. Hence, the one-drop rule of blackness becomes the one-drop rule of whiteness. In this sense, whiteness encloses those who share the culture of the *majority*. The subject is understood to disappear into the invisibility of the U.S. national identity.

The interest of maintaining whiteness mainstream explains the apparent declining significance of race (Lomas 2005, Melamed 2011). As some individuals within minority groups are 'promoted' to whiteness, this movement produces an effect of race effacement when what we have, in fact, is a re-accommodation of racialized groups. In this sense, the perception of race as having a declining significance is part of the liberalist ideological apparatus.

The phenomena of miscegenation and immigration are not exclusive to the present days. Nevertheless, its interference in diminishing racism is pointed as highly important as liberalism projects its image of egalitarianism and (racial) progress. This egalitarianism is promoted through the 'celebration of the *mulatto'* as the figure able to discontinue the endless racial battle. This process has taken place since

the 1990s in the U.S. (Elam 2011). Still according to Michele Elam, different means of communication such as websites, magazines, media watches have celebrated miscegenation and organizations and multiracial groups have advocated it (xiii).

The celebration of the *mulatto* figure makes the U.S. the exporter of a politics of racial liberalism and national benevolence. In this perspective, monoculturalism is a handicap (Melamed 2006, 1) that prevents the U.S. to ascend globally. The need to demonstrate that capitalism and racial inequality do not work hand in hand, Melamed continues, has produced a liberalist discourse of race in which individuals who position against racial integration are hindering the U.S. national project. Multiracialism and global citizenship are presented as the desired qualities whereas monoracialism is criticized. These aspirations lead to the ideal of the 'American'[13] universal subject as 'multicultural global citizens' (Melamed 2006, 7).

The 'idea' of a mixed U.S. contests the primacy of monoculturalism and becomes the leading light in the creation of a new model of development and power. This new nation strives to be race free and mixed race becomes the newly 'discovered' way of reconstituting racial categories beyond the color line (Ibrahim 2007). That is, the celebration of the *mulatto* figure is not inconsequential. Since the existence of *mulattos* in the U.S. society is not a new phenomenon – in fact, the very core of black identity has been "the racial mixture inherent to it" (McDonald 2011), Elam wonders about the reasons of such ideological shift. Following diverse scholars, she argues that mixed race identity has been legitimated not only due to campaign for recognition but also due to the fact that its aspirations "happen to mesh with national aspirations and are then sanctioned by institutional investment and government recognition" (Elam 2011, 7). As it promotes a view of a race free U.S., the 'existence' of the mixed body serves perfectly to prove that the U.S. is not a racist country (Elam 2011, 7, Mitchell 2012, 28, Melamed 2011).

The celebration of miscegenation is also reinforced amongst white Americans largely through the 'race novel discourse' (Melamed 2011). This discourse, Melamed argues, "made it possible for white Americans to comprehend the act of reading a novel as (and a substitute for) an active politics of social transformation" (2011, 24). That is, even

[13] I reproduce the term 'American' used by Melamed to implicate the universalizing aspect of this ideology.

though mixed race literature does produce a series of questionings regarding the fixedness of racial identity, according to Melamed; mixed race literature has also been co-opted by multiculturalist discourses of egalitarianism in which 'understanding difference' becomes the solution for racial conflicts and discrimination (2011, 24).

This focus on mixed-race has eventually made 'black' narratives secondary, thus producing the *effect* of reducing the racial issue to a matter of overcoming the restriction of monoracial identities. This positioning, Elam argues, "tend[s] to reinforce the perception that monoracial identification is, by contrast, collective, prescriptive, trapped in the antiquated race mentality of the 1960s and 1970s, and associated with all things conservative" (2011, 10-1). In this excerpt, Elam denounces the reduction of monoracialism to an outdated discourse of essentialism, and as going against the hegemonization of mixed raciality. In other words, she is advocating the re-racialization of mixed raciality rather than its egalitarian whitening (re-race vs. e-race) which places both mixed-racial and monoracial demands (for attention to race inequality) in the past.

The silencing of monoracial blackness under the cooptation of mixed raciality into a purportedly de-racialized present has led to an intense debate whose result is the emergence of a changing perception of race. In my analysis of *No Telephone to Heaven*, *Caucasia*, and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*, I want to show that the perception of blackness as stable is where narratives of passing not only encounter their space as sites of contestation of racial determinism but also open space for the idea of racial whitewashing. That is, they both question the idea of strict identities as limiting and re-racialize 'too black' identities as identities to be overcome.

At this point, it becomes necessary to propose different lenses through which to observe the changes in current racial discourses. As disclosed previously, Critical Realism is the chosen tool.

1.3.2 Critical Realism

To counter the emergent post-racialist discourse, this dissertation recuperates a Critical Realist view of race and identity. Following Paula Moya, Michael R. Hames-García, Linda Martín Alcoff, and Satya P. Mohanty among others, I will argue that, even though racial liberalism has installed a narrative of race as disappearing, what we see is the

infiltration of liberalist discourses that seek to deny the experience of racialization. In fact, there have been changes in the configuration of race, but race persists as a structuring principle of the U.S. capitalist society (Melamed 2011, 1) (see topic 1.3.1). Considering the prefix post- as meaning critique (crisis) rather than the erasure of racial identity, I will argue for a critical (post-) race discourse that encloses the view of the racial experience as still oppressive and limiting.

Racial liberalism seeks to argue that racial distinctions are superficial. This erasure of racial distinctions represents the utmost reading of identities as unstable and fragmented. This position is based on the postmodern view of identity as "purely arbitrary, and hence politically unreliable" (in Alcoff and Mohanty 2006, 3). The postmodern view of identity challenged essentialist conceptions that pose identity as fixed and immutable. As the constructed character of (racial) identities is highlighted, associations to essentialist narratives of identity such as the black one are questioned.

In fact, racial liberalism takes the postmodernist predicament of identities as fragmented to a step ahead. The understanding of strict identities as remnants of a social past redresses the concept of identity as a 'choice'. Individuals are assumed to have complete autonomy over the configuration of their identities and can 'choose' whatever they want to be. The complete relativism of this notion along with the recrimination of identities who do not fit the universalism of global, multicultural identities ultimately reinscribes the notion of race and 'fixes' new form of identity expression. That is, racial liberalism fixes identities by limiting the 'choice' to *either* assimilating into 'American' universal citizenship *or* belonging to 'particular' accounts of identity such as the black one.

Critical Realism also follows the postmodern notion of identities as fragmented but recuperates the contingency of the social in the making of identities. That is, identities are fragmented but they are constituted against each individuals' experience. While the postmodern view of identity sought to strip the concept of any ontological and epistemological value, Critical Realism has counterattacked by seeking to revalue identity as a site of social knowledge and hence political action.

Critical Realism encloses the view of race as a social construction but distinguishes from social constructionism by arguing that there is no pre-existent subject on which race is constructed. Butler, for instance,

also draws on Critical Realism in relation to gender. For her, social constructionism implies that there is a pre-existent subject on which gender is constructed. Instead, Butler would argue; the subject is constituted as an effect of that construction. This is the distinction that critical race theorists and critical gender theorists (and critical realism theorists as well) have been making. Whereas social constructivism claims that the world is socially constructed; a realist would argue, furthermore, that these constructs have a direct effect on reality, which changes through them and also constitutes them in return.

In the introduction to the book *Identity Politics Reconsidered*, Alcoff and Mohanty (2006) also criticize the postmodern approach to identity and propose a realist theory of identity. They question the anti-essentialist critique of identity as "fictions imposed from above". Identity, they argue, is not "less real for being socially and historically situated". They then advocate,

> identity-based knowledge can achieve objectivity, not by the (unachievable) ideal of the disinterested, passive observer, but through a more workable approach to inquiry that aims to accurately describe the features of our complex, shared world (Alcoff and Mohanty 2006, 6).

In another book published in the same year, Alcoff defines identity as "positioned or located lived experiences in which both individuals and groups work to construct meaning in relation to historical experience and historical narratives". She then associates it with agency: "Given this view, one might hold that when I am identified, it is my horizon of agency that is identified" (2006, 42).

The idea of having a 'horizon of agency' reports to the concept of identity politics. According to Chris Barker, identity politics "aim[s] at changing social practices, usually through the formation of coalitions where at least some values are shared" (2004, 96). That is, identity politics refers to coalitions among people that share some commonalities in order to struggle for their rights. Even though identity politics is followed by an anti-essentialist impulse nowadays, the infinite range of identity meanings makes the task of working with shared values and individuality a complicated issue. The intrinsic connection between a specific take on identity and the politics that emanate from that 'choice' make 'identity politics' "necessary fictions marking a temporary, partial, and arbitrary closure of meaning" (Barker 2004, 96).

The postmodernist focus on a "strong epistemological skepticism, valorization of flux and mobility, and a general suspicion of all normative and/or universalist claims" (Moya 2000, 6) disqualifies the partial and arbitrary closure of meaning requested by identity politics. According to the postmodern paradigm of identity, the construct of identity should be dismissed due to the impossibility of providing an objective account of 'reality' (Moya 2000). Moya argues that postmodern versions of politics have led progressive political activists and/or theorists "to undermine or 'subvert' identities in order to destabilize the normalizing forces that bring them into being" (2000, 6), dislocating identity and identity politics to marginality. Identity politics is thus born to be soon attacked as 'essentialism' (Sánchez 2006, 32)[14], to which communitarian ideals are reduced.

Essentialism is the belief that "signs have stable meanings that derive from their equally stable referents in the real" (Barker 2004, 61). The implication is that objects have an essence that *cannot* be changed. However, Hall redresses the notion of identity into that of a *positioning.* Positioning refers to the capacity of the subject to recuperate his history and to break away from it. Identity is a fictional construction that encloses the idea of 'oneness' and 'discontinuity' (Hall 1994, 393). Oneness represents a partial closure of meaning that is constantly reassessed. These movements towards oneness and discontinuity redress the notion of essence as constitutive of identity. This 'essence', nevertheless, takes shape in an endless process of construction and reconstruction.

Indeed, the return to supposedly 'essential' features of identity may seem dislocated if the social and historical parameters are not considered. The reinforcement of 'race' as a construct is justified within the idea that these groups are interpellated as having essential features – even though such features have been proven to be constructed (Alcoff 2006). The constitution of racialized groups as 'different' from others encloses common experiences of oppression. That is, racism produces social and economic exclusion as its *effect*. The history of slavery echoes in the present difficulties to ascend economically and educationally whereas the permanence of racism in current U.S. society

[14] It is important to notice that this critique of identity, which was promoted mainly by postmodernists, appeared in a moment in which there was a "social and intellectual tendency toward 'essentialism'" (Moya 2000, 6).

works to maintain racialized individuals at the bottom of the economic ladder (as Crenshaw's and Alexander's studies have demonstrated).

Even though the disconnection of essentialism and authenticity from the notion of identity is valid, racial liberalism has also dismantled identity politics based on the argument of racial fragmentation. Whereas past narratives of race sought to maintain the color line through the reinforcement of black individuals "stay[ing] in their places'' (Smith qtd. in Wald 2000, 33), neoliberal multiculturalism reinforces the differences within blackness. The aim is to show the lack of similarities among the diverse experiences of racial identity.

In spite of the several attempts to revalidate identity as a valuable, non-essentialist construct, the dispute between essentialist notions of identity and the postmodern notion of identity as unreliable persists. The reasons for this dispute are in the slippery ground on which identity *and* identity politics are constituted. I follow several authors' argument (Alcoff 2006, Crenshaw 2011, Mitchell 2011, Melamed 2011, among others) that race is still a fundamental feature of present economic and social relations – hence, it is a fundamental setting against which identities are constituted as racialized. Also following these authors, I consider that the current instability of race relations represents a moment of change in past racial formations. That is, race is a fluid concept (Hall 1997) that is currently undergoing intense change.

These changes engender a *crisis* in the form race is understood. Crisis, for Antonio Gramsci, "consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born: in this interregnum, a great variety of morbid symptoms appear" (in Winant 2006, 988). Race has reached such a momentum, with various scholars disputing its meaning. As David Hollinger (2011) has observed, the discursive field is still seeking to establish the meaning of 'post-race' (176). That is, authors use the terms post-race, post-racism, and post-racialism in different and sometimes conflicting ways.

As we have seen, the prefix post- has been used to describe an emergent view of post-racialism, which is deeply connected to racial liberalism (see topic 1.3.1). In spite of this reductive account of reality, several authors (such as Nayak 2006, Taylor 2007, Hollinger 2011, Melamed 2011, and Mitchell 2012) acknowledge that the concept of race cannot be perceived in the U.S. as it was in the past. These changes have created among sociologists and race theorists "[t]he sense of being in the wake of an important historical shift". This sense has encouraged

authors "to borrow the 'post' from postmodernism and use it to specify their simultaneous debt to and distance from their favored historical dynamic" (Taylor 2007, 625). That is, there is a sense of debt to past racial dynamics but the recent changes have brought up a wish to distance from old structured principles of racism in the U.S.

Crenshaw points out that, even though the predominant meaning the term post- in post-race has received seeks to cancel the interrelation between the (recent) past reality of race in the U.S. and this so-called post-racial moment, this meaning of post- can be disputed and come closer to how it is understood in post-colonial or post-apartheid, for example. In these terms, post "signals that the past does not simply precede the present but partly constitutes it" (Crenshaw 2011, 1313). That is, the ideological making of post-racialist discourse celebrates the end of race and racism and disregards the perpetuation of this phenomenon in the U.S.

This is the meaning of post-race I want to combat. Even though the prefix post- has been widely used to refer to the fact that the U.S. has moved beyond racism, I use this prefix in this study to signal that there has been a rupture. Nevertheless, this rupture does not mean moving beyond the past but in spite of it (Hollinger 2011, 176). That is, it means race studies should feed from past narratives and theories used to explain race, but it also acknowledges that there have been changes in this terrain. Hence, in this dissertation the meaning of post- does not signal that race and racism are elements of a historical past but that contemporary racial configuration represents a variation of the continuing phenomena of race and racism (Winant 2006, Mitchell 2012, Melamed 2011, Crenshaw 2011, Bonilla-Silva 2010).

Contemporary race studies and antiracist discourses have failed to consider the intersection of the dominant race (whites) and the oppressed race (blacks) upon the mixed race individual. Crenshaw's initial answer to this challenge is to "recognize that the organized identity groups in which we find ourselves are in fact coalitions, or at least potential coalitions waiting to be formed" (Crenshaw 1991, 1255). Hollinger, in turn, focuses on the fluidity of these identities and points out that "[t]he less fixed ethnoracial categories and their socially prescribed meanings become, the more opportunities people have to ask what is meant by 'we' and to choose their affiliations rather than accept roles assigned by empowered elites" (Hollinger 2011, 181).

George Lipsitz (2003) and Paul Spickard (2003) make a similar argument. They argue for the fight to change from the value of authenticity to the value of experience. According to these authors, the experience of oppression is or should be the common dominator. This would redirect discussions regarding the 'authenticity' of a specific performance of identity to the forms through which a particular group is oppressed.

As economic dominance over new and extended areas (such as different countries, peoples, and ethnicities) takes place, racism continues to be reproduced and rearticulated. In this sense, the distribution of wealth is an indirect but major factor upon which peoples or groups of people are or will be racialized. As power relations redistribute wealth and impute racism upon differing populations, the formation of coalitions should also be perceived as a never-ending process. The interrelation between these formations and the economic aspect cannot be overlooked.

The perception that we are at a moment of racial 'crisis' informs the analysis of the novels selected for this study. They will be examined through the lens of a changing racial moment that encloses both abstract liberalism under the guise of racial uplifting – in which mixed-race narratives are co-opted into color-blindness and whitewashing of black identity – and critical realism as a perspective from which to critique the liberalist dissimulation of racism.

The term post-*race* is used in this work to enclose the notion that racial relations are in the process of reconfiguration, the awareness that race is still a structuring principle of modern society, and that the material manifestation of it is confirmed by the limited social and economic mobility of racialized groups. This perception leads us to combat *post-racialist* discourses that feed from the abstract liberalist principles of individualism, egalitarianism, and universalism to foment a view of race and racism as disappearing. These considerations will ground the analysis of the permanence of the trope of passing in current mixed race narratives.

1.4 RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

My research framework thus takes into consideration the crisis in the concept of race and the emergence of the liberalist discourse of post-racialism. Hall's argument that race is a 'floating signifier' (1997)

becomes indisputable in the present scenario. With the instability of the notions attached to race, the concept of race 'floats' among diverse interpretations and tendencies. The emergence of post-racialist discourses confirms this tendency. The view of post-*race* I want to acknowledge, however, does not pursue the idea of race as disappearing but acquiring new meanings and being extended to groups of people other than the 'traditional' ones (such as blacks and Latinos, for example). Critical Realism leads us to take into consideration that, in processes of racialization, what matters are common experiences of oppression and not getting lost into the issue whether there are similarities or differences within the racialized group. This way, the adoption of the prefix post- of 'post-race' foregrounds the ongoing construction of the term.

The perception that blackness is changing has been co-opted by post-racialist discourses and reproduced as 'proof' that the end of racism is close. This 'proof' is further sustained by the centralization of mixed race in current media and the perception of talks about blackness as 'passé' (Elam 2011, xix). As these discourses gain access to the media, (see topic 1.3.1) the emergence of two opposite and confrontational directions appear. One of them "espouse[s] mixed race as the great hallelujah to the 'race problem'" and another "can only hear the alarmist bells of civil rights destruction" (Elam 2011, xiv-xv).

None of these positions helps to understand the role of post-race passing in current narratives. My position is to consider not only that mixed identity does confront the idea of a fixed and immutable black identity but also that its existence has been co-opted by liberalist discourses. That is, mixed race identities dispute racial essentialisms but their resistance is often elided by the liberalist discourses of racial egalitarianism, individualism, and meritocracy. Briefly, these three ideals support the notion that personal effort will allow *any* individual to rise above racism and conquer personal success.

This dissertation also accepts the premise that there is a performative politics put forth by narrative constructions of mixed race and passing. It, however, also acknowledges the fact that the emergence of the *possibility* of mixed race identities brings up personal anxieties and questionings in these individuals. I comply with Elam's suggestion that "mixed race is no fait accompli but very much a category under construction" (2011, 7). As mixed race is 'no fait accompli', it leads me to situate this study within the postcolonial paradigm of the in-between

space (Santiago 2000) which was translated into English as the contact zone (Pratt 1992), also theorized in Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994).

Santiago's concept of in-betweenness finds similarities with the current post-race moment. Both represent an in-between space in which the crisis in the concept of race produces an opportunity for a review of the way racialized populations are understood and acted upon. This concept, according to Santiago, refers to the social, cultural, and bodily mixture of the colonized individual. Santiago argued that this process brought about a new society "of the *mestizos"* which "is contaminated in favor of a subtle and complex mixture between the European and the autochthon individuals – a kind of progressive infiltration effectuated by the savage thought, i.e.; the opening of the only way possible that could lead to decolonization"[15] (15, *my translation*).

The progressive infiltration effectuated by the 'savage thought' is reviewed in this work in the contention between liberalism and Critical Realism. Even though there is a clear predominance of racial liberalist ideas within the U.S. society, Critical Realism and Santiago's concept of in-betweenness relocate the agency of the racialized individual into the scene. This individual cannot be perceived as being only in a one-way direction towards whitening. This movement is a two-way process of 'contamination' that destabilizes not only old forms of perceiving racialized populations and their cultural traits but also affects intra group perception of race. I employ Santiago's conception of in-betweenness in this post-race moment as 'the only way possible that could lead to decolonization' – that is, that could lead to social integration and de-racialization of the black population.

Yet, it is very important to note that this is a different historical moment. Hence, I apply Santiago's concept with some restrictions. As I will attempt to demonstrate in the analytical chapters that follow, just as processes of (re-) racialization are constantly in the make so are the relations of domination upon racialized populations. In this sense, it is expected that processes of integration and (de-) racialization vary in time, degree, cultural weight upon the populations affected and which populations are affected.

[15] "… uma nova sociedade, a dos mestiços, [que] é contaminada em favor de uma mistura sutil e complexa entre o elemento europeu e o elemento autóctone – uma espécie de infiltração progressiva efetuada pelo pensamento selvagem, ou seja, abertura do único caminho possível que poderia levar à descolonização" (in the original).

In fact, processes of contamination have now been reversed towards the assimilation of racial difference into whitewashing. Racial liberalism revisits mixed race narratives as representing a race free U.S. Even though this discourse seems inclusivist, it points to whitewashing and the suppression of difference – thus, to an insidious form of racism. The liberalist 'solution' to the division between whiteness and an oppressed identity is reduced to assimilation. This assimilation process is violent because it denies mixed race individuals freedom to self-determination.

Following Santiago's concept of in-betweenness, Butler's concept of performativity (topic 1.1.1) helps us unveil the making of new racial discourses as repetition and reiteration of a practice or citation that bring meanings into being. In this sense, race will be regarded as a discursive practice subjected to processes of repetition and reiteration. As such practice presents imperfection in its repetition, this repetition gives room to change and contestation of old norms. As we have seen before, racial meanings are highly contestatory and hence prone to change. Through the observation of performativity, my aim is to unveil the makings of new forms of identity expression particularly related to this changing racial moment.

The concept of mixed race also becomes fundamental for this dissertation as it brings to the fore the relation between the emergence of new forms of racial identity and post-race passing. This connection is both potentially revolutionary and reactionary. The celebration of narratives of mixed race racial passing in the post-race period brings about liberalist discourses of racial resilience but also seeks to understand the changes in racial configuration by observing how multiplicity comes to enclose the meaning of blackness. In this sense, performativity is intrinsically related to mixed race as it refers directly to the limits imposed by these changing identities. The space of contestation opened up by the emergence of mixed racial identities is also (and probably predominantly) a space of reproduction of (a changing and adaptable) dominant discourse.

In this dissertation, I also take into consideration the critical realist argument that history and culture cannot be transcended. As Moya has argued, "all knowledge is situated knowledge" (Moya 2006, 101). Considering the *im*possibility of transcending history and culture, identity becomes a valuable source of knowledge regarding a specific time and space. This source of knowledge has to be carefully examined

because, even though mixed race identities can work as "important sources of knowledge about the world" (Moya 2002, 114), mixed race individuals may not necessarily be aware of their role in contemporaneous narratives of oppression (Elam 2011, 56). That is when current dominant racial thought may be perpetuated.

1.4.1 Hypotheses

As Hall argues that race is a floating signifier, he points to an aspect of identity other than gender that is constantly interpreted and re-signified. As we have seen, race relations are currently undergoing a vast change. This change both allows to confirm the disconnection between racial identity and essence and to put forth a liberalist view of race as disappearing. That is why it is important to appropriate the concept of post-race to disclose the changing racial relations, not as being diluted but as being confirmed in different situations.

This racial instability has been addressed in novels that deal with characters that pass either for white and/or for black. In order to understand the interrelations between the so-called post-race period and mixed race narratives, some hypotheses were raised. These hypotheses follow the perception that, even though blackness has presented signs of change, this process does not mean the end of racism. In light of this knowledge, *the aim of this dissertation is to unveil the form through which the corpus responds to the discourses of racial liberalism and Critical Realism.* More specifically, my hypotheses are that:

1) Narratives of racial passing in the 'post-race' context disturb former racial dichotomies and borders;

2) This challenge appears in two veins: it fragments the color line at the same time that it recreates it as a step toward whiteness;

3) Mixed race narratives may be read as arguing against assimilationist notions of U.S. citizenship that attempt to foreclose the racialized individual from national belonging.

This framework gives room for reassessing race studies in light of current social and historical changes. Naming this study as post-race comes to mean taking a positioning against racism as well as focusing on how race permeates societal relations. The perception of race has changed and, hence, race studies have to develop a renewed theoretical framework. This renewed theoretical framework includes the perception

that liberalist discourses have changed racial perceptions and race relations and consequently have affected race studies[16].

Following these considerations, the design of the research seeks to unveil the forms through which the corpus selected responds to post-racialist and Critical Realist discourses. More specifically, this study seeks to (a) unveil the meanings behind contemporary narratives of mixed race identities; (b) observe the changes in the meanings attached to racial passing (c) observe how blackness, whiteness, and the dynamics between them are constructed.

1.4.2 Chapter Outline

In this chapter, I have sought to introduce the context in which post-race discourses emerged and to explore the meanings attached to these new discourses of race. The fluidity of the concept of race within current arguments for the dismissal of the term has been contextualized in relation to the permanence of racism in contemporaneous society. Since my aim is to examine how post-1980s novels respond to current racial discourses, this chapter examined the concept of passing in light of contemporary perspectives of post-race. From these considerations, I brought the conceptual parameters to be used in this dissertation.

In the subsequent chapters (2-4), I will analyze each of the three novels in the light of the contemporary debates on 'post-race' and passing, expanding them in relation to particular textual moments when passing is explicitly or implicitly figured. The interpellation of opposing forms of racial perception leads us to consider how the reiteration of racism interferes in the making of the main characters' identity and their insertion in a 'post-race' world.

Finally, I will interweave my analyses in order to construct a comparative reading of the novels regarding the trope of passing for white and post-race discourses. The changing discourse on race these novels present and their connections and disconnections from racial struggle will be discussed. The liberalist discourse of post-racialism that points to a race-free U.S. is disputed by a Critical Realist view of identity that recuperates the notion that narrative identities that display, demystify, and debunk ongoing discourses of racism do matter.

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[16] That is so because language not only reproduces our experiences, it reaffirms and creates these experiences.

CHAPTER TWO

CONTEMPLATION AS RESISTANCE

> At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes. Or perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into a wholly new and separate territory. Or we might go another route (Anzaldúa 78-79).

Mostly during the colonization but also currently, the *unity* of language, religion, and race has been part of the imperialist discourse as a justification for the *superiority* of the European over the colonized (Santiago 2000, 14-16). This notion represents the opposite description of the reality of the colonized countries – especially in terms of race – reinforcing the discrepancy between the two cultures. Until recently, the lived experience of mixed race individuals had meant to deal with these opposing realities: the Eurocentric ideal of whiteness or the colonized reality of miscegenation. Clare, the main character of *No Telephone to Heaven*, represents an attempt to understand these contradictions.

This chapter investigates the emergence of the discourses of post-racialism and post-race in the novel *No Telephone to Heaven.* As a novel written in 1987, my hypothesis is that the discourse of post-racialism is not a central issue in the main character's experience with race. Among the three novels chosen for this dissertation, Clare Savage's racial duality *introduces* the notion of the binary system as strict and incapable of accounting for the fragmented character of (racial) identities. That is, the novel does not propose the post-racialist argument that race is a minor feature of one's identity. Indeed, the main feature of *No Telephone to Heaven* in this dissertation is to work as a background against which the infiltration of racial liberalist ideas is perceived.

In order to understand how these ideas are put forward, I will analyze the ongoing construction of Clare's racial identity through the lenses of Butler's concept of performativity and Santiago's concept of *in-betweenness*.

2.1 *NO TELEPHONE TO HEAVEN by Michelle Cliff*

No Telephone to Heaven brings about the story of a mixed race individual. Clare Savage is born in Jamaica and, as a teenager; she travels to the USA with her family. Later on, when her parents get divorced, she remains in the U.S. with her father whereas her mother returns to Jamaica with her younger sister. As she grows older, she decides to move to the United Kingdom where she faces her cultural and racial heritage in a more concrete way. The experiences she faces in these two countries – the USA and England – lead her into an internal voyage of discovery and conflict.

Each one of these countries brings up different issues that will be dealt separately. The first issue to be tackled regards the way her parents interfere with Clare's understanding of her racial identity. The second issue to be dealt with regards a character in exile of herself and of her identity. Clare's feelings regarding blackness – first in the USA, then in England – will be examined. The third issue to be tackled regards Clare's contemplation of her in-between position in relation to the characters Jane Eyre and Bertha (characters of Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre*, 1847), and Pocahontas. Finally, Clare's passing and the context of post-race will be taken into account.

2.1.1 Parents are destiny (?)

The novel starts its narrative in 1960. Clare, still a teenager, is moving to the Unites States with her family. Her father, Boy Savage, is a mixed race individual who, in his everyday life, attempts to be associated with the dominant culture. Being of a lighter skin complexion, he acknowledges a white identity – whenever it is possible he tries to 'pass' as white. An example of this happens when they are driving to their destination in the US. The motel innkeeper in which they stop by asks him whether he is a "nigger." Boy immediately perceives the need to deny the black portion of his racial origin, "'I am a white man. My ancestors owned sugar plantations'" (Cliff 1987, 57). The innkeeper accepts the premise but makes a point of telling Boy that in America *to pass* is unacceptable and a crime.

Boy is described as "streamlining himself for America," "a new man" (Cliff 1987, 57). Differently from his wife Kitty, who wishes to pass only to "avoid the aggravations" (Cliff 1987, 61) of U.S. racism, he

not only denies his origins but also instructs Clare to do the same. In sum, he 'teaches' her the value of whiteness. Boy dictates Clare's future into whitening. He does not question her desires, but acts to guarantee her a better future: "Through all this – this new life – he counsels his daughter on invisibility and secrets. Self-effacement, Blending in. The uses of camouflage" (Cliff 1987, 100). Clare, young and inexperienced, lets herself be guided.

By passing, Boy sets the example for Clare. In other moments, he summons her to do the same by arguing for her whiteness. That is the case when Boy Savage takes Clare to enroll her at a U.S. school. In the interview with the principal, the issue of race comes into play. Asked about Clare's race, Boy responds: "White ... of course" (Cliff 1987, 98). The distrustful principal briskly adds: "I do not want to be cruel, Mr. Savage, but we have no room for lies in our system. No place for in-betweens" (Cliff 1987, 99).

Unaware of what position to take regarding her racial identity, Clare follows her father's guidance by remaining in silence. By keeping in silence, Clare performs whiteness. That is, at this moment, passing for white means simply silencing about the racialized part of her being. In addition, the principal's reiteration of the one-drop rule and Boy's and Clare's submission to it confers this rule its validity. Boy's discourse, his passing, and his insistence that Clare does the same subscribe to an essentialist view of race in which the mark of their 'inferiority' has to be hidden.

The episode with the principal takes place a short time after Clare's mother returns to Jamaica. Tired of the discrimination she undergoes daily, Kitty summons Boy to go with her, but with his denial, she leaves with her younger and darker daughter. The family separates along the color line: the darker daughter with the darker parent and the fairer daughter with the fairer parent. By doing this, Clare's parents subscribe to the logic of former passing novels. The parents expect their children may wish to pass, and that can only be possible by distancing from black family connections. The presupposition under the reasoning of Clare's parents is that, upon being able to, a visually white individual would choose to pass (Toland-Dix 2004).

Through the separation of the family, we realize the power of dominant ideology. The dominant ideology constructs whitening as desirable to both the U.S. black citizens and the Jamaicans who see in the color of their skin the mark of a stigma. According to Shirley

Toland-Dix, in the Jamaican society, the children within a family where the parents presented a different skin configuration were supposed to be raised by the parent who better represented the color of the child. When Clare's parents decide to get divorced, there is no questioning on who should take care of whom. The darker daughter stays with the darker parent whereas the lighter one stays with the lighter parent. In Clare's family, it means that she remains with her father whereas her sister leaves with their mother to Jamaica.

Boy's denial to follow his wife and the disintegration of the family along the color line show what his desire of attaining white privilege costs him. His refusal to understand the pain his racialized wife goes through is what causes the dissolution of his family (Toland-Dix 2004). While his wife cannot pass because she is not white enough, Boy manages to integrate into the white America. This racial apartness creates an unbearable anxiety in Kitty that is ignored by her husband. As he manages to live up to the U.S. ideal of whiteness, Boy is not directly confronted with his 'blackness' and cannot understand Kitty's difficulties. Consequently, he fails to understand his wife's suffering and isolation. In the end, this difference in racial perception and reception becomes determinant in the separation of the family.

The separation of the family marks Clare's abandonment by her mother which "creat[es] a sense of loss and longing that Clare spends the rest of her life trying to assuage" (Toland-Dix 2004, 45-6). Clare suffers with her mother's departure and does not really understand her decision. She feels that race has something to do with the way her family separates and her mother's inability to remain in the U.S., but her young age and her inexperience with any direct racial confrontation lead her to conjecture about the real reasons for her mother's decision: "What had happened? Why was her mother gone?" (Cliff 1987, 96). Clare misses her mother. This feeling refers to the fact that, by remaining with her father, she unintentionally sides with him against her mother, given the binary racial configuration he constructs by turning his back on Kitty.

In addition, this feeling also relates to the fact that Kitty is visibly black whereas her father is visibly white. Clare's allegiance to her father or mother becomes more and more directed to their racial difference. Remaining with her father means to align with whiteness whereas meeting her mother means to align with blackness. Whiteness means having a father and *becoming a U.S. citizen* (which, according to

Melamed 2011, is only a step away from becoming 'a universal subject') whereas blackness comes to mean having a mother and belonging to a community.

It is relevant to point out that both racial groups have aspects that may be considered appealing. Becoming a universal subject encloses the possibility of moving in different circles without inquiries. The anonymity granted by whiteness brings the privilege of not being under the scrutiny of the white gaze. The black community, on the other hand, however oppressed, still means the privilege of 'belonging', an aspect Zygmunt Bauman (2000) has highlighted. Bauman argues that the sense of belonging and safety ethnicity provides is unquestionable. He argues that ethnicity allows for the "withdrawal from the frightening, polyphonic space where 'No one knows how to talk to anyone else' into a 'secure niche' where 'Everyone is like anyone else'" (2000, 107).

Maria Helena Lima points out that Clare's separation from her mother represents both a rupture with a parent and a rupture with her 'African' roots and the black community. Seeking to redress this rupture is what drives Clare's search of unity (Lima 1993, 39). Clare's trajectory describes restlessness and desire to change this state of personal subjection. The understanding of the dimension of this problem comes through changes, which are initially only geographical. The physical displacement appears as the plot develops, and there is a change of scenery that includes three different countries – Jamaica, USA, and England.

In this trajectory, Clare is constantly interpellated into embracing either whiteness or blackness. Her fragmented identity makes her seek to express the uniqueness of her identity. Through this quest, we come to realize the weight of the settlers' cultural heritage in the subjectivity of the colonized, especially in racial terms. In this scenario, passing for white becomes a desirable and hateful wish at the same time. It is desirable because narratives of 'whiteness' construct white identity as privileged and it is hateful because the perception of whiteness as monoracial and superior belittle Clare's mixed identity.

In spite of this discourse of racial superiority, the crisis whiteness entered in the post-World War II period has allowed for racial liberalist narratives to emerge (see chapter one, topic 1.3.1). Yet, the racial liberalist discourse of egalitarianism, meritocracy, universalism, and racial neutrality has had little effect in Clare's narrative. In fact, the focus on the mixed race character of Clare's identity points to a Critical

Reading of her narrative. Her fragmented identity disturbs the color line, introduces the notion of intra-racial difference, and presents the notion of passing as a choice pre-determined by the narratives of race she comes across. Even though these features have been co-opted by racial liberalism, they also question the construction of race by the imperative white.

This questioning leads Clare to start disconnecting from her father's wish to pass. Alone in the USA with her father, Clare initially accepts the invisibility of her black inheritance and observe the cultural clashes happening around her. Soon enough, however, Clare starts questioning her father's positioning regarding race. After some time following her father's positioning towards passing, she becomes more and more rebellious against her father's wish to 'pass' and to assume a white identity.

This 'rebellion' introduces the notion of choice to racial passing in the novel. Yet, this choice does not comply with the racial liberalist understanding of identities as 'blank spaces' in which individuals can inscribe anything they want. Clare's questioning of the binary model shows her dissatisfaction with the notion of whiteness as superior and, hence, desirable. Above all, her 'choice' is encouraged by her close connection with the oppressed community (represented by the figure of her mother). The racial binary is presented as unchangeable and undisputable, but Clare challenges this model as she questions its strictness.

Clare follows her father's guidance and 'passes for white', but she also uses this time to take an interest in events related to race. That is the case when Clare becomes obsessed with an episode in which four young black children are killed in a bombing at Sunday school. She buys the paper to follow the news and, as she finds a picture of one of the girls in a coffin; she cuts it out and keeps the picture with her. The picture seems to symbolize her desire to expose her 'hidden' blackness.

Boy observes this behavior and asks her, if, similarly to her mother, she "want[s] to labor forever as an outsider [. . .]." He means that her observation of U.S. racism can only set her apart from the American citizenship: "You are an American now. [. . .] We are not to judge this country … they give us a home. Your mother could never understand that… she blamed the whole place for a few ignorant people … that's why we lost her" (Cliff 1987, 102).

In this statement, Boy performs the liberalist racial concept through which racism is perceived as limited to specific and sparse demonstrations that cannot effectively disturb one's life. The particularism of race (and racism) is treated by Boy as a minor symptom and not as a structuring principle of the U.S. capitalist society. Boy seems to perceive black identity as secondary. In this sense, he reproduces the universalizing discourse of identity perpetrated by multiracialism. Also according to liberalism's imputation of race upon the 'overtly race conscious', Boy implies that disturbance can only come if people position themselves against the U.S. nation. That is why he advises Clare not to 'judge this country'.

Following this understanding of the phenomenon of race, Boy thinks that he and Clare can overcome racism by ignoring racist demonstrations and merging into mainstream U.S. whiteness. As Clare questions these statements, she disturbs Boy's liberalist view of race in which passing is redressed as integration into the U.S. universal citizenship. That is, the understatement of liberalism is that the epistemological knowledge derived from racial identity should be relinquished and forgotten. In Boy's discourse, the refusal to do it means to waste an opportunity of 'personal progress'.

For Clare, nevertheless, the picture of the dead black girl represents "a subject which became taboo between father and daughter" (Cliff 1987, 102). Racism is rarely spoken of, and Boy cannot understand the reasons for Clare's behavior. Boy's silence regarding race again confirms his compliance with dominant racial discourses. Boy cannot understand why Clare seeks to recall what he wants to forget. For him, passing means enjoying the privileges of whiteness. For Clare, however, passing means to forget her heritage and to relinquish her knowledge of racial oppression. Her rebellion against her father's wish to pass shows she wants to leave a mark, to *contaminate* an essentialist view of whiteness in which there is no space for contestation and disagreement.

By managing to pass and to get a job, Boy is convinced that racism is something that does not interfere in his life whereas for Clare race has been the reason why her family has fallen apart. It is at the moment in which they learn of Kitty Savage's death that Clare speaks up and lets us glimpse at the restlessness that torments her soul. As Clare is unable to cry, Boy accuses her: "You callous little bitch. I suppose you have more feelings for niggers than for your own mother."

Outraged by the implications of this insult, Clare replies: “My mother was a nigger... And so am I” (Cliff 1987, 104). Boy loses control and slaps her.

This moment represents a rupture with any bonds Clare still had with her father. Old enough to be free from her father’s tutorship, Clare flies to England where she moves into a little apartment. She acknowledges that she “choos[es] London with the logic of a creole. This was the mother-country” (Cliff 1987, 109).

Yet, Clare still perceives discourses of racialization as outside of her and relating to those darker than her (as in the Jamaican organizing principle of race). Her uneasiness with the U.S. reality and mostly the void left by her mother’s departure make her review her initial response to race and racism. She, however, still thinks there is a place in which she can escape this dilemma. London becomes the symbol of this quest and the place to abstain from any race engagement.

2.1.2 London: contemplation

According to Thomas Cartelli and Toland-Dix, it is when Clare comes to England that she experiences a cultural shock. This shock reinforces the state of apathy that Clare showed when she followed her father’s guidance into passing. Similar to the time in the U.S. when she observed racism, in England, Clare spends most of her time alone “in observance of this country” (Cliff 1987, 111). That is, even though she argued with her father about ignoring her blackness, she also ‘passes’ in England, not by faking to be white but by not getting involved with anything or anybody. She isolates herself in a small apartment and cultivates her loneliness: “Without speaking for years. Without feeling much of anything except a vague fear of not belonging anywhere” (Cliff 1987, 91). During this period, Clare evades direct confrontation with her in-between racial identity and she spends her time in “walks, museums, films, books” (Cliff 1987, 112).

This state of apathy is reinforced by the unexpectedness of what she encounters in London. Her first thoughts regarding the country were that “[h]er place could be here. America behind her, way-station. This was natural”. Nonetheless, Clare is shocked by what she sees as soon as she puts her feet on the ground: “She was not prepared for the dark women in saris cleaning the toilets at Heathrow” (Cliff 1987, 109). This picture shows Clare that, even in the mother-country, a racial hierarchy

is present – and that this hierarchy points to racial discrimination. Even though her white skin allows her to detach herself from the 'oppressed', she feels that her position in the binary system of race is that of exclusion.

Still in London, Clare seeks "to silence the beckonings she feels from her dead mother" (Toland-Dix 2004, 47) and the racial meanings attached to this memory. In order to do so, she enrolls in a graduate program in Classics at the University of London. She admits that "[t]his suited her for a time. Study. Dreams and images. Refuge. Rivalry of nature. Balance. Harmony. None enter here unless he is a geometer. Mnemonics. Order from chaos. [. . .] She needed this – yes. Her head filled" (Cliff 1987, 117). The study of ancient art and artists, which has nothing to do with the racialized part of her being, is the subject of her studies. They substitute her need for order by replacing the chaos of her internal conflict by the safety of acknowledging *only one side* of her cultural inheritance – the one that allows her to 'be' white and racially invisible.

By learning the ways of whiteness, Clare responds to its intense interpellation. As only blackness is marked by race, this intense interpellation is not perceived as constricting and limiting her actions. However, the 'choice' to study the Classics is not inconsequential and random. Instead of a choice, it is a response to the white culture taught, among other places, in her school in Jamaica and later on, in the U.S. The reiteration of whiteness as 'superior' and universal makes Clare seek to connect with whiteness.

The interpellation of whiteness is disguised as a 'civilizing' process in which the particularities of 'race' seem to have been left behind. In this sense, her mixed racial identity is silenced and whitewashed. She feels forced to choose a side since she cannot conciliate the two-ness of her racial identity. Aware of these narratives of personal identification, Clare initially 'chooses' whiteness as a form of soothing her relentlessness and silencing her multiracial character.

An essentialist view of passing would implicate that she has accepted dominant narratives that disqualify her subjectivity when she is, in fact, dealing with the instability of her mixed racial identity. Her biracialism goes against narratives of racial purity – be either black purity or white purity. Even though Clare's experience cannot be reduced to a categorical identity, she cannot transcend the interpellations she comes across, and she responds to them in a generally expected

way. That is, she does not contest these narratives; instead, she deals with them as they come across.

Even though the study of the Classics, for instance, brings her restlessness for contradicting the truth of her mother's return to Jamaica. This study brings Clare the relief of avoiding troublesome issues. This attempt at escaping her uneasiness is, however, reduced fruitless as Clare's studies are disturbed by a violent march against immigration. The shouts of the demonstrators appear in capital letters: "KAFFIRS! NIGGERS! WOGS! PAKIS! GET OUT!" In their hands, they carry a banner that claims: "KEEP BRITAIN WHITE!" (Cliff 1987, 137).

Even though intimately touched by the racism declared in this demonstration, Clare is able to pass unnoticed. By simply silencing about her 'race', she confirms the race system. This is the case when her friend Lilly tells her she should not be worried about the racist demonstration from the previous day. She says: "you're hardly the sort they were ranting on about" (Cliff 1987, 139). Lilly protects her from being identified as black, whereas Clare now knows that her blackness, as a historical, political position, is no longer reducible to hegemonic racialization – neither in the essentialist terms of the one-drop rule nor in the liberalist terms of post-racialist whitewashing.

Clare hesitantly disagrees: "That doesn't make it at all better. . . . Besides, I can never be sure about that . . . and I'm not sure I should want . . . ah, *exclusion*" (Cliff 1987, 139 my emphasis). Her friend, however, interprets exclusion as *inclusion*: "'your blood has thinned, or thickened, or whatever it does when . . . you know what I mean'". Clare understands perfectly what it means, but she fails not to be bitter about it: "You mean I'm presentable. That I'm somehow lower down the tree, higher up the scale, whatever" (Cliff 1987, 139). She is ironic regarding her easiness to pass for white because, even though this act is perceived by Lilly as a form of triumph, Clare refuses to feel relieved by it. She knows passing for white implicates in accepting the devaluation of an important portion of her being and thus the upgrading of racism in the guise of racelessness.

Clare pretends to ignore the aggressiveness of the demonstrators, but this moment makes her ponder about returning to Jamaica. Even after so much effort to pass and/or ignore racism, Clare does not feel indifferent to it and seems to see 'passing' "more and more as a betrayal of her black family and friends" (Toland-Dix 2004, 47). That is, Clare starts perceiving her act of passing as betrayal. She perceives it as

betrayal, however, not because she is faking an identity but because her passing denies her the possibility of claiming a racialized identity. Lilly's discourse (above), in fact, interpellates her into complying with mainstream views of race in which her race should not be brought to the fore. At this moment, Clare refuses this interpellation because she cannot silence her mixed racial identity anymore.

The demonstration and Clare's refusal of its racial undertones lead her into choosing to move back to Jamaica. Before examining the moment in which Clare moves back to Jamaica; however, I will examine specific moments in which Clare confronts the image she has of herself and that of imperial icons: Jane Eyre, Bertha, and Pocahontas.

2.1.3 Clare and Imperial Icons – understanding her 'role'

Still in England and after some experiences in which Clare seeks to alienate herself and forget about her racial identity, Clare comes to compare her life to that of two different characters in Charlotte Brontë's novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) and later on with Pocahontas. Jane Eyre's and Pocahontas' narratives become emblematic of the identity conflict Clare is dealing with. The narrative of personal development regarding Jane Eyre's character makes her reflect upon her own role in society. Through this reflection, we realize Clare's desire to belong to the stable universe these stories inspire as well as the contradictions they represent in her life.[17] Pocahontas, on her turn, shows her that the allegorical representation of this real-life character has served imperial purposes and hence, cannot give her any kind of direction to understand her own racial and cultural mixture.

Clare gradually realizes that her perception of England as the 'mother-country' and her hegemonic position in the colonizer-colonized dichotomy are misplaced. In the process of coming to this understanding, Clare identifies with Jane Eyre in Brontë's homonymous novel. Nonetheless, a marginal character in Jane Eyre, the Jamaican white Creole Bertha (Edmondson 1993), soon substitutes this first identification. This shift in her perception shows Clare's difficulty to become unified such as in her interpretation of Jane Eyre's trajectory.

Jane Eyre presents characteristics of "a female bildungsroman" and of a "retrospective autobiography" (Smith 1998, 52). It is a

[17] A fuller version of the comparison Clare Savage makes with Jane Eyre was previously published in the proceedings of the *XII Congresso Internacional da ABRALIC*.

bildungsroman because the narrative is construed as a learning trajectory of a character who reflects upon her personal journey. It is autobiographical because, the pillars of this style, according to Sidonie Smith, are in the affirmation of an independent, individualist, free, and unified self (Smith 1998).

The advent of postmodernism, however, has destabilized the notion of an 'enlightened individual' in search of personal growth of former autobiographies and has highlighted the artificial character of identity (Lima 1993, 36). Lima complicates the matter even further by pointing out that the *postcolonial* Bildungsroman "paradoxically attempts both to represent the movement from fragmentation and loss toward wholeness and homeland, and to deny the possibility of such recovery" (1993, 54). That is, this writing style deals with "the colonized subject's historical loss of a 'unity of being' after the arrival of the European" (Lima 1993, 53).

Nevertheless, bildungsroman and autobiographical writings become complementary forms of writing for the postcolonial writer. In this movement, bildungsroman as postcolonial writing represents a reassessment of the autobiographical genre. This form of autobiography also seeks to address the individuals' search for unity, but the conflicting narratives of identity – the European unified self and the colonized fragmented *Other* – create a challenge for postcolonial writers.

Clare's initial pursuit of Jane's model of personal development is related to "the romance of (female) individualism" (Smith 1998, 52) that the heroine manages to carry forth. Clare pursues this identification by seeking to deny the 'collective call' of her oppressed identity. This collective call relates to the concept of collective novel. The relationship between history and literature highlights the collective aspect of these narratives of identity. In fact, Lima recalls Edouard Glissant's argument that this model of relationship between individual and collectivity "refuses the European model of individualism" (1993, 36).

Seeking to break away from her mother's and blackness' call, Clare tries to find vestiges of herself in Jane. By becoming Jane, Clare understands this process as allowing her to disregard the 'black' portion of blood in her veins and free herself from the constraints imposed by racialization. Aware of mainstream narratives of identity as unity and purity, Clare does not understand that this feeling of freedom is an illusion caused by the apparent invisibility of narratives of whiteness.

In addition, Clare's situated knowledge does not allow her to perceive that Jane's strength is also her weakness. Jane cannot signify neither wholeness and strength nor illegitimacy and marginality. Her privilege of whiteness is also her weakness because of the constraints that surround a young British woman in the XIX century. The narratives of identity proposed by mainstream culture at that time limit her options to becoming a wife, a spinster or a prostitute. Even though Jane's narrative shows an individual able to choose her future, the final resolution (she marries Rochester in the novel) is also the most satisfactory answer and the only one free from some form of prejudice. That is, in spite of her apparent power to take her life in her hands; the limits of this 'freedom' are pre-determined.

Jane's apparent freedom is highly limited by the historical period (the XIX century) and space she occupies (England). The 'feeling of freedom' perpetuated by Jane's narrative of personal quest regards her construction in Clare's mind of an independent, individualist, free, and unified self – autobiographical aspects pointed by Smith (1998, above). Jane appears to be a self-determined individual in opposition to Clare's narrative of identity because, contrary to Jane's identity, Clare's collective narrative depends on her 'particular' community. Her fragmented *other* is constrained by racialization and not universalizing accounts of identity (such as Jane's).

Clare, however, is not aware of Jane's weakness. In spite of this, she soon realizes Jane's individualism does not satisfy her. While Jane's narrative of personal development coincides with the bourgeois notion of progress and closure, Clare's misplaced desire and understanding of being a British citizen makes her narrative of 'closure' illegitimate and marginal in relation to mainstream narratives of identity. Through the understanding of *Jane Eyre*'s narrative as the representation of a self grounded in the imperialist notion of subjectivity, Clare realizes that 'passing' for white and First world citizen is among the narratives that apprehend her. The need to pass – i.e. perform whiteness – loses importance through the understanding of the discourses that have attempted to define her. She knows that her identity construction is not just a matter of choice and that these narratives circulate and have real effects in her life. She also knows this construction of reality can be changed. Her mixed racial background pushes her in both directions, but the strong connection she feels for her mother and the blunt loss of this

affection disturb her attempt at passing and ignoring the black portion of her identity.

Critical Realism brings us to the conclusion that, even though Clare seeks to ignore her racial duplicity, this fact is part of her historical, social, and personal identity. That is, it is part of her being and, hence, part of the elements that determine her agency. Following Alcoff's definition of identity as shared social and historical experiences, Clare's agency towards her racialized identity starts to be glimpsed at as she questions her 'passing' and starts connecting with her mixed origins.

The perception of Jane's subjectivity as explaining only part of her being makes Clare reconsider this initial identification. Clare soon considers that a smaller character in *Jane Eyre* may better apply to her mixed experience of racial identity: "No, she told herself. No, she could not be Jane. Small and pale. English. No, she paused. No, my girl, try Bertha. Wild-maned Bertha." In a stream of thought, Clare reinforces her conclusion: "Yes, Bertha was closer the mark. Captive. Ragôut. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarron. All Bertha. All Clare" (Cliff 1987, 116).

The Bertha Clare identifies with resembles this character's depiction in Jean Rhys' *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Hornung 1998). The depiction of Bertha in Jean Rhys's prequel to *Jane Eyre* performs resistance to narratives of *Othering* that attempt to confine her uniqueness into pre-established categories of the self. This differentiated reading of the same character is performative of a politics of appropriation.

In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Bertha gets mad due to the conflicting discourses that presumably define her. Rochester expects her to be 'the colonizer' since she is 'white' and land proprietor. However, as her performance deviates from this stereotype (especially in her close relationship with her servants who are former slaves) he imputes on her the derogatory perception of her as black (Halloran 2006), savage and, consequently below the status of a British subject. Rochester perceives Bertha's performance of whiteness as failure. Her inability to 'pass', that is, to convince Rochester of her Englishness, leads her to madness.

Clare's trajectory finds striking similarities to Bertha's. Clare is also divided between an imperialist and an oppressed identity. She also has to answer to a split discourse – be either an Englishwoman or the colonial *other* – and both characters encounter discourses that value

Englishness as 'a higher stage of civilization'. *Sargasso Sea* and *No Telephone to Heaven* criticize the understanding of (racialized) identities as fixed and inferior to the European self. Indirectly, both narratives disrupt the notion of unified identity as a desirable model and propose the valorization of marginalized identities. The in-betweenness of these identities contaminates the strictness of the color line. In this sense, they question the essentialism attributed to racial identities and welcome a Critical Realist reading of identity. The questioning of essentialism attributed to racial identities disturbs the racial binary and introduces the notion of fragmented identities that *respond* to the socially constructed realities that surround them.

The notion of identities as fragmented and unstable, however, not only questions essentialisms but also introduce some post-racialist ideas. As we have seen in chapter one, the construction of the U.S. "as a universal nation and a model democracy" (Melamed 2006, 7) encompasses the celebration of multiracial identities. The refusal of Jane Eyre's stable and racially pure self and the acceptance of Bertha's fragmented *other* enclose the rejection of monocultural identities and introduce the idea of fixed and stable identities as restrictive.

Engulfed by these narratives of identity and her personal experience, Clare is interpellated into making a choice regarding the *two possible identities* presented to her: mainstream whiteness or an oppressed racialized identity. That is, she *has* to choose in order to *act.* Her choice, however, is not to embrace a black identity but a *Third World racialized identity*. Clare knows this identity is multiple and stereotypes cannot described it. Her decision is to suppress parts of her identity that relate to whiteness and embrace a racialized and colonized identity. As her father noted proudly, they are descendant of landowners. In Jamaica, this white lineage promoted them to a higher social status (and all the privileges associated to it), and in the U.S., it allowed Clare to 'pass' as white and heir of European culture. On the other hand, by assuming an oppressed identity, the latter voice has to be suppressed. That is why Clare's narrative cannot find closure as *Jane Eyre*'s narrative had. Her mixed racial origins along with narratives that construct this identity as in-between interpellate her into seeking her uniqueness.

Clare's position in the world is contingent to these narratives of identity. These narratives limit her horizon of agency by interpellating her into following predominant forms of racial identification. As we

have seen, Clare has attempted at being 'Jane' for a while, but the maddening force of ignoring racial interpellations that surround her ends up in verbal aggression.

One day, Clare is in the university cafeteria when she is interpellated by a student "whom Clare barely knew". This stranger attempts to start a conversation by commenting about the racist demonstration that had happened the previous day: "I say, those nig-nogs[18] are a witty lot". At Clare's silence, the narrator reproduces Clare's impressions on the woman' talk: "she barreled on about an uncle in Uganda who had sewn a man's lip back on, bitten off in a fight, by the man's own wife". Clare remains silent, and the woman insists by telling her about the expulsion of this uncle from Uganda by, her words, "Idi Amin, that 'great ape'". At this point, Clare bursts out: "Why don't you go fuck yourself?" (Cliff 1987, 138).

This outburst reveals to us (and Clare herself) that she cannot be Jane. According to Clare's view of Jane Eyre, this character's narrative complies with master narratives of progress and stability while the uneasiness of her racial condition points to a different direction. The dialogue both interpellates Clare as white and the racialized other as inferior. Clare's initial silence 'confirms her whiteness', however, the insistence of the stranger into belittling her racialized peers makes her take a stand against it. Thus, she impersonates Bertha's character, with the richness of her unstable, vulnerable, and fragmented self. Through her identification with *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s Bertha, Clare's trajectory "complicates the utility of recourse to a fixed identity, to any 'true' self" (Smith 1998, 59).

Clare's first identification with Jane Eyre points to an attempt at accomplishing what this character's narrative has. This first identification and its dismissal may be read as Clare's attempt and consequent failure at following the classical notion of autobiography. Clare's effort to grasp the notion of progressive personal development is contradicted by Clare's experience of dislocation and the impossibility to adapt to these master narratives. Following her experience, Clare assumes the multiplicity of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s Bertha. The interpellations towards this identity come through a multiplicity of voices. Narratives of black identity clash with narratives of racial whitewashing. Clare, however, does not stop as this comparison. She

[18] "Variation on 'nigger', evoking stereotypical African tribal chanting, dancing etc." (Urban Dictionary).

moves past Bertha and seeks to understand herself in another iconic character, Pocahontas.

It is in one moment of contemplation that Clare comes across the statue of Pocahontas. In a little trip to Gravesend, and upon reflecting about the allegorical woman she encounters, Clare comes to understand she cannot escape her racial past anymore. That is, even though her racial identity is a construction (as any identity, in fact, is), this constructed reality informs her actions. The contextual knowledge brought about by her experience with race affects and limits her actions towards responding to the racialized portion of her identity.

In a walk around the city, she sees a statue of Pocahontas. She finds out that Pocahontas was baptized and given a new name. She lists what she learns: "Found she had been tamed, renamed Rebecca. Found she had died on a ship leaving the rivermouth and the country, but close enough for England to claim her body" (Cliff 1987, 136). Clare feels the anguish of becoming a monument but losing oneself: "Something was wrong. She had no sense of the woman under the weight of all these monuments". That is when the weight of her silence regarding her racial origins overwhelms her: "She thought of her, her youth, her color, her strangeness, her unbearable *loneliness*" (Cliff 1987, 137 my emphasis). Similar to Pocahontas, Clare's loneliness is highlighted in the contradictory interpellations she comes across. She cannot take a side without relinquishing part of her being.

Carmen Birkle recalls Linda Hutcheon's observation that Pocahontas's life comes to work as "historiographic metafiction" (in Birkle 1998, 64). According to Hutcheon, historiographic metafiction refers to novels that include self-reflexive elements paradoxically attained to historical personages. In this sense, the narratives regarding Pocahontas' life count as historiographic metafiction because even though she is a historical individual, the facts of her life are brought to the future mostly through the interpretation given by secondary sources – the colonizers.

Clare observes the statue and, as she "walk[ed] towards it [. . .] her training suspected allegory" (Cliff 1987, 135). She comprehends Pocahontas' representation as allegorical as she cannot see a woman but a celebratory symbol of the pacific integration between the American Native and the English conqueror (Edmondson 1993, 190). Pocahontas' image works as "a personification of the New World" (Cliff 1987, 135) in which the native is shown as good and tamable. The understanding

that there is more to 'the official story of Pocahontas' comes from Clare's own split identity. Birkle argues that Clare "is interested in the feelings and the suffering that Pocahontas must have endured because these are also her own; Clare Savage does not know where she belongs" (1998, 70).

At the same time, she feels disappointed by the little information she reads in the pamphlets available to visitors (Joseph 2000). These pamphlets tell her, among other things, that "A fever took her on her return to Virginia: 'Friend of the earliest struggling colonists, whom she nobly rescued, protected, and helped.' The pamphlet said there had been a son" (Cliff 1987, 136-37). The pieces of information regarding Pocahontas come from different sources and Pocahontas herself "is rendered mute" (Joseph 2000, 317).

The statue of Pocahontas at Gravesend "gave nothing else away" (Cliff 1987, 136) and Clare wonders about the real woman below those layers of historiographic metafiction, "something was wrong… Where was she now?" (Cliff 1987, 137) That is, where is the real woman below these layers of apparent choice? By questioning where the real woman is, Betty Joseph argues, Cliff demonstrates that her image has been appropriated and reenacted throughout history to justify the colonization process and the nation's myth making (2000, 317). Through her own experience of dislocation, however, Clare feels that there is more to this allegorical figure than what she reads in the pamphlets.

In fact, Pocahontas suffered a brutal process of colonization that 'successfully' transformed her into another being. One of the elements to pacify her is the church. Missionaries managed to Christianize her. She is baptized and married within this church. These acts, in fact, represent the diverse ways in which Pocahontas' image is estranged from her people and appropriated by the colonizers to convey the 'pacific' making of the New World (Birkle 1998). Her identity is finally stripped of any connection with her old self as she is given the Christian name of Rebecca. Her marriage to John Rolfe, along with the birth of their son Thomas, in fact, came to represent "the creation of the first American family" (Laura Wasowicz, in Birkle 1998, 70). This family, however, disintegrates when, having come to England to meet the English king, James I, Pocahontas gets sick and dies (Birkle 1998).

Clare knows (or at least suspects) about the violence of Pocahontas' domestication. This suspicion emerges in her conflicting experience in the exile. Her internal turmoil and the constant analysis of

the facts that regard her racialized being show us she knows the limits of colonization/domestication. The constructed image of an untroubled woman lets the facts of her life to be imagined. We know that Pocahontas, in fact, was "kidnapped by colonists, held against her will, forced to abandon the belief system of her people, and then taken to England in 1616 where she was displayed as a tame Indian" (Lima 1993, 41).

As historiographies multiply, so does the representation of Pocahontas' life. Birkle then asks the obvious question: "what is the story that Clare Savage reads when contemplating Pocahontas' statue in Gravesend?" (1998, 64). My argument is that the narrative shows, through Clare's interpretation, that Pocahontas was a 'lost soul'. Pocahontas lost herself to colonization and, in the process, became a symbol, which emptied her of her 'humanity'. The symbolism attained to Pocahontas empties her from any humanity as it denies the reality of her racialized body. Her racialized body is materially constituted *against* narratives of racialization and as successfully integrating the 'unity' of the colonizer. Pocahontas's image is constituted in opposition to her racial and cultural backgrounds that are erased to become something else. This something else is her assimilated story that, similar to current narratives of racial liberalism, celebrates her racial identity as *pacifically assimilated* into whiteness at the same time that denies the contradictions of this assimilation.

Birkle observes that the city in which Pocahontas was buried symbolizes her homelessness (1998, 64). She is not buried in her homeland but appropriated by those who colonized her and her land. This homelessness is Clare's homelessness. As Clare yearns for unity, Pocahontas shows her that geographical dislocation reverberates in identity displacement. Clare feels *location* as *cultural unity* (even though this is hardly true about postcolonial countries) and *dislocation* as *fragmentation* and loss of the self.

Pocahontas, Birkle argues, represents "the final moment of identification, rejection, and ultimately, understanding of the futility of this attempt of identification" (1998, 66), i.e., the futility of trying to connect to these fabricated icons. Clare identifies with Pocahontas because they "shar[e] colonization – because Clare, like Pocahontas, is 'a colonized child' (Cliff, 1990, 265)" but Pocahontas' narrative is soon "rejected as forfeiting resistance and decolonization" (Birkle 1998, 74). Clare discards, then, not any interrelation between Pocahontas and herself, but Pocahontas' 'official historiography'. Clare knows she is

also ‘lost’ and disconnects from Pocahontas as she recalls ‘her own people’ and, differently from allegorical Pocahontas, she decides to take a stand in this direction.

Clare’s reflection about Pocahontas, Joseph argues, regards Clare’s experience in England. Reflecting about the allegorical life of this character becomes one of the moments that leads her to her final decision of returning to Jamaica (Joseph 2000) and embracing the cause of the oppressed in her country. Belinda Edmondson recalls ‘the power of representation’ in Clare’s observation of the statue of Pocahontas. She argues that the representation of Pocahontas surpasses the meanings of poverty and privilege Clare perceives in the mother-country. Edmondson writes, “in the symbol of Pocahontas is frozen the entire history of the New World, its violent resistance to European imperialism converted to acquiescent, feminine (I use the term deliberately) collaboration” (1993, 190). Cartelli goes further to add that the “discovery of the grave of Pocahontas” raises Clare’s “New World consciousness” and she takes the decision of, not only to return to Jamaica but also to join the revolutionaries (Cartelli 1995, 92).

Pocahontas’ representation interpellates Clare into seeking her own voice and escaping Pocahontas’ destiny. The interpellation is then reversed and it works to certify Clare that she cannot be rendered mute as Pocahontas had been. Clare refuses to settle, and the contradiction of racial narratives (Bertha and Pocahontas) shows that race cannot ever be stabilized within tight constraints. Stabilization is not possible because, as observed in chapter one, black identity has always been hybrid. That is, instability has always been part of these identities and, the current racial moment has allowed racialized individuals to express it.

The expression of this instability relocates agency within these individuals. Similar to Pocahontas, Clare comprehends she has been silenced by mainstream narratives of whitewashing. As these narratives interpellate her into whitewashing, they silence the mixture of her racial identity and proclaim it as impure and retrograde. Clare’s reading of Pocahontas’ silence shows her she does not want to be ‘tamed’ in the same way that she feels Pocahontas was. The injustice of the prejudice of racism arouses this desire to act towards blocking this one-way process of colonization.

Clare’s feminine collaboration to European and the U.S. imperialisms is disrupted by her refusal to embrace these narratives. Clare, instead, embraces the narrative of the oppressed. Engulfed by

narratives of Black Power and Civil Rights, Clare recurs to her 'community' – in this case, her Third World Country and the women she associates with: her mother and her grandmother. However, the force of binary racial interpellations hinders any project of in-betweenness. She cannot assume her intermediate position yet and she feels forced to choose one of the sides of the racial binary. The strong connection with her mother and the feeling of injustice brought about by her mother's and her country's racial destiny makes her choose the weaker side of the binary. Clare completely forfeits the privilege of whiteness by going back to Jamaica and joining the racially battered individuals of her country.

Racial interpellation is still strong enough to make Clare feel that she has to choose one side of the binary to feel complete. As she is neither white nor black, the result is an impossibility of this wish to become true. Her narrative, however, inaugurates a discourse in which her mixed racial origin has to be acknowledged. She could have chosen to be 'white' but such a decision would implicate in relinquishing a strong facet of her identity. The experience with racialization in the U.S. and then in England interpellate her into choosing to align with the sufferers in her country. By doing so, Clare hints at the deep connections between her, her mother, and her homeland. The invisibility of whiteness appealed to her, but a sense of injustice towards her beloved mother (and country) as well as those in a similar position to her lead her to choose to align with the sufferers in what she would like to believe is 'her country'. The reasons for this 'choice' are discussed in the next topic.

2.1.4 Returning to Jamaica

Clare, who at first had accepted to develop tolerance towards the conflicting voices she listens to, is struck by the feeling of segregation and apartness she feels in these foreign lands. Her reflections regarding narratives of individuality (Jane Eyre), assimilation (Pocahontas) and her own contradictory narrative along with the personal disappointment with her mother country are the limit of her resistance to the desire to return home, as we shall see.

Jane Eyre's 'individualism' and Pocahontas' assimilation are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. Being born 'white' and monocultural, Jane Eyre performs whiteness and mainstream culture more comfortably

whereas Pocahontas assimilates into this culture later on in her life. These characters' interpellation, then, works to reproduce whiteness and mainstream culture as the ultimate destination. Yet, Clare integrates these characteristics in her racial identity as part of her and not her totality. By doing so, Clare welcomes the post-race narrative of racial crisis. Clare's mixed racial origin brings to the fore her 'individualism' and her 'assimilation' as part of her narrative of racial multiplicity.

In this point of the narrative, Clare is more and more aware of the concrete effect of ideologies of race. To pledge allegiance to whiteness or blackness would be to comply with the norm. Clare's narrative undermines the normativity of whiteness by foregrounding its arbitrariness. Clare's experience in exile makes her aware of the bias present in monocultural narratives of whiteness that seek to hide her mixed racial origin. Her feeling of displacement associated to narratives of racial stability (such as Pocahontas') makes her aware of the limits of this ideological making.

Homi Bhabha and Edward Said have written about this phenomenon. Bhabha writes that being in exile "makes you increasingly aware of the construction of culture and the invention of tradition" (Bhabha 1994, 248). Said continues,

> [m]ost people are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home; the exiles are aware of at least two, and this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is *contrapuntal* (Said 2000, 186).

The narrative, nevertheless, describes her return in essentialist terms. Clare thinks of her homeland as female and primitive (Lima 1993). It is female because the parallels she establishes between Jamaica, her mother, and grandmother occur repetitively in the narrative. It is also primitive because Clare recalls her land and herself in ways that recall the uncivilized, the *savage*. One of these moments happens when Clare compares herself to a 'Gorilla' that "mov[es] through the underbrush" in order to "[h]id[e] from the poachers" and "long[s] for tribe" (Cliff 1987, 91). Clare's description of herself as a Gorilla is an ironic re-reading of a supremacist view of race that disqualifies racialized individuals as disordered and purposeless.

By representing the land as female and primitive, Lima argues, the narrative points to essentialism and "makes [Cliff's] project, the

possibility of revolutionary social transformation, and its figuration ultimately incompatible" (Lima 1993, 40). That is so because the return to ideas regarding the land as female and primitive complies with imperialist narratives of cultural inferiority. That is, even though Clare's narrative denounces the essentialism of these views, it still complies with these terms of racial degradation. This narrative mode clashes with Clare's project of social change. Unable to escape the context of her personal narrative, Clare's social transformation is limited by its own precepts. By presenting a 'visibly white' woman who pledges allegiance to racialized individuals, Clare's narrative disturbs narratives of racial essence. However, as her narrative is constituted around narratives of imperialist superiority and racial identity of the 1980s, she ends up trapped between the dogma of racial unity and the desire to move beyond that.

The difficulties faced by Clare's fragmented identity are reinforced by the closure portrayed at the final scene of the novel. Clare associates with guerrilla[19] fighters and they get ready to attack the film crew of a U.S. production. The film is supposed to portray the saga of a local heroine. The army[20] appears and ends the rebellion quickly, leaving many dead behind. Clare is among them.

Toland-Dix recalls that Cliff argued in the essay "Caliban's Daughter: The Tempest and the Teapot" that Clare's death is what makes her 'complete' because "[h]er grandmothers' relics will be unable to distinguish her from her darker-skinned sisters" (Cliff 1991, 45). Cliff reanalyzes this scene repeatedly. In an interview to Meryl F. Schwartz, Cliff reconsiders her previous understanding of Clare's death: "I see Clare's return as tragic. She's a fragmented character and she doesn't get a chance to become whole at all" (Cliff 1993, 601). Meryl F. Schwartz recalls that, in her article "Clare Savage as Cross-roads Character" (1990), Cliff repeats the idea that, with her death, Clare has become whole. Cliff argues: "that's one way of becoming whole, but she's still dead" (1993, 601).

This is, in fact, part of Clare's personal tragedy. Cliff's view of Clare's death as a moment in which she cannot be told apart from her darker-skinned sisters reveals the intensity of racial interpellation.

[19] This term is used throughout the novel to describe the group of revolutionaries and has a similar implication to that of 'Gorilla'. The depreciation imbued in the word guerrilla represents the struggle and resistance of racialized people as illegitimate.
[20] It is not clear in the novel if the troops are Jamaican, American or both.

Racial interpellation urges racialized mixed race individuals to crave for something they cannot have – a black skin. Clare's death confirms the impossibility of 'becoming whole' in a racially mixed skin.

This impossibility is, in fact, part of the complexity of Clare's life. Clare has experienced a binary discourse in which identities are defined as white or black and she decides to align with the weakest side of this binary but she fails to bring real change upon it. This failure is also a success due to the fact that is brings to visibility meanings that might have remained untouched otherwise.

Clare's tragic ending suggests a connection to past narratives of passing in which the life of a mixed individual could only end in tragedy. Her death as 'closure' reenacts the trope of 'tragic *mulatta'*. This tragic end hints at the impossibility of reaching wholeness. Even though Clare answers to binary racial narratives (when she joins the revolutionaries), her death advances the massacring effect of the strictness of these narratives. The pain of living between two races, however, is not the force that drives Clare to death. Indeed, Clare dies because the conflicts instigated by being interpellated as both white and black lead her to take issue with the injustice raised by processes of racialization. Clare's narrative questions the easy assumption of racial inconsistency by showing the fluid, unstable and even empowering aspect of this identity (Bost 1998).

2.1.5 Closure

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, the idea of 'belonging' to a group becomes the answer to Clare's difficulty to deal with her mixed origin. After around twenty years living abroad (from 1960 to 1980), Clare returns to her country and joins a group of revolutionaries. They get together to cultivate the land that was abandoned by Clare's grandmother.

The reasons for Clare's 'choice' to join the revolutionaries go back to her position as an exile. The relationship between the spaces she occupied, her subjectivity, and the clash between narratives of purity and linear progress originate an uneasiness regarding everything that is foreign. The U.S. represents the discomfort of having to deal with the need to pass and the effects this racism imposes on her mother who refuses to do so. In England, the shock of the unexpected makes Clare reconsider her convictions regarding her racial identity. The irresolution

of these experiences makes her return to Jamaica in a movement of hope to find the past integrity of a child's experience.

In Jamaica and infused with the spirit of resistance, Clare decides to cultivate the land abandoned by her grandmother. Upon doing so, she follows her mother's advice: "'I hope someday you make something of yourself, and someday help your people.' A reminder, daughter – never forget who your people are. Your responsibilities lie beyond me, beyond yourself" (Cliff 1987, 103). This interpellation is a call for the renunciation of individualism and the embrace of the racialized community (which, in this case, are the racialized poor in Jamaica). Clare managed to ignore this call for a while but after dealing with the ambivalence of being a universal citizen *and* Third World citizen, white *and* black; she succumbs to the interpellation of the racialized and struggling part of her being.

That is, in spite of arguments that disqualify mixed race narratives as dismantling racial struggle, Clare confirms Spickard's (2003) and Lipsitz's (2003) arguments regarding mixed race people. They argue that, even though mixed race individuals struggle to deal with the uniqueness of their identities, their commitment is with their communities of origin. That is Clare's case – when the clash of these voices finally demands a decision from her, she recalls her mother's memory and commits to the racialized community as her own.

Clare's narrative recuperates racial identity as a source of common knowledge and struggle. Racial identity becomes a source of identity politics in Clare's narrative through her search of coalitions to fight racial oppression. Clare's agency is determined by her situated knowledge of racism and the restrictions imposed by dominant whiteness. We cannot say that her 'passing for white' misrepresented her, for she also is 'white'. However, her mixed racial identity and the interpellations toward it work as a constant reminder of her in-betweenness. Clare's mixed identity, hence, challenges essentialisms through a constant construction, *re*-construction, and denial of identity as a stable paradigm. The perception of identity as fragmented challenges the stability of the black/white binary.

This permanent becoming produces a post-race view of identity I want to work with. The destabilization of the black/white binary does not need to advocate the end of coalitions of struggle to fight oppression. The diversification of these communities of oppression does

not mean the end of identity politics but the need to re-organize the groups around the materialization of oppression.

Narratives of whiteness disqualify Clare's mixed racial identity by interpellating her to choose a side to fight. When she decides to embrace the racialized part of her being, she also has to relinquish whiteness. Clare's sense of being in 'exile from herself' reinforces the need to fight to avoid assimilation and her consequent disappearance in a culture that does not reflect the wholeness of her racialized being. Clare rejects narratives of purity and unity and accepts the 'impurity' of her people.

Yet, the contradiction between these terms – purity and impurity – is discursively constituted and epistemologically false. The colonial relationship cannot be understood as a one-way direction. The introduction of the colonized in the culture of the colonizer interferes in the claimed pure identity of the colonizer. That is, despite the status of objectivity, these constructs are fictions imposed from above that acquire a real meaning for identities.

The 'impurity' of the people Clare joins in Jamaica is rich in degrees of racial combinations. These combinations contradict an expected parity within the racialized individuals. This contradiction becomes clear in the scene in which she is taking some of the revolutionaries to work in her land:

> These people – men and women – were dressed in similar clothes, which became them as uniforms, signifying some agreement, some purpose – that they were in something together – in these clothes, at least, they seemed to blend together. This alikeness was something they needed, which could be important, even vital, to them – for the shades of their skin, places traveled to and from, events experienced, things understood, food taken into their bodies, acts of violence committed, books read, music heard, languages recognized, ones they loved, living family, varied widely, came between them. (Cliff 1987, 4)

Essentialist views of race are debunked by the intrinsic difference among these people. Clare knows these people share oppression but they are hardly a cohesive group. In spite of sharing oppression, Clare stands out in this group. Clare is "daughter of landowners" and is in a truck "alongside people who easily could have hated her" (Cliff 1987, 5).

Race, in this case, is the element that intersects their interests. In spite of other differences, narratives that construct race as an important feature of their identity cancel eventual differences.

These men and women are the 'revolutionaries' Clare joins in Jamaica. In her purpose to belong, Clare joins her country folks that do not share her social condition. She, in fact, joins the racialized poor and places herself against her own class – the socially favored mixed Jamaican of black and European ancestry (Toland-Dix 2004, 48). Her wish to belong to this group of underprivileged appears in her desire to respond to the negative interpellations that construct her 'race' as abject (see Butler in chapter 4). As her 'race' is interpellated as a negative feature, her social existence is constituted around racist epithets and the meaning of this identity for her. In this sense, the strong connection she feels towards her (racialized) mother and the negative attributes given to this identity work as a source of agentive purpose.

Rosaura Sánchez brings an interesting conclusion regarding Tomás Rivera's story "Zoo Island" which seems appropriate here. In this story, a group of three young boys is constantly interpellated as "dirty Mexicans." Sánchez concludes: "This identification as 'Other,' imposed upon them from the outside, leads to a conscious nonidentification with the Gringos and in turn this nonidentity generates a desire for an identity of their own" (Sánchez 2006, 46). In the novel, Clare is not directly interpellated as black but her inner connection with her mother's identity – her historical identity – makes her internalize the interpellation of blackness as offensive to her. In this internalization Clare 'accepts' being identified as *Other*. Similar to the boys in Tomás Rivera's story, this internalization leads her to a conscious nonidentification with whiteness.

This conscious nonidentification with whiteness leads Clare to seek identification with racialized individuals. Her friend Harry/Harriet[21] sponsors the somewhat awkward union with the Jamaican revolutionaries. Using words and a perception of the racialized as *her* people, Harry/Harriet recalls the discourse of racial allegiance of Clare's mother (page 80 above). Initially, this interpellation comes in the form of letters but, as Clare comes to Jamaica, Harry/Harriet compels her to join the group of revolutionaries. "It time" (Cliff 1987, 188) to meet them, she tells her.

[21] This transvestite is referred as Harry/Harriet throughout the novel.

Clare attempts at answering to this challenge with a solution – giving land to the poor and helping them to make it productive again. This solution is, in fact, a form of dealing with contradictory narratives of racialization. Liberalist narratives of post-race that argue for the denial of aspects of identity connected to race do not change her response to interpellations that racialize her.

At first, Clare manages to avoid responding to racialization as a core feature of her identity, but in her final decision, her urge to answer to the racialized portion of her being becomes apparent. Nevertheless, this answer is clearly propelled forward by a common experience of *prejudice* and not the material realization of racism in her social and economic life. This can be read both as problematic and liberating. The problem with Clare's answer to being racialized is that it is clearly based on the *prejudice* she feels abroad and that interpellate her (as well as those dearest to her such as her mother and sister) as inferior regarding the 'white race'. Differently from the men and women on the truck, Clare has not suffered with poverty and other difficulties faced by her fellow citizens. As blackness diversifies through a change in economic conditions and a liberalist discourse of race takes place, the awkwardness of Clare's alliance with the 'revolutionaries' is brought to the fore.

The awkwardness, in fact, is established by the implied idea that racism is mostly a matter of representation and not a social and economic problem (Melamed 2011, 4). In these terms, Clare's narrative questions assumptions regarding the representation of race. By dying in a revolution that is only hers in terms of identity oppression (in opposition to social and economic), *No Telephone to Heaven* points to the awkwardness of this type of union based on racial interpellation. Clare's trajectory seems to suggest that, as blackness changes, other routes of resistance have to be sought.

2.2 CONCLUSIONS

The constant interpellation Clare goes through and the questionings raised by it bring about a post-race discourse in which race is perceived as unstable and unresolved. Nevertheless, this instability refers primarily to the formation of identity. Even though Clare does join the racialized poor in her country, the reach of the novel is discursive and propagates a view of race as changing. At the same time

that Clare's narrative installs a view of blackness as not essentialist, the discourse produced by Clare's narrative might be co-opted into a liberalist reading by which, if there is not essence, there are *not* factors that justify struggle based on racial identity.

Clare's choice to join the racialized poor in Jamaica is predicated on her battered identity and not her battered social situation. The limits of this view of racialization point to a privileged reading of racism through which the author (usually an economically, socially, and culturally privileged subject) gives voice to the need to change racism through the lenses of prejudice. Even though Clare is aware that the social situation of the black poor has to be changed, the fact that she dies without accomplishing much implies in the awkwardness of her answer to racial interpellation. By focusing mostly on the problems regarding the subjectivity of the character, the narrative complies with the racial narrative of post-race through which changes in prejudice and the sympathy of the reader may be enough to change the racial situation.

Her light skin and the privileges associated to 'belonging to whiteness' do not manage to overcome her allegiance to her black mother and the sufferings of the black collectivity. Throughout her trajectory, diverse moments[22] point to the inner struggles she is dealing with to comprehend her role in the world in which she is (still) interpellated to answer back to blackness. Another of these moments refers to her own name. Cliff argues that Clare's name "is significant and is intended to represent her as a crossroads character, with her feet (and head) in (at least) two worlds". Clare Savage's first name means clear, white. Cliff informs us that this name "stands for privilege, civilization, erasure, forgetting. She is not meant to curse, or rave, or be a critic of imperialism. She is meant to speak softly and keep her place". As to her last name, *Savage*, Cliff points out that "[i]t is meant to evoke the wildness that has been bleached from her skin" (Cliff 1990, 265). That is, it evokes the attempts at whitewashing her racial identity. At the same time, the contradictions present in her name show the instability of such identities. Her first and last names account for a split character and her difficulty to adapt. She returns to Jamaica but as Toland-Dix has stated, "[t]he home Clare longs for does not exist" (2004, 50). She is not a black Jamaican. She is 'American'/British/Jamaican and all races at

[22] Such as those previously analyzed in this chapter: the distress of her father's desire to pass, the disappointment regarding her mother country (which is further illustrated through her comparison with Jane Eyre, Bertha and Pocahontas).

the same time. She is fragmentation, and she cannot be reduced to a single Jamaican identity.

Within the U.S. metanarrative of the one-drop rule, Clare comes across a 'given' identity; nevertheless, her experience shows her that her racial identity is much more complex than that. As Elia has stated, "[p]assing, even when it involves agency, is never free from the dominant discourse" (2000, 359). Indeed, Clare's white skin complexion allows her the privilege of passing without conscious effort but it also denies her the possibility of promptly claiming her oppressed identity. This in-betweenness allows her to question the politics of domination and to engage in a slow process of personal discovery and healing which continues with the character's inner journey.

In the end, Clare embraces the oppressed portion of her identity. Clare's choice contests the *Truth* of the visual connection between race and skin color. This *Truth* confirms that interpellation and personal history are stronger than the *visual* in the making of her subjectivity. The fact that she is visibly white also puts forth an in-between identity. By putting forth the differences between the revolutionaries and Clare's fair skin color, the narrative redresses the U.S. notion of the color line. Even though Clare dies in the end, the in-betweenness of her identity disrupts essentialist views of race by showing racial identity as a permanent construction.

CHAPTER THREE

TAKING A STAND

> Before all of this radical ambiguity, I was a black girl (Senna 2006, 431).

This chapter investigates the issue of passing in *Caucasia* from a liberalist and Critical Realist perspective. As we have seen in chapter one, liberalist discourses on race have attempted to put forward a view of race as 'disappearing'. Nevertheless, race is not 'disappearing' but new forms of racial oppression are replacing old forms of racism (such as that based on phenotype). In this process, black individuals perceive that the meaning of blackness is changing, becoming something else they cannot quite grasp yet.

This changing discourse of race reaches the main character in *Caucasia.* As a mixed race individual, Birdie Lee experiences the instability of racial identities. The one-drop legacy pushes her towards identifying as black; however, the disconnection from race promoted by post-racialism also shows her another possible path. As a visibly white individual, Birdie Lee can embrace either whiteness or blackness. Nevertheless, Birdie's narrative develops a sense in which these limits must be extrapolated. As we will see subsequently, the discourse of racial 'choice' points to a third form of racial configuration. My hypothesis is that current discourses of race make a multiracial identification the third option. This hypothesis will be tested through the analysis of Birdie Lee's trajectory.

3.1 *CAUCASIA: A NOVEL by Danzy Senna*

The story starts in Boston in the 1970s when Birdie Lee is eight years old. She and her sister Cole are born to Deck Lee, a Black revolutionary intellectual, and Sandy Lodge Lee, a white teacher who is engaged in the Black movement. Birdie is the 'white' daughter whereas Cole has a darker skin tone. The story starts at the moment in which "Boston was a [racial] battleground" (Senna 1998, 7) and ends when Birdie Lee is a teenager, and she returns to Boston to meet her father and sister.

Such as Clare's parents before, Birdie's family also separates and does so along the color line: Deck stays with Cole and Birdie with

Sandy. Deck takes Cole with him to Brazil[23] with the promise of a reunion when things are calmer. Sandy, worried with her past activities as a revolutionary, decides that she and Birdie have to travel around the country to avoid being arrested. The family never gets together. Suffering with the absence of her father and sister, Birdie tracks them down. In this meeting, she and her sister reflect about their perception and experiences with race.

Caucasia is rich in passages that deal with the social and psychological construction of racial identity. From these, five moments stand out and will be analyzed in this chapter: Birdie's identification with blackness, Birdie's need to 'pass as black', the rupture with this racial identification, Birdie's need to 'pass as white,' and the final scene in which Birdie meets her father and sister. In these separate scenes, a prevailing theme appears – that of performing identity – be whiteness, blackness, or biracialism. Finally, Birdie's performance of race and the meanings it raises regarding a post-race condition will be examined.

3.1.1 Birdie's identification with blackness

In her childhood, Birdie is taught to identify with blackness. This is reinforced not only by the close relationship with her sister but also by learning to be black with her parents. Her parents, in fact, each on his or her way, seek to teach the girls the value of being black. The beginning of this teaching starts with the girl's isolation from the 'outside dangers'. This isolation comes in the form of homeschooling. Birdie and Cole's parents want to protect the girls from racism, but the girls are not quite aware of what their isolation means. Birdie reports that she "had some vague understanding that beyond our window, outside the attic, lay danger – the world, Boston, and all the problems that came with the city" (Senna 1998, 6). Away from the outside world, the confrontations that might come with their skin color difference are delayed.

Sandy Lee teaches the girls to be race-conscious by recommending the reading of books such as Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Their mother's objective, the narrator tells us, is that the girls become "the first child raised and educated free of racism, patriarchy,

[23] The trip to Brazil is full of hope. The racial paradise Deck expects to find, though, becomes disappointment as he discovers that the Brazilian racial mixture is not due to lack of racism but a subtle form that reinstates it as whitening.

and capitalism" (Senna 1998, 138). Similar to their mother, the girls' father also shares this interest in giving the girls a race-conscious education. His technique is to share his knowledge regarding race to teach the girls about race and racism.

Sandy Lee and Deck consider that isolating the girls from the outside world will keep them safe from racism. However, the books Sandy requests them to read deal directly or indirectly with the issues of racism, patriarchy, and capitalism. The girls' isolation and the books Sandy requests them to read produce an artificial space against which these ideas are allocated. This artificial space disregards the interconnection between identity formation and horizon of agency. Building up race-consciousness can only mean something against the grain of the black race being represented as both a 'race' and 'epistemologically different'. That is, by restricting their epistemological knowledge of race, the girl's parents restrict their understanding of race.

Differently from Sandy, who seeks to treat the girls equally, Deck clearly favors Cole over Birdie in these teachings. This preference comes from his perception of Birdie's visibly white body as effectively white. Even though Birdie is not the object of such teaching, she grasps some information:

> Some of his ideas I was familiar with, had heard in school, about the Diaspora and the genocidal tendencies of the white man. / Others were new to me – like [. . .] his notion of how white people find their power in invisibility, while the rest of us remain bodies for them to study and watch (Senna 1998, 72).

In these teachings, Deck reproduces the notion of the visibility of the black race as being marked by the gaze of race. While the white body is unmarked – therefore, rendered invisible – bodies that escape this definition become discernible by narratives of race that mark only these bodies as racialized.

At this point of the narrative, the girls are young and race-consciousness is the dominant discourse of blackness. Race-consciousness sought to invert the white gaze by attributing value to the black race. This attribution of value included the criticism of black and white marriage as an attempt at whitening. That is the case one day, when Deck and the girls are on the street. They see an interracial couple (as he and Sandy once were) and Deck asks Cole: "'[w]hat's wrong with

that picture?'". Cole does not care to answer, but Birdie answers diligently: "'Diluting the race!'" (Senna 1998, 72-3). Deck dismisses Birdie's answer by "snort[ing] in the place of a laugh" and stating: "I guess you could put that way". At another moment, Deck asks the same question regarding a TV show. Birdie attempts at an answer, but her father waits for Cole's answer: "White people love to see us making fools of ourselves. It makes them feel safe". Deck does not hide his gladness at Cole's learning: "He patted her shoulder" (Senna 1998, 73).

Sandy's political engagement and Deck's theoretical teachings are the basic components of the girls' racial upbringing. Deck's racial theory, however, constitutes black identity as both an essence and an effect. The constitution of race as an essence comes in different instances. Deck reinforces the view of race as an essence through his genuine affection for Cole: "Cole was my father's special one. I understood that even then. She was his prodigy – his young, gifted, and black. Her existence comforted him. She was the proof that his blackness hadn't been completely blanched" (Senna 1998, 55-6). By doing so, the narrative demonstrates that Deck's learned perception of race produces the effect of engaging emotionally with the 'black body' in opposition to Birdie's visually white body.

Sandy, in her turn, also perceives the girl's race according to the visual. She tells Birdie why she got engaged with race struggle: "And the crazy thing is, your sister was the reason I did what I did. Having a black child made me see things differently. Made it all more personal. It hurts to see your baby come into a world like this, so you want to change it" (Senna 1998, 275). In these words, it becomes clear that Sandy fails to see the fact that both children are mixed race. She justifies her struggle against racism based on her *visibly* black child.

In spite of not being perceived as black by her father and her mother, Birdie feels she is 'black' and fails to understand her parents' inability to see beyond the skin color. She states: "My mother did that sometimes, spoke of Cole as if she had been her only black child. It was as if my mother believed that Cole and I were so different. As if she believed I was white, believed I was Jesse[24]" (Senna 1998, 275). The anti-essentialism of Birdie's feeling 'black' confirms the effects of racial identification but not her mother's inability to see beyond skin color.

[24] Jesse is the name Birdie adopts when she and her mother are hiding and she passes for white. See topic 3.1.3.

Birdie suffers because her blackness is not recognized – hegemonic whiteness whitewashes her.

The unstable terrain upon which race is constructed is also highlighted in Cole's story of a (fictional) people that used the language the girls invented together. Full of imagination, Cole tells Birdie the story she created. The story of the Elemenos is full of racial symbolism. According to Cole, this people

> could turn not just from black to white, but from brown to yellow to purple to green, and back again. She said they were a shifting people, constantly changing their form, color, pattern, in a quest for invisibility. According to her, their changing routine was a serious matter – less a game of make-believe than a fight for the survival of their species (Senna 1998, 7).

Cole's story of the Elemenos theorizes the distinction between the liberalist and critical realist narratives of anti-essentialism or post-race. The changing ability of the Elemenos deals with the fact that identity has ontological and epistemological value; hence, it is a site of social knowledge and political action. Identity, however, is not a stable and unified construct. It changes and is constituted as narratives of identity interweave. As Cole defines it, identity is "a serious matter".

This observation challenges the liberalist argument that racial identity is a minor element, which should not stand as a barrier to becoming a U.S. citizen (Melamed 2011).The fact that identity is "a serious matter" and shifting implies in "the survival of their species" reaffirms Critical Realism's call to recuperate identity as a resourceful basis for political engagement. The constructed character of identities does not take place in a political, social, and historical vacuum. Identity is constructed in the contact with these narratives and is, hence, in constant movement. They support an anti-essentialist discursive conception of post-race as a moment of adaptation to the challenges of a changing view of race. This moment of adaptation, though, does not implicate in the complete assimilation or disappearance of the history of the subject.

Birdie perceives that 'passing', as in her sister's description of the Elemenos, consists of disappearing. This fact is promptly questioned by Birdie: "As she spoke, a new question – a doubt – flashed through my mind. Something didn't make sense. What was the point of surviving if

you had to disappear?"[25] (Senna 1998, 7-8). Cole's description of the 'shifting people' makes racial passing a form of hiding. Birdie questions the politics of passing and again the making of identities. She draws our attention to the fact that 'disappearing', that is, assimilating into the U.S. universal culture, means relinquishing her personal history. Even before passing, Birdie is aware of the fact that this is not a simple matter. That is the issue to be examined in the following sections in which Birdie first has to 'pass' for black and later on when she has to 'pass' for white.

3.1.2 Passing for Black

From the very beginning, Birdie has to deal with the constructed feature of identities. This stands out at the school for black students in which she is enrolled. As it would be expected, Birdie has difficulties to be accepted by the other students. This rejection informs her that she does not belong. The implied statement is that blackness is desirable whereas mixed blood or whiteness places her outside of the possibility of being loved and cherished. Birdie understands the message and wants to be black in her skin and in her affiliations.

Birdie's fear of being interpellated as white (Rummell 2007, 5) and her desire of blackness disturbs traditional narratives of passing (Botelho 2010, 87). In many passing novels, the tragic *mulatta* fears being discovered due to a mark on her body that will denounce her blackness. Birdie, however, fears that her *blackness* is denounced as fake. She feels that being 'discovered' in her performance can break the weak balance of her life. This way, Birdie's tragedy inverts the logic of previous passing narratives by the need to reiterate her blackness.

As the students at Nkrumah[26] engage in visual perception with Birdie, they become outraged by her presence in their school. They interpellate her: "What you doin' on this school! You white!" (Senna 1998, 43). As we can perceive, the students' notion of race replicates Deck and Sandy's response to her visually white skin. As they are faced with a 'black and white' girl, they essentialize her 'racelessness' by attributing whiteness to her body. Birdie feels extremely uncomfortable with this assertion of the 'lie' of her skin: "All eyes were on me, and I

[25] As we will see subsequently, Birdie does not question this 'disappearance' when she and her mother hide their names (see section 3.1.3).

[26] The name of the school refers to an important African politician who became the president of Ghana. He helped to promote Pan-Africanism.

tried to think of something to say. I felt the familiar tightening in my lungs. The children stared at me, mouths hanging open. A terrific silence had overtaken the room" (Senna, 1998, 43).

Birdie's fear of her identity being mistaken for a performance reflects the uneasiness of her in-between position. She was taught to see herself as black, but her comrades fail to see her this way. This failure leads to the turning moment in which some girls threaten to cut her hair. It is her sister Cole, who empowered by her visible blackness, defends her. One of the girls, Maria, justifies her behavior by saying, "'cause she's white she thinks she's all that". Cole grabs Maria's hair and says: "Listen, metal mouth. Birdie isn't white. She's black. Just like me. So don't be messing with her again or I'll cut off all your hair for real this time" (Senna 1998, 48).

By the performative process of naming Birdie as black, Cole manages to produce her as 'possibly' black. That is, Birdie is left alone, but she is not promptly accepted as a black girl: "Nobody messed with me, but they didn't talk to me either" (Senna 1998, 48). As we can see, the process of being accepted as a black girl is slow. Her sister's defense facilitates the process, but it is only with the approximation of other students that she is welcome into that community. Even though she perceives that after this episode, "the rest of the school saw [her] in a new light"; she is continuously afraid of being mistaken for a fraud, "a fear that at any moment I would be told it was all a big joke" (Senna 1998, 64).

The transition between the refusal of liberalism and the perspective of Critical Realism becomes very clear in this passage. As Birdie's racial identification has to be constructed, the myth of the freedom of choice becomes apparent. Due to the predominantly black environment she is inserted, Birdie seeks the privilege of being accepted by her black peers and not the privilege of the invisibility of whiteness and U.S. citizenship. Her visible 'whiteness' de-essentializes narratives of race as constructed in the opposition between black and white. Even when race is not perceived as an essence, it still depends on social recognition to be acknowledged.

Birdie's racial identification is founded against her 'visual' characterization. The rejection by her black school peers brings the liberalist argument that mixed-race individuals are oppressed by racial categorization itself into the picture. At the same time, Birdie's rejection constructs her black school peers as retrograde for being limited by

essentialist views of race. This narrative, hence, produces a double effect: reinscribes race upon those overtly race conscious (in this case, Birdie's black peers) and allows mixed race individuals to disconnect from blackness and escalate towards a universal U.S. citizenship (a renewed form of whiteness).

This representation of black identity is an effect of liberalist discourses. As blackness is marked by 'race', interpellations regarding a return to experiences of blackness is perceived as limiting. This phenomenon is amplified in this post-race moment by the post-racialist discourse through which, by complying with U.S. universal citizenship, *anyone* can reach progress and the eventual invisibility of 'whiteness'. *Anyone*, however, is limited by a wide enclosing precept: individuals of any race or any nation(ality) that do not disturb the U.S. capitalist structure.

Birdie's refusal to accept to be treated as white, nevertheless, points to a critical reading of her racial performance. The contradiction of color and race contests the way racialization is understood. The lack of a mark that denounces her blackness not only shows the limits of the one-drop rule to explain 'race' but also de-essentializes it. This lack of connection between the body and the race 'infiltrates' well-established notions of race and restitutes the agency of the racialized individual. Birdie is not in a one-way direction towards whitening, she also contaminates the perception of race in the U.S. At this point of the narrative, Birdie's choice of blackness disturbs the multicultural precept that points to integration as a pacific movement towards whitening.

At Nkrumah, Birdie has to make an extra effort to convince people of her blackness. In order to change into a black girl, Birdie learns to speak Black English and accessorizes. She ties her hair in "a tight braid to mask its texture", pierces her ears, and buys new clothes (Senna 1998, 62). As Cole and Birdie's language is perceived at Nkrumah as being other than Black English, they make an extra effort to fit in. Cole is reading a magazine and points it out to her sister: "We talk like white girls, Birdie". From the examples in the article, they practice Black English. Cole tells her sister: "don't say, 'I'm going to the store', Say, I'm goin' to de sto'. Get it? And don't say, 'Tell the truth.' Instead, say, 'Tell de troof.' Okay?" Birdie follows her sister's guidance and whispers to herself: "Tell de troof" (Senna 1998, 53).

This act of passing (for black), which Birdie calls "the art of changing" (Senna 1998, 62) highlights performativity as a central aspect

of Birdie's identity (Rummell 2007). The art of changing reiterates the constructed and historically situated character of identities. Birdie's indeterminate racial identity leads her to constantly deal with its constructed character. The effort to convince others of her blackness is developed in her experiences with changing afterwards: "I learned the art of changing at Nkrumah, a skill that would later become second nature to me" (Senna 1998, 62). By reading a magazine such as Ebony, trying to learn how to speak, dress, and behave like a black person, as Grassian observed, Birdie is accepted by the school students, but not without the cost of having to learn how to perform a new self. In spite of Birdie's positive view of her changing abilities, this process is deeply painful because it questions the possibility of being loved and accepted by her family andher peers.

Birdie's and Cole's need to interpret their blackness shows that race is a fabricated construct. The concept of blackness the girls find at Nkrumah encompasses Brett St Louis definition of race as "unit[ing] differentiated people through arbitrarily ascriptive traits" that "can neither be adequately sustained nor explained and, worse still, silently invokes naturalistic claims as a means to cohere a social group as a racial collectivity" (2002, 659).

The blackness they learn at Nkrumah reproduces an essentialism that challenges the black identity Birdie learned with her parents. It also fails to enclose the diversity of Blackness itself, and thus of black people. As the representation of black identity put forth by the Nkrumah's students fails to enclose such diversity, it also fails Birdie as she has difficulties to accomplish the performance of blackness expected from her. Hence, the limited perception of her blackness as anchored in the whitewashing of her skin needs to be overcome by the continuous reenactment of her performance.

Previously the game of changing was a game of make-believe the girls played at home, but as Birdie puts it: "only at Nkrumah did it become more than a game. There I learned how to do it for real – how to become someone else, how to erase the person I was before" (Senna 1998, 62). Kathryn Rummell argues that, through the comparison of performance to the children's make-believe game, "Senna interrogates the category of blackness: by implying that it is nothing more than make-believe, a costume to be donned and doffed at will, she suggests that the category is empty at its core" (2007, 5). Nevertheless, the emptiness Rummell describes is a response to essentialist views of race

that presume that blackness is established previously to the experience of the subject. We have to be careful, however, and add that race is not an essence, but it exists as an effect. Therefore, it is not an 'empty' category but a valid constructed category.

By demonstrating the constructed feature of racial categories, Birdie's experience in Nkrumah questions the view of race as essential and unchangeable. This questioning installs the crisis within the concept of race and questions the inability of the color line to establish a distinction based on skin color or even cultural construction. In fact, the narrative constantly points to the *visually* as being constitutive of Birdie's race.

That is the case when Deck favors Cole over Birdie in his teachings. Birdie's visibly white body brings about conflicting meanings for him. The way he treats Birdie presumes her 'whiteness' to be a privilege she will request by passing at the same time that it is the image of the 'enemy'. In this sense, Deck perceives Birdie's body as recreating the boundaries between whiteness and blackness and not breaching them. Deck fails to see her daughter's mixed race as irreducible to a racial binary.

The fact that Birdie is the most interested in Deck's teachings de-essentializes race and, according to Habiba Ibrahim, it is "part of a larger critique of racial essentialism" (2007, 165). Ibrahim's argument is that, while his teachings are clearly directed to Cole (the 'black' daughter); it is the 'white' daughter who seems more interested in learning. The visibility of the 'white body' that 'wants to be black' questions the notion that an essence would be attached to it. The girl's behavior regarding Deck's teachings demonstrate that race is a cultural construction that impinges meanings on bodies.

The critique of racial essentialism in *Caucasia*, in fact, sets up the post-race context as anti-essentialist. Anti-essentialism appears in *Caucasia* as it focuses on Birdie's racial diversity and identity contradictions. Birdie's 'white' body floats between whiteness and blackness. Birdie's fragmented identity is, however, still 'black'. Even though it is not expected from her (by her father and others as we will see subsequently), she pledges her allegiance to blackness. In this sense, the body is de-essentialized, and racial meanings become subject to revision and further scrutiny.

As the visibility of Birdie's white skin denies "the truth of race" (Kawash 1997, 164), Birdie perceives that her racial identity is highly

unstable. This instability is first hinted at her lack of a name in her birth certificate. As her parents "couldn't agree on a name for [her]" – the mother called her Jesse, her father Patrice, it is the name her sister gives her that everybody starts using. That happens, not before it has caused in her a sense of confusion: "For a while, I answered to all three names with a schizophrenic zeal" (Senna 1998, 19). This schizophrenia accompanies "her uncertain identity" (Watson 2002, 105) from the beginning. As in her birth certificate that still reads 'Baby Lee', Birdie learns she has to recreate her identity repeatedly, as she faces new people and different realities. This recreation comes with the understanding that, for her, being black is not a ready-to-wear identity.

The discursive effect of her parents' lessons regarding the value of blackness is to confirm the regulatory norms responsible for the creation of a powerful psychological basis for the maintenance of a black mindset. As the performative force of the discourses of her visible whiteness destabilizes the 'norm' of her racial identity, Birdie comes to question the initial construction of her being as *black*. The effect is the fragmentation of her identity. Even though Birdie thinks of herself as black, she is perceived as white amongst blacks. In this scenario, her subjectivity is subjected to the gaze of the white *and* the black man. Being observed through this kaleidoscopic gaze, she is *both* black and white and *neither* one of them.

That is, in confluence with the current post-race period; Birdie's experience is one of crisis. This crisis brings up space for the review of identity and group formation based on the definition of blackness by the imperative white. The focus on the uniqueness of Birdie's racial configuration reinforces the idea of intra-racial difference and allows mixed race individuals to disconnect from the binary system of race. These aspects of mixed race identity highlight the fluidity of race and the need of identity politics to be continually re-constituted.

Sandy manages to acknowledge the discrimination suffered by those who are interpellated under the historical legacy of white racism. Yet, as Deck did before, she also reads Birdie's skin as 'whitewashing' her blackness, i.e., entitling her to the privilege of whiteness and escaping the discrimination of blackness. As Birdie's parents appeal to the *visual* to classify Birdie and Cole, they dismantle the basic assumption of the one-drop rule. They perform the inversion of the one-drop rule of blackness to the one-drop rule of whiteness. As they 'promote' Birdie to whiteness, they concur with the aim of the racial

liberalist discourse to maintain whiteness mainstream (see chapter one, topic 1.3.1). The implications of this inversion, however, also include the idea that Birdie is not only visibly white, but she *shares* or *will share* the culture of the majority of U.S. citizens. This disregard of the values that place blacks together brings forward the notion that racial identity is just a matter of color and political engagement. The complete annihilation of identity installs a reductionism of identity to a malleable 'multicultural' entity that moves peacefully towards universalism.

Even before Birdie considers the *possibility* of passing for white, she is constructed as white. This construction works as powerful interpellation towards whitewashing. Through this situation, Senna criticizes essentialist views of blackness. At the same time that passing for white can be seen as a betrayal to the black race, in a period of black pride, they also ostracize a girl "as not black enough" (Elam 2011, 103). The opening paragraph of the novel starts, in fact, with an introduction into what Birdie feels regarding her loss of this primary identification with blackness and her personal history:

> A long time ago I disappeared. One day I was here, the next I was gone. ... The next I was a nobody, just a body without a name or history, sitting beside my mother in the front seat of our car, moving forward on the highway, not stopping. (And when I stopped being nobody, I would become white – white as my skin, hair, bones allowed. My body would fill in the blanks, tell me who I should become, and I would let it speak for me.) (Senna 1998, 1)

Interestingly enough, Birdie perceives her loss of reference of blackness in relation to the visibility of her body as perceived by others. This perception takes the place of her personal history and racial connections. Her body 'passes' as what was once a lived experience of blackness. The loss of reference of blackness allows Birdie to become 'nobody' – i.e., not marked by blackness. In this sense, Ibrahim argues, 'nobody' becomes 'anybody' (2007). Being anybody, on its turn, is associated to the invisibility of whiteness. This way, Birdie moves towards becoming a U.S. citizenship (and the universal subject) that Melamed talks about.

Birdie's racial identity, in fact, is questioned from the very beginning. In the same way that Carmen and her father, Birdie's grandmother places her skin over her origins. Proud of her visible

whiteness, Birdie's grandmother "liked to remind me of my heritage every time I came over. She would pull me close to her and say, 'You're from good stock, Birdie. It still[27] means something". Even though the grandmother's presence in Birdie's life is erratic, her celebration of Birdie's visible whiteness reinforces her father's rejection on the same grounds. These times it is Birdie who "always seemed to get the brunt of her attention, while Cole was virtually ignored" (Senna 1998, 100).

Birdie's grandmother guarantees the teaching of the value of whiteness by telling "stories about how good [her] blood was" (Senna 1998, 100). The 'value' of Birdie's skin reflects in an appreciation that follows the color line. Birdie's grandmother disregards the one drop of black blood and perceives her as essentially white. Strangely enough, Birdie endorses the one-drop rule when she criticizes her grandmother for 'seeing' her 'whiteness': "She believed that the face was a mirror of the soul. She believed, deep down, that the race my face reflected made me superior. Such a simple, comforting myth to live by" (Senna 1998, 366).

Birdie's visible whiteness raises in her grandmother a feeling that mimics love. Birdie, however, questions the gratuity of this love: "Or maybe it wasn't me she loved, but rather my face, my skin, my hair, and my bones, because they resembled her own" 1998, (Senna 1998, 365). Interestingly enough, Birdie never verbalizes a similar reasoning regarding her father's preference for Cole. She knows his preference is mirrored in their color, but she does not criticize her father in these terms. That happens because her father's offense affects the core of her constructed love and admiration for blackness whereas her grandmother offends her by obliterating her cultural association to blackness.

As noted earlier, Birdie's parents and her grandmother's treatment of her as white works as *involuntary* passing. She believes she is black and resents when her family treats her and her sister differently. Birdie fears that her performance of blackness is perceived as fake by strangers such as Carmen and the students at Nkrumah but she does not understand her family's compliance with this view of her as 'passing'. Birdie does not want to be white but some of those she cares the most treat her as if she were. This passing – that does not relate to her

[27] The grandmother's observation that being white 'still' means something reinforces the notion that whiteness is in crisis. This is further highlighted by the fact that she is described as belonging to a decadent aristocratic family.

behavior but to how she is perceived – questions the view of the concept of passing as a voluntary and artful act.

Birdie does not mean to deceive anybody by claiming a unitary and essential white identity. Indeed, she regrets her inability to disrupt the visibility of her white skin through her performance of blackness. This difference will prove crucial to Birdie's destiny. The subsequent facts of Birdie's life will show that this identification can be perceived differently as she has to perform whiteness.

3.1.3 Passing for White

After the family separates, Sandy tells Birdie that the FBI is seeking them, and they have to run away. At this moment, Birdie's ability to change is again requested from her. Sandy tells Birdie they "would be looking for a white woman on the lam with her black child. But the fact that I could pass, she explained, with my straight hair, pale skin, my general phenotypic resemblance to the Caucasoid race, would throw them off our trail" (Senna 1998, 128). Birdie becomes Jesse Goldman and Sandy becomes Sheila. Differently from previous passing novels, it is neither Birdie who decides to pass nor herself who chooses the features of her new identity. She has to do so due to her mother's fear of being caught (Rummell 2007).

On the road, passing for white becomes the art of blending in. Tucker argues that "[t]he constant focus on the ability of Birdie to morph easily from one racialized identity to another hints at the illusory nature of race and its shifting significance" (2008, 78). Its shifting significance is further confirmed as Birdie performs whiteness and starts perceiving this identity as hers, as well. She reports, for instance, that after a while, the name Jesse Goldman "no longer felt so funny, so thick on my tongue, so make-believe" (Senna 1998, 190). This realization shows performativity at work and disturbs the notion of racial authenticity. That is, the reiteration of whiteness constructs it as a valid identity. Birdie's need to perform whiteness shows her that, the fact that she is interpellated as white (in the school she enrolled and by the family that rents their house for them, for instance) helps her to *constitute* her identity as white.

The beginning of this process comes from forgetting the things that belonged to her old self such as the box of negrobilia her father and sister left her before leaving. Birdie resists this change. She repeats to

herself: "'I haven't forgotten'". Nevertheless, she painfully admits that the objects in the box "seemed like remnants from the life of some other girl whom I barely knew anymore, anthropological artifacts of some ancient, extinct people, rather than pieces of my past" (Senna 1998, 190).

Similar to the box of negrobilia, she starts forgetting about her father. Birdie suffers with this prospect and makes a point of telling Mr. Pleasure (the horse from the farm they are) her story, "the real story of my father and sister, repeating the same cold facts over and over again as if to convince myself that they had existed" (Senna 1998, 191). Along with the attempted view of her performance of whiteness as a game of make-believe, this repetition brings her a feeling of safety that helps her believe that her "real self – Birdie Lee – was safely hidden beneath my beige flesh, and that when the right moment came, I would reveal her, preserved, frozen solid in the moment in which I had left her" (Senna 1998, 233).

Birdie's expectation of finding her 'real self' beneath her flesh shows that Birdie deals with the historically situated narratives of race she comes across. Even though she deals with race as an unstable and fragmented construct, her expectation of having her blackness hidden somewhere implicates in a view of race as pre-inscribed in her body. However, as Birdie shows the expectation of this revelation, she also doubts it. Hence, her narrative discloses race as a construction that is inherently related to her being in the world and dealing with either being racialized or being racially unmarked. She constitutes her racial identity as she goes about dealing with the experience of race. This form of viewing her racial constitution allows us to perceive racial formation as a process in constant change and directly affecting racialized subjects.

Similar to Clare in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Birdie perceives her performance of whiteness as a form of 'passing'. When she recalls her experiences of blackness as accounting for her real self, this remembrance confirms she perceives her new white identity as a fake one. Passing for white is for her, similarly to the first view of passing, a betrayal that her father had previously condemned: "no daughter of mine is going to pass" (Senna 1998, 27). Birdie, nevertheless, wonders about how her father would feel about the fact that she 'passed' in order to escape. Interestingly enough, she concludes that her father "would see our situation as innocent and practical" and that her experience with

passing could, in fact, help him by "support[ing] my father's research" (Senna 1998, 189).

In this narration, Birdie finds a justification for 'passing'. In order to manage her uneasiness regarding her 'deceitful' act, she concludes that her performance of whiteness could be useful for her father's research. That is, reasoning that her passing may work beyond her own interest but in the interest of the black race helps her overcome her feelings of guilt and disloyalty. These feelings show the force of black identity as a 'communitarian identity' that opposes to whiteness. The strength of this interpellation makes her feel her act of suppressing the 'black portion' of her identity as 'passing'. That is, passing as it was first understood: as betrayal and deception of her 'genuine identity' (see Belluscio's definition of passing in topic 1.1). Even though her in-between position makes her question the strictness of the one-drop rule, Birdie still feels and, indeed *seeks* to find, what she believes to be her 'true' self beyond all these layers of racial definition.

This feeling of inadequacy and betrayal is reinstated as, in the predominantly white state of New Hampshire; she comes to know a visibly biracial girl. Samantha allures her, and she observes the girl "the way one slows to look back at a freeway accident" (Senna 1998, 225). This sentence shows a mixture of curiosity, surprise, and fear. Birdie's daily experience has shown her that, in spite of her fears of being discovered, she can 'hide' her blackness. Hence, when she sees a girl whose mixed racial origin is stamped on her skin, she gets confused and perplexed by a racial experience that has to be different from hers. This difference encloses the blunt need to deal with her mixed racial origin whereas Birdie can postpone any direct encounter with her in-betweenness.

Birdie soon realizes what the differences between Samantha's and her mixed identity mean. She concludes that she does not "want to be black like [her]. A doomed, tragic shade of black. I wanted to be black like somebody else" (Senna 1998, 321). She wants to be 'black like somebody else' because she perceives Samantha's isolation and sadness. She wants to be 'black like somebody else' because she perceives Samantha is treated differently by other people. That is the case when Samantha starts dating a white boy named Matthew, and the boy treats her with disregard. The narrative reveals that Samantha "always walked behind him when they were at school. He treated her

with ambivalence, feeling her up in the hallways, talking down to her in public" (Senna 1998, 252).

Birdie understands that Samantha's school peers constitute her racial duality as a non-identity. Hence, Birdie refuses to be *black like* Samantha. This concept of blackness belittles her in-between position as a mixed race individual. Birdie's refusal reflects her absorption of the white/black binary. She perceives Samantha's mixed racial identity is interpellated as a negative attribute and hides in an 'essential' performance of whiteness. At this moment, she is not prepared to acknowledge the post-race meanings of her identity. As narratives of biracialism she comes across are mostly negative, Birdie simply takes in this information and, helped by her 'disguise', she avoids any type of confrontation.

Samantha also fails to be performative of the meaning of blackness as constructed within Birdie's family. Even though there is a desire of blackness, both girls' biracialism and the impossibility of 'being black' serve as a pre-text for the yearning of a stable and recognized identity outside the black and white binary. As we can infer from the way Samantha is treated this yearning for a stable and recognized identity relates to the whitewashing of mixed racial identity. Discourses of post-racialism acknowledge fragmentation and fluidity, but only as a step towards integration into the U.S. universal citizenship. These discourses seek to stabilize diverging forms of identity by impinging the mark of negative upon these identities. These narratives, however, are highly problematic because they deny a space for these individuals to attempt to find their own narratives of identity apart from the black/white binary.

Passing for white is also highly problematic for Birdie because, contrary to her blackness, she is constantly taught to despise this new self. Her mother is the main agent in this direction. In one of these moments, when the landlord of the house they rent in New Hampshire explains why his son goes to school in another city in pompous terms, Birdie perceives her mother's disapproval, "My mother had a tense smile on her face, and I could almost hear her thought, 'Fuck you, you elitist pig'" (Senna 1998, 148). In other cases, she perceives whiteness as excluding the *Other*. Birdie learns, for instance, that 'whites' can recognize each other through some protocols. This recognition, in turn, leads to acceptance of their equals. Such is the case when her mother is promptly accepted by the owners of the house they

are about to rent. The identification comes through small details such as Sandy's "appropriate" clothing style, the fact that she speaks "their language" (Senna 1998, 149) and with an accent "so like their own". Birdie notices the 'white' couple receives them well because "they knew she [her mother] was one of them" (Senna 1998, 150).

The performative in these cases exposes the racist reiteration of whiteness as an essence of superiority that does not tolerate other forms of identity expression. This discourse of hatred prevents Birdie to feel she can accept the white identity as hers and forecloses the moment in which she bursts out and tells her friend Mona to "shut the fuck up" (Senna 1998, 263).

This crescendo happens in the series of racist moments in which Birdie has to hide the black portion of her identity. As she is accepted as white, people are unaware of her 'race' and make racist jokes and comments. Upon hearing these comments, Birdie either remains quiet or leaves. She avoids confrontation because she knows that this reaction is the only one she manages to display: "when I heard those inevitable words come out of Mona's mouth, Mona's mother's mouth, Dennis mouth – nigga, spic, fuckin' darkie – I only looked away into the distance, my features tensing slightly, sometimes a little laugh escaping" (Senna 1998, 233).

It is in a trip to New York that the burden of this silenced anguish will reveal itself. While they are driving around, a group of black boys hit her mother's boyfriend and Birdie's feelings of complete detachment surprise herself:

> I was scared, but also embarrassed. Jim looked like a fool lying there, holding his face and groaning. I didn't want the teenagers to think I belonged with these white people in the car. It struck me how little I felt toward Mona and Jim. It scared me a little, how easily they could become strangers to me. How easily they could become cowering white folks, nothing more, nothing less (Senna 1998, 264).

Birdie's disconnection from white people and whiteness reveals that the performance of in-between identities not only fragments the color line but also recreates it. Even though she has come through several experiences in which her in-betweenness comes to the fore, her historical and social knowledge of race inform her to keep her performance in accordance to the black and white binary. Hence, her

racial encounters show her she is supposed to ‘choose’ a side of the racial binary. This ‘choice’ brings forward the force of racial interpellation in re-constituting the color line.

Birdie’s personal history leads her to identify with blackness. As whiteness is constructed as an object of hatred, not even Birdie’s feeling of safety among the white community of New Hampshire prevents her from seeking to identify with blackness. Blackness is constructed as positive among the most important people in her life: her father, mother, and sister. This positive identification with blackness and negative identification with whiteness make it easy for her to disconnect from ‘white’ people.

Birdie’s sense of blackness, however, is questioned as she attempts to explain Samantha why, upon being discriminated as Jewish she says she is not Jewish. Her reasoning is the following: “My mom’s not Jewish. She has to be Jewish for me to be Jewish, really, and she’s not”. This explanation converts in a more profound reasoning,

> As I said it, I wondered, for the first time, if the same was true with blackness. Did you have to have a black mother to be really black? There had been no black women involved in my conception. Cole’s either. Maybe that made us frauds (Senna 1998, 285).

Birdie concludes that, even though she is perceived as black because of her skin, she and Cole may not be ‘black’ due to their white mother. In this conclusion, we can see the post racial context working on Birdie’s understanding of her racial condition. This understanding welcomes liberalist ideas regarding race that ultimately invalidate the one-drop rule of blackness and reconstruct it as one-drop rule of whiteness. This reconstruction is sustained by a network of discourses that undermine the notion of race as phenotypic. Among them, we have narratives of multiracial identity as an object of celebration, the reinforcement of the idea of intra-racial difference amongst the black community and the emergence of a view of racial identity as a ‘choice’. In these movements, the novel denounces the liberalist version of post-race by exposing the arbitrary distinction between an anti-essentialism that idealizes invisibility (whitewashing) while reiterating essentialist narratives of blackness.

Birdie knows, however, that her racial experience reflects more than ‘passing for’ some race. Her racial experience reflects her family

history and social connections. This is what we will see when she meets the black side of her family again.

3.1.4 Reencountering blackness – (dis)identification

After four years apart from her father and sister, Birdie decides to leave New Hampshire to look for them. At this moment, Birdie reassumes her black identity and the name Birdie Lee. This reenactment of blackness recalls old memories of belonging and non-fulfilled promises. Indeed, the non-fulfillment of the promise of reunion of the family is one of her greatest disappointments in life.

When Birdie finally meets her father, she makes it clear that she resents the fact that he has not tried to find her. She finds out that Deck and Cole had lived in Brazil for only two years and that they had been back to the U.S. since then. Deck attempts at explaining the reason why he did not seek her, but Birdie does not accept his explanation and confronts him: "Papa, do you even know where I've been? Do you even care? I've been living as a white girl. [. . .] I passed as white, Papa" (Senna 1998, 391). Deck's answer surprises Jesse: "But baby, there's no such thing as passing. We're all just pretending. Race is a complete illusion, make-believe. It's a costume. We all wear one. You just switched yours at some point. That's just the absurdity of the whole race game" (Senna 1998, 391).

According to Deck, performance is similar to theatrical pretend (Elam 2007). According to Elam, Deck's "notion of a race-free 'offstage' revives the tired dichotomies: the 'real' versus the 'performed,' the referent versus the reference, and essence versus action" (2007, 754). Elam argues that this model eliminates the social relations and context in which the individual finds him/herself. In Deck's model, identity and politics are comparable to essence and therefore they should be relinquished. Nevertheless, this equation eliminates the individual's social location.

The elimination of the individual's social location is highly problematic. Even though identities are constructions, these constructions are the elements that guide the individual's existence in the world. As the individual's social location is the site in which his or her social knowledge is constructed, its elimination equates the elimination of Birdie's agency and any possibility of political action.

At this point, Deck takes on the social constructionist theory that race "was not only a construct but a scientific error" (Senna 1998, 391). This error, he argues, might be in the course of being corrected since Birdie was, according to him, "the first generation of canaries [meaning mixed individual] to survive, a little injured, perhaps, but alive" (Senna 1998, 393). The comparison is between *mulattos* and canaries sent into mines to check if the air was poisonous,

> My father said that likewise, *mulattos* had historically been the gauge of how poisonous American relations were. The fate of the *mulatto* in history and in literature, he said, will manifest the symptoms that will eventually infect the rest of the nation. (Senna 1998, 366)

As 'the first generation of canaries to survive', Birdie's narrative represents a detour from tragic *mulatto* narratives. Her personal tragedy does not implicate in madness or loss of her life, but it represents the loss of contact with the black part of her family. Birdie's in-between racial identity is still a source of angst and anxiety, and she still perceives her 'passing' as faking an identity. Nevertheless, as she meets her father and sister at the end of the narrative, this 'tragedy' is reverted.

Even though Deck argues that race is an illusion, he knows what race has brought upon him and his daughters. Cole argues that her father is right when he says that race is a construction, nonetheless, Cole continues, "'that doesn't mean it doesn't exist" (Senna 1998, 408). We know race does 'exist' because, besides separating the family along the color line, race has accounted for Birdie's feeling of guilt over her act of passing for white. Deck himself had explained to Birdie the decision to separate the girls in essentialist terms: "Cole couldn't have gone with your mother. Not just for safety issues, imagining there were any. But also because it just wasn't working out. Cole needed a black mother. It was important to her" (Senna 1998, 394). Deck's discourse is schizophrenic. He both argues that race is make-believe and acknowledges that race produces real-effects of interpellation that prevent a thorough interaction between the different races.

In spite of these contradictions, Deck is tuned in to current race theory and the racial movement (see topic 1.3.1, and subsequently in this section). He advances the perception that blackness is changing because of the heterogeneity of the community. In fact, the advent of a liberalist view of race has reinforced the notion that the black identity

encloses a variety of behaviors, costumes, religions, and social status and cannot account for the wide variety of black individuals. As an example of this, Deck observes that the poor black still faces racism whereas the middle class takes advantage of race. Birdie reports her father's words: "He said racism mattered, but that it was being exploited by the elite". These individuals, he continues, are "addicted to racism" because they "need something to remind you that you're not a total sellout' (Senna 1998, 396).

His theory that the black rich should not 'play the race' card reproduces, in fact, current views on race according to which if race is not visible/palpable, there is no racism. The complexity of the whole 'race game' is that blacks *of all classes* are frequently interpellated into being authentically black at the same time that *rich* blacks are criticized for taking advantage of racial matters.

This discourse of race versus class invariably weakens anti-racist movements. As racial problems are diluted into class problems, identity politics loses meaning and racial struggle is fragmented. This fragmentation brings a challenge for racial struggle in general and race studies in particular. My answer to this challenge is to follow Crenshaw's conclusion and to recognize that identity politics is based on coalitions (see chapter one, topic 1.3.2). As oppression changes, the challenges placed upon a specific racial identity change. Hence, struggle has to be constantly re-organized and re-assessed. As oppression takes new forms, struggle against it has to adapt and change.

Birdie's racialized identity reports to Moya's concept of identity. According to this author, "identity ascription is an inescapable – but not necessarily pernicious – fact of human life; it can enable, as well as constrain, individual freedom" (Moya 2006, 101). Identity, Moya continues, is knowledge – knowledge of the historical, cultural, or material context of an individual (see chapter 1). Birdie's race knowledge is a social construction that affects and limits the construction of the social reality that surrounds her. As Birdie comes across narratives of identity, she makes use of her personal knowledge to respond to them. This constant dialogue with her racial experiences and current discourses of race constitute her identity.

This continuous (re)making of her racial identity reflects both the infiltration of racial liberalist ideas and Birdie's connection to the black community. Birdie's personal history works, in fact, as the constraint that directs her racial performances. Even after experiencing the

rejection at Nkrumah and the four years of passing for white in New Hampshire, she decides to acknowledge her racialized identity. Nevertheless, this identity is not quite the same she 'learned' as a young girl.

Birdie's trajectory points to the impossibility of being accepted as authentically black. This difficulty, along with the meeting with her (mixed race) sister, suggests a disconnection from previous forms of racial identification. This disconnection is further reinforced by Birdie's recollection of her father's comparison between hybrid individuals and canaries: "I saw myself as a teenager in a high school with a medley of mulatto children, canaries who had in fact survived the coal mine, singed and asthmatic, but still alive" (Senna 1998, 412).

According to Ibrahim, Birdie's desire for blackness 'marginalizes' whiteness "while blackness either disappears or loses its reality" (2007, 155). The paradox of this substitution, Ibrahim is that it "signal[s] integration" (2007, 155). Ibrahim does not refer to racial liberalist ideas in her reasoning, but she understands that Birdie's refusal of both mainstream whiteness *and* essentialist blackness points to a new form of understanding racial processes. Birdie's trajectory challenges former discourses of race and welcomes mixed race as a possible identity. This movement, in fact, signals integration into the U.S. universal citizenship.

3.2 PERFORMANCES

Birdie's trajectory brings performativity to the fore. Her constant change makes her miss having "one face, one name, one life" (Senna 1998, 219), but it also teaches her she can change. Even so, Birdie is unsure about what the loss of referentiality her wandering about means. For example, she questions if Ali (her father's friend) "would turn against [her] if he knew [her] full story, if he knew all the worlds [she] had lived in, worlds [she] still carried inside of [her] now" (350).

Birdie's performance approximates Butler's concept of performativity. As the character passes from believing that her performance is fake to accepting the terms of the constraints imposed on her, Birdie becomes what she initially seemed to fake. That is, Birdie's performance complies with Butler's argument that "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed,' but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (Butler 1990, 181). That is clearly the case when

Birdie is performing either whiteness or blackness. However, as Butler discloses, even though the subject is produced by norms, the agency is not completely foreclosed, but it "locate[s] agency as reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power" (Butler 1993, 15). In this sense, Birdie's agency is contingent to racial power relations contemporary to her. That is, the fact that she can and she questions race as a stable construct comes from the crisis this concept is undergoing currently.

Birdie's trajectory, in fact, suggests that the instability of (her) race make her life complex. Race becomes a central issue as it governs her search for a stable identity. Its instability leads her to welcome a new form of identity. In a post-race world, in which the concept of race is in crisis, racial identity is clearly linked to responding to cultural texts that surround us in opposition to maintaining a static relation with one's historical and social past. The instability that these responses create dominates Birdie's quest for some form of (racial) identity.

By articulating racial identity within the hegemonic norms of the post-race context, Birdie discloses the construction of racial identities but also complies with a post-racialist view of race. As the racial binary is constructed as giving space to the emergence of new identities, this narrative is co-opted by racial liberalism and the 'prescription' of black identity is promptly contested as hindering racial progress in the U.S.

Mainstream whiteness, in its turn, is also questioned as strict and in need of reformulation. This reformulation points to not only the infiltration of racial liberalism in identity matters but also the penetration of the 'savage thought'. Even though the one-drop rule of *whiteness* has as its purpose the maintenance of whiteness mainstream, the 'savage thought' perpetrated by mixed race narratives points to the complexity of this matter. Indeed, the fact that mixed race identities are celebrated reflects the co-optation of these individuals' argument towards a view of identity as constructed and not essential. The 'integration' of different forms of identity is a complex issue that involves the reconsideration of former ways of perceiving racial identity and points to the need to rearticulate identity coalitions permanently.

Rummell argues that reading *Caucasia* through the lens of post-ethnicity is "productive" because these lenses allows us to perceive that "Birdie moves through numerous 'circles' and, as she does so, constantly shifts her affiliations" (2007, 2). These shifts, nonetheless, are not aleatory and inconsequential. They are grounded on Birdie's

experiences with people and their racial identification. That is what this analysis has sought to demonstrate: that Birdie questions racial boundaries but these questionings are built up in her experience with them. In this dialogic movement, a post racial view of race as a concept in crisis has come to the fore.

3.3 CONCLUSIONS

The passing genre has conventionally explored the difficulties of the mixed race individual by presenting a tragic character that, in the end, complies with the logic of the one-drop rule and reassumes his or her blackness (Helal 2006). *Caucasia* disrupts this premise, as it does not reproduce previous passing narratives in a tragic end or a return to blackness and experiences of authenticity (Evans 2003). The "continual social pressure on the narrator to corporealize race" (Kawash 1997, 148) of previous passing narratives accompanies Birdie, but she manages to partially escape it. That is, similarly to other narratives of passing in which the passer is constantly required to perform race, Birdie undergoes this pressure, but she also questions the institutions that have established race as the 'truth of the body'.

As the mixed individual is perceived as a possible identity, to pass or not to pass loses meaning. As Nerad has stated, for a character to be passing, there should be a stable and definitive "pre-passing identity" (2003, 816). Birdie's blackness, however, is clearly neither stable nor definitive. As the construction of Birdie' identity becomes a never-ending process, she becomes something other than black or white. She is neither black nor white but a new identity that still has to be constructed. Birdie's experience, in fact, restates Jackson and Jones's concept of passing. As we have seen in chapter one, these authors' argument is that passers are neither faking a new identity (the essentialist argument) nor disputing the historical given meaning of their identities. This happens because Birdie is not passing in the sense of faking an identity. In fact, she is dealing with the narratives of identity she comes across.

In this sense, I agree with Elam (2007) that Birdie's passing is neither an act of deception nor resistance – that it is, instead, a critique of an essentialist view of identity as fixed and prescribed. This fixity is explored in the novel that "'troubles' not only blackness but also whiteness as binary categories and practices, while demystifying the conceptual simplicity of multiracial constructions (Botelho 2010, 84-5).

That is, *Caucasia* troubles 'passing' as a response to narratives of racial integration as conciliatory and free of difficulties.

Even though both Senna's and Cliff's novels urge a reading of blackness as changing to include non-essentialist notions of race, they also invite a reading from which the mixed race individual challenges blackness as a 'strict' and 'limiting' identity (see chapter one, topic 1.3.1). That is the case of the narrative of Birdie's rejection by the other students at Nkrumah. This rejection produces an image of blackness as 'essential' and homogeneous, against which these novels potentialize racial difference as a heterogeneous site of conflict. Rather than celebrating narratives of multiculturalism, Cliff's and Senna's novels enact the resistance to both the dissolution of race and the fixity of anti-racist politics.

A Critical Realist reading of identity dislocates essentialist views of race and re-states identity as constructed in response to social and historical interpellations of identity. As Birdie's body trumps the visual, it questions the essentialism of racial constructions. The possibility to 'multiply' her racial identifications goes against the hegemonization of mixed raciality. It, in fact, disturbs the view of race as responding to discourses of essentialism and brings the acceptance of difference and diversity as the core making of any identity.

Hence, Birdie's narrative disturbs post-racialist readings of this process of multiplication of racial identity. The reinforcement of difference debunks essential views of racial identity but does not necessarily comply with an uncritical notion of multicultural identity. Birdie's racial identity is neither 'essentially black' nor assimilated. Her racial identity expands the notion of racial identity, positing post-race as a processual meaning of race that confronts ongoing reshapings of racism rather than positing post-racialism as the end of race and racism.

We have seen that Birdie's self-characterization as involuntarily passing for white, not for Black, refuses the conventional narrative of passing. Her father and her sister repel her because mainstream narratives of black identity in *Caucasia* still engage in racial purity. Birdie is not visually black and her father deducts that she may wish to pass for white. This perception of Birdie's racial identity shows her as apart from blackness and reproduces the master narrative of assimilation. Her father's failure to perceive her racial uniqueness as disrupting the binary system of race whitewashes Birdie's racial difference. In this sense, he complies with a racial liberalist reading of

mixed race narratives and reduces Birdie's connections to both whiteness and an oppressed identity to assimilation. This interpretation of Birdie's racial identity denies her the possibility of seeking self-determination.

Translating her desire to belong to her family's historically disenfranchised community, Birdie's identification with blackness, furthermore, does not provide her with the privilege that normally ensues from passing. This privilege is denied to Birdie because, even though she 'learns' to be black, her racial identity is perceived by others as either mixed or white. This way, Birdie's story confirms Bauman's perception that the easy affiliations and cultural knowledge of blacks is a source of envy (2000,107). Birdie wants to belong, but she does not manage to.

According to the realist theory of identity, "identities are not self-evident, unchanging, and uncontestable, nor are they absolutely fragmented, contradictory, and unstable" (Moya 2000, 84). We may argue that Birdie reflects upon her 'original' identity and, as she faces multiple ways of identity expression and continually verifies the answers she receives against the societal environment that surrounds her, Birdie develops a critical-realist view of her identity.

According to Moya, it is in the interface between this process of verification and the answers given by the society that identities are contested and can change (Moya 2000, 84). As Birdie observes she can be neither black nor white, she contests the prescription of racial identities in her wish to be free from an essentialist racial definition. In this sense, *Caucasia* is performative of an expanding racial identity. As Birdie's narrative focuses on the heterogeneity of her racial identity and the problems produced by its non-recognition, her trajectory both contests a simplistic view of the dissolution of race and disrupts the fixity of anti-racist politics. At the same time Birdie is challenged to seek the uniqueness of her identity, the perception that whiteness and blackness do not describe her being propels her forward. Her interpellated disconnection with blackness is painful and unsolvable. It, in fact, indicates an eternal 'becoming'. This new form of racial identification represents a mixture of the old and the new in racial discourses (Ibrahim 2007).

Birdie's narrative exposes this discursive construction meant to de-racialize the whitewashing of blacks who do not assimilate into the discourse of U.S. citizenship. What we perceive is a shift from the one-

drop rule of blackness to a one-drop rule of whiteness (a parodic term for what is known as whitewashing). The result is that Birdie's integration brings about a non-essentialist notion of blackness at the same time that allows for the assertion of whitewashing. In this sense, whitewashing updates racism by redistributing racial categories. At the same time these narratives challenge former racial dichotomies and borders; they redefine the boundaries of race. This crisis installs a post-race period in which it is necessary to reconsider identity formations as a constant organization around common sources of oppression.

CHAPTER FOUR

BOUND TO U.S. CITIZENSHIP?

> She was caught between two allegiances, different, yet the same. Herself. Her race. Race! The thing that bound and suffocated her. Whatever steps she took, or if she took none at all, something would be crushed. A person or the race. Clare, herself, or the race (Larsen (1929) 1986, 225)

This chapter investigates the issue of passing in *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* from both liberalist and critical realist perspectives. It seeks to verify the construction of these distinct perspectives on post-race narratives through the analysis of the main character's experience with race. In this realm, the way Rachel Morse's identity is interpellated towards either essentialist returns to blackness or the assimilation of a universal account of identity will be taken into consideration.

4.1 *THE GIRL WHO FELL FROM THE SKY by Heidi W. Durrow*

Differently from previous novels that dealt with miscegenation[28], *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* does not end in a tragedy but starts from one. The tragedy immediately recalls the trope of the tragic *mulatto* (see chapter One). The tragic happening leaves the protagonist of the story motherless. The mother is Nella, a Danish woman, who, after separating from her African-American husband, decides to move to the U.S. Nella's emotional instability, (she is recovering from alcoholism) along with the unexpected pain of perceiving that her children are perceived as racialized by the U.S. society and by her new boyfriend are among the elements that draw her to jump from a roof with her three young children. From this tragedy, Rachel is the only one to survive.

Even though the book starts from this personal tragedy, it does not linger in it. Quite the contrary, it soon becomes clear to the reader that Rachel is anything but tragic. In a radio interview, the author, Durrow, argues in this direction:

> The tragedy is outside of her, it's not something that's part of her character. I think that's something that's been frustrating about other stories about the 'tragic *mulatto*,' that somehow it was an inherent difficulty

[28] But similar to *Caucasia*.

> within the character. For Rachel ... she's still able to be whole, ultimately, and I think ultimately triumphant. (2010a)

After the tragedy, Rachel moves in with her grandmother and aunt in a predominantly black area. We will see in the next pages that, in her encounters with black and white individuals and under the pressure to define her racial identity, Rachel's characterization denaturalizes race and challenges the one-drop legacy. In order to understand how Rachel grows out of a tragic *mulatto* tradition to become a post-race figure some issues have to be considered.

First, as she was born and raised outside of the U.S., she has to learn that the U.S. system of race regards her as racialized. This learning process and what it means for her will be explored. Subsequently, we will deal with her attempts at aligning with a racial identity, whether it is with blackness, whiteness, or beyond these restrictions. Afterwards, the questioning of essential views of black identity will be followed by the analysis of a character that transcends social contingencies. Then the connections between passing and performativity will be taken into account. Finally, the discourse of post-race that *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* puts forth will be examined.

4.1.1 Learning to be racialized

The military life of Rachel's father kept them away from the U.S. up to the moment in which the story is introduced to us. As Rachel was raised abroad, the novelty of her racialization is one of the factors to make her question the U.S. racism. Rachel is a young child when she moves to the U.S., but the narrative starts right after the tragedy when she is eleven years old, and she is at the hospital.

The beginning of the story portrays the moment Rachel is picked up by her grandmother at the hospital. Motherless, she moves in with her (black) grandmother. In Portland, Rachel sees herself inserted into "a dominant black culture" (Lubowicka 2011, 75). The black individuals who inhabit this neighborhood both repel Rachel due to her visible whiteness and 'teach' her 'how to be a black girl'. The newness of this situation and the awareness of her racialization lead Rachel to question her father's silence about their race: "He never told us he was black. He never told us that we were" (Durrow 2010, 80).

Similar to Birdie Lee in *Caucasia*, Rachel soon understands that she needs to perform blackness to be accepted into the new community. In the same fashion of *Caucasia*, the narrative of *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* inverts the traditional passing narrative by presenting black identity as desirable. This desire is constructed in two veins: the wish to be accepted by the new (black) community she is living in and the wish to be able to love and admire her (black) family. The first wish comes mostly from the need to be accepted by her school peers whereas the second demonstrates her understanding that her most beloved ones are 'racialized' – and hence discriminated. As it will be shown subsequently, blackness becomes an unreachable object of lust and the central issue in her search for some form of identity stability.

According to Elizabeth Zarkos, Heather Mills, Monica Killen, and Marisol Rexach, Rachel is "thrust into a society that refuses to see an individual without acknowledging their race first, including the social status and discrimination that are seemingly inherent within" (2011, 122). Race becomes dominant in Rachel's life as it emerges as her mother's justification to protect her children by killing the whole family. Nella's argument is that "she can't protect" them from the cruelty of the world (Durrow 2010, 259). In Portland, race also becomes dominant in Rachel's relationships with her new family, friends, and acquaintances.

After her mother disappears from the scene, Rachel comes to deal with both negative and positive notions of blackness. The contradictions of being perceived as black, but not black enough, are present in her social contacts. She slowly starts to realize what it means to be in an in-between position in the U.S. The fact that she was raised in a race-free environment further complicates her blackness:

> I am light-skinned-ed. That's what the other kids say. And I talk white. I think new things when they say this. [. . .] They tell me it is bad to have ashy knees. They say stay out of the rain so my hair doesn't go back. They say white people don't use washrags, and I realize now, at Grandma's, I do. They have a language I don't know but I understand. I learn that black people don't have blue eyes. I learn that I am black. I have blue eyes (Durrow 2010, 10).

The contradictions of a contemporaneous racial mindset are all there. Rachel is perceived as a 'betrayer' by her school peers not only because of her light skin but also because of some of her characteristics

that are attributed to whiteness. Her differentiated 'language' along with the fact that she uses washrags makes her 'white'. That is, these elements show that she does not comply with an 'essential' and strict black identity. Interestingly enough, in this piece of narrative Rachel concludes that race is an important thing she did not know of. However, she does not manage to conclude the sentence with a wider view of race – she does not mention that race has become important because *she is in the U.S.*

Rachel seeks to endure the new reality by erasing what she was before. After the tragedy, she calls herself "the new girl" (Durrow 2010, 10). This epithet indicates her attempt at overcoming such a dramatic past. Soon enough, however, Rachel acknowledges that she is pretending to be the new girl: "She [her grandmother] doesn't say anything about my mother, because we both know that the new girl has no mother. The new girl can't be new and still remember. I am not the new girl. But I will pretend" (Durrow 2010, 6). The point of view of the narrative shows that the interconnection between present and past is not completely broke. Rachel still remembers a past in which she had a family and blackness was not the center of her concerns.

The instability of her identification with 'the new girl' epithet also shows her difficulties to erase the memory of her (white) mother. In the spirit of 'new girl', Rachel, as the narrator, starts describing her perceptions regarding race from the moment she moves in with her grandmother. Her first impressions on blackness, in fact, are presented to the reader when she is coming to her grandmother's house from the hospital. As Rachel narrates her story after it has taken place, we perceive that Rachel rereads some facts of her life based on what she has learned about race.

For example, since the beginning of the narrative the association of race with pride is noticeable. This association, nevertheless, is only possible after *Rachel has learned what it means to be black in America* – something we know Rachel has not completely assimilated before moving to the U.S., and more specifically to Portland. One of these scenes shows the moment in which Rachel and her grandmother ascend the bus to go home, the bus driver compliments her grandmother as "'Pretty and lucky'". Rachel states that this "is the picture I want to remember: Grandma looks something like pride. Like a whistle about to blow" (Durrow 2010, 4).

This climate of racial pride reappears later on in the narrative. Miss America is elected, and people tell Rachel she is black. Rachel observes that she has blue eyes, and she cannot see the woman's 'blackness'. Grandma, Rachel observes, "is happy that a black woman is the most beautiful woman in the world. And so is the grocery store cashier. It's a new day, the grocery store cashier says". After observing her grandmother's and a stranger's pride with the fact, Rachel writes, "[a]nd I believe that I am supposed to be happy about it" (Durrow 2010, 58).

Rachel's surprise at the fact that she should be happy about the fact that Miss America is black questions the promptness of racial associations. Should she be happy because Miss America is one of 'them'? Another factor that surprises her is the invisibility of the woman's 'blackness'. Instructed on race in different settings (mostly Turkey and Germany where she lived before), Rachel fails to understand the U.S. racial configuration and can only see a 'white body'. Hence, the election of a black Miss America teaches her two things about U.S. racism – the notion of black community and the one-drop legacy. Learning that Miss America is 'black' indirectly confirms Rachel's 'blackness'.

As we can see, the contradictions of differing narratives of race subsist at the same time. Even though narratives of race contemporaneous to Rachel (the story develops in the 1980s) are in the process of inverting the one-drop rule of blackness to the one-drop rule of whiteness, former forms of racial characterization such as the one-drop legacy is still reiterated.

In this sense, Rachel's foreign gaze participates in the process of destabilizing the U.S. system of race. As she 'learns' the facts of U.S. racism, she also contests them. As a mixed individual raised abroad, Rachel is the personification of globalization. Her position as a 'multicultural global citizen' places her at the center of the current process of racial reformulation and against monoculturalism and the overtly race conscious.

Rachel's love and admiration of blackness come mostly from the pride and love for her 'black' grandmother and aunt. Another source comes in the form of direct teaching by Aunt Loretta's boyfriend. His race conscious discourse is persistent and affectionate. The fact that Rachel likes him also helps her to assimilate his discourse: "I like Drew because he is smart and he has a big, deep voice. He talks about 'giving

back to the community,' 'uplifting the people.' He says the things he says over and over" (Durrow 2010, 29).

When Drew gives her two books, he also seeks to teach Rachel to be race conscious. This teaching comes in the form of Fanon's book *Black Skin, White Masks*. Drew explains, "That's from me'" (Durrow 2010, 114). The second book, which was with her aunt, however, reveals the mixed race terrain Rachel lives in. It is a collection of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tales. This collection promptly reminds Rachel of her mother's homeland. As a classic of the European culture, this gift draws attention to Rachel's unstable whiteness in stark contrast to the mainstream whiteness portrayed in these fairy tales.

The contrast between the two books points to the duality of Rachel's racial identity. Even though it points to fragmentation and an anti-essentialist reading of race, the reinforcement of the duality of Rachel's racial origin also disrupts the one-drop rule. As Rachel's mixed origin is highlighted, the fact that is reinforced is not that Rachel has 'one-drop of black blood' but that she has 'one-drop rule of white blood'. Hence, the narrative lets us glimpse at the process that helps constitute mixed race as *white* in opposition to (re)racializing their experiences.

Rachel has difficulties to understand why a construct she never perceived as important has started to dominate the scene. The racist ascription she receives makes her uncertain about what she is. In this new experience with race, Rachel perceives that the construct of race has not remained in the past but it seems to 'surround' her entire life. This perception leads Rachel to start narrating the situations and people according to their visible color.

> There are fifteen black people in the class and seven white people. And there's me. There's another girl who sits in the back. Her name is Carmen LaGuardia, and she has hair like mine, my same color skin, and she counts as black. I don't understand how, but she seems to know (Durrow 2010, 9).

Rachel's previous knowledge of race informs her she is neither black nor white. However, when she learns that Carmen – a girl with the same characteristics of her – is 'black', Rachel manages to glimpse at race as constructed in the U.S. territory. Rachel learns about her blackness and her mixed racial identity as well as the fact that these constructs are given differentiated meanings almost concomitantly. In

the predominantly black community she lives in; blackness is a positive attribute whereas mixed race is negatively constructed as an 'in-between' racial identification.

This in-betweenness, however, is constructed differently from Santiago's definition of the term. Her school peers do not perceive Rachel's in-between identity as positively contesting the essentialism attributed to blackness but as a threat to this very notion of blackness. This way, Rachel's school peers work to maintain the boundaries of the racial binary. Still attached to old forms of racial performances, they perceive those who deviate from the norm of black authenticity as a threat to their way of living and understanding the U.S. society. They understand the agency of the individual is limited by his or her racial location and fail to see deviant forms of racial performance as potentially disruptive of the racial system.

Following this understanding, blackness *and* whiteness are constructed as essential by her school peers. This essence is associated with what 'blacks' and 'whites' are supposed to do. In fact, soon after Rachel arrives in the U.S., she comes to perceive that parts of her are 'white' while others are 'black'. Lisa Page (2010) points out that Rachel starts observing that some behaviors and personal features reproduce dominant expectations as to clear-cut racial scripts. In the novel, these scripts represent the characters' perceptions of race according to racial stereotypes. Performing race is clearly associated, therefore, with being interpellated as such.

4.1.2 Rachel's whiteness

A static view of black identity leads her school peers to interpellate Rachel's behavior as white. One of the things she does to 'confirm' this is her taste for (mainstream) jazz. Drew, similarly to his daughter Lakeisha, reproaches Rachel's taste for 'white' music. They argue that she has to listen to 'black' music. Drew tells her: "Young lady, we've got to get you schooled" (Durrow 2010, 163) and decides to take Rachel to a nightclub where they listen to blues.

Rachel's literacy into the 'black' and 'white' things also entails the performative division of sports and music into a different slot for each 'race'. Rachel narrates: "[p]laying tennis is one of the things that goes in the white category, along with classical music and golf". Rachel, however, observes that there are exceptions to the rule such as her Aunt

Loretta and her father. Her aunt and father not only play tennis, but they also allow themselves to have connections with white people.

Rachel's inadequate performance of blackness is associated with betrayal. She is perceived as attempting to pass for white because, for instance, she is "fast like those white girls". These observations are surrounded by insults that seek to impose this difference as degrading. Tamika calls her a ho (slang for whore) and claims Rachel has "slept with half the basketball team" (Durrow 2010, 170).

The 'white facts' of Rachel's life start standing out, and she starts questioning the reasons to hide them. Her mother was white, and she does not want to forget about her. But, as Lakeisha asks Rachel what her mom looked like, she feels that the description of her appearance might portray her simply as a 'white woman', when she thinks of her as especial: "If I describe what Mor[29] really looks like it will make her seem plain: long blond hair, white skin; she had an accent [. . .]. If I describe her to Lakeisha, it will make Mor seem like any other white person you'd see". The solution Rachel finds is to tell a half-truth: "My mom was light-skinned" (Durrow 2010, 115).

As Rachel learns that to acknowledge her 'white connections' prevents her from being accepted as authentically black, she avoids being seeing with Tracy, her friend, because she is white: "most of the time I try not to let the black girls like Tamika see me talk to Tracy, because Tracy is a white girl. And the way they say that – white girl – it feels like a dangerous thing to be" (Durrow 2010, 28). Another situation is the contrasting interest in studies. She is a good student and her school peers implicate with it. She wants to be accepted in the predominantly black school, but she observes that "[b]lack girls don't seem to like me. Maybe there is something dangerous about me". Her aunt explains to her that she might be avoided because "[g]ood students aren't always going to be popular with their peers. Those are her exact words. 'You make them have to work harder'" (Durrow 2010, 68).

In the above citations, the repetition of the notion of her in-between position as a threat appears in the words 'danger' and 'dangerous'. Rachel's in-betweenness becomes a trouble that constantly recasts her race as she is interpellated as dangerous and hence, inadequate. In this sense, the performative effect of this citational act is to constitute her school peers as both unable to acknowledge the

[29] Rachel uses some Danish words in her speech. Mor means mother.

uniqueness of her racial performance and as outdated and hindering the progress of racial relations.

At school, Rachel 'betrays' blackness not only because of her behavior but also because of her appearance. Her confrontational appearance, in fact, makes Rachel have difficulties to make friends. As her hair was longer, straighter, and therefore more similar to 'white' hair, she was constantly discriminated. Clearly associated with her mixed look, Tamika argues that Rachel "[t]hink[s] she all cute" (Durrow 2010, 170). When she cuts her hair shorter and it "curls up", the schoolgirls start looking at her differently. Rachel narrates: "since I cut my hair Tamika Washington don't be minding me much no more" (Durrow 2010, 68). Rachel's hair, in fact, dominates the scene. As she straightens it and comes closer to a white ideal of beauty, her peers criticize her: "Wearing my hair down and straight is one reason that the girls who hang out in the bathroom want to beat me up. They say: You better watch out or I'll snatch you bald-headed" (Durrow 2010, 96).

As in the first view of passing, the way Rachel's hair is fixed represents a threat to the U.S. binary system of race. Interestingly enough, her hair is not a threat because it can denounce her blackness (in the event of her being passing for white), but because it may make her look 'white'. The verbalization of this 'threat' by Rachel's school peers complies with old ways in which 'whiteness' sought to reinforce the color line. This way, the narrative again constructs blacks as retrograde and attached to old forms of racial perception.

To complicate things further, Rachel's grandmother perceives her white skin as an asset and wants her to avoid getting 'darker'. Rachel, however, does not wear the sunscreen as her Grandma tells her: "'Stay outta that sun. It will make you dark and dusty'". Contrary to her grandmother's advice, Rachel welcomes the sun. Following the race-conscious discourse of Drew's teachings, Rachel argues that "she is perpetuating racist ideas from slavery. There's nothing wrong with being dark-skinned". Rachel's grandmother perceives Rachel's answer as an insult and she argues: "It's what her mother taught her and she's passing it on" (Durrow 2010, 170). Born in a different time from that of Rachel's, her grandmother considers the validity of having a white appearance.

Rachel notices that her grandmother is "not proud when she says those things" (Durrow 2010, 170). Grandma[30]'s discourse, in fact,

[30] Rachel's grandmother is not named in the novel.

clearly shows the conflict raised by former narratives of white superiority and black pride. For Rachel's grandma 'passing' is both a chance to the privileges of whiteness *and* a betrayal of blackness. Narratives of whiteness belittle blackness in order to construct whiteness as privileged and in opposition to blackness. Nevertheless, narratives of black pride also interpellate grandma's *subjectivity,* which is constructed against and in relation to these clashing views of racial identity.

As we can see, Rachel's grandmother transmits the conflicts of the black identity to her niece. 'New' in the U.S. racial culture, Rachel learns to admire blackness but fails to understand the intricacies of her grandma's conflicting discourse. Rachel's foreign upbringing and the postponed establishment of a connection with the black community disconnect her from the heavy U.S. racial legacy. Yet, she is quite aware of narratives of race contemporaneous to her. In this sense, Rachel's racial consciousness differs from her grandma's. She knows blackness is constructed as negative by dominant whiteness, but she also learns that, among her peers, blackness is constructed as *an asset to desire*.

Rachel, however, soon starts noticing the huge abyss there is between blacks and whites in the U.S. An instance of this observation comes from the spatial distance between whites and (poor) blacks in America. Rachel narrates: "Grandma wakes up at 5:15 a.m. She takes the number 7 bus downtown and transfers to the 34. That takes almost two hours. She works for a white lady in the southwest part of town. That's where the white people live" (Durrow 2010, 32).

Rachel understands that there is a geographical distance between the two neighborhoods – her grandmother has to wake up early and take two buses to get to work in a *white* neighborhood. This geographical distance shows there is a ghettoization of blacks. Then, Rachel recalls her friend Tracy who used to say she lived in the ghetto and her initial opposition to this idea:

> A ghetto has tall buildings and empty lots, trash all over the street and city noise. Here the houses are two stories; the houses have trees in front and everyone has a yard. I always told Tracy she was wrong, but now I think Tracy was right. The ghetto looks different in different places, but if you live there, it makes you feel the same. (Durrow 2010, 160)

In this citation, race is constructed as spatial and social segregation rather than skin color. Even though it has been pointed out

that both a greater number of black people left the 'ghettos' and also impoverished whites have come to occupy these spaces[31], this re-structuration of U.S. urban spaces was co-opted by racial liberalism as another 'proof' of the end of racism.

In spite of this, Rachel' understanding of her living conditions as a form of ghettoization reveals that the fact of segregation remains. Rachel's realization that Tracy may be right shows that, in spite of current liberalist post-racialist discourses that picture race and racism as episodic, Rachel perceives race as being part of her life in the U.S.

By observing the reality of race in the U.S., Rachel starts to understand the nature of the racial conflict in this country. She faces the absurd of racial categorization mostly due to her mixed race appearance. Interpellations towards performing blackness constantly press her to 'choose race' (as in the criticisms and insults put forth by her school peers). The author of *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*, Durrow argues that the question 'What are you?' forces biracial children to choose between one of the two races. She argues that "[t]he satisfactory answer isn't usually, 'I'm black, and white.' Other people want mixed race kids to choose who they are" (2010).

Choosing, in fact, is not a new feature of blackness, even though it has been argued so. Mixed race individuals always had to choose. The problem was to choose to be 'white'. Current narratives on race, however, represent the disconnection from mainstream blackness as tolerable and plausible. Nonetheless, race narratives interpellate Rachel into returning to essentialist forms of blackness, and she initially feels she has to choose. Even though she feels welcome by her black family, the society that surrounds them keeps telling her there is something 'wrong' with her in-betweenness. This issue is explored in the next topic.

4.1.3 An *in-between* identity

The internal conflict raised by the classification of certain types of behavior and knowledge as either 'white' or 'black' is further

[31] This phenomenon has been explored in different studies. Kasey Henricks, Bill Byrnes and Victoria Brockett (2013) cite Bonilla-Silva and Gianpaolo Baiocchi's study (2003) in which they argue that the phenomenon of de-segregation might be a reflex of both growing white poverty and the restructuring of urban space. A similar argument has been made by Mitchell who points out the impoverishment of whites as erasing the geographical segregation between the black and white populations.

complicated by the need to belong. After the tragedy, Rachel is practically alone in this world. With her father away, she has only her grandmother and aunt to take care of her. Similar to what happened with her mother and herself before; this small family unit is constantly questioned due to their different appearance. This is the case when a woman sees Rachel with her Aunt Loretta and Drew. After saying that her eyes were pretty, she "looked at Drew and Loretta real funny". Rachel observes that "'[m]aybe she thought I was stolen,'" but then she reasons: "But I think what a family is shouldn't be so hard to see. It should be the one thing people know just by looking at you" (Durrow 2010, 77).

In spite of the liberalist take on race *The Girl Who Feel from the Sky* eventually portrays, the 'implausibility' of Rachel's family is what makes her question essentialist readings of race. Race is the first thing people notice when they see her with her relatives. The non-essentialist composition of Rachel's family disrupts the color line by foregrounding the mixed character of these racialized nuclei. A critical realist reading of this family composition draws our attention to the fact that race is still a fundamental feature of people's identity – the first thing people notice – but it is also unstable enough to welcome different readings of a construct otherwise perceived as static.

In spite of the contradictions of Rachel's racial identity, she has learned to accept blackness as part of her identity. An example of this acceptance comes from the love and admiration she feels for her aunt: "I guess I'll be like Aunt Loretta. Aunt Loretta is a black woman – the kind of woman I will be" (Durrow 2010, 98). Rachel wishes to be black like her aunt, but this desire is presented as unachievable as she fails to be accepted by her school peers. In one of these moments, Rachel is in a school ceremony in which she is to receive a medal from the student class president. She anticipates the moment enthusiastically:

> I imagine how she will put the blue ribbon with the golden saucer-sized medallion around my neck. Gently, gently. Then smooth the front of my shirt with a long, soft stroke. She will take my hand and raise it in victory, and everyone will see that the beautiful Carmen LaGuardia is just like me. She is no longer one of the fifteen [black girls in class]. And I will no longer count myself as one [mixed individual]. (Durrow 2010, 69)

In both excerpts – regarding her aunt and the school ceremony – Rachel uses the future tense. The use the future tense shows her wish to be accepted is a dream yet to come true. Even though she responds to racial interpellation in the expectation of winning partners in racialization, she fails flagrantly. Differently from Carmen LaGuardia – who *counts* as black – (on page 104 above), Rachel fails to perform blackness accordingly. Her later introduction to the U.S. racist culture and the particularities of her previous experiences (she was raised abroad in differing cultures) makes her racial performance unique. This differing performance and her love and admiration of the black culture make her wish to be accepted in her singularity.

Rachel's happy daydream, however, is abruptly disrupted by reality when Carmen whispers to her that 'her titties' called the boys' attention during the race, and she should not "try to steal [her] man with those" (Durrow 2010, 69). In this scene, it becomes clear that belonging is associated with one's racial look – something Rachel cannot change. In the predominantly black community she is inserted, 'looking black' also comes to mean having 'access to being loved', though conditioned by physical appearance.

The rejection of Rachel's response to racial interpellation is clearly associated with liberalist narratives of race as hindering the progress of mixed race individuals. Rachel's skin color and blue eyes do not follow essentialist scripts of blackness and are rejected by the black community. This strict view of race represents the black community that interacts with Rachel as outdated and unable to welcome change. This form of representation of blackness 'prepares' Rachel's disconnection from essentialized views of race. In the pathway towards constituting her identity, Rachel's narrative welcomes a critical realist view of identity as fragmented and in constant interplay with the narratives of race she comes across. This disconnection seems, nevertheless, to lead her to disconnect from essentialized views of race and towards whitening.

The prizes of acceptance and love, however, are not only associated with Rachel's appearance but also with her capacity to perform blackness. In another instance, Rachel observes that her Grandma is moved by Lakeisha's solo in the church choir. Rachel claims she "want[s] to be Lakeisha". She observes jealously Lakeisha and her Grandma hugging and concludes that she "know[s] that [she is] black, but [she] can't make the Gospel sound right from [her] mouth".

Rachel associates her failure to sing the Gospel with her inability to be 'authentically' black. Authenticity, which, in this case, means to be able to connect to the black side of her family: "I can't help make Grandma's feelings show. They hold hands and Grandma hugs Lakeisha again. I can see what Grandma sees in Lakeisha. It is a reflection" (Durrow 2010, 120).

As Rachel fails to reflect blackness, she also learns to wish for it. This wish replicates in her dating a black person. When she kisses him, her wish of blackness seems partially accomplished: "Kissing John Bailey felt real good. It was like everything that's the outside me – the me that people see – made all of what is really me feel really good. When John Bailey touches me, I know this is the skin I want to be in" (Durrow 2010, 150). The kiss narrates Rachel's desire that her outside appearance reflects her 'inner' reality. As she fails to be perceived as racialized by blacks and is racialized by whites, the kiss becomes the symbol of this unachievable desire.

In spite of the constant mockery of her 'whiteness', Rachel also performs a mockery of blackness by labeling 'them' (black individuals) as intellectually inferior to her. Her self-characterization emphasizes her smartness, thus replicating racist discourse (concerning intellectual capacity) as an attempt at revenge for being excluded from the Black community. Rachel, as the narrator, informs us, for instance, that "[she] answer[s] the questions right" (Durrow 2010, 10). In contrast to this narrative, Rachel portrays her grandma and her school peers as lacking school knowledge. That is the case when Rachel feels uncomfortable with her grandmother's pronunciation. When her grandmother says: "I think you adjustin fine", Rachel thinks, "I want her to put *s*'s on the ends of her words and not say 'fixin to' when she's about to do something". Rachel recalls that the students at school also speak like that. Then she reinforces the 'difference' between her and 'them' by concluding that they are "not as smart as me" (Durrow 2010, 9).

David R. Roediger observes that the pledge to acknowledge an individual's biracialism does not overcome racialization but adds to it instead (2008, 219). McDonald follows this reasoning and argues that this pledge does not work to diminish racism. Mixed race identity, instead, "reiterates white supremacy by attempting to etch a space for itself somewhere under whiteness – which it knows it can never access – and definitely above blackness" (McDonald 2011). Rachel's portrayal of the other students as 'they' and intellectually inferior to her both

constructs herself as disconnected from the black students and as racially superior. This statement enacts racism rather than racial superiority, confirming McDonald's contention that mixed-race identity does not translate into the end of racism and asymmetrical racialization. Here we see that it is performative of situated interests – which, as in this case, often replicate the assimilationist ideologies of racism.

With the constant 'teachings' regarding race, Rachel soon becomes proficient. Her proficiency, however, does not guarantee her immediate acceptance by the club of blackness: "In high school I still don't have a best friend, even though I know how to answer the questions differently now". The correct answer is, according to her: "I'm black. I'm from northeast Portland. My grandfather's eyes are this color. I've lived here mostly my whole life. I'm black. I'm black, I know" (Durrow 2010, 147-48).

The fact that Rachel 'learned the right answer', nevertheless, does not prevent her from continuing to be rejected. Within the text, this rejection relates to Rachel's failure to represent an authentic essentialized subject. The consideration of the current racial moment in which the emergence of a hegemonic mixed race subject threatens blackness leads us to read this rejection as the rejection of a threat. In contrast to the context of the one-drop rule in which to be mixed-race meant *to be black*, in the current racial moment, to be mixed-race is to be perceived as whitewashed.

This process of whitewashing, in fact, has a double take. It both encloses the interest of maintaining whiteness mainstream (Lomas 2005) and a reformulation of race in which racism based on phenotype loses meaning over other forms of discrimination (Melamed 2011, see topic 1.3.1). Following Melamed's concept of New Racism (2011, 14), Rachel's trajectory works for the questioning of racialization within the U.S. borders. At this moment of transition, it is not simple to 'classify' her race, but it is possible to notice that her knowledge and appearance make her a serious candidate to the new universal subject.

Spickard mentions Maria Root's 'A Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People' to conclude that mixed race literature has tended to argue that race is an "individual choice, [. . .] something plastic that may – and perhaps must – be molded by individuals on a daily basis" (2003, 48). This view of racial identity confirms the notion of performativity since Rachel's racial performance is a response reiterating her interested selection of the cultural discourses she comes across. Hence, the

celebrated possibility of choosing is, in fact, a constraint constructed as freedom. As liberalist narratives of race construct blackness as retrograde and strict, mixed race individuals are *compelled* to 'choose' biracialism.

Rachel has learned that the prizes of love and acceptance cannot be given to her because her skin and behavior are not so straight forwarded aligned with blackness. This inconsistency is, in fact, one of the factors that make her question the prompt assumption of her blackness. She wonders about the Danish. Why should aspects of the other half of her culture be forgotten? Rachel points out: "I don't want being Danish to be something that I can put on and take off. I don't want Danish in me to be something time makes me leave behind" (Durrow 2010, 205).

Rachel's characterization, thus, underscores that Danish culture is an important part of her being. Similar to blackness, she cherishes her Danish connections and culture. Her Danish mindset spurs her to desire for social recognition of its embeddedness in her experience of being racialized in the U.S. McDonald argues that Rachel's difficulty and "reluctance to identify as black is connected to the implied idea that accepting a black identity – and since Rachel is so light she can, in fact, *choose* –would somehow erase or deny the memory (read: existence) of her Danish mother [. . .]" (McDonald 2011).

Rachel's desire to acknowledge her 'whiteness' is consistent with Butler's anti-liberalist notion of performativity. By acknowledging that her identity is not only connected to blackness, Rachel brings about a critical realist reading of identities. Even though the discursive possibility of acknowledging her double identity is brought about by the disruption of the one-drop rule of black blood and its replacement by the one-drop rule of white blood, Rachel's recognition of her in-betweenness redress her agency as not only favoring whiteness but also destabilizing old forms of perceiving racialized populations. This contamination of racial identity is a way of promoting social integration and de-racialization of the black population.

Rachel's reflections regarding her identity are utterly related to her 'Danishness' (Lubowicka 2011). By meaning to maintain both her cultural inheritances – her mother's Danishness and her father's U.S. blackness – Rachel disrupts the logic of narratives of the one-drop legacy. Rachel questions the essentialization of black identity such as Clare and Birdie had done before. As she is not born in the U.S. and

moves into the country later on, the ‘freshness’ of her understanding of the U.S. racist culture makes it easier for her to relinquish any form of allegiance she learned to have with the black race in the name of a non-static view of racial identity.

This disconnection also appears in the discourse of Rachel’s mother. Nella is, in fact, perplexed by the fact that her children are ‘classified’ as black and develops a reasoning very similar to Rachel’s regarding both their racial heritages: “My children are one half of black. They are also one half of me. I want them to be anything. They are not just a color that people see” (Durrow 2010, 157). In this conclusion, Nella completely disregards the color line and names them as *one-half black* and *one-half white*. In this process, Nella produces them as *in-between* the U.S. binary system of racial classifications. The reiteration of this conclusion – by Rachel andher mother – constitutes this new racial classification as a *possible* racial identity.

The changing meanings of race interpellate Rachel in both the direction of a Critical Realist make of identity and racial liberalism. These conflicting discourses create in Rachel a ‘racial anxiety’ that has to be acknowledged. This is developed in the next topic.

4.1.4 Rachel and a changing perception of blackness

The narrative of *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* lets us glimpse at a changing blackness in which race-consciousness and racial pride have been replaced by decadence and indifference to the future of racialized individuals. While observing that her (black) neighborhood is decadent, grandma talks “[a]bout the way black folks used to care about more than loud thumping music and gold chains” (Durrow 2010, 147). Blacks, according to Rachel’s grandmother, are not interested in addressing racial issues but ‘enjoying’ their music.

Drew also observes a change in blacks’ behavior. As a young man, he is different from those he observes because, according to Rachel, “[h]e has all kinds of things to say about our times, like how racial injustice is worse than when he was growing up.” Alike Rachel grandmother’s, Drew points out that “he never thought he’d live to see the day that the young brothers would be killing each other over tennis shoes” (Durrow 2010, 162). Drew continues describing the changes in blackness by pointing to the birth of a new form of racism. He recalls that “a bunch of skinheads” killed an Ethiopian man. He concludes

telling Rachel: “Mark my words: Lines are being drawn” (Durrow 2010, 162).

The fragmentation of racial identity redresses the color line and, as the case of the Ethiopian man reflects, re-creates racism on the ground of national versus foreigner. Ethiopians are a small group in the U.S. and started migrating into the country after the passage of the 1980 Refugee Act. They are quite new to the U.S. and have had difficulties to strive in a different cultural scenario (Kobel 2013). As a differing racialized group, U.S. blacks ostracize them. The fragmentation of the black community reinforces this politics of individualism and U.S. blacks fail to see them as allied in the fight for better racial understanding and construct them as rivals and racialized.

The disintegration of black identity appears also in the characters’ redundant alcoholism. Indeed, the narrative reports several characters with drinking problems. Birdie’s mother and father drink a lot and Nella’s boyfriend Doug, whom she meets in AA’s meetings, is also a recurrent alcoholic. Both men in Nella’s life are directly responsible for two personal tragedies. Her drunken husband sleeps and accidentally puts fire in the house causing the death of their first-born child. Later on, Doug’s constant drunkenness makes him unforgivably offend and beat Nella’s children.

These lines show that processes of racialization are being reformulated. The case of the U.S. Ethiopians is a demonstration of both the multiplication of forms of being black and racial fragmentation within the country. The recurrent alcoholism of both black and white characters points not only to social and economic decadence, but also to the lack of purpose brought by the fragmentation of the notion of community. This fragmentation reflects the decadence of the black community in which blacks care more about music than about each other, and they might kill each other over tennis shoes.

One aspect of this uninterested atmosphere and decadence seems to be related to the changing perception of race in the U.S. In a scenario in which blacks do not have any exceptional leader and the dominant narrative of race is that this construct should be disregarded as secondary, race-consciousness and racial pride are replaced by an acceptance of racial liberalist values. The individual becomes more important than the community does, and blacks, who found a source of support for their rights in this union, find themselves abandoned to the idea of meritocracy.

As discussed in chapter one, meritocracy is the argument that individuals are able to take their lives in their hands and reach success. The materiality of racism that, for instance, places blacks in poorer schools and neighborhoods, is not perceived as part of the problem. The reception of this argument of meritocracy leads to the liberalist abstraction that reduces their difficulties as a *personal* inability to progress.

These episodes of racial reformulation show that liberalist readings of race have become predominant in race relations. Racial liberalism has even co-opted anti-hegemonic politics of *difference within difference* (blacks and Ethiopians, for instance). This hegemonic cooptation works towards the nationalization of blackness and fragmentation of the color line. That is, it 'upgrades' blackness into universal U.S. citizenship whereas advocating against being overtly race conscious. The color line becomes a secondary racist tool that has to be aggregated to other features to function. That is the case of some blacks' political activism. Their 'insistence' on constructing them apart from U.S. universal citizenship recasts race upon them (see Melamed in chapter one).

The above considerations confirm that the representation of blacks as culturally inferior is still a tool in hand. As Bonilla-Silva has argued, cultural racism constitutes race (and blackness) as unable to change (see chapter one, topic 1.3.1). The argument is that, by refusing to embrace the U.S. 'universal' knowledge, blacks produce themselves as different from U.S. universal citizens, hence, reinforcing racism. The underlying statement of current racial liberalism is that racialized individuals who disconnect from being 'too black' are welcome to mainstream U.S. culture and would not be prone to racist treatment whereas those who insist on keeping difference intact – as Rachel's school peers – are the 'real' maintainers of racism. It is implied that, to reach U.S. citizenship, black individuals 'have' to overcome the particularism of their culture. Rachel wants to be accepted by the community that received her at the same time the narrative constructs her as oppressed by interpellations towards an essential view of blackness. This contradiction (initially, at least) prevents her from acknowledging her biracialism.

Nevertheless, as Rachel starts reading *Black Skins, White Masks*, she also questions previous forms of understanding blackness. In his book, Fanon brightly analyzes the psyche of the black individual by

responding to the constructed desire of whiteness. Rachel cannot entirely agree with the book because she "becomes aware of the fact that all essentialist definitions are too narrow and cannot embrace all that she feels she is" (Lubowicka 2011, 78). Indeed, Rachel's historical distance from Fanon's writings produce a feeling of unfamiliarity with his arguments.

That is the case of the chapter called 'The Man of Color and the White Woman.' She ponders: "Just that title makes me mad. I can't explain why" (Durrow 2010, 115). The referred chapter talks about the fact that a black man can feel white by espousing a white woman. Fanon writes, "By loving me, she proves to me that I am worthy of a white love. I am loved like a white man./ I am a white man" (2008, 45).

The chapter disturbs Rachel because it deals with the possibility of her father having 'desired' to be white when he married Rachel's white mother, Nella. The implications of this feeling make her feel 'mad'. This feeling indicates, in fact, how the constructed image of black and white is still strong enough to make her feel uneasy about sharing both colors in her body.

Yet, the unsettlement caused by Fanon's classical book is widened as she reaches the following statement in page 173: "Wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro". At this moment, Rachel thinks "of how the other black girls in school think I want to be white". Rachel perceives her situation, however, as much more complicated than that. She claims: "I don't want to be white. Sometimes I want to go back to being what I was. I want to be nothing" (Durrow 2010, 148).

Rachel wants race to be nothing such as when it was when she lived in Europe. To when race was not a factor in her life. Lubowicka argues that by claiming she 'want[s] to be nothing'", Rachel shows the direction she takes into understanding her racial situation. Lubowicka recalls Rachel's mother complaint in which she does not want her children to be "just a word" (Durrow 2010, 244). According to Lubowicka, when Rachel expresses her desire to 'be nothing'; she is, in fact, exploring the "possibility to stop seeing things and people as eternally contrasting with each other" and more as having changeable and dynamic stories (2011, 80). Still according to Lubowicka, the uniqueness of Rachel's racial identity is expressed at the end of the novel, when the narrator reports: "Brick puts his arms around me. When he looks at me, it feels like no one has really seen me since the accident.

In his eyes, I'm not the new girl. I'm not the color of my skin. I'm a story. One with a past and a future unwritten" (Durrow 2010, 264).

Rachel, in fact, has several reasons to wish to be black, but this impossibility makes her wish to evade racial classifications. Whereas it is true that 'being nothing' approximates Rachel of the white condition of the universal subject, it is also true that the focus of her desire is not whiteness but evading the essentialism of the white/black binary. She identifies neither with whiteness nor "with Africa, its peoples and attributes, nor with the word 'Negro' or with 'whites'" (Lubowicka 2011, 78).

Inspired by Fanon's reading, Rachel also questions Jesse Jackson (a civil rights activist) who claims black U.S. citizens should be called African-American. Rachel claims that this might not be a good idea because "I don't know any black people who have even been to Africa. It's like calling me Danish-American even though I've never been to Denmark" (Durrow 2010, 148). This observation of the current racial moment does not declare the end of race but redresses simplified forms of viewing racial identification and recast racial struggle as a challenge to be remedied. This challenge requests an intersectional view of oppression in which coalitions are formed based on commonalities of oppression *and* the constant reformulation of (racial) identity.

The power of discourse to bring something into being is interwoven with social and economic powers. As Melamed has brought about, the *effect* of the discourse of racial instability has been co-opted by (neo)liberalism and the U.S. state power interest to produce the country as race free. As legitimate as Rachel's experience is – as her narrative may be read as reflecting the angst of mixed race individuals in finding a place of self-determination – its co-option by racial liberalism redresses this narrative as a proof of the end of racism in the U.S.

Nevertheless, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* reinforces the notion that race is being diluted towards a renovation of the one-drop rule of blackness into the one-drop rule of whiteness. This is confirmed; for instance, as Rachel observes that culture and color do not always conflate: "Jesse isn't like a white guy. He calls white people pilgrims. He speaks a broken Mayan Spanish. He recites revolutionary Jamaican poems by heart. He's surprised that I haven't read *Black Skin, White Masks* all the way through" (Durrow 2010, 188). As race boundaries become more and more diluted, Rachel becomes able to observe race as a secondary identity trait: "When Jesse and Brick talk, I can forget that

Jesse's white, and I can forget that Brick's black" (Durrow 2010, 202). This 'forgetfulness' is associated to her inability to see race in their daily meetings. When they hang out

> we talk about the people who walk through Pioneer Courthouse Square or real things: like what's happening in the world, or books, or things like that. I forget that what you are – being black or being white – matters. Jesse makes me see there's a different way to be white. And Brick makes me see there's a different way to be black (Durrow 2010, 202).

The reiteration of black and white as being similar to each other and not exclusive to each race constructs race as a secondary feature of one's identity. Post-racialism celebrates this 'diversity' as a step towards moving beyond race. A critical realist view of post-race that encloses the notion of racial fragmentation also encloses the notion of racial identity as secondary. Racial identity becomes secondary as its diverse facets emerge; yet, the reality of oppression is not overlooked. This change, nevertheless, does not take place in a vacuum of time and space, the restructuring of the U.S. society along with neoliberalism have redressed this notion of identity fragmentation into the discrediting of racial barriers.

Rachel's friend, Jesse, also notices her racial indeterminacy: "You're different anyway, you know? It's like you're black but not really black" (Durrow 2010, 230). As Jesse constitutes Rachel as 'not really black' and Rachel perceives Jesse as not completely white, they confirm that the meanings of race are changing in America. In the above lines, black culture and white culture appear as not essentially connected to any race. This disconnection may indeed work to combat racism based on stereotypes. These characterizations performatively construct racial identity as not associated with the color of one's skin but with communities of interest.

Rachel's claim of the one-drop of white blood disconnects her from essentialist narratives of blackness and connects her to 'universalism' in opposition to the particularism of race. Following Melamed's and Mitchell's perception that race has been disconnected from phenotype, Rachel comes to 'pass', not as *visually* white but as *culturally* white. In this conclusion, Rachel is much closer to representing post-racialism and the liberalist argument in which mixed race people are oppressed by racial categorization itself (Crenshaw

1991) than critical realism and the post-race concept of crisis.

McDonald's argues that the message of *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* is simple: "I'm not black. I'm not white. I'm both" (McDonald 2011). In the U.S. context of racial inequality, however, this message is extremely problematic because biracial identity suggests an image of racial harmony that "reinforce[es] anxiety about (being affiliated with) blackness (McDonald 2011). Even though the new biracial hegemony over blackness cannot be reduced to any prescription against biracialism *per se*, this anxiety is real. As Rachel criticizes the 'essentialism' of blacks, for instance, the narrative re-racializes blacks that attend to this precept at the same time that it cultivates an image of the 'superiority' of the multicultural, 'globalized' mixed racial individual over the monoracial, monocultural, 'communitarian' black individual.

This double reading of the passages – liberalist or critical realist – is problematic because it shows the pervasiveness of liberalism, but it is also liberating as critical realism allows us to observe the changing meanings of race as reconfiguring the view of blackness as fluid, fragmented. This view of blackness brings the notion of personal identity without mischaracterizing fight based on communities of interest. In addition, as liberalist ideas take over, this is the foundation against which racial struggle has to respond.

4.2 PASSING AND PERFORMATIVITY, REVISITED

Catherine Rottenberg argues that the category of race in the U.S. is contradictory. Reaching a conclusion similar to that of Kawash (topic 1.1), Rottenberg argues that, even though in the mixed individual body and race do not necessarily coincide – that is, race cannot show 'the truth of the body' – melanin has been the marker of racial identity in the United States (Rottenberg 2003). The contradiction of this marker is that, as the visible is an important part of 'race' in the U.S., the racial dubiety of biracial individuals – the I-am-not-so-sure-about-what-I-see – becomes an indirect disruption regarding race as a valid construct from which to classify individuals. Rachel's blackness, for instance, is promptly questioned as people see her blue eyes. When people see her with 'black people', a question mark is implied. That is, Rachel's skin is perceived as black, but as people see her eyes, they conclude that she is related to whiteness.

According to Marcia Alesan Dawkins (2009), passing raises a paradox since it shows the inability of markers to show 'the difference'. Still according to this author, passing questions our ability to know something about race other than what the visual markers, history, and rhetoric have allowed. Rachel's experience shows that, even though her peers (mainly at school) keep telling her that, in order to 'correctly' perform race she has to follow some protocols, the thin line between the two sides of the racial binary allows her to perceive that whiteness does not have inherent characteristics that preclude black subjects from becoming 'white'.

I argue that Rachel's performance is a response to narratives of race she comes across. Race is recreated for Rachel through reiterative interpellation. The contradiction inherent in these interpellations – be it in the form of negative or positive attributes – is reinforced by the reiteration of Rachel's failure to comply with the norms of either the black or the white race.

Rachel's agency is constructed against the grain of her racial encounters. These encounters reveal that her whiteness refuses to disappear into blackness. Her mixed racial identity and the interpellations towards either blackness or whiteness work as constant reminders of her in-betweenness. The reiteration of race constitutes Rachel as both racialized and non-authentic. The inherent contradiction of this racial classification prompts her to question established forms of race. Zarkos, Mills, Killen, and Rexach argue that, whereas some characters in *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* exercise their agency by refusing some labels, they also comply with this labeling when they accept their role as 'black individuals' (2011). Rachel clearly accepts her role as a black individual but also questions the impossibility of this identity.

Following Austin, Searle, and Derrida, I argue that the constant process of interpellation guides this acceptance. Here it is important to recall Butler's reasoning regarding the connections between interpellation and performativity. An interpellation works as a constative when the instability of the borders between constative and performative speech acts is obliterated. While a performative means that by saying something, something is being accomplished; constatives seem to be passively describing a given reality. An utterance such as 'It's a girl', at the moment a baby is born, is seemingly a constative but "the constative claim is always to some degree performative" (1993, 11). That is

because naming is "one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language" (Butler 1997, 2). That is, by 'girling the girl' the constative performs the act of constructing the baby as a girl.

This phenomenon is constantly reproduced in *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* in which variations of the epithet 'black' work as a constative (and performative) attribute. This attribute, however, comes mostly in the form of offensive naming. Even though "not all name-calling is injurious" (Butler 1997, 2), the association between naming and negative attributes end up by producing an abject identity in the novel. In spite of this fact, Butler's argument that offensive attributes also allow for agentive space leads us to look at these constatives as working in both ways. According to Butler, name-calling allows for agentive space because

> one is not simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence, initiated into a temporal life of language that exceeds the prior purposes that animate that call (1997, 2).

In *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*, the association of offensive words with other forms of repulsion towards blackness constitutes the strength of the interpellation. Rachel's first racial 'insult' is produced at the moment Rachel is called 'jigaboo' by her mother's boyfriend, Doug. Later on, we learn of physical violence. Doug himself narrates the moment he hits Nella on the face and hits Rachel on the legs with the TV power cord. At this moment, Nella narrates from her dairy, Doug used the *n* word: "'You damn little n----'". Rachel's feelings are perceived by her mother who continues: "That word./ The way Rachel looked at me. Big tears on her face. And no sound. [. . .] She knows the word. She is black. I know she is not a word. If she is just a word then she doesn't have me" (Durrow 2010, 243).

Another moment in which Rachel is insulted due to her blackness happens at her date with (the white boy) Jesse. Jesse and Rachel are together when two cars pass by, and they hear a scream: "'Nigger! Nigger!' And then 'Nigger lover!' Again and again and again". As they leave, Jesse tells Rachel 'not to mind them.' Yet, Rachel confesses that she does mind (Durrow 2010, 233). Rachel minds because she knows

that the invisibility of whiteness does not draw people's attention, but the visibility of blackness is enough to arouse people's negativity. The mark of difference becomes the mark of prejudice.

When her friend Jesse, for instance, claims he uses drugs once in a while and he explains that he does that but "[i]t's not like those people," (Durrow 2010, 229). Rachel asks him what he means by 'those people'. Jesse answers: "You know, all crazy. Turn into a bum" (Durrow 2010, 229). Rachel gets a little angry with him wondering if his prejudice encloses more than he admits: "It sounded like you meant black people or . . . I don't know" (Durrow 2010, 230).

The association between insult and blackness makes Rachel wonder about her association to blackness. Following Butler's regarding the gap produced by the insult; Rachel's interpellation into blackness prompts her to act. Rachel's agency regarding the negative naming, however, is to feel disconnected from blackness. Even though Rachel's *black* identity is constructed as valuable in relation to her family and (some) friends, it is the lack of 'blackness' that prevents her from fully belonging.

In the relation between the black and white identity, 'black' gains Rachel's heart, but contradictorily, this blackness is what she cannot become. This impossibility originates contradictory responses. Since the pejorative naming offends her beloved family, she feels the need to protect them from this cruelty. This pejorative naming also constitutes her blackness. The contradiction of this process of interpellation makes her seek a space of identity determination that is free of any label. That is when she feels she wants to be nothing.

To be nothing, however, means to achieve the invisibility of whiteness. According to Rottenberg, this claim to access whiteness reveals a desire "to remain viable and to not be completely marginalized in a white supremacist power regime". In order to do so, the raced subject "must constantly and perpetually attempt to embody norms that have historically been associated and concatenated with whiteness" (2003, 7). That is, by wishing to be 'nothing' Rachel accepts the premises of liberalism. These premises upgrade racism as they seek to whitewash and assimilate black cultures under the guise of universalism.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

The questionings of biracial individuals disrupt the racial binary that starts to be dismantled. The inherent facts of Rachel's contestation of the racial binary are related to the power of reiteration. As we could notice, race as an imposition is a constant in Rachel's childhood, but, as she grows old, this symbolic order is questioned as she is granted with moments that allow her to perceive that there are different ways to express her racial uniqueness. This perception opens way for race, and blackness more specifically, to be perceived as one form of identity expression that has its value. Even though Rachel's trajectory brings about liberalist discourses on race and criticizes essentialist narratives of blackness, it also shows that the response to these narratives does not necessarily mean a concealment of racism. Instead, a critical realist analysis of Rachel's understanding of race as disconnected from essentialisms leads us to glimpse at a change in racial thought.

Butler has argued that hegemonic ideals create the very spaces of its contestation. The reiteration of norms is confronted with the subjects' desire that creates a 'space' between normative roles and social practices. As subjects strive to embody regulatory ideals, they also reformulate and adapt the norms in unpredictable and potentially contestatory ways (Butler, 1993). It might be useful to bring Coronado's conclusions regarding "Gloria Lopes Stafford memoir". He argues that

> cultural differences are not allowed to dissolve in a soothing movement towards consensus, and the multicultural moment is one of tension, struggle, discomfort, and disagreement. But this is simultaneously a moment of hope for fuller self-awareness, and for claiming a place in a multiethnic community. By adopting a willingness to know herself as a complex individual with a life embedded in an ethnically and culturally diverse community, Yoya is able to resist the presumption of an unproblematic 'us' as well as to avoid falling into the trap of seeing all Anglos as an undifferentiated 'them' (Coronado 2003, 64).

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky also presents a character that transcends the binary barrier of race in a more complex way than passing. Rachel's performance of whiteness and blackness is the

material expression of how the 'us' of integration is problematic and uncomfortable. Similar to Yoya in "Gloria Lopes Stafford memoir", Rachel's experience is one of tension and struggle. There is hope for fuller self-awareness, but there are also the dangers of post-racialist discourses that claim that this integration is pacific regarding whiteness but antagonistic regarding essentialist performances of black identity.

Liberalist post-race narratives construct racial identity as choice whereas Critical Realism acknowledges the real effects not only of historical ways of perceiving race as well as of the ongoing possibilities for changing. We have seen that Rachel desires to be accepted in the singularity of her racial condition. She attempts to identify with blackness, but it is only in the end; and by failing to reach this identity, that Rachel detaches from the need to become *essentially* black. Similar to *Caucasia*, *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* initially presents whiteness as undesirable. Rachel learns to admire and embrace blackness. Nevertheless, in Rachel's incursion into the intricacies of becoming black, she perceives she wants to preserve her racial singularity.

Reading *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* from a critical realist post-race stance, we may conclude that the novel proposes to view race as a concept to be reviewed in an anti-essentialist fashion. The main character's "complex journey through alienation and despair" brings up an individual "with her own voice, open to a world of possibilities" (Dawkins 2010). This opening to a world of possibilities is constructed by the changing meanings of race. The changing meaning of race may bring the acceptance that identities are fluid and contradictory as Rachel's – hence, prone to disrupt strict lines of behavior and culture.

In spite of this positive aspect, the explicit defense of multicultural global identity reinscribes racism upon the overtly race conscious. According to Elam, 'passing' is "a form of historical engagement, as cultural palimpsest, as continuous negotiation with social practices and norms [. . .]" (2011, 105). Rachel's experience shows that this continuous negotiation with social practices and norms brings about differing racial meanings. These meanings enclose the maintenance of the fiction of racial purity and superiority of whiteness as it did in the past, but they mostly indicate a shift from racial ambiguity to multiracial identification. That is, as a mixed race individual, Rachel comes across narratives of race in which her racial ambiguity is interpellated to seek stabilization in multiracial identification.

As we have seen, the post-racialist discourse claims that multiracial identity can pacifically co-exist with other forms of racialization – be it whites or blacks. Reality, however, is much more complex. Liberalist racial discourse has associated biracialism with multiracialism and whiteness. In this sense, the assimilationist construction of multiracialism co-opts mixed-race people into the master narrative of U.S. universal citizenship. On the other hand, as Rachel's racial identity is constructed as unique, the novel re-narrativizes race, showing how its meaning changes once it cannot be reduced to the universalist fiction of U.S. 'whiteness'.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINAL REMARKS

> "Prior to this, people had felt a strong affinity with their own folk and their own city-state. But as the borders and boundaries became erased, many people began to experience doubt and uncertainty about their philosophy of life" (Gaarder 1997, 75).

In the above citation, philosopher and writer Jostein Gaarder refers to changes undergone in antiquity. Interestingly enough, the connection between the instability of borders and the awakening of doubt and uncertainty about a philosophy of life applies perfectly to current times. The erasure of racial borders and boundaries questions well-established knowledge regarding the concept of race and the instability of racial identity comes to the fore. As whiteness moves in the direction of losing the status of majority (Lomas 2005) and racial liberalism becomes the dominant view on race, contradictory racial meanings emerge. As Debra J. Dickerson has written,

> Everyone is searching, everyone's trying to reconcile modernity with history and trying to figure out who to be, a decision that is often quite arbitrary. It's not just blacks; the whole world is confused. It knows too much (2004, 235).

In the analysis of the three novels carried out in this dissertation, it is apparent that doubt and uncertainty about a stable philosophy of life/race has emerged. From the notion that racism is over to the perception that there is, in fact, a crisis in the meaning of race, diverse interpretations of the phenomenon have appeared. As St Louis has argued, "the door is […] open", and, as "the continued significance of the materiality of race as an existential phenomenon" remains, "we are not told what shape it might assume" (2002, 661).

Possible materialities indicate a superficial erasure of the concept of race, such as in post-racialist discourse, along with a multiplication of racisms such as pointed out by Melamed and Mitchell. In any case, the meaning of *post-race* has not been established yet (Hollinger 2011). As pointed out in chapter one, I follow the analysis of several authors to conclude that this so-called post-race period does not point to the disappearance of race and racism; instead, it indicates that there is a crisis in the way race is understood and acted upon (Melamed 2011, Mitchell 2011, Crenshaw 2011).

Indeed, as a cultural concept, race is in a process of constant reformulation. In the U.S., race was originally associated to skin color but, as we have seen, more complex forms of racialization are replacing the notion of race as phenotypic. These new forms of racialization include, on the one side, the fiction of a new American universal subject (Melamed), and on the other, the re-narrativization of mixed race identity. That is, mixed race narratives disrupt conventional narratives of race as defined by the imperative white but the shape it might take is not clear by now.

The analysis of *No Telephone to Heaven*, *Caucasia*, and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* pointed to configurations of race that could not be reduced either to essentialism or to liberalist assimilationism. The narratives, in fact, pointed to a social-realist critique (see chapter one) of racial reductionism. In what follows, I will discuss the conclusions from the analysis already conducted.

5.1 MIXED IDENTITIES OR WHITEWASHING?

Critical Realism, Butler's concept of performativity, and Santiago's concept of in-betweenness have allowed me to explore the novels within the psychological conflict raised by the way black identity was constructed as essentialized. As explained in the introduction, the current post-race moment has sought to dismantle essentialist perceptions of identity by pointing out the flaws of this type of construction. As "white supremacy and colonial capitalism" are slowly replaced by "racial liberalism and transnational capitalism" (Melamed 2006, 2), the internal logic of racial superiority based on phenotype loses meaning and is challenged. The white gaze promptly 'corrects' its shortsightedness and recriminates those who do not follow this project of racial integration. As Melamed pointed out, those overtly race conscious remain 'racialized' whereas those who assimilate into a multicultural non-threatening identity are promoted to a supposedly universal U.S. citizenship.

The constitution of black identity as 'essential' was based on the depiction of blackness as principally opposed to the 'superiority' of whiteness. Current mixed race narratives, however, challenge the appropriation of essentialism of this form of identity representation. As the 'savage thought' imposes itself, disturbing master narratives of whiteness in the same breath, essentialisms fall to the ground, and the

wide diversity of racialized populations is highlighted. The in-between space created by this crisis produces an opportunity for reviewing perceptions of racialized populations.

These changes in the discourse of race have been co-opted by post-racialism as an indicator of advances towards racelessness. Yet, this path towards 'racelessness' appears in the three novels in the form of a refusal of former models of race and racism and not the celebration of the end of race and racism. The questioning of the limits imposed by this model of race fragments the racial binary. As racial identity is disconnected from color, the color line also loses meaning.

The most drastic change related to the current post-race moment, though, refers to the shift from the overt one-drop rule of blackness to the covert one-drop rule of whiteness. The latter is an attempt to "upgrade" the former into a new dynamics of racism – namely that of assimilationist whitewashing. Yet, as the protagonists seek coalition with epistemic blackness and refuse to assimilate interpellations of whitewashing, the contradictions of this process are highlighted.

As we have seen in chapter one, this upgrading of racism to a covert form in egalitarian guise, by which it can be more easily perpetuated, produces an assimilationist concept of whiteness. The purity once demanded from the 'white race' is threatened by the weight of racial infiltration. This infiltration is perceived in the acceptance (and indeed encouragement) of multiracial individuals to be assimilated and counted as white, such that post-racialist unmarkedness is forged as the continued majority of U.S. citizens (Lomas 2005). In this sense, the characters' racial fragmentation both shows a non-essentialist notion of blackness *and* allows for the assertion of whitewashing. The co-option of narratives of racial fragmentation by racial liberalism redistributes and reaffirms racial categories. This is the main conundrum of this post racial period. At the same time that mixed race narratives challenge the racial border, they redefine the boundaries of race.

Yet, it is clear that Clare, Birdie, and Rachel expand the understanding of racial identity. The underlying issue is that identities are not clear-cut and fixed but their borders are frail and give space for fragmentation and instability. *No Telephone to Heaven*, *Caucasia*, and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* ultimately propose that the one-drop legacy cannot account for the multiplication of racial identities that have emerged currently in the U.S.

Rummell's (2007) conclusions regarding the novel *Caucasia* could be extrapolated to the other two analyzed in this dissertation. Rummell argues that *Caucasia* does not dwell in the contradictions of the racial binary but explores the notion that mixed identities cannot be reduced to one of the sides of it. Similar to Clare's and Rachel's narratives, the binary model is the origin of Birdie's questionings but it is not the answer. These girls' narratives, in fact, point to two possible readings: the right either of pledging one's racial affiliations towards blackness or whiteness or, through post-race lenses, the argument that race cannot establish safe identity boundaries.

The current post-race moment represents an in-between space in which the social, cultural, and bodily mixture of the racialized individual comes to the fore. Following Santiago's concept of in-betweenness, it may be argued that this process may bring about a new society. This society is contaminated, no more by the mixture between the European and the autochthon individuals, but by the disruption of essentialist views of identity. The 'U.S. citizenship' (as constructed by neoliberal multiculturalism) and the racialized mixed race individuals make up a racial mixture that, even though co-opted by dominant narratives of whiteness, do not lose its force of conflict, tension, and processes of cultural infiltration.

This movement of infiltration, however, is full of contradictions. These contradictions are apparent in the three main characters' journey. Their fears, the rejection, and attempts at 'fitting in' appear throughout their narratives. This anxiety reflects the difficulties of growing up at a moment in which race and racial identities are in crisis. The reflection of this crisis in Clare's, Birdie's, and Rachel's narratives is in the portrayal of blackness as irreducible to skin color, racial interpellation, and racial stabilization.

The reiteration of race interpellates the girls into 'stabilizing' their racial identities. Interpellation leads Clare to seek integration with poor Jamaicans. However, the impossibility of conflict-free integration foregrounds heterogeneity within difference. Birdie and Rachel undergo intense processes of interpellation in which their performances of blackness and whiteness are questioned, doubted, and eventually refused. The impossibility of 'stabilizing' the unstable leads to a critical realist rather than an essentialist understanding of race which is re-

narrativized through the uniqueness[32] of their personal stories and their individuality.

The uniqueness of their stories disturbs racial reductionism within both black and white communities. In fact, the three narratives end up questioning interpellations into racial essentialisms. In *No Telephone to Heaven*, Clare's tragic destiny lets us glimpse at the inadequacy of discourses of identity that summon a 'resolution'. Differently from Birdie Lee and Rachel, who engage with the possibility of being something other than black *or* white, Clare's narrative shows the restricted freedom imposed by the one-drop legacy.

In *Caucasia*, the narrative of the one-drop legacy also remains central in discourses of race but its disruption is further reinforced by Birdie's pledge of biracialism. Even though Birdie's narrative shows that race matters, the narrative ends with a profusion of observations regarding the characterization of deracialized mixed race identity. At Cole's suggestion to attend a school with apparently several biracial children, for instance, Birdie thinks of herself as a canary that survived the coal mine – a comparison her father made (and which she originally refused) with mixed race children who are finally able to escape the strictness of the racial binary (see chapter 3, topic 3.1.4).

Birdie starts noticing there are other mixed people out there. This observation, as simple as it seems, stands out for the possibility of thinking outside the black and white racial binary. Birdie represents, in fact, Senna's view of biracialism. Senna argues that things have changed since her childhood: "There are more and more people like myself – children of interracial relationships – and more and more of them are defining themselves as mixed" (Senna 2005, 87). The reasoning brought about by these reflections is that Birdie can refuse the one-drop legacy of blackness and proclaim her biracialism without fear of being reproached. Even though she has suffered – and her trajectory shows exactly that –, she has survived.

The Girl Who Fell from the Sky also shows the fragmentation of racial identity. Rachel's 'inability' to perform blackness and her closeness to the white culture disturb essentialist narratives of race. Rachel's 'passing' reflects the integration of cultural values of both races and not faking an identity. As she deals with the positive and negative aspects of race, she becomes aware of the different ways of being black and white. This awareness de-essentializes race and thus

[32] As Lubowicka had concluded regarding Rachel (see chapter 4, topic 4.1.4).

sets her apart from former ways of performing blackness. As Rachel moves towards whiteness, her narrative seems to confirm the post-racialist claim that racial integration is a smooth movement towards whiteness but an uncomfortable one against essentialist performances of black identity.

The three novels, *No Telephone to Heaven*, *Caucasia*, and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*, in fact, deal with the issue of assimilation as a troubling liability. As the protagonists deal with the conflicts raised by 'hiding' their blackness, for instance, these narratives disclose the dilemmas raised by conflicting identity narratives. This conflict is particularly complex regarding current changes in the discourse of race. The one-drop rule of blackness, which excluded mixed race individuals, is now reversed to the one-drop rule of whiteness and welcomes these individuals.

In this sense, the three protagonists face the possibility of 'crossing the color line' and joining whiteness. This 'union' is based on the racial liberalist narrative of racial identity as choice. Yet, at the same time that this narrative constructs the individual as autonomous and detached from her community, the freedom associated with the disconnection from former ways of identity performance brings about anxieties. That is, this *possibility* disturbs any easy association to either blackness of whiteness.

As we have seen in the analysis of the three novels, the particularities of the three protagonists' trajectories contest any form of identity restriction. Even though they refute essential views of blackness, they do not wish *to become white*. That is, they do not comply with racial liberalist narratives of identity that seek to 'fix' identity as either belonging to a supposedly universal 'American' citizenship or to racialized accounts of identity. That is, their racial identities do not disappear into assimilationist processes that seek to deny their right to self-determination.

As we can see, these conclusions are closely related to the girls' undefined racial identity. The question whether to pass or not is substituted by whether to assume black, white, or multicultural identities. This is the subject of the next topic.

5.2 PASSING IN A POST-RACE WORLD

As discussed in chapter one, the rebirth of narratives of passing in this so-called post-race period raises questionings to the reasons of such movement. Elam suggests that the investigation of whether passing is a fake representation of identity or a response to interpellation is not what really matters but "[w]hat do discourses about passing culturally enable, disable, facilitate, accommodate?" (2007, 751).

As Clare's, Birdie's, and Rachel's narratives have shown, 'passing for white' has changed from 'faking an identity' to 'choosing' a racial identity. Indeed, Tucker's study confirms that racial choice is more and more present in African-American literature (Tucker 2008, 34). This movement, however, may be co-opted by a racial liberalist reading of racial identities. As discussed in chapter one, passing has been reviewed into a notion that disregards the phenotype and regards the culture. As once racialized individuals integrate the white culture, these individuals are problematically deracialized in the shift from the one-drop rule of blackness to the discursive shift to the one-drop rule of whiteness.

Tucker's finding replicates in my dissertation but with an additional element. Clare's, Birdie's, and Rachel's narratives can be interpreted as being against pre-determination of race. My understanding is that their narratives do not comply with the racial liberalist upgrade of passing as whitening. Instead, their narratives allow for a freer racial configuration in which the choice is not limited to black and white identities. While Clare's narrative presents the difficulties to deal with restrictive assertion of identities, Birdie and Rachel experience the possibility of identifying with a multiracial identity.

Clare does not manage to identify as multiracial because she undergoes intense interpellations towards essentialist performances of identity. Throughout her trajectory, diverse moments point to the inner struggles she is dealing with to comprehend her role in the world. She is interpellated towards racism whether in the form of a rigid racial binary or, as we have seen, in the form of mixed-race assimilation to whiteness. She goes through deep inner struggles in order to try to comprehend her role in a world that gives her access to the privileges of whiteness, but denies them to her beloved ones. Her racial identity encloses differentiated meanings that include a multiple racial identity.

There is no reference to racial integration but only fragmentation in the narrative of *No Telephone to Heaven*. Clare can be partially perceived as a representative of unfulfilled racial integration as she considers the richness of the multiple and contradictory identities of known characters such as Jane Eyre, Bertha and Pocahontas (as discussed in chapter 3). Even though she comes to understand that none of these characters fully represents her being, her welcoming of Bertha (and eventually Pocahontas) points to the acceptance of multiracialism rather than the monoracialism (and culture) of Jane Eyre. The power of representation of these icons suggests that identities are fragmented, multiple and eventually global and cannot be confined within a view of racial and cultural unity.

Caucasia disrupts the premises of past passing novels by presenting a character that undergoes the pressure of choosing race but also questions the institutions that have established race as the 'truth of the body'. She wants to be black, but she also questions the essentialism of this strict identity. Her narrative disputes the post-racialist (liberalist) claim that this integration is pacific and only suffocated by retrograde essentialist performances of black identity.

The narrative of an individual in conflict with the binary system of race demonstrates, above all, that race is a category in crisis. This crisis reflects in new configurations of the passing genre. Dawkins has argued that mixed race narratives restore the notion of passing because mixed race individuals can 'assimilate' neither whiteness nor blackness. Dawkins recalls Birdie's reflections about her 'incomplete identity' in which she felt her life to be a "gray blur, a body in motion, forever galloping toward completion…half-cast, half-mast and half-baked, not ready for consumption" (Senna 1998, 137).

Birdie's reflections, in fact, deal with the dual character of the passer. Birdie seeks to construct an identity beyond the strictness of blackness or whiteness. The fluidity of Birdie's identity shows that race is still a fundamental feature of her racial experience. Even though she manages to partially escape the pre-determination of essential views of race, Birdie's biracialism is the setting against which her identity is constituted as racialized.

The presentation of anti-essentialist constructions of racial identity also appears in *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky*. Anti-essentialism appears in Rachel's interpretation of her friends Jesse and Brick's racial identity. Rachel observes that she forgets that Jesse is

white and that Brick is black (Durrow 2010, 202) while Rachel herself desires to be accepted in the *singularity* of her racial condition. Even though these are anti-essentialist constructions of racial identity, they are limited to only three characters in the novel. This limitation lets us glimpse at a changing perception of race that is not yet shared by most. That is, the novel brings differentiated forms of perceiving and constructing racial identities as a constant dialogue that is, as Elam stated regarding mixed racial identity, not 'fait accompli'.

Like her characters, *Caucasia's* author, Senna, also argues in the direction of a view of racial identity as non-prescriptive. She writes that, as a little girl "[she's] always identified [herself] as black", however, currently "[she's] less interested in giving this answer, than [she is] in examining the question itself: What do we mean when we talk about 'identity'? [. . .] And what do each of my potential answers (black, white, mixed, just human) mean to you?" (in Bowman 2001, 26).

The racial liberalist reading of such narratives constitutes minorities who seek to express their oppression as illiberal and against universalism and, on the other hand, conditions mixed race individuals' belonging to U.S. citizenship under the renewal of whiteness. As this renewed whiteness accepts the inclusion of new 'members', its constitution becomes based on making the mixed race individual 'disappear' into a supposedly universal and homogeneous U.S. national identity.

Yet, the three narratives reject this discourse of racial whitewashing. The novels reject both the essentialist discourse of race in which whites and racialized individuals should comply with the norms of race (the one-drop rule of blackness) and the liberalist discourse of assimilation (the one-drop rule of whiteness). Indeed, the narratives point to a view of race as an effect of ongoing shifts in racialization rather than as racism holding any stable form.

Thus, Clare's, Birdie's, and Rachel's narratives suggest that multiracialism is not a choice. The force of racial interpellation they undergo shows that they cannot 'choose' a racial identity deprived of historical and social meanings. These historical and social meanings are intrinsically related to the debunking of racial liberalist discourses and of multiculturalism as the new whiteness.

The multicultural solution that propagates that different races can live along with their differences intact is false (Grassian 2006). Whitewashing disrupts former ways of perceiving and dealing with the

black and white race. Power is determinant to guarantee which practices, thoughts, behaviors, etc., will keep on going. This issue, in fact, is brought about by Clare's, Birdie's, and Rachel's narratives but cannot be answered by them.

5.3 BLOOD AND BONES

The emergence and the subsequent establishment of racial liberalism as a dominant discourse have raised several issues for race studies in general and for this study in particular. Whereas in a race-conscious model racial struggle and the conquest of racial equity is one of the main issues of discussion, in racial liberalism these issues are obliterated. The implied argument, which the novels challenge, is that racialized individuals 'can achieve' personal improvement as long as they assimilate the U.S. culture and relinquish communitarian values. The substitution of the notion of community by individualism and meritocracy dismantles identity politics while leaving whiteness unmarked. The loss of this source of support misleads racialized people into relinquishing the struggle for integration through assimilation in the egalitarian guise of deracialization.

A critical realist reading of the novels analyzed in this dissertation showed that essentialist ideas related to race cannot be sustained anymore. On the other hand, the refusal of essentialism does not mean the denial of the real-effects of race and racism. Race and racism continue to affect the lives of racialized individuals. Indeed, the lives of the main characters of the novels analyzed are guided by the constant interpellation towards racist accounts of identity. This constant interpellation shows what post-racialism has sought to deny. Race and racism are not minor features in the lives of racialized individuals. Race and racism guide the making of these individuals' identity and their decisions towards racial allegiances.

Clare's, Birdie's, and Rachel's narratives point to the multiplication of racial identifications. In this sense, these narratives go against the hegemonization of mixed raciality. These girls' narratives disrupt racial liberalist narratives that seek to present mixed raciality as hegemonically moving towards whiteness. The diversity of mixed race points to difference as the core making of any identity.

The rejection of both racial essentialism and deracialization follows a critical realist perspective of race**.** Racial formations and racial

identity are coalitions based on oppression rather than either on the essentialism of the color line, under the one-drop rule of blackness; or on the denial of race as the ongoing effect of racism promoted by the racial liberalist discourse of whitewashing, under the one-drop rule of whiteness.

As *No Telephone to Heaven*, *Caucasia*, and *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* question these assumptions regarding racial identity, the novels promote a shift in how racial identity and identity politics are perceived. Clare, Birdie, and Rachel construct their identities (and solidarities) through their politics of anti-essentialism and rejection of the one-drop rule of whiteness, disrupting the notion that racial identity is intrinsically related to specific prescriptions of identity.

In this sense, a Critical Realist understanding of identity challenges the current discourse of post-race by debunking the assumption that racial identity is essentialist rather than a rearticulation needed to challenge the ongoing reconfigurations of racism. Even though post-racialism is currently the predominant form of racism in the U.S. (Crenshaw 2011), the constitution of racialized identities as perpetrated by the three protagonists disrupts the racial liberalist discourse of assimilation as an easy and peaceful process towards U.S citizenship.

The disruption of the predominant discourse of racism is related to Alcoff's definition of identity (topic 1.3.2). Clare's, Birdie's, and Rachel's identities are constituted through the interaction between their lived experiences, historical experiences, and the meanings attributed to them. Their agency is then established through their identification *and* disidentification with pre-established forms of identity. In this process, the three girls promote a view of racial identity as non-prescriptive and in constant mutation. The reformulation of racial categorizations in these three novels (from phenotypic to cultural[33] and from the one-drop rule of blackness to the one-drop rule of whiteness) calls for coalitional politics based on constructionist rather than essentialist notions of racial identity.

As we have seen, however, a racial liberalist view of identity goes radically against the Critical Realist perspective of identity as a construction that affect one's form of insertion in the world. The denial of the real effects of the master narrative of racism has worked to justify not only the dismantling of race and identity politics but also to argue

[33] (Melamed 2011, 7). See chapter 1, topic 1.3.1.

for a universal U.S. citizenship that is available to everyone. As racial liberalism seeks to disconnect identity from one's social and historical location, Critical Realism and race scholars insist on observing the *effect* of racialization as part of the constitution of identity.

Following a postmodern view of identity, the post-racialist discourse has sought to strip racial identity of any meaning by promoting mixed race individuals to a celebrated multicultural identity and by lowering those who seek to maintain their allegiance to the black race as a *side effect* of former ways of viewing racial identity. The construction of mixed race identity as multicultural has sought to deny the assimilationist feature of this movement whereas the construction of black identity as retrograde and abject denies the oppression undergone for centuries by blacks and blames the victim as reproducer of this bias.

Even though the post-racialist discourse has propagated the idea that the U.S. has moved beyond race, this is not what my study has found. In fact, the re-configuration of race and the new processes of racialization have demanded a closer attention to the current historical moment and the changing view of race it has perpetrated: as race is perceived as non-existent, *different forms of racism* continue to strive. Unveiling these forms of racial exploitation is certainly a path for race scholarship to take in seeking to unveil bias and fight for a more racially egalitarian society.

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