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*Araştırma Makalesi*

**“I AM THE LINK BETWEEN THE SHORES WASHED BY THE  
CARIBBEAN SEA”: CIRCUMCARIBBEAN CONNECTIONS AND THE  
RE-VISIONING THE MULTICULTURAL U.S. SOUTH IN ERNA  
BRODBER’S *LOUISIANA*<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract**

*The U.S. South has been acknowledged to be a microcosm of global souths shaped by multicultural communities and transformed into a global space through border crossings, liminality, and transnational turns, which inevitably led to incredible changes in the field of southern literature. New studies and global movements have given way to multiculturalism that recognizes the Caribbean, Asian, Hispanic, African, and indigenous presence in the South. Multiculturalism ends the black/white and North/ South binaries leaving the age of southern exceptionalism in the past. Through its protagonist Ella Townsend’s anthropological study, Erna Brodber’s novel Louisiana (1994) aims to discover the commonalities between the U.S. South and the circumCaribbean and thus create a syncretic southern space that embraces transnational identities and multicultural community. Louisiana as a setting presents hybrid and liminal spaces that depict commonalities between the U.S. South and the Caribbean. This paper’s theoretical concept is based on Homi Bhabha’s critical concepts of hybridity and liminality explained in his collection of essays on Colonial Theory, The Location of Culture. Within this context, this paper aims to discuss the relationship between the U.S South and the Caribbean and how these relations define cultural hybridity and identity formation in Louisiana.*

**Keywords:** *The South, Hybridity, Recognition, Multiculturalism, Identity.*

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<sup>1</sup> The article was presented in College English Association 50th Annual Conference, New Orleans in 2019.

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**“I AM THE LINK BETWEEN THE SHORES WASHED BY THE  
CARIBBEAN SEA”: ERNA BRODBER’İN LOUISIANA ADLI  
ROMANINDA KARAYİPLER BAĞLANTISI VE ÇOK KÜLTÜRLÜ  
AMERİKAN GÜNEYİNİN YENİDEN YAPILANDIRILMASI<sup>2</sup>**

**Öz**

Amerika'nın güney eyaletlerini yansıtan küresel güney kavramı mikro kozmik düzeyde çok kültürlü topluluklar tarafından şekillendirilmiştir. Bu kültürel çeşitliğin fiziki sınırları ortadan kaldırdığı ve dolayısıyla bölge insanını ve edebiyatını derinden etkilediği yadsınmaz bir gerçektir. Yeni çalışmalar ve küresel hareketler güneyde Karayip adalarında gelen halklar Asyalı, Afrikalı, Latin kökenli ırkların ve kültürlerin varlığını kabul eden çok kültürlülüğe yol açmıştır. Çok kültürlülük bölgede devam eden kuzey/güney siyah/beyaz gibi dikatomileri ve güneyin istisnai bir bölge olduğu yönündeki görüşleri sonlandırmaktadır. Erna Brodber's Louisiana (1994) adlı romanı, ana kahraman Ella Townsend'in antropolojik çalışması aracılığıyla, Amerika'nın güney eyaletleriyle Karayipler arasında var olan bu ortaklıkları irdelemektedir. Roman mekân olarak Louisiana eyaletini seçmek suretiyle bu ortaklıkları en iyi ve hibrid bir şekilde sunmaktadır. Çalışma kuramsal okumasına Homi Bhabha'nın The Location of Culture adlı eserinde Postkolonyal kuramında yer alan Hibridite ve eşiklilik kavramlarına dayandırmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Amerika'nın güney eyaletleri ile Global güney arasında nasıl bir bağlantı ve etkileşim olduğunu ve bu ilişkilerin diaspora haklarının hibrid kültürlerini ve kültürel kimlik tanımlamalarını olan etkilerini Louisiana üzerinde irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Güney, Hibridite, Tanınma, Çok kültürlülük, Kimlik

## INTRODUCTION

The American South has become a transnational and transcultural manifestation of multiculturalism and hybridity. Because of its geographical proximity and porous borders, the South became an “extended Caribbean,” to borrow from Immanuel Wallerstein. Spaces such as Louisiana received an influx of people from diverse ethnicities and cultures who intermarried Native Americans, African Americans, the Caribbean, and Asian Americans creating hybrid identities and cultures. Mikhail Bakhtin uses the term hybridity to distinguish literary narrators who had a double voice and lyrical poems with a single voice. Homi Bhabha adopts the concept from Bakhtin, and in his collection of essays, *The Location of Culture*, he states that “there is a space in-between the designation of identity... this interstitial space [third space] between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains the difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). The concept of hybridity that this paper aims to use can be analyzed under two categories: ethnicity and culture. The analysis of hybridity in *Louisiana* focuses on cultural and ethnic diversity. In that sense, ethnic hybridity

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<sup>2</sup> Bu makale 2019 yılında 50th CEA (College English Association) New Orleans, USA konferansında sunulmuştur.

is understood as one having access to multiple ethnic identities. Ella, the protagonist of *Louisiana*, is an example of ethnic and cultural hybridity. She is of Caribbean descent and educated and taken Anglophone culture. From Bhabha's perspective, we can say that since there is not a pure culture and culture is dynamic, culture and identity cannot be fixed to a particular space and time. In other words, there is no fixed Americanness or Caribbeanness but "in-between-ness" that we call hybridity (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). Scholars from different disciplines—cultural studies, communication studies, and literature—have questioned the meaning and possibilities of applying hybridity and liminality to their studies. According to Bhabha, "Liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction ... prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4). Although Bhabha's work on liminality is controversial, it is also very influential. Talking about in-between-ness, Bhabha states that "these 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). The U.S. southern spaces that diaspora inhabits create this innovative site of collaboration. Thus conceptually liminal is a favorable term to consider regarding place and memory on renegotiation and identity formation.

The temporal implication of liminality is another dimension of liminality presented through specific forms of circumCaribbean. With its crucial geopolitical location, the U.S. South embodies liminality and hybridity due to its diverse ethnicities and cultures and reflects transnational and transcultural dialectics through which identity is reconstructed and preserved. Multicultural South ends the black/white and North/South binaries and contributes to, as Lisa Hinrichsen writes, "the reassessment of southern distinctiveness" (Hinrichsen, 2015, p. 159). Contemporary scholarship depicts that Southern literature "shares much, historically, socially, economically, with other regions, other cultures [...]" and that a study of the South must begin with a recognition of those commonalities" (Hobson and Ladd, 2016, p. 2). The concept of circum-Caribbean, which refers to a "space which includes the insular Caribbean, together with northern coastal states of South America, Central America, and the Caribbean coast of Mexico," reflects one of these commonalities (Sanz, 2009, p. 1). I use the term circumCaribbean instead of the Caribbean since it involves a more diasporic approach, which overlaps Brodber's attitude towards "the Caribbean." Brodber states that she does not "deal with [the Caribbean]. I don't deal with the word 'Caribbean.' I was talking to them, but it is not a concept I work with. I am 'diaspora;' 'I'm" African diaspora" (Russell np.). Her ethnographic and anthropological approach embraces multiculturalism rather than a specific nation or culture. Thus hybridity is used as a more inclusive concept that would enable a larger global connection of ideologies, including Pan-Africanism.

Erna Brodber's 1994 novel *Louisiana* dissolves the borders and boundaries within the concept of circumCaribbean and creates cultural contact between the Caribbean and American South. In *Louisiana*, Brodber uses the U.S. state of Louisiana as a syncretic setting to recover cultural aspects of the diaspora in which the hybridity of different cultures and religions helps people recuperate their subjectivity through memoirs, folk tales, and songs. The ongoing interconnection between the circumCaribbean and the southern states of the U.S. allows the circumnavigation of cultures and mobility of cultural formations across geographical boundaries challenging the region's exceptionality that ignores long historical, cultural, and political connections. The circumCaribbean creates a space in which literary texts can form a transcultural region. In this context, this article attempts to discuss how Brodber's novel *Louisiana*, as a post-southern form of writing, re-conceptualizes the region to create new complexities and display historical, political, and cultural connections between the U.S. South and the circumCaribbean, thereby challenging the traditional conceptual models that reinforce the South's insularity and exceptionality.

The novel reimagines southern spaces and literary traditions by extending these traditions beyond the sphere of the individual performance and introducing, as Jessica Adams states, "ritual(s), historical re-enactment, carnival, dance, among others" (Adams, 2007, p. 6). In *Just Below the South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South* (2007), Jessica Adams states that the U.S. South and the Caribbean "form a regional interculture- a space defined not so much by a shared set of geographical boundaries or by a single, common culture as by the weave of performances and identities moving across and through it" (2007, p. 6). Physical spaces highlight social dynamics that celebrate a vibrant and creative culture. The setting in Brodber's novel marks this type of dynamism and emphasizes the significance of space with its unique qualities. In other words, the novel accentuates Louisiana with its "rich multicultural society we now see as a part of the South" (Lowe, 2008, p. 1). Louisiana, due to its geographic location on the shore and closeness to the Caribbean, was a peculiar destination for the Atlantic slave trade during Spanish and French colonies, which "created an unusually diverse black population," especially in New Orleans and Baton Rouge (Ingersoll, 1996, p. 133). By the middle of the eighteenth century, there was a visible degree of creolization in Louisiana, but "the established population was inundated" by an influx of slaves from New Indies, Africa, North America, and Europe (1996, p. 134). In his detailed history of the Louisiana Slave trade, Tomas Ingersoll writes in detail about the diversity of cultures brought through slaves from different parts of the world, including French Antilles as in the following manner:

William Butler, a "trader of New Orleans," brought a cargo of slaves with English names in 1794. These blacks may have been Creoles born in America. In many cases, all that is given is the colony where the trader purchased the slaves: Jamaica (most frequently), Martinique (before 1790), and Cuba. In some cases, however, the

national origins of the slaves are noted, and while the variety is impressive, slaves from the Congo are particularly numerous. Yet, at least one trader, Jean-Francois Merieult, sold slaves imported directly from the Senegal coast in 1803. (Ingersoll, 1996, p. 144)

In addition to these ethnicities, we know that many refugees arrived in Louisiana after the Haitian revolution, enriching its diversity. Louisiana<sup>3</sup> purchase by Thomas Jefferson in 1803 expanded slavery in Louisiana because Louisiana was the most lucrative slave market due to its proximity to plantations, which contributed to the creation of a multicultural society in present-day Louisiana as an interstitial, or the third space, to borrow from Bhabha, where individuals can negotiate and articulate their identities

In *Louisiana Culture from Colonial Era to Katrina* (2008), John W. Lowe notes that “from the beginning in the oral tales of Indians, the letters and journals of the early European explorers, and the spiritual memories of nuns and priests, Louisiana has had a literature directly generated by its locales and events” (2008, p. 6). He further states that “much of [this literature] remains untranslated from the original native languages” (2008, p. 6). Thus, Brodber’s novel *Louisiana*, which enriches the transcultural space of southern literature, can be read as a project that aims to translate original stories to stretch Southern studies’ existing borders. For that reason, the setting with its diverse cultures offers a “contact zone for cultural exchange” (Hinrichsen, 2015, p. 159). The novel *Louisiana*, as a signifier, represents two sites—the character and the story itself. It performs both southern and the Caribbean cultures. As Anissa J. Wardi writes, Louisiana, as a State, is a representation of the South, a “landscape of contradiction and continuity, [...] a repository of cultural memory” (2003, p. 27). As a border state, Louisiana is home to diverse ethnicities and cultures, where we can witness border-crossings, constant and dynamic interaction among these diverse cultures.

The protagonist Ella Townsend, a Jamaican-American graduate student of anthropology at Columbia University, is commissioned by the Work Projects Administration (WPA) to “retrieve the history of the Blacks of Southwest Louisiana” (Brodber, 1994, p. 3). She infuses her narrative with oral tradition, songs, storytelling, and historical and anthropological facts. However, her scientific research methodologies and academic background are challenged when psychic powers influence her upon her arrival in Franklin, Louisiana. As an academician trained in Western values and reasoning, which tends to problematize and disavow the metaphysical as a source of knowledge, Ella finds it challenging to explain the communication with “celestial ethnographies,” to use June Roberts’s phrase (2006,

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<sup>3</sup> Louisiana territory was consisted of so many states of modern day America, starting from Louisiana in the South and going up to the North covering Mississippi, Alabama, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kansas, Nebraska, Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Missouri, North and South Dakota, some parts of Wyoming and Montana.

p. 109). The narrative voice describes Ella's liminal situation: "the child knows they are not her words for they are nowhere in her head, but she is quite sure that she has heard of them and that your lips haven't moved. With so many years of formal schooling, she cannot think 'ghost'" (Brodber, 1994, p. 28). Her narrative presents an alternative epistemological understanding of the circumCaribbean knowledge and culture. In her fieldwork, Ella researches how people of oral cultures manage their knowledge by collaborating on an individual body of stories wholly adequate to their moral lives and social world. By using storytelling as a central device in achieving a sense of self, producing knowledge, and providing a connection between the individuals and the land, *Louisiana* unites circumCaribbean, while also creating harmony within the interior and exterior spaces of discrete individuals.

Through Ella's research and Mammy's stories, *Louisiana* also depicts how colonialism created a "composite of cultures," to use Edouard Glissant's phrase while dislocating various ethnicities in the Caribbean and eradicating indigenous cultures and histories. In *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993), Paul Gilroy describes black identity as an ongoing travel and exchange process across the Atlantic that tries to understand its position about European modernity (1993, p. 19). Gilroy emphasizes the effective interaction of displaced ethnicities with other cultures, which dynamically work to transform their sense of identity. Gilroy writes;

It may make sense to try and reserve the idea of a tradition for the nameless, evasive, minimal qualities that make diaspora conversations possible. This would involve keeping the term as a way to speak about the apparently magical processes of connectedness that arise as much from the transformation of Africa by diaspora cultures as from the affiliation of diaspora cultures to Africa and the traces of Africa that those diaspora cultures enclose. (1993, p. 19)

From this standpoint, *Louisiana* manifests historical, cultural, and political interconnectedness among the diaspora and embedded national and political cultures. Her transformation can be read from Bhabha's critical term of hybridity as the culture is perpetually in motion. In an interview by Keisha Abraham, Brodber states that "History, yes—and politics, perhaps, even more than history, though the two are so closely related. *Louisiana* was part of my larger interest in Africa and diaspora and the need for blacks of the diaspora, and to a certain extent of Africa, to know each other and to understand that you have to get through it together, for political purposes if nothing else" (Abraham np.). To portray this consciousness, Brodber utilizes sociolinguistic and socio-cultural patterns and examines relevant reciprocal themes, which are the fundamentals of Gilroy's concept of "Black Atlantic," by approaching the terror of the Middle Passage and the experience of dislocation from culture and history.

*Louisiana* translates Edouard Glissant's vision of Caribbeanness into a fictional text that defies national borders in favor of cross-cultural currents' rich

nature and re-envisioning personal and communal identity. In his book, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* (1989), Edouard Glissant explains that "Caribbeanness, an intellectual dream, lived at the same time unconsciously by our people, tears us free from the intolerable alternative of the need for nationalism and introduces us to the cross-cultural process that modifies but does not undermine the latter" (1989, p.137). The definition of the Caribbeanness as a multiple series of relations moves the South to global integration, which in turn creates more pluralistic space and identity. Stuart Hall posits that cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide oneness, and this oneness is the essence of Caribbeanness (Hall, 1989, p.223). The recuperated personal narratives in *Louisiana*, those of Ella and Reuben, strengthen the relatedness between multicultural hybrid diasporic identities liberating the region from being either "narcissistically bucolic" or "pathologically racist" (Monteith, 2007, p. 66).

In *Louisiana*, Brodber presents Afrocentric and ethnocentric practices searching for a liberated Caribbean identity to better relate the U.S. South to the Global through the hybrid characters, such as Ella, Madame, and Reuben, who represent transcultural connections and belonging to two different cultures and spaces through ancestral connections that occupy the text's liminal spaces. Their situation can be best defined via Bhabha's hybridity, which meant in-between-ness. The spaces they occupy "provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood" on their way to reconstruct their cultural and ethnic identities. Thus Louisiana, as a state, becomes "an innovative site of collaboration" in the definition of one's self that was lost due to colonial expansionism (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). Brodber's fiction "acknowledges a range of psychic and efficient interconnection across space and time created through the displacements and deracination that colonial expansionism set into motion" (Hinrichsen, 2015, p. 175). In its depiction of spirit possession and storytelling technique, the text encourages the reader to reconstruct the interconnection between mind and body, interior space and exterior space, within the liminal space that the spirit occupies. This reconstruction, I argue, enables the reader and the Caribbean diaspora to have a more excellent cross-cultural dialogue while making discursive crossings from one to another. In other words, the depiction of spirit possession through Afro-centric religious practices such as Voodoo allows the diaspora to unearth the historical and cultural loss and reconstruct their transnational and hybrid identities that, as Lorna Burns points out, "promote[s] creolization and mixed identities that refuse to solidify into a specific model," which also problematizes the region's exceptionality (2009, p .101). Thus recovery of mind and soul comes to life through oral stories and spirit possession, which renegotiate connections across space and time. Ella's finding her roots and changing her name, learning some historical facts about her family can be an example of this sort of recovery.

Significantly, Louisiana is chosen as a setting, as this locale significantly displays the U.S. South's liminality and circumnavigation of cultures by dissolving

the physical and metaphysical boundaries. The novel's function accentuates what Lowe states in his book *Calypso Magnolia*, that "New Orleans said to be more Caribbean than southern-although surely it is both" (2008, p.ix). Ella disentangles two Louisianas, one in Jamaica and the other in America. The American Louisiana and the remembered Jamaican parish, as Lisa Perdigao writes, represent "the space between the living and the dead, between the oral histories and written texts," and between the U.S. South and the global south (2007, p.75). The similarity between the two places enables the characters to become a part of different social circles—Ella's husband-to-be-Reuben Kohl becomes a singer and finds out his familial bonds via these circles—and locate themselves in the liminal space of the U.S. South. This sense of belonging to a place and history would enable the hybrid and multicultural identities to have peace of mind by forming intercultural bonds, what Mammy articulates as "two places can make children" (Brodber, 1994, p.17). Mammy's articulation highlights the fundamentals of robust diasporic identity and suggests that to establish an epistemological and ontological space within the dominant white society, one needs to recuperate and then embrace his or her culture, language, tradition, cosmology, and history.

Circumnavigation of cultures and liminality are among unique aspects of *Louisiana*, as the boundaries between the living and the dead and between the circumCaribbean culture and Southern culture are porous. Ella highlights this liminality and temporality when she says that she is "The link between the shores washed by the Caribbean Sea, a hole, yet I am what join your left hand and right. I join the world of the living and the world of spirits. I join the past with the present. In me, Louise and Sue Ann are joined" (Brodber, 1994, p. 124). Through her narrative and Mammy's stories, Ella relates multiple levels of temporality and spatiality. Ella becomes a figurative cultural site that enables cultural connections across space and time when she links the shores of the Caribbean and the U.S. South, the past and the present, the dead and the living.<sup>4</sup> Through historical re-enactment, she instantiates cultural openness and Caribbeanness. By underscoring commonalities between the occupied space and exterior spaces, Ella's actions articulate the features of diasporic identities and experiences of globalization. Thus, it attempts to synergize global with local, which creates a sort of "grounded globalism," to use Peacock's phrase (2007, p. 271). Similarly, Brodber's novel bridges Southern literature with that of the Caribbean through liminality, intertextuality, and transculturally that bespeaks of both cultures. In this sense, the book opens the space for studies of Southern and Caribbean literature.

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<sup>4</sup> The Caribbean religious and ritual practices are not monolithic; therefore, we cannot mention one specific meaning of death and its cultural implications. For this rich topic see Ronald Marshall and Patsy Sutherland article, and THE SOCIAL RELATIONS OF BEREAVEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN *OMEGA*, Vol. 57(1) 21-34, 2008



To elaborate on how the book opens this space, we may answer the following question: How should we read this novel or the novel's function within and between southern and Caribbean literary traditions? *Louisiana* infuses distinct traditions, post southern writing, and magic realism and offers recognition to both traditions by contrasting dualities to discover the similarities between different cultures and regions worldwide. The novel achieves this purpose through its syncretic setting because it performs both African American and Caribbean cultures. In Franklin, Ella meets, along with Reuben Kohl, Ann Grant King, a.k.a. Mammy, and Mammy's best friend Louise Anna, as her primary source of oral traditions and stories. These oral stories would provide ethnographic data to recover forgotten or lost histories so that they would serve to create hybrid and liminal characters who may connect to their past. Utilizing oral stories and oral culture, *Louisiana* highlights the productive power of language to provide politics of recognition. Through the transformative power of oral tradition, Ella's story asks us to consider and revise our very definition of knowledge and reality, our expectations about the region and its literature through the "multicultural and diasporic face" (Hinrichsen, 2015, p.159), which is presented and enlivened through storytelling and Mammy's memories.

Ella's professor specifically chooses Mammy for the interview because she "has important data to give; [...] she has seen things, had done things; her story is crucial to the history of the struggle of the lower class Negro that they want to write" (Brodber, 1994, p. 21) and she was "the most original storyteller" (1994, p.47). Mammy presents oral tradition as a living tradition whose value and power expand and continue to have relevance for the present and have the authority to reconstruct the future. Mammy embodies the tremendous responsibility of a storyteller, and her duty is "to guide to the psychic transportation of the listener through the hallowed experiences of ancestors in a realm that [might be referred] as a 'virtual reality'" (Teuton, 2008, p. 187-8). Ella uses a tape recorder to record her interviews with Mammy. The nonlinear chronological arrangement and structural organization create a spatiotemporal aspect of constructing meaning and reinforcing this meaning. At their first meeting, Ella and Mammy play cards, and Mammy asks Ella many questions about her background. After a couple of meetings and before Mammy had an opportunity to tell her memoirs to Ella, she dies. Her death is the beginning of recuperation and a series of events in the book. Using Mammy's death as a device rather than a material fact, Brodber employs the circumCaribbean element of magic realism, coined by Franz Roh in 1925 and extensively used in Latino literature, to blend supernatural events with realistic narrative without questioning the improbability of these events. In *Magic Realism: Theory, History, Community*, Lois P. Zamora and Wendy B. Faris explain that:

The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of world means that they often situate themselves on the liminal territory between or among those worlds- in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism or pragmatism... Mind and

body, spirit and matter, life and death, real and imaginary, self and other, male and female: these are boundaries to be erased, transgressed, blurred, brought together, or otherwise fundamentally refashioned in magical realist texts. (1995, p.6)

The elements of transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are carefully integrated into Ella's story in Louisiana because magic realism enables us to recognize the continuities between living and death. To do so, Mammy communicates with Ella through the tape recorder blurring the boundaries. This act is a magical, metaphysical, and spiritual connection between the living and the dead, which I call a moment of cultural contact. Mammy, through storytelling and her memories, achieves harmony between the interior and exterior landscapes. The recorded memories would expand the diaspora's consciousness because of the memory and the loss that the tape records have meaning only insofar they engage the knowledge of the audience. Ella's transcription serves to emerge the perished stories as the real subjects of the testimonies. The tape recorder mediates the memories of the dead; in so doing, the text allows reenactment of historical consciousness. Thus, the power of storytelling creates the world that mediates between the region's hybrid characters and larger spaces.

In recording the interviews, Ella deterritorializes and transcends the boundaries between circumCaribbean and the U.S. South, between the material and metaphysical, and between the past and the present to portray cross-cultural connections between the U.S. South and the circumCaribbean and unite the diaspora. *Louisiana* reiterates the idea that "Look, we're the same thing" (Abraham np). To explain this sameness, Mammy conduits stories of migration, political histories, slavery, and other enriching stories of the past that would enable the diaspora to make connections with their roots. Ella and Reuben, for example, reconstructed their identities through Mammy's stories. For instance, Ella discovers her familial history through Mammy's stories; these recoveries help the diaspora redefine and reconstruct their diasporic identity and the Caribbean American literary tradition. As an important discursive site, *Louisiana* portrays a Caribbean identity conceived of as a synthesis of cultural features. Thus the text shows that local and global are inseparably bound together rather than separated by space or time. This is achieved through magical realism in which spirits of the dead mount on the tape recorder to maintain the connection. Mammy and Lowly's (or Louise Anna's) spirits control Ella's text, and they lead Ella to reconcile a history that connects the diaspora to their ancestral lands, thus forming a kind of alliance among the various global "Souths."

*Louisiana* starts with a spiritual intervention in the form of heteroglossia, to use Bakhtin's term:

*"Anna, do you remember? Can you still hear me singing it?  
It is the voice I hear  
The gentle voice I hear  
That calls me home.*

...  
Upon the hill  
the rising sun,  
they sang, and I couldn't help but add my own tone deaf notes to that song I still  
love so, sang in a way I still  
love, so  
it is the voice that calls me home. (Brodber, 1994, p. 9)

At first, it is a multi-voiced and multifaceted beginning. It is hard to understand who the addressor is and who the addressee is. In the beginning, the voice we hear is that of Lowly, who is talking from the world of spirits. Lowly keeps in touch with Louise Anna King through the “genealogies of performance,” to use Michael Foucault’s term, and she talks to her friend about her funeral and the songs they sing for her (Roach, 1996, p.11). Genealogies of performance refer to “reciprocal reflections that [the bodies] make on another’s surfaces as they foreground their capacities for interaction” (Roach, 1996, p. 25). In his book *Cities of the Dead: Circum -Atlantic Performance* (1996), Joseph Roach states that genealogies of performance “attend to ‘counter-memories,’ or the disparities between history as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences” (1996, p.26). In this sense, the telepathic communication performed through the tape recorder is significant to transmit past stories and songs. The songs are from Jamaica, and they call Anna home to her native land. The metaphysical communication connects the living and the dead; therefore, the act signifies the possibilities of historical re-enactment: combining the Diasporas with history to recover the Caribbean diaspora lost culture. Such textual shifts suggest “alternative modes of building, dwelling, and thinking” (Hinrichsen, 2015, p.165) and constitute spatial and temporal dislocations when Mammy King talks about her days in a plantation, which reminds Lowly that “black box [...] Miss Inquisitive had peeped into the Mister’s room... that he was then... I was only ‘Miss Anna’...’but there is singing and playing. Little green gal from the islands” (Brodber, 1994, p. 13). The telepathic communication also delineates the porousness of boundaries and creates liminal spaces in which hybrid subjects may establish dialogic relations between the shores of the Caribbean and the U.S. South. Mammy’s death and her communication with Ella through the tape recorder are highly significant.

The text focuses on spirit possession as a transformative experience, as a means of accessing “transgressive knowledge,” and as an essential element of common spiritual rituals (Toland-Dix, 2007, p. 192). When Mammy dies, the transformation of transgressive knowledge is performed through the tape recorder, which functions as an umbilical cord that connects the U.S. South to the circumCaribbean. The connectedness is conducted to recover the loss and reconstruct social history within the relationship between history and memory. In his book, Roach proposes a model for how societies compensate for the loss of individual members. The absence of the dead, the enslaved, or the missing shoots a hole through the web of connections that constitute the society’s fabric. The process

of "surrogating" that Roach describes demands that such a lack can be filled by a suitable "substitute," a surrogate (1996, p.26). "Genealogies of performance," as Roach states, "attend to counter memories or the disparities between histories as it is discursively transmitted and memory as it is publicly enacted by the bodies that bear its consequences" (1996, p.26). The gap created by the loss ancestor's culture can be filled by oral tradition: Mammy's stories, songs, and language.

The surrogating is exemplified via Afrocentric cosmologies when Lowly and Anna talk about mounting somebody and transferring their stories. The multiplicity of voices—in Mammy and Anna's dialogues—on the real produced the effects of crossed texts and crossed histories. To do so, she uses a metaphor to delineate the connections between Jamaicans and African Americans. Before Ella starts recording Mammy's memoirs while she is still alive, Mammy and her dead friend Lowly speak telepathically about Ella:

- "Two places can make children! Two women sire another? Who laughs last ... Could be your chariot. Hold tight Suzie Anna. Get those water-logged feet to swing off the ground."

- "This be the kid?"

- "This is the horse. Will you ride?"

- "Will she do?"

- "Best I have seen. Will you ride?"

- "Let's see if she will." (Brodber, 1994, p.17)

This is reminiscent of Zora Neale Hurston's approach in *Tell My Horse*, where Papa Guede manifests itself by mounting on an object. Similarly, in *Louisiana*, Mammy and Lowly mount on the tape recorder—a surrogate—and communicate with Ella, who describes the moment as "possession as a silver spear piercing through one side of her head which leaves a sense of dust absorbed into the brain; as a result of this one can fully understand what is going on" (Brodber, 1994, p.106). It is significant that through Mammy's articulation of "two places can make a children," the text unites the shores of the Caribbean and the U.S. South and highlights hybridity and interculturalism. The impact of this unification is likened to a spear that leaves "a sense of dust" that clarifies and enlightens some epistemological inquiries. If Ella understands what is going on when the spirits talk to her through the recorder, she will be able to translate the messages and transcribe them.

In her taped conversations, Mammy describes her death as a "translation," as if she is a written text to be translated from a language to another. Through the translation, she does not perish but transforms into another entity or a form that has various functions. This transformative role of the oral stories is vital to the diaspora because their liminal location and situation require making connections with their ancestral lands to sustain their cultural identity. Ella and the tape recorder function as catalysts and translate emotions, feelings, memoirs, and stories of the celestial

ethnographies into a written form “through temporal and spatial mediation” (Hinrichsen, 2015, p. 172), relying on the magical potency of the words and stories. The spiritual and psychic transformation almost always takes a material form. Through this new material form, both the individuals involved in the transformation and the society can be renewed. While Mammy is transformed from the physical realm into a spiritual realm, the text symbolically translated the local to the global level connecting the local to the circumCaribbean. Mammy’s death makes her non-spatial and timeless. These qualities enable her to be in different places and eras, simultaneously highlighting alternative forms of being. In other words, Mammy’s translation should be regarded as opening up new dialogical and multiple connections that have produced “new identities and cultural configurations” (Hinrichsen, 2015, p. 161). Her translation increases cross-temporal and transcultural dialogue between the physical and the spiritual between the U.S. South and the circumCaribbean. This translation also challenges the concept of locality, which finds it difficult to cope with the increasing level of cultural complexity. Translating and ushering bodies and minds to spaces where they belong to would acknowledge diversity, recognition, and belonging in multiple sites.

The process of translation ushers the body, mind, and the soul home creating relatedness and confirming diversity. Mammy’s translation to her land, Jamaica, would bring acceptance and formality to the cultural complexity in the U.S. South. Mammy King talks to her long-dead friend Anna telepathically when she finally says, “Lowly girl, come and usher me home for I’m tired and lonely and want to come home” (Brodbber, 1994, p. 12). Ella narrates that Mammy had heard “dead friends of dying come to carry [the dead] home” (1994, p. 60). For that reason, Lowly, in Mammy’s funeral, “had come to accompany [Mammy] home” (1994, p.60). The word “usher” also relates to Ella’s specific duty on this project, as she ushers people to their own cultural identity while refusing solidified identity. The word “usher” connotes that they need someone’s help to take them back to Jamaica. While Ella ushers Jamaican descendants’ cultural and historical stories, *Louisiana* functions as a vehicle and ushers the U.S. South from being a regional and traditional local space into a diverse, multicultural, and global space.

Ella’s dialogic relation with the celestial ethnographies accounts for the reconfiguration of spatial and spiritual relationships through globalization and transnationalism. Roberts notes that through Ella’s initiation and transformation into a spirit medium, *Louisiana* becomes a “platform for the performance of spirit revelations containing not only the possibility of but also providing the conditions for, recasting and recuperating the colonial orientation of canonical imperializing historiography” (Roberts, 2006, p. 81). In her article “Cold Hearts and (Foreign) Tongues: Recitation and Reclamation of the Female Body in the Works of Erna Brodbber and Jamaica Kincaid,” Helen Tiffin discusses how the subaltern tries to access the hegemonic power and speak on behalf of them and thereby obliterate the inculcation of colonial subjectivity which severs the body from the mind (1993, p.

916). Tiffin further argues that Anglo-European textuality and its authoritative institutionalization not only captures the Afro-Caribbean body within Euro-representation but severs the body from the soul (1993, p. 911). To unite the body and the soul, hybrid characters that live in the liminality of opportunities search for culture-specific remedies that connect them both to the existing space and past spaces. Therefore, songs, stories, and religious practices are among the sources that people find transnational connections.

Songs occupy a significant place in Mammy's stories as crucial elements of oral culture; therefore, the folk song *Sammy dead, Sammy dead oh*, which is the sign of the arrival of spirit riders that want to mount their horse, is used as a gateway to interact with temporal spaces. Whenever we hear the song, Lowly or Mammy, or both, gets in touch with Ella through the tape recorder. The scenes after the song depict this fact when the narrator states that "the child knows they are not her words, for they are nowhere in her head but she is quite sure that she has heard them and that your lips haven't moved" (Brodbner, 1994, p. 28). Songs, folk tales, memoirs, the Anancy story, and dances are the unique characteristics of Afrocentric practices. The first song Ella hears in the record is "*Upon the hill, the rising sun. It is the voice that calls me home*" (1994, p. 51). Through this song, Ella discovers the meaning of some previously meaningless words and images. Some random words, such as "Birds dressed in white, banners, and the band" (1994, p.51), become accessible and meaningful through the song that Ella heard at Mammy's funeral. "Birds dressed in white" are people gathered in white clothes in the village surrounded by sugarcanes. Mammy's funeral was the "enlargement of the self-same photo" (1994, p. 51). Through these images, the songs and the text dismantle hegemonic discourses that are represented by "white birds" and resists the dominant order by subverting hegemonic meanings of cultural practices and redeploing them for own interests and the agendas of diasporic identities.

In addition to oral stories and songs, carefully chosen linguistic elements play a significant role in conveying the cultural and spiritual aspects of Caribbeanness and global connections. The word *conceivable* depicts Louisiana's importance as a setting in which diasporic identities can imagine a sort of relatedness to their homelands either due to the namesake or cultural similarity (Brodbner, 1994, p.78). The word *conjuror* similarly evokes forgotten things in the past. The image of the conjuror is a metaphor. The phenomenology of conjuring is an organizing aesthetic in *Louisiana*. It signifies the recording machine, which performs miracles by enabling communication between Mammy, Lowly, and Ella. As mentioned below, Ella's name changing implies a borderline existence that incorporates both land and spirit and is an example of this kind of phenomenology of conjuring because, in the reader's perspective, it creates a bond between cultures. Brodbner magically uses the term *conjuror* to transform knowledge and experiences from the past. When Madam Marie talks about the story of *Anancy*, Ella associates the magic pot in *Anancy* with the recording machine when she states, "Let me accept the

recording machine as the magic pot” (1994, p. 80). Utilizing this magic pot, Ella transcribes and transmits the knowledge she obtains through the performance of genealogies.

The words “tune” and “lyrics,” which are used throughout the book, serve to make the book coherent. Together with the word “song,” they illustrate the novel’s rhythm, which reflects the language and lifestyle of the Caribbean and the U.S. South, particularly that of Louisiana. The phrase “orthodox time,” which signifies the correct or proper time to do something, is crucial in proving the interconnectedness between cultures and societies (Brodber, 1994, p.87). Similarly, the word “dale” suggests the commonality between the West Indies and the U.S. South. When one reads “she was carrying her notes over hill and dale” (1994, p. 87), one may think of the explicit meaning of “dale” as a valley, yet the word connotes the Caribbean and the U.S. South as one country because “dale” means a share of common field or a portion of an undivided field, indicated by landmarks but not divided. Although the Caribbean and the U.S. South are different places, the merging of cultures allows people to imagine them as a part of a whole land. Handley discusses that the commonality does not mean apparent homogeneity in the Americas, and therefore the social, racial, and cultural similarities in the New World cannot be ignored any more than they can be definitively identified (1994, p.25). The phrase “dash into” literally means to strike or break into fragments; however, figuratively, it means to mingle or to affect or qualify with an element of a different strain thrown into it. The image of John Crow in “*John Crow seh him a parson pickney/ Can’t work, can’t work pon Sunday*” (1994, p.87) is an important historical and geographical image in Jamaican culture. It is the name of a rare bird and a range of mountains in Jamaica. The image has an important place in both Mammy’s and Lowly’s memories of Jamaica. The statement “We would help each other. I would help him through that memory, and he would help me find some memories” (1994, p. 87) exemplifies the role of memory as a curative form that helps people to have a sense of wholeness. Similarly, “Just before the battle mother” is a crucial song that is known only by the diaspora rather than the Jamaican sailors. The reason is that the Caribbean Diaspora shares some cultural and historical values with “the South.”

*Louisiana* challenges and resists the severing of the soul from the body by criticizing Western culture’s indoctrination, which often alienates people from their cultures of origin, thereby problematizing assimilation while embracing different cultures and ethnicities in the U.S. South. Ella delineates this alienation by saying that “[colonizers] teach you Perseus, Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Persephone... , But Green Island, they tell you nothing ‘bout a place called Louisiana here in the United States of America” (Brodber, 1994, p. 15). Thus, the text creates a rhetorical space for the voice of the dead to challenge alienation and offers recuperative rhetoric to heal the wounds. Mammy talks about Jamaica’s geographical features, and then she starts to sing a song, “*Green Turtle*,” which reminds her of the past and Jamaican history. Green turtle creates a sense of relatedness connotes the “Caribbean waters,

the waters of the green turtle” (1994, p.114). The lyrics “*Green turtle sitting by a hole in the wall, hole in the wall/ looking at the deep blue sea*” is used to commemorate those who left for the North seas to different parts of the world to make money, highlights Jamaica’s economic and social histories (1994, p. 114 emphasis in original).

The relatedness is established through multiple voices. When Mammy King and Ella meet, they play a card game, Coon Can, which becomes a metaphor for black hope and autonomy, meaning "blacks can." The focus of the conversation is more on Coon Can rather than on Mammy's cultural memoirs. The game itself is a symbolic interaction that carries deeper meanings regarding subjectivity and cultural representation. Mammy's acute historical and cultural sensitivity catches the nuances in Ella's pronunciation and questions as to her whereabouts. Ella states that she is from New York, yet Mammy asks, "where before that?" (1994, p.19). Ella responds that her parents are from "the islands" (1994, p.19). This is an exchange that serves the recuperation of individual histories and relatedness and regionalism and globalism. For George B. Handley, a complete understanding of history is often beyond representation because the lived realities were either initially understated or erased in historical documentation to conceal accountability (2004, p. 26). Therefore, *Louisiana* resists the colonial erasure of these lived realities and improves the accountability of oral sources. In this sense, Ella figuratively becomes a site of culture "which enables connections across space and time and instantiates cultural openness and flux" (Hinrichsen, 2015, p. 173). Mammy and Lowly, through their memories, fill the chasm between lived realities and written history. Their memories highlight the geo-cultural flows that transcend the regional boundaries of the US South. Through Mammy’s stories, the diaspora acknowledges, shares, and extends these stories to future generations. The novel strengthens the diaspora’s legacy and determination of the diaspora that sustains these memories, which form the data for the diaspora’s orthodox history the text aims to convey.

*Louisiana* depicts transnationalism, multiculturalism, and hybridity in the South by combining world religions and folk culture with various aspects of the American South with “over the rainbow’s mist, into the *seventh heaven* and back to the fete through days of *dinkie mini*, to see the *Thanksgiving* and the *nine-nights* to come and without a tired muscle" (Brodber, 1994, p.11, emphasis added). Mammy and Ella speak on certain days and specific cultural events when Ella explains, "she has been active with me on Fridays clearing up details–*dinkie mini*, nine nights, Portland, coon can” (1994, p. 115). Mammy transfers aspects of Caribbean culture using *Seventh Heaven*, which is the highest level of the heaven in Abrahamic religions such as Islam, Christianity and Judaism. At the same time, *dinkie mini* is a group dance, a ritual song held to cheer the family of a dead person, and an African tradition that is an integral part of rural communities’ mourning process. *Thanksgiving* is an American tradition celebrating the harvest and thanking God for the things He gave people. *Nine-nights* represents the Hindu religious practice



“Navaratri,” during which people invoke the energy aspect of God in the form of a universal mother. These references exemplify the hybridity in the text, which aims to delineate multiculturalism in the South. Such portrayals suggest that hybridity is conceived as a site of excellent creative resistance to dominant conceptual paradigms. As Arjun Appadurai argues, this is a positive result of globalism, what he calls “imagined worlds,” multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe (1996, p. 33).

The past and the place of memory in the U.S. South depict shared colonial history via slavery. For Gilroy, slavery in the West first and foremost a shared experience of “terror” that lies at the heart of black diasporic communities all across the Atlantic (1993, p.x). The slave trade was one of the transnational trade instances that allowed Western modernity to achieve its economic and cultural hegemony. To display historical, cultural, and political commonality between the U.S. South and the circumCaribbean, Brodber underscores “the particular experience of capture, transportation, the auction block, working in the fields, [and] the emancipation” (Russell np.). Brodber believes that slavery has not been looked at enough to highlight oneness, and she states that it “has [not] been worked through, and we have learned what we’re supposed to learn from it yet” (Russell np.). For that reason, *Louisiana* problematizes abstract philosophical modernity through Mammy’s memories. Mammy gives an account of slavery and mentions her grandfather Moses’s story, which is reminiscent of slave narratives. Mammy’s grandfather escaped from the plantation where he lived. He was chased and caught by dogs, and in his second attempt, he was hanged from a tree (Brodber, 1994, p. 109). In Mammy’s recordings, the word *slave* reminds the readers and the diaspora of the globalization process in the Caribbean, which started with the transatlantic slave trade and colonialism (1994, p.109). In other words, through the black Atlantic slave trade, *Louisiana* attempts to relate the world's social, political, and economic activities about the U.S. South. The oral stories and memories that Mammy translates to the modern reader through Ella display patterns of interconnectedness, which are discovered through music, oral stories, and shared history. In extending the regional borders and setting up bridges between the Caribbean and the U.S. South, the text attempts to recover a political past dominated by terror and atrocity.

In addition to recovering political and economic connection, Mammy’s narrative gives detailed descriptions of natural disasters that people endured, such as the big Jamaica earthquake. She describes the event as “never felt the big earthquake in 1907. That was big! Bodies on top of bodies...[I] didn't see the frogs jumping hop scotch in and out of the earth as it opened up now one crack, now the other” (1994, p. 20-21). Similarly, in another account, Mammy talks about her own story and throughout this memory, Ella figures out familial histories: “Mammy did marry Silas and had three children...He had been to some war, brought back disease which affected the whole family and died leaving her to carry on” (1994, p.59-60). Ella comments on what Mammy and Lowly told her: “They are facts. I defend that,

though I can't prove them to be so. I must commit them to paper while there is still time. That is my determination" (1994, p. 102). Ella discovers the liminal space of the South as a "repository of cultural memory" through which she connects to her past and her reconstructed identity (Wardi, 2003, p. 27).

Ella wants to find her home because nobody wants to stay in-between. Therefore, she continues to explain her liminal space and contemplates much deeper connections between the local and global by saying, "I am Louisiana I give people their history. I serve God and the venerable sisters" (Brodber, 1994, p.125). Finally, Ella changes her name to Louisiana, another act of translation and transformation, and acts as a mediator between cultures. Ella admits: "by the next morning November 11<sup>th</sup>, 1936, I was no longer just me. I was theirs. The venerable sisters had married themselves to me-given birth to me-they would say, and I could feel the change" (1994, p. 32). At this profoundly dramatic moment, she also represents Louise and Anna's spirits when she changes her name to Louisiana. On a metaphorical level, name changing, which implies the notion of return and recovery, unites mind and body and lived and shared experiences with the diaspora, eventually leading to transnational hybrid identities. The name change symbolically conjures her voice by escaping from the entrapment of patriarchal frames. She erases her European heteronormative name, and by changing it to Louisiana, she creates a hybrid space where U.S. Southern culture and the Caribbean culture infuse each other: mixedness. Thus, by changing her name, Ella self-consciously constructs her political identity, which I call an "act of recovery." In "giving birth to [Louisiana]," this transformation depicts the power operations that subvert and signify the hegemonic discourses of hybrid ethnic identities. Ella's name changing is thus a kind of primordial identification and postmodernist self-fashioning. In this political act, Ella rejects insufficient recognition, misrecognition, and non-recognition, thereby offering new ways of seeing and knowing the diasporic identity. From Bhabha's theoretical perspective, Ella embodies the idea that culture and identity cannot be fixed into a specific place and time. As Deleuze and Guattari write, "becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation between the two," it is becoming both (2004, p. 323). Ella becomes a hybrid character by decoding the relationship between place and memory and between the past and the present. Thus Louisiana, as a setting, provides a distinct opportunity for Ella and Reuben to reconcile the relationship between past and memory and social and political commonalities between the South and the circumCaribbean. This reconciliation designates a sense of belonging, locating Ella, Reuben, and the diaspora as transnational individuals. Ella's story underscores the significance of strong identity and relatedness by implying that the fullest knowledge of one's language, culture, cosmology, and history are crucial to make any connections.

Before Ella finishes her project, she dies. Reuben gathers her transcripts and finds a publisher. Her book is published posthumously. This symbolic event implies that conjuring past stories to future generations is an ongoing process, and it involves

many people, cultures, and spaces throughout the process. In other words, the death of significant characters, Mammy, Ana, and Ella's, suggests that there are not fixed essences but continuously changing and ever transforming processes. If Ella or any hybrid character had completed the transformation process, it would end up in static culture and identity, which is against the fluidity of the ever-changing nature of culture. It is a sort of relay race in which Ella recorded the transgressive knowledge and prescribed them for her book. Following her death, Reuben takes her place in the process and publishes her book. Thus the legacy and determination of the community are acknowledged and extended. Through Ella's story, Brodber urges us to consider ourselves as physically, spiritually, and culturally displaced people while highlighting that cultural identity, hybrid culture, gives us far more agency to shape our future, self, and community.

## CONCLUSION

Brodber's interdisciplinary approach creates a sense of wholeness through sociology, ethnography, anthropology, and Afrocentric religions. She draws attention to the survival of African religiosity within the diaspora. Since songs are part and parcel of folk culture, the folk singing community in *Louisiana* is hosted in the Congo Square in Franklin, where Ella is renamed "Louisiana." Congo Square also functions as a setting in which personal and communal history revelation is possible. As the members of the storytelling circle, Ella and Reuben reimagine and realign the relationship of the liminal world they occupy to the world of ancestors, so they are transformed and healed. Through oral histories and diasporic connections, Reuben finds his family ties in Congo Square. This supports Richard Gray's claim that the "South is an imagined community made up of a multiplicity of communities, similarly imagined" (2002, p. xxiii). Ella is convinced that Reuben "had found his family and his tall oak capillaries doubling back to home" (Brodber, 1994, p. 79). Congo Street embodies an ongoing transformation in the physical space, which reconstructs the sense of home that heals the wounds of dislocation and rootlessness, creating a sense of relatedness with circumCaribbean.

Brodber's use of magical realism and spiritual intervention, as a genre in Caribbean studies, functions as the primary tool to realize this recuperation. Throughout the book, carefully chosen linguistic parameters, vocabulary choice, and sentence structure contribute to the text's unity and coherency. Paul Gilroy's "interculturalism," Brodber's "celestial ethnographies," and Appadurai's "imagined worlds" gather in *Louisiana* as an outcome of globalism that enables circumnavigation of cultures. The imagined world is created with the memoirs of the people who have commonalities. Through the web of shared histories, individual, collective memories, and by depicting the Caribbean culture as a significant part of Southern space, Louisiana redefines the region and relocates the US South as a global site, thereby challenging the traditional conceptual models that reinforce the South's insularity and exceptionality. Thus the text contributes to reconstruction or,

in other words, re-inventing the South, which asserts its autonomy while acquiring more visibility in the global scene. The intimate relationship with the memories ultimately allows the members of the diaspora to locate themselves as transnational and transcultural individuals. Social transformation is achieved not only by recovering the past also by preparing the individuals for the future. Finally, *Louisiana*, as a text, builds a community that will nurture diasporic identity.

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