

## ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: TEXTUAL TRESPASSING: TRACKING THE NATIVE  
INFORMANT IN LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS

April A. Shemak, Doctor of Philosophy, 2003

Dissertation directed by: Professor Sangeeta Ray  
Department of English

This dissertation reframes notions of two disparate fields of study--postcolonial and U.S. ethnic studies--through an analysis of contemporary narratives located in the Caribbean, Central America and the United States. My choice of texts is dictated by their multiple locations, allowing me to consider postcolonial and ethnic studies as simultaneous formations. Throughout the dissertation I use the trope of trespassing in its various connotations to explore how these narratives represent native spaces, migration and U.S. spatial formations. Furthermore, I explore the manner in which *testimonio* surfaces as a narrative device in several of the texts. I establish the parameters of my project by describing the disciplines and theoretical discourses with which I engage. I argue that it is necessary to expand the boundaries of U.S. ethnic literature to include the literatures of the Americas. Furthermore, I also consider the implications of the trope of trespassing vis-à-vis my own subject position my own subject position and the narratives I analyze. Chapter two investigates the manner in which, despite contemporary theoretical and cultural critiques of essentialism, one continues to sense a reverence for sacrosanct notions of authenticity, origins, and nativism in contemporary narratives. I

explore these themes as they occur in texts from Jamaica, Guyana and Martinique and consider how these novels complicate the alignment of indigeneity with essentialism through their use of postmodern narrative tactics. In chapter three, I shift my investigation to Haitian and Cuban narratives of migration and the manner in which testimony, when it is linked to migration, becomes a means of trespassing especially for refugees who must constructing the postcolonial native space as “corrupt” as they attempt to gain political asylum in the United States. I argue that such texts as Edwidge Danticat’s Krik? Krak! and Cristina Garcia’s Dreaming in Cuban reflect discourses of disease as a way of representing the “unhealthy” relationships between the U.S. and Haiti and Cuba. Chapter four charts the movement of the native informant from the postcolonial native locale to the ethnic immigrant space. I use Gayatri Spivak’s critique of the postcolonial critic as “New Immigrant-native informant” as an analytical frame for addressing the ways in which Dominican American writers adopt or reject the role of native informant in the novels (for example, Julia Alvarez, Loida Maritza Perez and Nelly Rosario). Chapter five reflects a convergence of postcolonial and ethnic American concerns as it explores the implications of trespassing and testimony in narratives that represent transnational labor practices. I juxtapose the 1991 U.S. Congressional Hearings which address the plight of Haitian sugarcane cutters in the Dominican Republic through an appropriation of testimonial discourse with the subjective representations of migrant workers in the novels of Edwidge Danticat and Francisco Goldman.

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by

April A. Shemak

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Sangeeta Ray, Chair

Professor Stephan Palmié

Professor Zita Nunes

Professor Ralph Bauer

Professor Phyllis Peres

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“These are mine: these few gangrenous thousands who rattle in this calabash of an island. And this too is mine: this archipelago arched with anxiety as though to deny itself, as

though she were a mother anxious to protect the tenuous delicacy with which her two Americas are joined; this archipelago whose flanks secrete for Europe the sweet liquid of the Gulf Stream; this archipelago which is one side of the shining passage through which the Equator walks its tightrope to Africa. My island, my non-enclosure, whose bright courage stands at the back of my polynesia,; in front, Guadaloupe split in two by its dorsal ridge and as wretched as we ourselves; Haiti where negritude rose to its feet for the first time and said it believed in its own humanity; and the comic little tail of Florida where they are just finishing strangling a Negro; and Africa gigantically caterpillaring as far as the Spanish foot of Europe: the nakedness of Africa where the scythe of Death swings wide.

--Aime Cesaire Notebook on the Return to My Native Land

#### Introduction:

Literatures of the Americas: Expanding the Boundaries of U.S. Ethnic Literatures

#### Plotting the Americas

I would like to begin with an anecdote. A few years ago, while attending a meeting regarding the restoration of a park in my Washington DC neighborhood and

speaking with one of the park's administrators, he inquired whether I was native to the city. When I told him that I had grown up on a farm in Wisconsin, he exclaimed "Oh, then you're part of a dying breed!" I was a bit taken aback by this somewhat curious reference to the dwindling numbers of small farmers in the United States. But at the same time, I also recognized (because of similar past experience) that this man apparently saw me as a kind of "native informant"--someone who supposedly was "bred" with a kind of knowledge of the land that was/is on its way to extinction. While it would be easy for me to see myself through this man's eyes--small farmers do constitute less than two percent of the U.S. population--to do so would elide some important complexities in the way in which nation, land, and race are construed in the Americas, and specifically in the United States.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, it is important to note that at virtually the same time that farmers were going bankrupt and being forced to leave the land in record numbers, there was another land struggle taking place in Wisconsin--that of Native American land rights. The issue of Native American land rights has long been a contentious one in Wisconsin, which is home to at least six Indian nations. In the 1980's at the same time as the farm crisis, the Chippewa were struggling to maintain their treaty rights to hunt and spearfish on northern lakes. The Chippewa argued that spearfishing was a cultural practice protected by their treaty with the federal government, while white protestors argued that the Chippewa were given special treatment and access to land. For many of these protestors, the Chippewa and other Native American groups are seen as "trespassers" because of the way that they use the land (spearfishing has often been portrayed as "primitive," while rifle and automatic bow-and-arrow hunting is revered as a rite of

passage for many of the state's white rural population). The contradicting views over who had rights to the land is part of a legacy of Native American disenfranchisement,

In three major land cession treaties, the Ojibwe secured the right to hunt, fish and gather on the land they gave up to the federal government. For nearly 130 years, however, the State of Wisconsin prevented the Ojibwe from exercising their treaty rights. Tribal hunters who ventured off-reservations were arrested, thrown in jail, and their weapons confiscated . . . . Resistance to Indian treaty rights produced protests marked by violence and bigotry. Tribal members faced rocks, gunshots and racial taunts long after a federal court affirmed their right to hunt and fish in the ceded territory. It was a painful way to learn that treaties remain the 'Law of the Land'. (<http://natow.org/heritage.html>)

After generations of living off this particular space of land, Native Americans had become "trespassers". Seemingly, the only "right" place for Indians to exist in Wisconsin is on one of the state's five reservations, where they remain invisible to most of the state's citizenry. The fact that these two struggles over land--that of small farmers and indigenous peoples--were taking place in the same regional space at the same time is, I think, ironic because both of these groups, while having close cultural and kinship attachments to the land, continue to be marginalized from it--and for the most part, do not see each other as allies<sup>2</sup>. But even more significant is the struggle over how land is narrativized and who is given authority over these narrations. My purpose in recounting

both of these Wisconsin land narratives is to suggest that the questions raised by them: what is a native<sup>3</sup>? what is the function of a native informant? which narratives of land and space dominate and for what purpose are certain narratives resurrected? generates one of the central questions of my dissertation--who are the native informants of the literatures of the Americas and what is their connection to the spaces they construct through language? In other words, I want to suggest that the question of “native” testimony is a question which resonates throughout the Americas, whether it be in Wisconsin, Martinique, Jamaica, Guyana, Brazil or any other number of “American” spaces.

In some senses, I am continuing an exploration that has been central to Caribbean writers. In his essay “The Occasion for Speaking,” George Lamming explains “[West Indians] had to leave if they were going to function as writers since books, in that particular colonial conception of literature, were not--meaning, too, are not supposed to be --written by natives” (emphasis added, 27).

#### The Caribbean as Crossroads for Literatures of the Americas

I use the trope of “trespassing” as a working metaphor for my study. Significantly, “trespassing” serves as a counter for facile notions of travel and migrancy as it suggests the unsanctioned crossing of boundaries. Trespassing causes discomfort for both interlopers and those who claim to “authentically” occupy certain spaces; it suggests intrusion, infringement and encroachment. However, “trespassing” is useful because it allows me to cross many literal and metaphorical boundaries--geographic, linguistic and disciplinary.

This dissertation necessitates this kind of trespassing as it traverses two seemingly disparate fields of study: postcolonial studies and ethnic American studies. In the past

five years, one has seen the way in which these fields speak to each other with the publication of such studies as Cultures of United States Imperialism, which approaches the imperialistic role of the United States in the Americas, and Lisa Lowe's Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics, which uses postcolonial theory to rethink Asian American studies.<sup>4</sup> But no study of the literature that has been categorized as either postcolonial or ethnic American has been used to rethink the categories of postcolonial and ethnic studies. My work brings these two categories together by revisiting and re-envisioning the category of Caribbean literature. By putting Caribbean literature at the center of my study, I wish to emphasize what J. Michael Dash refers to as "the centrality of the Caribbean to the experience of the New World" (4). Dash proposes using the New World perspective, which he defines as "establishing new connections not only among the islands of the archipelago but also exploring the region in terms of the Cesairean image of that frail, delicate umbilical chord that holds the Americas together," as a lens for "exploring the idea of a regional imagination in the Caribbean" (3). Dash continues,

Including the Caribbean in any survey means ultimately more than simply expanding the literary canon to include new minorities or the heretofore marginalized. It means dismantling those notions of nation, ground, authenticity, and history on which more conventional surveys have been based and exploring concepts of cultural diversity, syncretism, and instability that characterize the island cultures of the Caribbean.  
(emphasis added, 5)

Ultimately, Dash concludes that there is “no possibility of grasping the collective identity of the Caribbean without its insertion in the Americas” (14).

The obvious starting point for my study then is an interrogation of the category of “Caribbean”. At the basic geographic level, “Caribbean” connotes a region which serves as a crossroads between North and South America. I use this term because it incorporates all of the linguistic regions of the area, unlike the term “West Indian” which usually refers solely to the Anglophone Caribbean. While “Caribbean” is certainly more encompassing than “West Indian,” it too can restrict meaning by connoting only island topographies, when in fact the Northern coast of South America and the eastern coast of Central America are also considered part of the Caribbean because they are washed by the Caribbean Sea and also share historical links with other parts of the Caribbean. For example, the populations of Belize (formerly British Honduras), Honduras and Nicaragua include descendants of those migrants who were “deported” from the island of St. Vincent and Dominica. Furthermore, with the increase in migration out of the Caribbean to other parts of the Americas, one must rethink the location of the Caribbean diaspora and the constitution of Caribbean cultural production.

### Trespassing Texts

“Trespassing” allows me to think of the various categories that authors and their texts traverse while also conjuring up many entangled images concerning land, property, boundaries, “legitimate” land holders vs “illegitimate” squatters, voluntary and involuntary migration, the unsanctioned crossing of borders, legal immigrants vs. illegal “aliens” and refugees. The history of the New World is marked by the ways in which

colonialism redefined “legitimate” relationships to land and space. In his critique of the poetics of imperialism, Eric Cheyfitz points out how land became subject to a process of violent translation whereby Native American lands were transformed by Europeans into individually owned properties marked by cultivation and enclosure (The Poetics of Imperialism: Translation and Colonization From *The Tempest* to *Tarzan*, 55). It is with this history of the link between language and land in mind that I have chosen the metaphor of trespassing for it is through the act of writing that these texts cross over established literary, ethnic and national boundaries. “Trespassing” is a fruitful metaphor for contemplating how texts which represent the “native” place in the Caribbean do so through producing new “unsanctioned” landscapes. Furthermore, the metaphor of trespassing is also helpful in thinking about how U.S. Caribbean writers produce texts which represent migration experiences which challenge established ethnic and literary categories in the U.S.

I must acknowledge that I myself am a kind of “trespasser“ vis-à-vis the narratives I analyze. Indeed I may in fact be treading on hallowed ground by interrogating the function of the Caribbean and Central American native informants from my own subject position. I concede that this undertaking does not come without problems, given the history of European and anglo-American exploitation of ethnic “others” as “informants”. Here I would like to return to the anecdote with which I began—many folks may just as well be disturbed that I would interrogate the nativist narratives of Midwestern family farming. And as this project has progressed I have found that nativism produces powerful narratives that hold the potential to “strategically essentialize” in times of crisis but can just as easily be appropriated by dominant

discourse for political gain (i.e. political rhetoric referring to farmers as the “bread and butter” or “heartland” of the nation), or to alienate and/or erase other narratives not considered to be politically expedient (the erasure of Native American land narratives from various national consciousnesses).

I explore the role of these native narratives in texts from throughout the Americas in order to suggest that the function of the native informant resonates beyond a particular region. Dash charges Caribbean criticism with “a lack of systematic theorizing on the region; the most original thought can be found in imaginative writing. Secondly, so much of Caribbean criticism, particularly West Indian criticism, is bedeviled by an obsessive nativism or nationalist self-affirmation that the project of relating individual movements or thinkers to a larger whole is daunting” (9).<sup>5</sup>

“Trespassing” is also helpful for considering the disciplinary boundaries that this dissertation “crosses”. Traditionally, Caribbean literature has been studied in line with linguistic categories--francophone, anglophone and hispanophone--which demarcate prescriptive disciplinary borders so that in English departments, often only anglophone Caribbean literature has been studied (if it is studied at all), while typically Hispanophone writers are studied in Spanish/Portuguese departments, etc. However, these linguistic borders reflect and reinscribe the hegemonic geographic and linguistic boundaries established through European colonialism. Such divisions create a false sense of historical continuity--i.e. by studying francophone Caribbean literature as separate from other Caribbean literatures there is a danger of conflating the histories and politics of Haiti, the hemisphere’s first black republic, and Martinique or Guadeloupe--which remain French departements. As Walter Mignolo argues in his book Local

Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking,

“One of the strong weapons in building homogenous imagined communities was the belief in a national language, which was tied up with national literature and contributed, in the domain of language, to the national culture. Furthermore, the complicity between language, literature, culture, and nation was also related to geopolitical order and geographical frontiers” (218). He continues, “The linguistic and philosophical models of the twentieth century . . . are of little use for dealing with the transnational dimension of plurilinguaging, since they appear in academic discourse as a universal-speaking subject” (219). J. Michael Dash further establishes this point when he writes,

A New World approach is also being proposed against the background of a still prevalent tendency to fragment the Caribbean into zones of linguistic influence or ideologically determined categories. For example, the literature of Cuba and sometimes Haiti is grouped with that of Latin America, and anglophone West Indian writers are grouped with their counterparts from other countries in the British Commonwealth. . . . Fragmentation is also evident on the inside, because histories of national literature in the larger Caribbean countries do exist; for instance, in Haiti,

yet Dash argues that “To force a national model onto a literature that often identifies itself with larger regional and ideological entities would be a misleading simplification” (The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context 3). By juxtaposing

texts from such varied places as Haiti, Cuba, Jamaica, Martinique, Nicaragua, Guyana, and the United States, this study crosses over many linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. I will argue that these texts “trespass” across the prescribed linguistic, geographic and national categorizations of Caribbean literature as well as “trespass” into the landscape of U.S. literature, where there needs to be “legitimate” acknowledgement of these texts.

Furthermore, by studying the Caribbean beyond its colonial boundaries, the history of U.S. economic imperialism in the region emerges.<sup>6</sup>

While I do not want to suggest that there are not problems in crossing disciplinary borders, the current flows of migration necessitate that we rethink the ways in which we study these texts. I assert that we must simultaneously study literatures of the Americas both in their local national contexts and also as texts which respond to hemispheric, and even global social movements. As Paul Giles states, “American literature should be seen as no longer bound to the inner workings of any particular country or imagined organic community but instead as interwoven systematically with traversals between territory and intercontinental space” (“Transnationalism and Classic American Literature” 63). What each of the texts that I examine in this dissertation reveal is the constant negotiation between the global and the local--whether through the local Texaco shantytown or the eponymous transnational corporation; an insulated Amerindian community of the Amazon--or the pan-indigenous struggle; the local violence of Haiti or the struggle of Haitian migrants to iterate their testimonials; Cubans at home and in exile, or migrant laborers of the global economy.

### Our/Other Americas

While some of the novels I explore in this study were written in and about a native Caribbean space (i.e. Patrick Chamoiseau's Texaco), the majority were written outside of the region in the United States (with the exception of Pauline Melville's The Ventriloquist's Tale, written in England). Writing produced in the United States by writers with roots in the Caribbean can be traced back as early as 1837 to the New Orleans-born writer, Victor Séjour, whose father was a free man of color ("l'homme de couleur") from Santo Domingo while his mother was a free mixed-race woman from New Orleans. According to the Norton Anthology of African American Literature Séjour published the first African-American work of fiction, "Le Mulâtre" (originally published in Paris, not the U.S.--his work has only recently been translated into English). Over fifty-years later, Cuban José Martí wrote some of his most anti-imperialist tracts while residing in the United States. Roberto Fernandez Retamar describes Martí's understanding of the Americas: "Martí, however, dreams not of a restoration now impossible but of the future of our America--an America rising organically from a firm grasp of its true roots to the heights of authentic modernity" ("Caliban" 20). For Martí, invoking the "native" in an American context becomes a means of countering the imposition of European cultural standards. In his own words, Martí explains his vision of "Our America,"

The European university must yield to the American university. The history of America, from the Incas to the present, must be taught letter perfect, even if that of the Argonauts of Greece is not taught. Our own Greece is preferable to that Greece that is not ours. We have greater need

of it. National politicians must replace foreign and exotic politicians.  
Graft the world onto our republics, but the trunk must be that of our  
republics. And let the conquered pedant be silent: there is no homeland of  
which the individual can be more proud than our unhappy  
American republics. (quoted in Retamar, 21)

Other Caribbean writers who have produced many of their texts in the United States include Harlem Renaissance writers, Claude McKay (Jamaica) and Eric Walrond (Panama) and more recently, Derek Walcott (St. Lucia), Paule Marshall (Barbados) and Jamaica Kincaid (Antigua). While the majority of these writers have come from the anglophone Caribbean, with the rise in immigrants from all parts of the Caribbean to the United States, we now have texts being produced in English by writers from such disparate places as Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Jamaica. While I do not want to conflate the histories of these places, it is necessary to address texts/writers from these places as representing corresponding experiences of colonialism and now constituting a significant contribution to “American” literature. I put this term in quotation marks to highlight its ambiguity as a literary/geographic category, especially in reference to the Caribbean, which is itself a part of the Americas. Caribbean writers such as José Martí and Aimé Césaire have interrogated the conflation of America with the United States. Martí writes, “Everything I have done to this day, and everything I shall do is to that end [,] . . . to prevent in time the expansion of the United States into the Antilles and to prevent her from falling, with ever greater force, upon our American lands” (quoted in Retamar, 25). While “American” literature has traditionally implied

literature produced in the U.S. and bounded by U.S. geographic borders, I use this term to represent literature from throughout the Americas.<sup>7</sup> Djelal Kadir echoes Marti's call to reexamine "American" cultures:

We will also need to persuade our America and our American Americanists to see that what we go on labeling America is a lexical and a historical malaprop, that America refers to a whole hemisphere and to over five hundred years of history, of which some 270 years antedate 17 November 1777 and the United States Articles of Confederation. We will have to reiterate, yet again, that America extends back to 1507, when the philologically impish cosmographer Martin Waldseemuller, from his own fun house of language, introduced as a pun on Amerigo Vespucci's name the term America to designate what is now South America" ("America and Its Studies" 20).

Kadir continues, "Our perspective must be translocal and relational, rather than fixed or naturalized. Our discursive locus must be supple, mobile, transnational, and, as mediate subjects among academic cultures and disciplinary fields, we must be ethical agents of transculturation, especially in times of affective paroxysm, when critical reason may be dimmed and civilized conversation drowned out" (22).

Pan-American cultural studies has begun with the publication of such texts as José Saldívar's Dialectics of Our America and Gustavo Perez-Firmat's Do The Americas Have a Common Literature, but Dash points out that both of these texts virtually exclude

the Caribbean. While Saldivar does incorporate Jose Marti (Cuban), he does so in order to erect a Latino hemispheric aesthetic, without regard to the African, indigenous, east Indian, Chinese, francophone, anglophone, lusophone and Dutch elements that make up the Caribbean. Furthermore, when Saldivar's text is seen in the context of other border studies scholars, which focus primarily on the U.S.-Mexican Border, there is a danger that border studies becomes synonymous with Chicano studies and eclipses other border formations in the hemisphere. The seminal works of border studies such as Gloria Anzaldua's Borderlands: La Frontera, The New Mestiza have come out of a particular political and economic history--and primarily focus on the fissures between Spanish/English and Spanish/Indian/Anglo cultures. But for conceptualizing a hemispheric cultural studies, one cannot overlook the importance of Haiti as the first black republic--and its impact on cultural production both in the francophone Caribbean and throughout the Americas.

Essay collections such as Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex and Nationality in the Modern Text, edited by Hortense Spillers, purport to study literatures of the Americas. And while at least one of the essays in the collection focuses on a region outside of the U.S., Haiti, the bulk of the collection keeps the U.S./North America intact as the center of literary study. Most of the essays in the collection do, however, include more complex gender analyses than found in the aforementioned collections.

There have also been several recent journal issues devoted to remapping American literary studies including: PMLA "America: The Idea, The Literature" (118: 1, January 2003) and Modern Fiction Studies: "Fictions of the TransAmerican Imaginary" (49:1 Spring 2003). Djelal Kadir's PMLA introductory essay provides a powerful

critique of both the way in which the term “America” has been (mis)used to connote solely the United States, but also “The study of America in a discipline referred to as American studies has been likewise marked by this singular national denotation through a curious series of historical and ideological reductions that are at once evidence of and conducive to a perennial nationalism” (11).

Paula Moya and Ramon Saldivar, co-editors of the MFS issue, articulate the notion of “trans-american imaginary” as encompassing the hemisphere: “The trans-American imaginary is ‘transnational’ to the degree that ‘American’ fiction must be seen anew as a heterogeneous grouping of overlapping but distinct discourses that refer to the US in relation to a variety of national entities” (1). While this idea resituates American literary study by “yok[ing] together North and South America instead of New England and England” (2), I find the application of this idea limited in the essays that follow. The United States remains solidly centered as American literature and “American” goes uncritiqued as a metonym for the U.S. Instead the essays extend the viewpoint of American literature beyond U.S. borders, but do not dismantle the U.S. as the literary center. A more effective method for linking North and South American literatures would be to turn the literary map upside down, and enact the kind of cartographic disruption achieved in Chilean artist Alfredo Jaar’s work --a visual spectacle erected on a Times Square billboard with a silhouette of the U.S. mainland emblazoned with the phrase “This is Not America” (It is Difficult). A journal special issue that comes closer to this methodology is the Spring 1998 issue of MFS, co-edited by Aparajita Sagar and Marcia Stephenson. In the introduction, “Contested Spaces in the Caribbean and the Americas,” the editors write, “This issue thus effects its own respatialization by bringing

into one scholarly frame regions that, despite their geographical proximity and contiguity, tend to be academically allocated to discrete 'area studies'" (3). The essays in the collection enact this respatialization by juxtaposing indigenous Andean texts with Afro-Caribbean Canadian and U.S. Jewish/Argentinian texts.

The primary methodologies used in these various theoretical reconfigurations of American literature fall into two categories: those that emphasize a Latino hemispheric aesthetic while ignoring other elements that complicate "Latino" as a hegemonic category; and those that expand their lenses beyond U.S. borders but keep the United States intact as a cultural center. My intervention incorporates the way in which U.S. foreign policy and economic ties have circulated in the hemisphere--and the impact on cultural production. Amy Kaplan has articulated this idea in her essay, "Left Alone With America" as

relating those internal categories of gender, race, and ethnicity to the global dynamics of empire-building. Cultures of United States Imperialism explores how such diverse identities cohere, fragment, and change in relation to one another and to ideologies of nationhood through the crucible of international power relations, and how, conversely, imperialism as a political or economic process abroad is inseparable from the social relations and cultural discourses of race, gender, ethnicity, and class at home. (16)

And yet, Kaplan's theory also remains focused primarily on the United States as a cultural center. I contend that it is necessary to "trespass" across existing methodologies

in order to interrogate the formations of literatures of the Americas in their multiple locations throughout the hemisphere. While I concede that this kind of trespassing can be risky (the danger of misinterpretations, lack of “expertise”), there is also much to be gained in doing so. Only by enacting such trespassing are we able to fully address the cultural ramifications of both the historical events of the past that have shaped the hemisphere and those which will shape the future.

### Reconfiguring Race and Ethnicity

With an increasing number of U.S. “ethnic” writers having roots in the Caribbean, it is necessary to rethink the manner in which this literature alters the already established categories of ethnic American studies without neglecting its ties to postcolonial studies.<sup>8</sup> One must decipher racial, ethnic and gender categories as they are manifested differently in Caribbean spaces and in the United States. An underlying question is who or what is “Caribbean”? By questioning this category of “Caribbean” and talking about its multiple placements and formations one must rethink postcolonial and ethnic American formations. So for example, when one claims Dominican-born Julia Alvarez as a U.S. Latina writer, what gets left out? Or, if one claims Alvarez as a Caribbean writer, what is left out? My aim is not to erase either the postcolonial or ethnic American categories, but to ask why these categories exist as either/or categories. I argue that we need to think of what can be gained when we think of these categories as being simultaneous. Thus, Alvarez is simultaneously both a U.S. Latina and Caribbean writer. Without examining the concurrency of these formations there is the danger of eclipsing the multiple heritages and histories within a given category. For example, the U.S. category “Latino/a” silences

the indigenous heritage of people from regions of Central America (e.g. Guatemala) and it also silences the African heritage of all of those places colonized by the Spanish and reliant upon African slave labor--Dominican Republic, Cuba, Belize, etc.

These dilemmas can be seen in other racial formations as well. For example, “black” and “white” are constructions that have formed differently in the United States and the Caribbean. How do we talk about the “blackness” of people who are considered “white” in their native place? For example, writer Michelle Cliff is a “white” Jamaican who is claimed as an African American writer in the U.S. Even when “blackness” is not being contested, what are the dangers of referring to Haitian-American writers such as Edwidge Danticat as African-American? Jenny Sharpe cautions against “treating transnational diasporas as homogenous groups, we need to exercise vigilance about locating their members within specific racial formations. The tendency among critics, however, is to ignore the historical specificities governing migrations from the former colonies to different metropolitan areas” (“Is the United States Postcolonial?” 112).

How do we theorize the complexities of racial and ethnic identities both “at home” and in the diaspora? Omi and Winant’s racial formation theory provides a productive framework to examine the construction of race and ethnicity in the United States, however, these theorists neglect to consider how gender and sexuality further complicate these formations. Similarly, Mervyn Alleyne’s The Construction and Representation of Race and Ethnicity in the Caribbean and the World and Anthony Maingot’s “Race, Color and Class in the Caribbean” provide helpful theories of racial and ethnic formations in various parts of the Caribbean, but also do not consider the impact of gender. Yet gender is too important a factor in migration experience to go

unexamined, especially when a significant number of women from the Caribbean and Central America migrate to the U.S. to end up working in the gendered roles of child-care providers and domestic workers.

While the tendency has been to address ethnic American studies and postcolonial studies as having separate histories and subjects, the presence of Caribbean cultural production (which is tied to the history of European colonialism as well as U.S. political interference in the region) in the U.S. demands that we find new ways of thinking about both of these fields. Yet Sharpe rightly cautions “The refashioning of postcolonial studies as a minority discourse has not only moved us far afield from the early objectives of colonial discourse analysis but also risks playing into a liberal multiculturalism that obfuscates the category of race” (“Is the United States Postcolonial?” 108). Sharpe also asserts,

I agree with Ruth Frankenburg and Lata Mani that discussions of the United States require a periodization other than postcolonial. The term postcolonial does not fully capture the history of a white settler colony that appropriated land from Native Americans, incorporated parts of Mexico, and imported slaves and indentured labor from Africa and Asia and whose foreign policy in East Asia, the Phillipines, Latin America, and the Caribbean accounts, in part, for its new immigrants. (106)

### Literary Native Informants and Testimonial Discourses

Each of the novels that I explore in this dissertation, struggling as they are with

questions of nativism, incorporate testimonial narrative tactics in telling their stories<sup>9</sup>.

Testimonio has been lauded as the genre of the subaltern: “It is a particular and effective example of a form of writing that appropriates dominant forms of imperial discourse to create powerful subaltern voices” (Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies, 230).

Testimonial narrative strategies are directly linked to the genre of “testimonio” which arose out of the Caribbean and Central America as a genre which foregrounds the voice of the oppressed. Specifically, “testimonios” have been promoted as a consciousness-raising genre--a kind of “trespassing text,” giving “First World” readers insight into “Third World” political and social injustices. Thus, the incorporation of these narrative techniques into novels about the native space and migration allows them to have multiple locations in the U.S. and in the Caribbean/Central America.

The texts that I examine in this project are marked by narratives that either directly mimic testimonio by being told from the point of view of a subaltern narrator who would not otherwise be “heard,” or sometimes these narratives incorporate interlocutors within the text in the form of fictionalized writers, journalists, anthropologists and ethnographers. What does the proliferation of tropes evoking the native informant signify for fictions of the Americas?

It is necessary to address *testimonio* and its various connotations in a bit more detail. The Spanish “testimonio” is closely related to the English words: “testimonial,” which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as “a written attestation by some authorized or responsible person or persons, testifying to the truth of something.” The related term “testimony” is defined as “personal or documentary evidence or attestation in support of a fact or statement; hence, any form or evidence or proof” and “testify” is defined as “to

bear witness to, or give proof of (a fact); to assert or affirm the truth of (a statement).” Generally, I use the words “testimonio” and “testimonial” interchangeably.

In a philosophical sense, Paul Ricoeur defines testimony as “the ultimate link between imagination and memory, because the witness says ‘I was part of the story. I was there.’ At the same time, the witness tells a story that is a living presentation, and therefore deploys the capacity of imagination to place the events before our eyes, as if we were there” (16). As Mary Louise Pratt points out, an early antecedent to the contemporary testimonio is the “autoethnography” format of sixteenth-century Andean Guaman Poma’s New Chronicles. Pratt defines autoethnography as “a text in which people undertake to describe themselves in ways that engage with representations others have made of them” and “involve a selective collaboration with and appropriation of idioms of the metropolis or conquerer. These are merged or infiltrated to varying degrees with indigenous idioms to create self-representations intended to *intervene* in metropolitan modes of understanding” (28). Similar to testimonio autoethnography “often involves concrete collaborations between people, as between literate ex-slaves and abolitionist intellectuals, or between Guaman Poma, the Inca elders who were his informants and perhaps the bilingual scribe who took his dictation” (29).

The genre of testimonio has received attention recently because of its place in movements for social justice in Central America and the Caribbean. *Testimonio* has been lauded by such critics as John Beverly, Marc Zimmerman and George Yudice as a place where the “subaltern speaks” as well as a place for social change and consciousness-raising.<sup>10</sup> Yudice defines testimonio as:

an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the

urgency of the situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.).

Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history (quoted in Gugelberger 9).

Of course, we need to ask what kind of “truth is summoned” through testimonials? In her study of Guatemalan army officer testimonies, anthropologist Jennifer Schirmer raises difficult questions regarding testimony and truth:

Many of us, for political and moral reasons, choose to believe the veracity of the testimony of the powerless victim. Poetic and moral certainty, though, does not provide us with a guarantee of veracity or even social understanding. To claim that only the victim’s (or any other actor’s) perspective allows one to grasp the truth of society as the bearer of knowledge of the social whole, already assumes that one knows what that truth is. But one is caught in a paradox. If one accepts the truth of any particular perspective because it is true from the perspective of the teller, then to claim it as a broader, more historical truth is to be merely dogmatic. To assess the veracity of any perspective is to apply standards of truth that are external to the perspective itself and thus to undercut the inherent truth of the perspective that is being witnessed. (“Whose Testimony? Whose Truth?” 62)

Thus, Schirmer's argument directly challenges Yudice's (and other scholars) placement of truth-value on the testimonials of powerless victims, solely because they are victims. She contends, "How does one judge which testimonies to believe? Why is one more trustworthy and meaningful than another? . . . Are only some people supposed to tell the truth, and others always lacking in credibility? Does one always give the powerless more license? If one does, should one necessarily omit the testimony of the powerful?" (62)

These are difficult but important questions to ask because at the same time that testimony has played an important role in the reconciliation and rebuilding of fractured nations such as South Africa and Guatemala after traumatic and bloody eras of apartheid struggle and attempted genocide--through the forums of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa and the Historical Memory in Guatemala, testimonio as a mode of truth-telling, has also come under attack. In particular the publication of anthropologist, David Stoll's Rigoberta Menchù and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans questions the veracity of Menchu's testimonial. Stoll reports that through his own research in Guatemala, he discovered accounts of events that differed from those reported in I Rigoberta Menchù. The publication of this book garnered a storm of controversy and media attention (Stoll's findings were reported on the front page of The New York Times) as well as the academic attention--with the publication of a casebook of essays edited by Arturo Arias, The Rigoberta Menchù Controversy. While I do not have the space to flesh out the nuances of the argument, I would like to highlight the "Rigoberta controversy" for what it says about testimonio, truth-telling, and the relationship between informants, anthropologists and the circulation of testimonio. Uruguayan writer Eduardo

Galeano sums up the arguments surrounding the case;

With suspicious celerity, a smoke screen is rising to hide forty years of tragedy in Guatemala, magically reduced to a guerrilla provocation and to family quarrels, those typical ‘Indian things.’ It goes without saying that the voluminous and well-documented report put together by the church, a committee presided over by Bishop Gerardi and published just last year, two days before his murder, did not enjoy the same publicity. There was no front page in the New York Times. Thousands of testimonials gathered throughout the entire country came together as small pieces of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle that recorded the memory of pain: 150,000 Guatemalans dead, 150,000 disappeared, a million exiles or refugees, 200,000 orphans, 40,000 widows. (“Let’s Shoot Rigoberta” 100)

In his definition of testimonio John Beverley also points to the political connotations of the term: “The word ‘testimonio’ in Spanish suggests the act of testifying or bearing witness in a legal or religious sense. The connotation is important because it distinguishes testimonio from a simple recorded participant narrative or ‘oral history’ . . . In oral history it is the intentionality of the recorder --usually a social scientist or journalist--that is paramount; in testimonio, by contrast, it is the intentionality of the narrator. (Beverley, “The Margin at the Center: On Testimonio,” 73.) I would argue that the distinction between oral history and testimonio is not as clearly defined as Beverley asserts. The interlocutor cannot be so easily extracted from the intentionality of the

narrator.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the intentionality of the narrator becomes even more obscured once the testimonio enters into the global marketplace as a commodity. It is necessary to remind ourselves that testimonio is just as much a narrative construction as a fictional novel or even, autobiography, biography and memoir. Indeed as Robert Carr points out, testimonial literature is both a construction and a commodity. In his essay, “Crossing the First World/Third World Divides” Carr states that “The emergence of testimonial literature in the First World marketplace (geographically defined) is thus involved in an ongoing history of mappings of Otherized communities and their worlds (dehistoricized and deterritorialized) for the accumulation of knowledge and power by bourgeois/ruling-class Anglo-Americans and their descendants” (155). Carr’s definition of testimonio reflects his reservations: “ ‘Third World’ experience produced for consumption” through the “the speaker from an exploited, oppressed community working with someone who has or can gain access to the managers of the mass media to produce a commodity that can be marketed” (156-157).

In addition to the geographic connotations of the term “Caribbean,” there are also historical antecedents to the term which have been analyzed by Roberto Fernandez Retamar in his famous essay, “Caliban,”<sup>12</sup>. Hortense Spillers summarizes Retamar’s essay, explaining, “ ‘Carib’ is translated as a ‘deformation’ and ‘defamation’ into ‘cannibal.’ The latter generates an anagram in ‘Caliban,’ as Shakespeare had already made use of ‘cannibal’ to mean anthropophagus ‘in the third part of Henry IV and Othello” (4). In linking Caribbean history with “Caliban/cannibal” narratives, one could read Caliban as the first kind of native informant--one whose words were misconstrued by his translators (Shakespeare, Columbus). In doing so, we must ask what the

implications of the legacy of the native informant are for contemporary fictions of the Americas because while my study examines novels from the Caribbean and Central America, the native informant in fiction can be found in texts from throughout the Americas in novels such as; Mario Vargas Llosa's The Storyteller (Peru), Maryse Conde's I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem and The Last of the African Kings (Guadeloupe), Jorge Amado's Tent of Miracles (Brazil), Miguel Barnet's Biography of a Runaway Slave (Cuba), Carolina Maria De Jesus's Child of the Dark: The Diary of Carolina Maria De Jesus (Brazil), Julia Alvarez's In the Time of the Butterflies (Dominican Republic), Edwidge Danticat's The Farming of Bones (Haiti), Manlio Argueta's One Day in Life (El Salvador).

Cuban scholar Miguel Barnet asserts that the testimonial novel "implies a conjunction of styles, a coming together of approaches and a fusion of objectives, a confrontation with problems within the American context, violence, dependency, neocolonialism, the falsification of history by means of schematisms applied and reapplied" (Biography of a Runaway Slave, Afterword 204). Many of these texts also "trespass" by using postmodern narrative tactics and offering narrators, who have traditionally been silenced, to act as "native informants" offering their testimony to history. Yet, since these testimonials are presented in novel form, they serve as a hybrid genre: text-imonials, which blend the narrative elements of the oral testimonio format with that of historiographic novels. As such, these texts demonstrate the complex subject-positions of so-called "native informants" and the difficulty in establishing "truths" through their testimonial narratives. I consider what the connection is between the political structures that contemporary writers are coming out of in the Americas and how

they tell their stories and to whom, both inter-textually and extra-textually. And while testimonial narrative tactics have the potential to subvert the “master narratives” of history (what Edouard Glissant refers to as History in Caribbean Discourse), I argue that the use of these tactics calls testimonio into question as a purveyor of “truth”. The ambivalence surrounding these fictional testimonials reflects an ambivalent relationship between the fictionalized “narrator-witness,” the nation-state and H/history.

Thus, an overriding theme in my dissertation is the connection between language and land. How do testimonial narratives contribute to the construction of a native Caribbean space? With this question, I am evoking Michel de Certeau’s notion of “space” as opposed to “place”. De Certeau argues that “space is a practiced place” referring to the manner in which language, and particularly, stories “carry out a labor that constantly transforms places into spaces or spaces into places” (The Practice of Ordinary Life, 118). I specifically examine the interaction between human beings and land in the novels and the manner in which these interactions create Caribbean “spaces”.

#### Native Informants in the Americas

The second question that I address throughout the chapters concerns narrative authority and how these texts construe positions from which their stories are told. The notion of *testimonio* that I use throughout the dissertation begs the question of the informant. One could look to such figures as La Malinche, Squanto, Sacajawea and Pocahontas for precursors to contemporary native informant narratives. While I do not have the space to recount the historical nuances each of these indigenous figures, it is important to note their roles as mediators between native and colonial cultures. These mediations, whether they were coerced, voluntary or a combination of motivations, signal

the earliest examples of attempts by indigenous peoples of the Americas to represent themselves within or outside of colonial discourse.

Thus, it is important to spend some time exploring the theoretical underpinnings of the “native informant” and its more recent connections to the discipline of anthropology, a field which originated as part of the colonial enterprise. The “native informant” described the subject within a culture from whom the anthropologist, a scholar outside of the culture, collected his data. In recent years, the field of anthropology has re-examined the way in which anthropologists represented their subjects and the knowledge received from these subjects. One of the questions surrounding the scholar/subject was how a subject’s experiences could be represented “objectively” when anthropologists were from outside of a given culture and were not native speakers of the culture’s language? What are the limitations of relying on the native informant’s interpretation as authoritative? One of the earliest texts to articulate the need to re-examine the relationship between ethnographers and their informants, and the role that language and writing play in inscribing this relationship was the collection of essays, Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography, edited by James Clifford and George E. Marcus. In his introduction Clifford asserts that

Anthropology no longer speaks with automatic authority for others defined as unable to speak for themselves ( ‘primitive,’ ‘pre-literate,’ ‘without history’). Other groups can less easily be distanced in special, almost always past or passing, times --represented as if they were not involved in the present world systems that implicate

ethnographers along with the peoples they study. ‘Cultures’ do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship. (“Introduction: Partial Truths” 10)

A shift has occurred in the field so that informants have come to be seen not merely as vessels to be tapped into and deciphered by Western scholars, but as active agents of knowledge. Clifford argues that, “Insiders studying their own cultures offer new angles of vision and depths of understanding. Their accounts are empowered and restricted in unique ways” (9). Clifford is speaking of the native informant in the context of anthropology located in a non-Western space. And yet even when native informants are “insiders,” their position as informants are still highly complicated by their own subjectivities within a given culture. What happens when a person goes from living their culture to studying it? Does that informant or culture still exist in the same way?<sup>13</sup>

Another question raised by the anthropologist/informant relationship is what the process of writing does for the understanding of a given culture. As Clifford states, “Literary processes--metaphor, figuration, narrative--affect the ways cultural phenomenon are registered, from the first jotted ‘observations’ to the completed book, the ways these configurations ‘make sense’ in determined acts of reading” (4).<sup>14</sup>

I explore both how natives are represented by forces of dominant discourses, as well as how native characters represent themselves. What is the significance of native

testimonial narratives once they migrate from the native space? The implications of this second question resonate not only with the fictional characters of the novels I analyze, but also with “real” Caribbean migrants (i.e. Cubans and Haitians) who must use testimony to construct themselves as subjects. This question of narrative authority becomes central to identifying the type of “spaces” that are produced through language. The ability that informants display in their narrative authority determines which narratives “trespass” from one space to another.

### Chapter Summaries

Chapter two, “Postmodern Nativisms,” investigates the manner in which, despite contemporary theoretical and cultural critiques of essentialism, one continues to sense a reverence for sacrosanct notions of authenticity, origins, and nativism in contemporary narratives. I explore how Caribbean writers express human relationships to land that struggle with the encroachment of global capitalism and subsequent migration which are always threatening to destroy this relationship/space. Is it, as Michelle Cliff argues, through a “landscape in ruination . . . in which the imposed nation is overcome by the naturalness of ruin” (“Caliban’s Daughter or Into the Interior” 152)? How do these nativist texts deconstruct the nation through explorations of race, gender and community? How is the nation produced or disrupted through these constructions?

I begin by analyzing Michelle Cliff’s No Telephone to Heaven which explores notions of nationhood and legitimacy as connected to land through the lenses of class, race and gender in Jamaica. The novel’s structure is episodic, tracing the lives of several characters including: Clare Savage, a “white” Jamaican whose family leaves Jamaica to escape the violence being waged against the upper-classes on the island; Christopher is

Clare's poor "black" alter-ego who struggles to make a living as a day laborer. I begin with this novel because it represents the most unconventional use of the testimonial narrative of the three novels in the chapter in that violence serves as a form of testimony for the character, Christopher, who murders his employer's family when the patriarch refuses to give him a plot of land to bury his grandmother. I argue that Christopher's violent articulations, which come in the form of mutilated, raped and dismembered bodies, are linked to the text's overt grappling with revolutionary politics. I also explore the relationship of gender to nativism through the female characters of the novel. I discuss both the overt connection between gender and native/nation with the character of Clare Savage, but also the legacy of dis-connection of gender and native with the character Mavis, whom Christopher literally dismembers in his violent massacre. Mavis's murder signals both an obliteration of her physical existence as well as her own testimony from the text.

I continue this chapter by examining Patrick Chamoiseau's Texaco which traces the stories of the indigent inhabitants of the eponymous shantytown in Martinique from emancipation through the present day. Texaco struggles to build and maintain community amidst the onslaught of outside intrusions in the form of "progress," "development" and capitalism. Chamoiseau's Texaco is told through the testimony of Marie-Sophie, a poor black female inhabitant of the quarter Texaco, who leads the inhabitants of Texaco in resistance to the white landowner's (béké) constant attempts to displace them. Marie-Sophie has recorded her testimony in a set of notebooks from which the Word-Scratcher, Oiseau de Cham, culls the story that readers encounter. Along with the interchange between Marie-Sophie (informant) and Oiseau de Cham

(ethnographer), there are other “informants” including an Urban Planner, who initially comes to raze the Texaco-quarter, and Ti-Cirique, a Haitian “man of letters,” who continuously edits Marie-Sophie’s manuscripts, resulting in multiple narrative disruptions.<sup>15</sup> The many stops and starts of this narrative, the pieced-togetherness of it all is a reflection of the community of Texaco itself which exists precariously on the outskirts of the City, always under threat of being demolished by authorities or natural disaster. Thus, the form of the testimonial itself reflects Texaco’s precarious position in the nation-state. For example, the novel’s chapter headings reflect the various developmental stages of the quarter: “The Age of Straw”, “The Age of Crate and Wood”, “The Age of Asbestos”, and “The Age of Concrete”. The narrative reflects the ambivalence surrounding the construction not only of a city-quarter, but also of a community in the movement from the rural countryside to the urban center. The text seems to ask what the sacrifices will be to a community which becomes more and more disconnected from the land. This question is fraught with the “death” that Marie-Sophie experiences upon writing her story down. She explains,

The feeling of death became even more present when I began to write about myself, and about Texaco. It was like petrifying the tatters of my flesh. I was emptying out my memory into immobile notebooks without having brought back the quivering of the living life which at each moment modifies what’s just happened. Texaco was dying in my notebooks though it wasn’t finished. (322)

In fact Marie-Sophie literally is the text as signified by her initials (M.S.) which also represent the initials for “manuscript” (ms).

The third novel that I analyze in this chapter is Pauline Melville’s The Ventriloquist’s Tale. In this novel, the Guyanese landscape offers a very different kind of Caribbean landscape than an island topography of Texaco or No Telephone to Heaven. Here the focus is the northern coast of the South American mainland. Part of this landscape includes the “interior“ of the Amazon where national boundaries become ambiguous, if not irrelevant. While Guyana’s population is composed of people of African, East Indian and European descent, Melville focuses specifically on the indigenous population. Melville’s text presents a question as to how indigenous peoples survive in the age of global capitalism. What are the cultural sacrifices necessary for this survival? The Ventriloquist’s Tale parodies testimonial narrative through its use of an indigenous informant, Chico, one of the many “ventriloquists” in the novel. We do not know whether or not to believe the story Chico narrates because, as he states in the prologue, “We, in this part of the world, have a special veneration for the lie and all its consequences and ramifications. We treat the lie seriously, as a form of horticulture, to be tended and nurtured, all its little tendrils to be encouraged” (3). Chico calls into question the recent trend in fictions utilizing testimonial narrative tactics as well as plays with the question of “native-informants”:

I must put away everything fantastical that my nature and the South American continent prescribe and become a realist. . . Why realism, you ask. Because hard-nosed, tough-minded realism is what is required these

days. . . Perhaps it has something to do with protestants or puritans and the tedious desire to bear witness that makes people prefer testimony these days. (9)

While Chico claims that he must use realism to tell his story because it is the trend, the ubiquity of myth throughout the narrative disrupts this “realism”. Thus, the question becomes, are we to trust this informant?

Moving away from texts which focus solely on local Caribbean landscapes, in chapter three, “Rights/Rites of Passage: Haitian and Cuban Migration Narratives,” I shift my investigation to the manner in which testimony, when it is linked to migration, becomes a means of trespassing in Haitian and Cuban migration narratives. I juxtapose multiple narratives--novels, short stories, and human rights documents--to examine the legal role that testimony plays for Haitian and Cuban refugees in constructing the postcolonial native space as “corrupt” and “dysfunctional” as they attempt to gain political asylum in the United States. I argue that texts such as Edwidge Danticat’s Krik? Krak! and Cristina Garcia’s Dreaming in Cuban reflect discourses of disease as a way of representing the “unhealthy” relationships between the U.S. and Haiti and Cuba. I explore how Cuban and Haitian “transitional texts” address the political volatilities in the “home” place and how they negotiate with their new U.S.-based “American” identities. What must one sacrifice in order to become this type of an “American”?

In addition to exploring what the cultural sacrifices of this migration are, I also address who gets to “travel” in these texts since in many cases migrations are propelled by political and economic instabilities “at home”. Ruben G. Rumbaut remarks “History

is filled with unintended consequences, and one of the ironies . . . of the history of a nation that expanded its influence and ‘manifest destiny’ into Latin America and the Caribbean is that, in significant numbers, their diverse peoples have come to the United States and themselves become ‘Americans’ (275). Rumbaut signals that the “Americas” are in “America” and in becoming “American” the cultural identity linked to the native place is often silenced or erased. When are migrants seen as “trespassers” of national borders? How are these texts trespassing across national literary and disciplinary borders? How is citizenship defined through race and ethnicity in these texts? What is the difference between immigrant and refugee narratives? How do these migrations compare or conflict with notions of nativism?

The texts I examine in this chapter shuttle between the categories of Caribbean literature and U.S. ethnic literature and are produced in the United States. I call the writers of these texts U.S. Caribbean writers to distinguish them from Caribbean writers living in Canada or Europe and (to differentiate it from the term “Caribbean diasporan writer,” which could encompass writers of Caribbean descent in the U.S., Canada, Europe and even, Africa). In addition to Danticat and Garcia, I look at non-fiction texts such as, the human rights reports Refugee Refoulement and Half the Story, published by the Lawyers Committee on Human Rights and National Coalition for Haitian Rights, and a testimonial short story by Haitian-American writer Nikol Payen “Something in the Water . . . Reflections on a People’s Journey” in which the Haitian-American narrator describes her feelings of ambivalence when she worked as a Krèyol interpreter at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where Haitian “boat people” were detained before being repatriated. I end this chapter by examining the testimonial narrative function in Yvonne

Lamazares' The Sugar Island.

Chapter four charts the movement of the native informant from the postcolonial native locale to the ethnic immigrant space in the United States. I use Gayatri Spivak's critique of the postcolonial critic as "New Immigrant--native informant" as an analytical frame for addressing the ways in which Dominican-American writers adopt or reject the role of New Immigrant--native informant in their novels. I begin by examining Nelly Rosario's historiographic novel Song of the Water Saints which juxtaposes the early twentieth-century invasion of the island by the U.S. military along with the exploitation of native Dominican women. I argue that the novel presents photography and postcards as visual images which trespass across time and space, and also highlight the constructedness of racial categories.

Next I consider the ways in which Julia Alvarez has positioned herself and her narrators as native informants in her autobiographical essays and fiction. In particular, I analyze Alvarez's novel Yo, in which the eponymous protagonist shuttles between the United States where her family immigrated to in the 1960s fleeing the Dominican dictator, Trujillo, and the Dominican Republic, where she returns to her extended family's estate to write and reconnect with her Dominican heritage. I compare Alvarez with other Dominican American writers including Rosario, Junot Diaz, Loida Maritza Perez, and Angie Cruz. I evaluate the manner in which a writer's own ethnicity, class, and race become cultural products, bestowing the public and privileged role of "native informant" on certain immigrant writers. For example, Alvarez, who is light-skinned, passes much more easily as "Latina" than Perez whose novel Geographies of Home addresses the dilemmas facing dark-skinned Latinas who are seen as a black in the United

States.

Chapter five, “Where Have All the Natives Gone? Testimonial Discourse and U.S.-Caribbean Relations” reflects a convergence of postcolonial and ethnic American concerns as it explores the implications of trespassing and testimony in narratives that represent transnational labor practices. I begin with the 1991 U.S. Congressional Hearings addressing the plight of Haitian sugarcane cutters in the Dominican Republic. I address how testimonio has become a “trespassing genre” through its various metamorphoses in the academy, literary circles and even in U.S. political discourse. I explore the appropriative potential of testimonio--as a literary genre and a discourse-- by interrogating the ways in which U.S. Congressional Hearings held in 1991, foreground testimonial narrative strategies as a way to legitimize the United States’ alleged concern for Haitian human rights in the Dominican Republic. I attempt to deconstruct the events of the hearings in order to reveal their construction as a moment of seemingly altruistic humanitarianism. In particular, I am interested in how the different “voices” or positions are presented in the hearings because while there is an “official” purpose to the hearings, there is also a way in which they adopt the “unofficial” genre of testimonial narrative. In doing so, the hearings produce what Albert Moreiras refers to as a “poetics of solidarity” which he explains originated in 1980’s Central America as a way to counter the genocidal practices and civil wars that shattered the region.<sup>16</sup> Obviously, because of the horrendous consequences of the United States foreign policy in Central America at the same time, only has to suspect this co-optation of solidarity language in the 1990s. Part of this analysis will include exploring the tensions between the literary genre testimonio and the legal definitions and uses of testimony--both as ways of articulating authority.

I have chosen to juxtapose the hearings with Edwidge Danticat's novel The Farming of Bones which deconstructs Dominican nationalism and produces a history of the Trujillo era through the fractured and ambiguous testimonial of Amabelle Désir, an orphaned Haitian domestic servant in the Dominican Republic. What becomes clear in reading the novel is that Dominican national history cannot be easily extracted from the history of the whole island of Hispaniola, largely because of the way that the continuous migration of fieldworkers from Haiti to the Dominican Republic binds the two nations together. The novel mimics the testimonio format since it is a first person narrative told from the point of view of a Haitian domestic worker who experiences oppression under the brutal Trujillo regime.

Along with The Farming of Bones' subjective portrayal of transnational labor history, I analyze another novel of transnational labor, Francisco Goldman's The Ordinary Seaman. Goldman is one of the only writers to address (in English) both the experiences of Central Americans in their "native place" and in the U.S. Goldman's text also carries a particular resonance when juxtaposed with the Congressional hearings and when one links the space of the hearings with U.S. official discourse denouncing the Sandistas and supporting the "Contras". The Ordinary Seaman addresses the ramifications of the Nicaraguan Revolution on the life of a soldier who comes to the U. S. in search of work, hoping to leave the revolution behind, but instead ends up in Brooklyn harbor stranded with a group of Nicaraguans, Guatemalans and Hondurans on a merchant marine ship that does not function. The owners of the ship, two U.S. citizens, evade international trade and labor laws and eventually abandon the migrant laborers when it is clear that the ship will never be seaworthy. The novel foregrounds the culpability of the

United States by paralleling the issue of the exploitation of migrant labor in the United States with that of the revolution which has failed at “home“ --due in part to U.S. funding of the “contras” (counter-revolutionaries). Goldman’s novel simultaneously addresses Central American identity formations in the United States, calling into question the category of “Latino/a” as well as the political struggles of the “native” place. However, what is perhaps most compelling about the novel is the inability of a “native” (in this case, an ex-Sandinista) to become an “informant”.

Through this examination of testimonial narratives that trespass across geographic, linguistic and disciplinary boundaries, and the related question of who functions as a native informant, my dissertation makes a significant contribution to the understanding of cultural production in the Americas. My dissertation facilitates a broader dialogue between the often segregated fields of inquiry--postcolonial and ethnic American studies--and asks scholars to consider “trespassing,” not as an alienating discourse of rights, claims and exclusion but as a right of entry into new ways of thinking about the literatures of the Americas.

In the next chapter I implement my first act of critical trespassing as I examine the construction of Caribbean native informants’ constructions of native spaces in the fiction of Michelle Cliff, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Pauline Melville.

Chapter 1: “Postmodern Nativisms: Michelle Cliff’s No Telephone to Heaven, Patrick Chamoiseau’s Texaco and Pauline Melville The Ventriloquist’s Tale”

### Introduction

Recent theories of globalization have asserted the need to move beyond theorizing the “local”. In their book Empire, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri argue that while many liberal scholars see attending to the sociopolitical nuances of different locations as a way to subvert the homogenizing tendencies of globalization, “implicit in these arguments is the assumption that the differences of the local are in some sense natural, or at least that their origin remains beyond question” (44). Hardt and Negri continue that to focus solely on the local risks a theoretical stagnation at the level of identity, which itself is a construction of the local: “What needs to be addressed, instead, is precisely the production of locality, that is, the social machines that create and recreate the identities and differences that are understood as local” (45).

One of the factors contributing to the “naturalizing” of the local is the way that place is imagined, and particularly the way that the environment imagined as place is seen as unchanging, “always there”. But in fact, evidence of the construction of the local can be seen in the etymology of the word “native” which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, shifts and changes from one geo-political location to another. While for some former colonies, “native” became a term to distinguish the indigenous inhabitants of a place from the colonizers, in other places, “native” denotes those people born in a place, thus, “natives” in colonies could be descendents of early settlers to the colony. But, “native” also came to mean “savage” or “barbaric”. For some newly independent nations, “nativism” became code for “nationalism” and a way to buttress the nation against outside interference. Central to the question of the meaning of “native” is who has rights to inhabit a particular place. I use the terms “native,” “nativist” and “nativism” as opposed to “indigenous” because in the Caribbean, the term “indigenous”

evokes the specific history of Caribs, Arawaks and Tainos, most of whom were exterminated on the islands. The exception is on the islands of St. Vincent and Dominica, where there is a small community of native Caribs (Hulme and Whitehead, 3). Also, the term “indigenous” evokes specific groups of people in the Americas and is used by the existing native peoples on the South American continent, of which the northern coastal countries of Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana are considered part of the Caribbean. The terms “native” and “nativism” are more flexible terms which can evoke the native indigenous peoples in the Caribbean, as well as the Africans who were enslaved and brought to the region to work as free labor on plantations, and Indians and Chinese brought to the region as indentured-laborers, but who now consider themselves the “natives” of the islands. “Native” in this sense evokes notions of self-governance and nationalism as opposed to colonialism. The idea of nativism suggests that there are non-natives, which I invoke in my study with the term “trespassing”. In fact, nativism has been a hotly contested issue in postcolonial studies for over a decade. Critics such as Benita Parry and Kwame Anthony Appiah have debated the possibilities and limitations of this concept. For anti-colonial movements, nativism has shown itself to be an appealing concept because it seems to offer a way to resist imperialism by appropriating the culture(s) of the colonized in place of that of the European colonizer. However, in his critique of nativist intellectual movements in Africa, “Topologies of Nativism,” Appiah argues that “we must not fall for the sentimental notion that the ‘people’ have held onto an indigenous national tradition, that only the educated bourgeoisie are ‘children of two worlds.’(58)”. Appiah points to the pitfalls of nativism--that it can too easily essentialize values, customs, rituals that are deemed “indigenous”--and appoint “the people” as representatives of those traditions--without considering the complex imbrications between colonial and colonized cultures.

In light of the debates, this chapters addresses various local formations and constructions of the “native” in Caribbean literature. It is appropriate to begin my study

of “textual trespassing” by looking at texts which deal with “native” issues. For the Caribbean, nativism is complicated by the history of the region. While there were “native” indigenous inhabitants on most Caribbean islands, as we know they became nearly extinct through warfare and disease.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in most of the modern-day Caribbean nobody is truly a “native”. But when speaking of independence movements in the Caribbean, nativism becomes attached to nation-building. There are many factors at stake when one calls oneself a native of a place. Typically, nativism establishes those who belong in a place as opposed to those who do not and is often linked with issues of land rights. Franz Fanon points out not only the “concrete” tangible value which land holds, but also the psychic value it holds by providing “dignity” to its people, stating that “for a colonized people the most essential value, because it is the most concrete, is first and foremost the land: the land which will bring them bread, and above all, dignity” (The Wretched of the Earth). Reterritorialization is enacted through both the material borders of nations as well as through the complex psychic terrain of citizens, the people.

Caribbean writers act as “trespassers” who transgress old colonial and literary boundaries to (re)construct Caribbean landscapes through new linguistic terrains. How Caribbean writers link nature and culture in their works is central to my investigation because as Caribbean theorist, Edouard Glissant argues, “The creative link between nature and culture is vital to the formation of a community” (Caribbean Discourse, 63). While there is a linguistic relationship between humans and land, it is also worth noting that the symbolic and historical connections of land and body in the Caribbean are reflected in cultural production. As the editors of Unthinking Eurocentrism point out, “colonialism”, “cult”, “culture” and “cultivation” are all derived from the same Latin verb “colo” thus, “placing in play a constellation of values and practices which include occupying the land, cultivating the earth, the affirmation of origins and ancestors, and the transmission of inherited values to new generations” (15). Thus, one of the premises of this chapter will be to chart the connections between the concepts of “planting”, “culture” and

“cultivation” in the context of Caribbean literature. I explore how Caribbean writers express human relationships to land that struggle with the encroachment of global capitalism and subsequent migration which are always threatening to destroy this relationship/place. Is it, as Michelle Cliff argues, through a “landscape in ruination . . . in which the imposed nation is overcome by the naturalness of ruin” (“Caliban’s Daughter or Into the Interior” 152)? I examine how these nativist texts deconstruct the nation through explorations of race, gender and revolution. And conversely, I analyze how the nation can be produced through these constructions allowing for the revisioning of Caribbean histories through the (re)constructions of Caribbean landscapes.

My analysis focuses on three contemporary Caribbean novels: Michelle Cliff’s No Telephone to Heaven, Patrick Chamoiseau’s Texaco, and Pauline Melville’s The Ventriloquist’s Tale. All three of these novels grapple with the intersections of colonial history, nation-building and culture. No Telephone to Heaven, primarily set in Jamaica, explores the relationship of race, class and gender to nationhood as it is tied to legitimate ownership of the land. No Telephone to Heaven deals with the revolutionary movement in Jamaica during the 1960’s and 70’s. The novel’s structure is episodic, tracing the lives of several characters including, Clare Savage, a “white” Jamaican whose family leaves Jamaica to escape the violence being waged against the upper-classes on the island and Christopher, Clare’s poor “black” alter-ego who struggles to make a living as a day laborer. The idea of “ruination” is central to how Cliff’s text constructs the revolution as part of the landscape (as indigenous/organic). I also explore the text/testimony offered by one of Jamaica’s landless poor, Christopher, a day laborer who murders his employer’s family.

Patrick Chamoiseau writes from the francophone Caribbean, whose relationship with colonialism and nativism is significantly different from that of the anglophone or hispanophone Caribbean. While many places in the anglophone Caribbean were undergoing independence in the 1960’s and 70’s, the francophone Caribbean, except for

Haiti which achieved independence in 1804, was undergoing a massive modernization campaign lead by France. The result is that Martinique and Guadeloupe became départements of France and remain economically dependent on the metropole. While Cliff's novel reflects the struggles of the newly-independent nation of Jamaica, in Texaco there is no nation. Thus, Martinique, while an island in the Caribbean, is also an extension of the European body politic. This situation has made it increasingly difficult to talk about an indigenous Martinican culture--especially as the French-controlled government has sought to eradicate the presence of it in lieu of a kind of "museumification," to use historian Richard Price's term, of Martinique's past. Two theoretical responses to this are Caribbean-based cultural movements which have "roots" in Martinique: negritude and creolization. Texaco serves as a creative extension of the latter as it attempts to trace the stories of the indigent inhabitants of the eponymous shantytown in Martinique from emancipation through the present day. Texaco struggles to build and maintain community amidst the onslaught of outside intrusions in the form of "progress," "development" and capitalism. Texaco is told through the testimonial of Marie-Sophie, a poor black female inhabitant of Texaco, but her narrative is repeatedly interrupted by the voices of other mediators of the narrative: the "Word Scratcher" who transcribes Marie-Sophie's narrative, the Urban Planner, who consults with Marie-Sophie on the re-construction of Texaco, Ti-Cirique, a Haitian "man of letters" who attempts to cleanse Marie-Sophie's narrative of creolisms, and the numerous notebook entries of Marie-Sophie which do not make it into her transcribed narrative. Thus, Marie-Sophie's narrative reflects the many material changes, the construction and deconstruction of Texaco, producing a kind of cobbled-together narrative. Her endlessly mediated testimonio reflects the increasing difficulty in talking about a "native" Martinican culture. Indeed, as Marie-Sophie's narrative becomes more solidified and streamlined into standard French, so too does Texaco and Martinique become concretized geologically and culturally--as the metropole's tentacles grasp onto the island.

Melville's text presents the quandary that indigenous peoples face as they occupy the interstitial space between tradition and modernity. Instead of offering a prescriptive message on the dangers faced by Amerindian communities, the novel grapples with questions of culture, tradition and modernity. The Ventriloquist's Tale parodies testimonial narrative through its use of an indigenous informant and in doing so, calls into question the recent trend in fictions utilizing testimonial narrative tactics. I argue that this testimonial ambivalence is linked to the ambiguous position of the indigenous informant to the nation.

#### I. Rui(N)ation: Michelle Cliff's No Telephone to Heaven

Ruinate, the adjective, and ruination, the noun, are Jamaican linguistic inventions. Each word signifies the reclamation of land, the disruption of cultivation, civilization, by the uncontrolled, uncontrollable forest, when a landscape becomes ruinate, carefully designed aisles of sugar cane are envined, strangled, the order of Empire, the controlled, the redefined landscape is replaced by the chaotic unkempt forest. The word ruination (especially) signifies this immediately; it contains both ruin and nation. . . . A landscape in ruination means one in which the imposed nation is overcome by the naturalness of ruin.

Michelle Cliff, "Caliban's Daughter or Into the Interior", 152

#### No (Wo)Man's Land:

The above quotation points to a central tenet of Michelle Cliff's novel representing the 1960's revolutionary movement in Jamaica--that the landscape, which in this case is overrun with "bush," holds revolutionary potential. No Telephone to Heaven is a novel about the organic connection between people and place; land serves as a historical palimpsest of shifting nativisms. By linking revolutionary politics to the landscape in ruinate, the "nation" is "ruin[ed]". The "people" are seen inherently revolutionary, through their connection to the landscape. Significantly, the opening

chapter of No Telephone to Heaven is titled “Ruininate”. Here, Cliff offers another definition of the word taken from B. Floyd’s Jamaica: An Island Microcosm, “This distinctive Jamaican term is used to describe lands which were once cleared for agricultural purposes and have now lapsed back into . . . ‘bush.’” (1). Instead of being seen as a kind of resistance to colonialism, the author laments that “Ruininate of all forms is an all-too-frequent sign on the Jamaican landscape, despite population pressure on the land”. Clearly, Floyd sees it as a failure of the Jamaican people to not have some kind of control or order over the landscape--in not being able to hold back the bush.

In Cliff’s rendering, however, “ruination” becomes synonymous with subaltern resistance to the established social and political hierarchies of Jamaica. “Ruination” signifies a reorientation of the relationship of people to land so that in claiming the land, the people claim the position of “native”. Cliff introduces this concept with the opening chapter which describes a group of Jamaican revolutionaries who themselves blend into the landscape wearing “clothes the color of dust” or the camouflage of “discarded American army fatigues, stolen from white kids high on dope” (6). It is as if the revolutionaries have been molded from the earth as the narrator says, “They were dressed to blend with the country around them--this dripping brown and green terrain” as “a matter of survival” (5). In a sense, these revolutionaries have themselves attempted a kind of “ruination” by attempting to discard the trappings of “civilization” in order to blend into the native landscape. Like the maroons who escaped slavery, these revolutionaries “decided to take [a] farm as a place to stay and conceal themselves” (8). The farm has been donated to the revolution by one of the members of the group, who we later find out is Clare Savage, a “white” Jamaican daughter of landowners who gives her land over to the revolution and becomes a participant herself. The farm has been “left by the family to the forest” so that it epitomizes “ruination”:

The forest had been moving up from the river for twenty years. In that

time the hillside of coffee and shade trees had also been taken over, and thick-trunked vines and wild trees settled into the hillside and strangled the precious, delicate coffee bushes. The citrus which had been cultivated on the flat acre by the river had been completely overshadowed by Ethiopian apples and wild bamboo--towering green stalks, shutting out the sun. (8-9)

In a rewriting of plantation labor, the revolutionary “soldiers” clear the land to plant. Using machetes, “swinging their blades in unison, sometimes singing songs they remembered from the grandmothers and grandfathers who had swung their own blades once in the canefields” (10). Cliff’s evocation of the ruination serves a testimonial function as well. Furthermore, the excavation of this land reveals the concealed history of the island, with soil that had “turned black--blackness filled with the richness of the river and the bones of people in unmarked graves” (11)<sup>18</sup>. Ultimately, the land is used to grow ganja, a kind of anti-plantation crop, to trade in exchange for weapons and food to feed the soldiers (11). The “ruination” of the landscape becomes linked to Cliff’s own definition of the term as “ruin and nation” as the revolutionaries use the land to cultivate their own movement. Marc Zimmerman argues that one of the tropes of Guatemalan *testimonio* narratives is an “apprenticeship in the jungle. . . a return to roots, a meeting and knowing of America and her indigenous peoples” (“Testimonio in Guatemala: Payeras, Rigoberta, and Beyond” 4)<sup>19</sup>. One can read Cliff’s evocation of the revolutionaries relationship to the ruinate landscape as evoking this *testimonio* strategy. Yet because the revolution is aborted at the end of the novel, we never actually hear a true *testimonio*. The nearest the novel comes to offering one is through Christopher, a day laborer and alter-ego of the protagonist, Clare Savage.

Christopher’s “testimony” becomes the bloody corpses he dismembers when he murders his employer’s family who are part of the "white" Jamaican landowning elite. Christopher's act of murder parallels the ruination scene when we learn that his "modus

operandi" is a machete, a tool traditionally used for cutting sugarcane as well as for keeping the bush "in check". He appropriates it for use in the killings and in doing so, it is transformed from an instrument of oppressive labor and destruction of the landscape into an instrument of brutal destruction of the bodies representing the landscape. The grotesque violence of this scene literalizes the brutality of Jamaican history and is emblematic of the violence done to the Caribbean through centuries of colonialism. It is significant that Christopher reinscribes this brutality onto the bodies of a landowning family. The bodies are not just stabbed--they are horrifically and violently mutilated--slashing the "excesses" of class and racial power.<sup>20</sup> In particular, the genitalia of the victims, are the site of the most brutal violence. When the employer's son, Paul, arrives home to this scene, he sees his father's "penis was severed so that it hung from his crotch as if on a thin string, dangling into the place between his open legs" (26). The image of his violated mother also sickens and humbles Paul;

Naked, as his father was naked, but with one arm across her eyes as if protecting herself from the eyes of others. . . He looked down at her, away from her neck, to where he had emerged twenty-five years before. The base of a rum bottle was caught between her legs. Wha' fe do? Terror at approaching this part of her. Have mercy. He pulled the bottle out and saw that the neck was broken. Jagged. Blood poured from between her legs, catching in her fine curled hair. . . He felt a terrible shame (NT 26).

By mutilating the genitalia of Paul H's father, mother and sister, Christopher obliterates the physical embodiment of the economic power of the family. The severing of his genitalia symbolizes an "impotence" in both the literal sense of loss of reproductive ability as well as a symbolic destabilization of the ruling class's power.

Christopher's manic rage is sparked by his employer's refusal to grant him a plot

of land on which to bury his grandmother. Thirteen years after her death Christopher wants to find where the government buried her, along with other poor people "all mashed together" (45), and move her to her own plot of land. He appeals to his employer, telling him, "[the policeman] say me can get me grandmother back. To give she funeral. Me know she nuh res! She roam, sah. Me beg wanna one parcel pon you property. Dat all. Fe bury she" (46). The "un"-burial of Christopher's grandmother becomes a powerful metaphor in the novel--for it serves as a reminder that there is no legitimate space for black women to exist in Jamaica. In Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative Belinda Edmondson argues that Michelle Cliff responds to the "revolutionary paradigms of Lamming and other male Caribbean writers" for whom "the erasure and replacement of the black female body is a necessary component of the canonical Caribbean male-authored revolutionary narrative that has fused the meaning of revolution to masculine authority" (108-109).

That he is ridiculed for his request propels Christopher to want to make himself be heard by whatever means necessary. Violence becomes his voice. His "testimony" is the bloody scene left behind after the murders which attempts to metaphorically "dismember" of the body politic since the bodies of this family represent the dominant political powers in Jamaica. For example, this class bases its land tenure upon family legitimacy, legalized land deeds, and has a history of primogeniture, which excludes much of Jamaica's poor population from ever having access to land. Christopher's destruction of this "legitimate" family signifies an opening for other modes of existence on, and relation to, the land.

Thus, the material bodies of Paul H's<sup>21</sup> murdered family become the site of cultural and political inscription of the various stratifications of Caribbean society along the axis of race, class and gender. Christopher symbolizes the most dispossessed and silenced of Jamaica's poor. He is anonymous--without an identity. After committing the murders, he easily escapes into the oblivion of the Kingston slums. He represents

someone who has no ties to the land. The only indication of his subjectivity is through the horrific “texts” of slaughtered bodies. Thus, bodies replace the documented, “factual”, “official” history of the Jamaica that is sanctioned by the state and benefits the elite. In the enactment of violence Christopher attempts to declare himself a subject.<sup>22</sup> In this sense, Christopher serves as a kind of Caliban who searches for the language to create his subjectivity, but it is only through cannibalistic violence that he finds one. Yet, despite this brutal testimony, Christopher is ultimately effaced when he is not recognized as the murderer. Instead he fades into the anonymity of the “Dungle” only to re-emerge at the end of the novel playing the part of a “de Watchman” a stereotypical “savage” character for a Hollywood movie .

Whereas Christopher literally and symbolically severs the phallic power of his employer, he asserts his own phallic power by raping Paul H's mother and sister. In doing so, he attempts to gain power through his violation of the “white” female body. Franz Fanon posits that the black man's struggle for power is articulated through his desire to possess the white woman's body, stating, “When my restless hands caress those white breasts, they grasp white civilization and dignity and make them mine” (Black Skin/White Masks 63) Christopher's rape of Paul H's mother and sister represents a desire for the power that their white creole bodies exemplify.

While the killings of Paul H's family by Christopher can be explained within the context of class struggle in Jamaica, what is more difficult to reconcile is why he also murders the family's black servant, Mavis, because like Christopher, she is poor, landless and thus ultimately powerless. Especially disconcerting is how he slashes her body beyond recognition. It is “slashed in a way none of his family had been slashed. The machete had been dug into her in so many ways, so many times, that Mavis' body became more red than brown. She had no more eyes” (28). Mavis is of the same class as Christopher and he is enraged by her loyalty to the family when he tells her he has killed them. He thinks, “Lord Jesus, they were dead and she was still taking care of them. In

death, as in life, their faithful servant" (48). It is this loyalty, the thought that someone like himself would uphold this racial hierarchy by remaining loyal to her employers that so enrages Christopher. She refuses when he asks her to "'Ear me out. 'Ear me out. Dem provoke I. De man provoke I.'" (48). He is angered that Mavis does not acknowledge his justification for murdering their employers. She thus, like her employer, refuses to allow a space for Christopher to testify on behalf of himself. Thus, while Christopher's violation of the white creole bodies of Paul H's female family members signifies his desire to possess the power their bodies symbolize, his mutilation of Mavis' body symbolizes his rage at not being heard both by her and within Jamaican society. His attempt to obliterate her identity/existence altogether because he identifies her black body with his own body; it is a reminder of his class status.

While Christopher mutilates Mavis's outward physical attribute, it is the only surviving member of the family, Paul H., who finishes the obliteration of her subjectivity when he is presented with the "problem" of disposing of Mavis's remains. Paul is angered by the problem presented by Mavis' body: "he did not know, how to reach Mavis' people. He did not know her surname. or the name of the place she had come from . . . no family record . . . No papers. No birth certificate. No savings book, no insurance policy" (28). Because Paul cannot find any of the documents that he thinks would indicate Mavis' origins, he thinks she has no origins. As a member of the poor working-class, Mavis does not have the papers that would make her "legitimate" to Paul H. and the state. Paul H's inability to search beyond state-sanctioned documents for clues to Mavis' history erases her subjectivity altogether. The predicament that Mavis' lack of documents presents for Paul H. also signifies the disparity between written and oral histories in Jamaica. As Walter Ong writes; "Print encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion. This sense affects literary creations and it affects analytic philosophical or scientific work" (Ong 132) Thus, Paul H takes for granted that written documents would provide the only available

history of Mavis. Paul H does not know how to search outside of the boundaries of printed documents for clues to Mavis' history. Thus, Mavis' subjectivity is doubly-erased, first, by Christopher's slashing of her body, then by Paul H's desire to burn and completely eliminate any trace of her dead body. Gayatri Spivak explains how colonialism and patriarchy work to silence the subaltern woman:

Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. . . both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. ("Can the Subaltern Speak?" 82)

The lack of a history or home for Mavis presents a problem for Paul H. in how to dispose of her body. Oddly enough, in trying to figure out how to dispose of it, Paul H. is presented with the same dilemma that ultimately incited Christopher's killing spree. But while Christopher wanted a plot of land to bury his grandmother's remains in order to allow her soul to "rest", Paul resolves to completely eliminate Mavis' body altogether; "He could not bury her in the family plot . . . He would just have to burn her body along with the sheets and nightclothes and pillows stained with blood . . . He felt inconvenience at the presence of Mavis' body and found himself turning on her in his head" (NT 28-29). Because she has no claim to the land, Paul feels that he cannot bury her in it. Thus, the elimination of her physical body signifies her erasure from existence in Paul's eyes. Her body is that last thing that connects her to the island--it is the only thing left that proves her existence. By burning her corpse, Paul eliminates Mavis' identity completely and ultimately keeps her from having any connection at all to the land. Without her body (even a dead body) Mavis is without a subjectivity and is robbed of an internment that

would maintain her identity so that ultimately, the erasure of her body signals the erasure of her identity.

### Unstable Geographies

Christopher's lack of connection to the land is further illustrated by his home in the garbage-laden shantytown of the "Dungle". Unrecognized officially as a place by the government, the makeshift cardboard dwellings of the dungle signal that the occupants have no claim to the land and their time there is only temporary. Amidst this dubious environment, Christopher's own subjectivity is tenuous. The narrator describes how Christopher lived with his grandmother before her death:

in a likkle shack in a shantytown near the Esso refinery on the outskirts of Kingston. A town of structures built by women and children. Structures made from packing crates . . . Found by a woman after an overseas shipment came in, discarded behind one of the big dealers downtown. Dragged by the woman and her children through the streets of Kingston . . . Structures made more commonly--for a packing crate was a true luxury, a blessed discovery--from bits and pieces, findings. (31)

Cliff configures the "dungle" as a primarily female space, but it is hardly a revolutionary space, where women and children caught in a perpetual cycle of poverty live in homes made of the discarded remnants of the wealthy. This crowded space which Christopher inhabits is contrasted to the home of his employers which is situated in a neighborhood of "numerous large stucco and tiled-roof houses, set back in pastel shades, with iron gates

and large dogs chained or roaming across the carefully trimmed and planted grounds" (22). It is significant that this description highlights the isolation of these homes, which is in sharp contrast to the Dungle. Yet both of these spaces lack communal ties. Furthermore, whereas the description of Paul H's neighborhood offers identifying markers to its occupants--wealthy, land-owning--the Dungle erases any identifying markers of its inhabitants. Thus, after committing the murders, Christopher can return to the "Dungle" "where no one knew him" (49). He is anonymous there--his grandmother is dead, his mother and father are gone--and there is nothing linking him to this space.

Whereas Christopher comes from the "Dungle," Cliff associates Clare Savage with a different kind of "jungle"--a racialized jungle where poachers hunt the rarest species to dismember them and sell their body parts. Here, the "native" is figured as "savage," but is also valued for its exoticism. The narrator describes how,

The albino gorilla moving through the underbrush. Hiding from the poachers who would claim her and crush her in a packing crate against the darker ones offended by her pelt. Make ashtrays of her hands, and a trophy of her head. . . She remembers the jungle. The contours of wildness. . . . Distant treks with her dark pelted mother. (NT 91)

Cliff plays on a disturbing stereotype--that of African/black as savage/animal/gorilla. Just as Christopher has lived in homes made out of packing crates, Clare imagines herself as being forced into the caged existence upon being "captured". And just as Christopher disappears in the "Dungle," so too is Clare offered refuge by the bush wilderness. The

passage signifies Clare's frustration at being put into categories, "boxes," by the societies in which she lives--because of her racial identifications. Furthermore, these spaces Christopher and Clare inhabit suggest a cutting-off of communal ties.

The "albino gorilla" passage also foregrounds Clare's racial ambiguity. One of the things that Clare discovers about herself is that her body specifically, her skin, cannot easily be "read" by other people, nor by herself. This racial ambiguity makes it difficult for Clare to identify herself as native to any place. Since she is light-skinned, she can pass as white more easily in some spaces, including the United States. Yet, this passing presents problems for Clare. Her father, Boy, can also pass, but her mother and sister cannot. She muses upon her precarious position between both white and black communities and at one point searches for cultural markers to relate to in Jane Eyre. Clare speculates about which category of womanhood she fits into:

No, she could not be Jane. Small and pale. English . . . No, my girl, try Bertha. Wild-maned Bertha . . . Yes Bertha was closer the mark. Captive. Ragout. Mixture. Confused. Jamaican. Caliban. Carib. Cannibal. Cimarron. All Bertha. All Clare. (116)

Here, captivity refers to Bertha, the white creole "madwoman" locked away in the attic in England--who is cut off from her own community in Dominica, as well as the captivity of animals, like the caged albino gorilla, symbolizing the psychic alienation that Clare experiences within a racially stratified society.

Searching for the Mother/Land:

Several critics have noted that Clare's disconnection to her place of birth is tied to her racial disconnection from her mother, Kitty. Passing causes problems within Clare's family in that she and her father, Boy, who share a similar skin-color can pass in white society while Clare's mother, Kitty and sister, Jennie, who are darker-skinned cannot. Kitty ultimately cannot reconcile her feelings of alienation with the space that she inhabits in New York so that she finally returns to Jamaica with Jennie. Thus, physical displacement triggers a psychic alienation between the mother/daughter relationship as they both attempt to deal with the "separate" spaces they inhabit. In her last letters to Clare, Kitty urges her to become reconnected to her heritage. She tells her, "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" (NT 103). Thus, Kitty wants Clare to maintain ties to her family, her African roots and the Caribbean.

Without her mother, Clare becomes rootless, wandering from country to country looking to belong and be accepted. The narrator explains how, "Clare Savage began her life-alone. Choosing London with the logic of a creole. This was the mother-country" (NT 109). Elaine Savory Fido explains the relationship between mother, land and offspring: "Should we have the mother's approval withdrawn from us, or should she leave us in some traumatic way . . . We might seek . . . not only a substitute relation with another woman . . . but also an adoptive country" (Fido 331). Clare seeks an "adoptive country" as surrogate mother when she goes to England--the "motherland. In as sense, Clare expects a kind of "rebirth" and acceptance upon entering England having become physically and psychically disconnected from her biological mother. But instead of

finding a welcoming home, she stands out as the minority in England. The move symbolizes Clare's ultimate attempt to live up to her skin-color, but it proves to be even more alienating than her time in New York had been because she cannot "pass" at all in the British white community. In England, she is seen as a black foreigner.

Clare's ambiguous relationship with Jamaica is also tied to her father, a relationship which is explored in Cliff's prequel to No Telephone to Heaven, Abeng. Here we learn that the "Savages" were Clare's European ancestors. In fact, Boy Savage imparts on his young daughter his family's "mytho-genealogy" as an attempt to cover up the family's scandalous history. Boy's great-grandfather, Judge Savage, inherited no land from his family in England because of the laws of primogeniture. Thus, he left England for Jamaica to construct his own place in the world through gaining property of his own. After drinking away his money and faced with losing the free labor of his slaves through Emancipation, Judge Savage decides that his slaves "would not be able to handle freedom" (check this quote, p. 39) and burns them to death (40). The contribution of these slaves does not end with their deaths though as "The bones of dead slaves made the land at Runaway Bay rich and green" (40). The novel also reveals another strand to Clare's nativist heritage: Judge Savage's Guatemalan Indian mistress who represents a "personification of the New World" to the Savages who wanted to "forget about Africa" (30). In a romanticization of this indigenous history, Boy refers to Clare as his "Aztec princess" (10). Yet, it is revealed that Inez, who was kept against her will and repeatedly raped by Judge Savage, but considered by his descendants as a "Guatemalan Indian mistress" had a mother who was a Miskito Indian and a father who was a Maroon, an Ashanti from the Gold Coast and "Inez was known as a friend of slaves on Savage

Plantation” (33). In fact, Inez conspires with a slavewoman, Mma Alli, an Amazonian figure “with a right breast that had never grown” (34) who teaches her obeah.

By 1958, the Savage family property had been divided up and sold off--developed into summer homes. Boy takes Clare there on a tour where she sees traces in the earth of where slave huts used to be. In this sense, the land can be read as a palimpsest where the history of the island has been etched over leaving only fragments and traces of the past visible. And yet, when there is an accidental encounter with a previous inscription of history on the place, there is an attempt to erase it altogether:

In 1958, while digging near the churchyard during some renovations to the building, workers uncovered a coffin of heavy metal--a coffin of huge proportions. Not the shape of a coffin at all--shaped like a monstrous packing case, made of lead and welded shut. A brass plate which had been affixed to the coffin and etched with an inscription informed the vicar that the coffin contained the remains of a hundred plague victims, part of a shipload of slaves from the Gold Coast, who had contracted the plague from the rats on the vessel which brought them to Jamaica. . . The coffin should be opened on no account, the plaque said, as the plague might still be viable. The vicar commissioned an American navy war ship in port to take the coffin twenty miles out and sink it in the sea. (8)

The removal of the plague-ridden coffin from the churchyard dispelled the ever-present fear that the history of slavery might “infect” or “contaminate” the dominant historical

narrative. It has been effectively “cleansed” of its vileness and made innocuous for tourists.

While Boy Savage “was fascinated by myth and natural disaster . . . Nothing, to him, was ever what it seemed to be. Nothing was an achievement of human labor” (9), in stark contrast, Kitty’s family rests on tangible realities: “When he talked about his notions of space and time and magic to her mother’s family, they only laughed at him . . . Earth was the one concrete reality” (10). In fact, Kitty counters Boy’s influence over Clare by taking her to her own mother’s house in the country (ch. 7). While Kitty is light-skinned and her family owns property, she “cherished blackness” (127) and tries to teach Clare an appreciation for the land and people who work the land. While staying at her grandmother for an extended visit, Clare befriends Zoe, the daughter of Miss Ruthie, a market woman who lives on Clare’s grandmother’s property. Despite their class and racial differences Clare and Zoe’s friendship blossoms as they explore the landscape together. It is Zoe, however, who reminds Clare of their different relationships to the land--Clare has property, while Zoe is territorial about having lived and worked on the land with her mother, but not owning it (118). Clare decides to go hunting for “Massa Cudjoe” a wild pig, “the descendent of what had been the predominant form of animal life on the island, before the conquerors came, outnumbering even the Arawaks, who would not kill them. There had been thousands and thousands of wild pigs . . .” (112). She and Zoe hew their way through the bush to get to the pig, but when they hear what they think is a man nearby, Clare shoots the gun, yelling, “ ‘Get away, you hear. This is my grandmother’s land.’ She had dropped her patois--was speaking buckra--and relying on the privilege she said she did not have” (122).<sup>23</sup> When instead of shooting a man,

Clare shoots her grandmother's prized bull, Zoe fears that she will be blamed and she and her mother will have to find a new piece of land to live on (131). This use of the gun to assert her claims to land parallels Christopher's attempt to claim land in No Telephone to Heaven through his violent use of the machete.

In No Telephone to Heaven, Cliff problematizes the notion of land as "mother" for Kitty and Clare because they are separated from land--their return to Jamaica does not automatically reconnect them to the land. Kitty experiences a sense of alienation because of her displacement from Jamaica. Moving to New York signifies a cultural loss for her: "She lived divided, straining to adjust to this place where she seemed to float . . . She questioned why she was so miserable--and immediately responded that her mother was dead" (75). Kitty's feels a loss of her culture by being cut off from Jamaica, and this loss is intimately connected to her feelings of alienation from her mother who remains on the island. She remembers dressing her mother's dead body. It is this contact with the body that allows Kitty to maintain a connection to land--and her ancestral memory:

when she dressed her mother's body, it was the first time she remembered seeing her mother's nakedness. The breasts full--the nipples dark--were stiff with lifelessness, and she caressed them. From somewhere came an image of a slavewoman pacing aisles of cane, breast slung over her shoulder to suckle the baby carried on her back. (71)

Kitty's contact with her dead mother's body conjures a maternal image of a slavewoman, who, through her labor, is also mother of the land. She produces the offspring that will

continue to produce the sugarcane and wealth of the island. While this image may essentialize the African woman's body and its relationship to the land, at the same time, it also can be interpreted as illustrating the kind of connection that Mavis and Christopher's grandmother do not have with the land in their deaths. That Kitty's mother is buried on her own land offers a sense of history and kinship to Kitty that cannot get anywhere else--it is an unwritten, unspoken history. Unfortunately when Kitty dies, her connection to her mother's land is not maintained. Instead of being buried on her mother's land, "[she was] buried in Kingston, in a cemetery which held no history for her family--burial in her mother's ground was not a question. The ties had been broken. The land was ruinate." (NT 103) In this case, ruination represents a severed connection between kinship and land.

Eventually, after wandering through Europe with a Vietnam veteran, Clare decides to return to Jamaica. When she arrives there she has a fever and pelvic infection, the result of her sexual relationship with her lover, Bobby, whose own body was contaminated with Agent Orange during the Vietnam War. Doctors tell Clare that she will probably be sterile as a result of the infection (169). This sterility has several implications. That Clare becomes sterile upon returning to Jamaica is paralleled by her realization that she must become involved in the revolutionary struggle there. Thus, at this point, woman's reproduction becomes separate from political consciousness. Yet, it is significant that this separation of the female body's reproductive abilities and politics occurs with Clare, a mulatto. She is robbed of her ability to literally reproduce children, so that she must find other means of maintaining a tie to the island, her culture, her home. That her own mother's and grandmother's bodies are still implicated in reproduction as a

means to political consciousness signals an essentializing of racialized gender roles.

If Clare can reclaim her black ancestor's land she has a chance to reclaim her Afro-Caribbean heritage. In order to reunite with this part of her heritage she needs to return to the land of her mother and grandmother. Cliff explains in "Clare Savage as Crossroads Character," the relationship between Clare and the landscape of Jamaica:

For me, the land is redolent of my grandmother and mother, it is a deeply personal connection. The same could be said of Clare Savage, who seeks out the landscape of her grandmother's farm as she would seek out her grandmother and mother. There is nothing left at that point but the land, and it is infused with the spirit and passion of these two women. (266)

Clare goes back to her grandmother's place, which has gone to ruin and been reclaimed by the surrounding forest. Clare imagines it as a place which has gone back to the wild is once again like it was in pre-Columbian days "When only Arawaks and iguanas and birds and crocodiles and snakes dwelt there" (172). The farm which has become overrun by nature: "the forest had already moved in . . . around the house, edging the verandah" (8). Here, the landscape is being redefined by slowly making the house a part of the earth again. The land is actively changing and revising itself.

The forest had obliterated the family graves, so that the grandmother and her husband, and their son who died before them, were wrapped by wild vines which tangled the mango trees shading their plots, linking them

further to the wild trees anchoring them to the ground. (8)

This transformation signals a gradual re-interning of the people into the land--land and the body are becoming one.

Clare bathes in the river near her grandmother's house and "let the cool of it wash over her naked body, reaching up into her as she opened her legs. Rebaptism." (172) Even though she is literally sterile, the "rebaptism" which takes place in her reproductive organs signals a "new" kind of reproduction. Clare reestablishes a connection to nature that is natal and native. Furthermore, it is during this "rebaptism" that Clare remembers her childhood days spent at the river. She connects this memory with the other women from the community who were also at the river washing clothes. (p. ???) In her collection of autobiographical essays, The Land of Look Behind, Cliff describes this memory

The river--as I know it--runs from a dam at my cousins' sugar mill down to a pool at the bottom. . . . This is our land, our river--I have been told. So when women wash their clothes above the place where I swim; when the butcher's wife cleans tripe every Saturday morning; when a group of boys I do not know are using my pool--I hate them for taking up my space. ("Claiming an Identity They Taught Me to Despise," 26).

This quote highlights the different class concepts tied to land--as a child Cliff saw the land as property, space to be claimed, while others in the community see this space as

communal. For Clare, her return to the land of her grandmother signals a restoration of her identity. It is admirable that Cliff attempts to revise the landscape and imagine it as a female space where land is passed down through matrilineal lines, but ultimately this romanticization does not consider the complexity of a return to Jamaica (motherland, homeland)..

After Clare's experience at her grandmother's farm, she offers her land to the revolution. In doing so, Clare ensures that it will produce the means of resistance. Cliff attempts to show how land holds the potential for a collective revolutionary participation which challenges the plantation system's concept of individual property. In other words, Clare's giving up of her "official" land rights signals a transition of land back to the community--revising who the "natives" of the place are by creating new kinship and communal ties around land which are not based on racial hierarchies. Thus, while Clare's power may not lie in her ability to reproduce children, her rebirth signifies a rebirth of the land for the people. Cliff does not essentialize "woman" as reproducer-- disrupting the "motherland" narrative (mother of the land)--and creating new modes of reproduction and ways for women to exist. Cliff's configuration of the island as mother, offers Clare a rebirth into a life where she can claim her ancestry. It thus serves as a changing point in her consciousness.

In the space of the revolution, the narrator describes how,

These people--men and women--were dressed in similar clothes, which became them as uniforms, signifying some agreements, some purpose-- that they were in something to together--in these clothes, at least, they

seemed to blend together. This likeness was something they needed, which could be important, even vital, to them--for the shades of their skin . . . varied widely, came between them. . . A light-skinned woman, daughter of landowners, nativeborn, slaves, emigres, Carib, Ashanti, English, has taken her place on this truck, alongside people who easily could have hated her. (4-5)

Thus, the revolution brings Clare back to her African origins and Caribbean community. In doing so, she breaks down the barriers of skin color--she is a landowner and light-skinned--the poor are mainly dark-skinned so that when she gives over her land to the revolution to produce ganja to sell and buy weapons with she is forfeiting her privilege as a light-skinned woman in the country. By doing this, Clare takes on an active relationship with the land by making it work for the revolution. Until she does this, Clare's relationship with her environment, whether it be in America, England or Europe, has always been a passive one. She has always waited for her environment to define her instead of vice versa. Not only is this a reconnection through matrilineal origins, but a reconnection to the Afro-Caribbean origins that were severed when she family land, "serv[es] as a vehicle for Caribbean nationhood and for maintaining social networks between Caribbean communities and migrants overseas" (Besson 208)

However, the romanticization of the grandmother's farm as "family land" is complicated at the end of the novel when Clare dies as a result of her revolutionary participation. She is literally burnt into the landscape as she and her fellow revolutionaries are shelled (208). Her death offers several interpretations. First of all, it

reevaluates the notion of return for Clare. Upon her arrival, she romanticizes her connection to the land and her place in Jamaica, the heritage of her mother and grandmother that the land holds. Her death could be viewed romantically in that she literally becomes part of the landscape when she is killed so that she achieves the connection for which she returned to Jamaica. But, this reading seems too simple. More realistically, Clare's death reveals the complications involved in a return. Her separation from Jamaica has produced cultural differences in Clare that cannot easily be worked out upon her return. She cannot be seamlessly assimilated back into Jamaican culture. Yet, if we compare Clare's death and "burial" with that of Mavis and Christopher's grandmother, the socio-economic hierarchy of land ownership is disrupted as Clare's white creole body is not buried on her own (her family's) land, but on the land of the people. In terms of ancestral property, Clare's death and "burial" symbolize a reconnection to her community as she dies on the land that she has given over to the revolution. Clare's former private property becomes land for the community and will provide the means to sustain that community through the sale of ganja produced (an alternative to the plantation crop?)--a non-capitalist venture--outside of the capitalist market economy. Thus, this move to family land mimicks slaves' use of land--burial plots(death) amidst gardens (sustenance).

### Conclusion

In an interview with Judith Raiskin, Cliff acknowledges the limits of Clare's rendering in No Telephone to Heaven: "But it's kind of an idealized novel, . . . I really wanted to show that she makes this choice and she wants to be part of this group but she will never feel that she's really part of it . . ." (Raiskin 64). It would seem that Clare's

potential to disrupt the land-based hierarchies is lost when she dies. These are the questions that reach far beyond Cliff's text to the ongoing impact of global capitalism on the Caribbean--where land continues to be used to produce profits for outside corporations. As the recent film Life and Debt shows, the impact of global capitalism on the landscape of Jamaica is increasingly eradicating the "native" in favor of "tax free zones", etc.

## II. Native Creolizations: Patrick Chamoiseau's Texaco

Nowhere in the Caribbean has the question of nativism taken on such urgency as in the French Antilles, especially since Martinique and Guadeloupe have been departmentalized by France. Since the 1960's, Martinique has undergone a massive modernization project to assimilate it into French culture and politics. While this has allowed the island one of the highest standards of living in the Caribbean, it has come at the price of its culture--French language and culture are highly valued above anything native to Martinique, including the Creole language spoken by most of its inhabitants. In light of this, Martinique has been at the heart of two theoretical movements seeking, among other things, validation for the island's culture. In the 1930's-40's, Aimé Césaire, the island's premier poet of the time, helped to usher in the Négritude movement along with Léopold Senghor and Diop. The Négritude movement sought to bring much needed attention to Africa as a homeland for the black diaspora, as well as to the cultural contributions of Africans and African-descended people. Ironically, Césaire is also credited with helping Martinique become a département during his tenure as mayor of Fort-de-France. In reaction to what was seen as the stagnant African essentialism of

négritude, the créoliste movement began and was led by Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Jean Bernabé. In their manifesto, “In Praise of Creoleness” (Éloge de la Créolité), published in 1989, the créolistes posit that the Caribbean is a fluid mix of cultural elements:

Creoleness is the interactional or transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements, united on the same soil by the yoke of history. . . We conceived our cultural character as a function of acceptance and denial, therefore permanently questioning, always familiar with the most complex ambiguities, outside of all forms of reduction, all forms of purity, all forms of impoverishment (891-92).

This is in stark contrast to négritude’s sole emphasis on Africa as the cultural origin of the Caribbean: “Creoleness is an annihilation of false universality, of monolingualism, and of purity” (892). Créolistes sought to acknowledge the multiplicity of Martinican society: “In multiracial societies, such as ours, it seems urgent to quit using the traditional raciological distinctions and to start again designating the people of our countries, regardless of their complexion, by the only suitable word: Creole” (893). They argue against essentializing one Creole identity and posit that creoleness is what distinguishes them from the metropole: “It is through Creoleness that we will be Martinicans. Becoming Martinicans, we will be Caribbeans, therefore Americans, in our own way” (902)

The Créoliste movement has sparked a fierce debate among some Caribbeanist scholars. For example, historian Richard Price accuses Chamoiseau, et. al. of sensationalizing the “folk” to further their own ideological agenda: “the literary works of the créolistes are, on the whole, complicitous with the celebration of a museumified Martinique, a diorama’d Martinique, a picturesque and ’pastified’ Martinique that promotes a ’feel-good’ nostalgia for people who are otherwise busy adjusting to the complexities of a rapidly modernizing lifestyle” (The Colonel and the Convict, 175). Derek Walcott agrees stating, “In the manifesto we hear really the old yearning for naivete, for the purified and primal state of the folk of the virginal countryside, with its firefly fables and subdued nobility; in other words, Rousseau and Gauguin from the mouths of their subjects, their voluble natives” (224). However, Walcott credits Chamoiseau’s fiction, specifically Texaco because it “subverts, contradicts, and then triumphs over” this nostalgia for the “folk”. I argue that it is Texaco’s postmodern narrative structure that subverts the nostalgia for origins for while on the surface it would seem that telling the story in the voice of a poor black female, Marie-Sophie, would seem to valorize the subaltern, native voice, her voice in fact is subverted by other voices in the text--demonstrating the impossibility of ever capturing the “authentic” native voice or of rendering the native space. The structure of the narrative parallels the multiple constructions and deconstructions of the quarter of Texaco itself--which suggests that the “native” place is continuously redefined.

Similar to the “Dungle” of No Telephone to Heaven, Texaco is initially configured as a place of anonymity, where the inhabitants have no connection to each other or the land. The community struggles, however, to maintain ties to each other and

the land despite the fact that there is no stable, authentic space for them to inhabit. The novel's use of material markers (wood, crate, concrete) signals an epistemic shift from a French/Western paradigm of linearity, which Glissant argues "is a trap created by an assimilationist way of thinking" (Caribbean Discourse, 88), to one that encompasses Martinique's "native" organic history. As such, Texaco is a work of historiographic meta-fiction, which Linda Hutcheon explains, "is written today in the context of a serious contemporary interrogating of the nature of representation in historiography" (The Politics of Postmodernism 47). Hutcheon continues that this genre "foregrounds and thus contests the conventionality and unacknowledged ideology of that assumption of seamlessness [of realist narratives] and asks its readers to question the processes by which we represent ourselves and our world to ourselves. . ." (53). Texaco represents Martinique's shift towards modernity through a narrative that contemplates its very own construction. The narrative reflects the ambivalence surrounding the construction not only of a city-quarter, but also of a community in the movement from the rural countryside to the urban center. The text charts the sacrifices that Martinique makes in the name of development as the nation becomes more and more disconnected from the land. Chamoiseau's use of the landscape as a historical and literary figure reflects Edouard Glissant's theory of land affiliation:

The relationship with the land, one that is even more threatened because the community is alienated from the land, becomes so fundamental in this discourse that landscape in the work stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is

not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in this process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process” (Caribbean Discourse, 106).

While in No Telephone to Heaven, the “dungle” squatters are seen as dangerous in their anonymity--a place which absorbs the ills of the nation, but is impenetrable and unreadable to the outside world, the shantytown of Texaco seems to offer the only alternative to the concretization of French culture on the island. For Texaco, the “squatter” becomes the thing that both challenges and defines nativism. As trespassers who illegally inhabit a space on the outskirts of the city of Fort-de-France, the squatters of Texaco challenge the white “békés” who rely upon French laws of possession for claiming the land--or religious doctrine to dictate who is a “native” and who is not. Modernization is seen as a force which destroys the history (and people) of a place.

While on the surface it may appear that there are similarities between Mavis in No Telephone to Heaven and Marie-Sophie--the comparison ends there. Whereas Mavis remains a mystery, Marie-Sophie is a subaltern who speaks and reveals that not only is she tenacious in her repeated attempts to build and rebuild Texaco, but she is also literate having written down her stories in notebooks, and consulted the local scholar, Ti-Cirique, in matters of “proper” use of the French language. The narrative also includes the “sub”narratives which interrupt the main narrative from time to time resulting in a blurring of the narrative’s boundaries--a kind of inter-textual trespassing. J. Michael Dash remarks on the narrative structure of the novel, stating, “since much of the writing is a parody of archival models, it questions and undermines , like the mangrove itself, the

solidity of the era of concrete” (The Other America 144). The various writing styles depicted include Marie-Sophie’s notebooks, the Urban Planner’s notes to the Word-Scratcher, Ti-Cirique’s editorial comments on Marie-Sophie’s notebooks, footnotes from the Word-Scratcher, Oiseau de Cham, who writes Marie-Sophie’s story as the novel. Thus, while there is the issue of who can claim a right to a piece of land in Texaco--there seems to be a metanarrative-- a struggle over who can claim the story, the page, the novel. This struggle dethrones Marie-Sophie as the native informant and suggests that just as the quarter of Texaco is patched together from various materials, peoples, and histories, so too is Martinique a compilation of his/stories and voices. Walcott writes that “Texaco, like Ulysses, is a large prose-poem that devours the structure of narrative fiction by its ruminative monologues, . . .”(219). Martiniquan history from slavery, emancipation and to the present age of modernization, is represented through the various types of dwellings and building materials used through each era of history: straw, wood, asbestos, concrete. With every hutch that is built, so too does the narrative accrete, but not in the sense of a linear progression, but as Walcott states, “it is l’histoire, not History but the the story, the fable, the rumour, as opposed to times, dates, and places” (“A Letter to Chamoiseau” 219). Conversely, the destruction of hutches is also evident in various deconstructions of the narrative’s structure. To use Glissant’s terminology, Texaco offers an “an anthology of landscapes”: plantation, City, shantytown, volcano, hills, Texaco (159). Ernest Pépin and Raphaël Confiant write of the novel: “it becomes clear that this novel proposes a new reading of history and especially of the organization of space and social sedimentation” (“The Stakes of Créolité” 99). My analysis focuses both on the story that Marie-Sophie narrates as well as the way that the story is told and what the

implications are of this narrative for nativism. I argue that what results in Texaco is a kind of “text-imonial” so that through the process of writing her story, what gets recorded is not only Marie-Sophie’s memories but the process by which an oral testimony becomes a text.

It is important to note that I am primarily using the English translation of Texaco, translated by Haitian-born Miriam Rejouis, with the aid of her husband Val Vikironov. Translation adds yet another layer of mediation onto the text that the other texts in my study do not have. This presents a particular challenge for my study since language is so tied to the question of nativism and space. This novel in particular relies upon the notion of language as a signifier of space--language as a way to build space. So for Chamoiseau, using Creole in his text serves as a way to make this a novel about Martinique, not just a novel written in French about a place. So the question for my purposes becomes is the native space that the English translation of Texaco creates the same as the French/Creole version of the novel? Undoubtedly, because of the very nature of language, it is not. For examples, the translator, Miriam Rejouis explains that the original novel contains both “mulatto French,” “a laminated language spoken by the dictionary and by books from France” (394) and “creole French”. Rejouis continues, “It is this penchant to iron out, to civilize Creole language and reality, to make them fit into the straitjacket of an untouchable standard French, that makes Mulatto French unsuitable as Martinique’s written language” (394). She continues, “Creole French is the organic opposite of Mulatto French”.

One could argue that the translator becomes another kind of ethnographer of the text. In response to the question of whether she has “overtranslated” the novel, Rejouis

writes,

Have we then as translators betrayed the original book by actually making it readable when it can strike so many as opaque? We of course don't think so. Not only because any translated text is already a processed text, that is, text necessarily digested by an intermediary reader who in turn becomes a writer, but also because despite the Babelian ambitions of Texaco, Chamoiseau meant for his book to be readable (393).

One could apply these same concerns to the mediation of the ethnographer/writer.

Texaco's Living Landscapes.

The first half of the novel focuses on the life-story of Esternome, as Marie-Sophie narrates the stories he passed down to her. She functions as both an informant and an interlocuter/ethnographer in the text when she records his story in her notebooks. Yet, she also mediates his story through her own memory. It is not surprising then that Esternome comes to represent a nostalgic nativism where her narration of the changes to the landscape are filtered through her nostalgia for her now-deceased father.

For a time, after his emancipation from slavery, he lives a bucolic life, migrating to the hills behind St. Pierre with his lover, Ninon. Esternome's relationship to the land represents his newfound freedom as he moves from place to place, interacting with it as a carpenter building hutches and gardening. This freedom is signified through his reference to the hills as "Nouteka"--a Creole possessive form meaning "we"--a claiming the hills (Glossary). The landscape of the island reflects the changes after slavery as

various ethnicities and classes of people interact with the land in different ways:

. . .old whites stationed by folly. Engaged men freed of their contracts, they had climbed up here in the days of Marquis d'Antin, when Carib men still ran about the land. . . We ran into bekes' blackwomen. They had gotten a flank of hill, a ridge of land, early on. . . We ran into maroons. Their hutches blended into the ferns. . . We found black affranchis . . . Among them sometimes were shipwrecked whites who spoke Polish or another motherless tongue. (123-127)

It is here in the countryside that Esternome and Ninon “learn to read the landscape” (129), and in reading it they learn to inhabit the world in a way unknown during slavery. No longer bound by the restrictions that slavery put upon them, they move beyond the limited “laboring” interaction with the land and build homes into the hillside: “We learned to put down our hutches on terrace platforms dug out of the vertical slope, to knit them to the bone of a rock if a rock was around. To seal them with soil. To use the sloping parts for the hutch’s entrance” (129). Much like the notion of “ruination” the landscape takes on an active role in the lives of the people. She continues, “The Creole Quarter obeys its land . . .The Creole Quarter is like a native flower” (132). It is through working the land, and adapting to it that the inhabitants become “native,” cultivating new lives for themselves. This is in contrast to the colonial practice of changing the landscape to suit the needs of colonial economy--where versatile island topographies were reconstructed for monocultural production.

Yet, even this bucolic time cannot last as new people begin to inhabit the countryside as the population of the island changes. And while Esternome happily remains in the Quarter, Ninon wanders outside of its boundaries to witness not only the seasonal changes in the landscape, but also the changes in the population as “coolies,” indentured-laborers from India, and Chinese arrive to do the labor that slaves had done before emancipation (138). The Martiniquan landscape represents this ethnicization as the new immigrants fit into and transform the island: “. . . only the congos took the hills very quickly, to return to the land. The Madeirans melted. The chinese took over City with groceries, then with stores of all kinds. The coolies were gathered by the plantations and the peaceful market towns. . .” (138).

With the abolition of slavery (and the erasure of the planters’ free labor source) a transformation of the landscape takes place--so that the island’s economy turns to sugar factories which in turn take inhabitants of the Quarter away from their gardens (139). Not only does industrial development transform people’s relationship to land, but there are natural forces working as well. The eruption of the island’s volcano, Mount Pélée, serves as a reminder that the landscape is constantly redefining itself and reclaiming territory--with the eruption resulting in the ossification of St. Pierre and Ninon along with it. Esternome searches for her amongst the ossuary: “Stone and people had melted into each other. Frigid fingerless hands stuck out of the walls” (150). He excavates sites looking for Ninon’s remains and in the process Esternome’s body is also changed by this volcanic landscape: “The skin of his feet was burnt up to his knees” (151). He is forced to give up his search when “the mountain covered the burnt-out bodies with new ashes. With time they turned to charcoal without rot or smell” (153). Still unable to leave,

Esternome attempts to rebuild St. Pierre, but is eventually driven out when Ninon comes back as a zombie (155). This catastrophe creates an impetus for the a massive migration of people to the island's other city, Fort-de-France. Esternome too finally flees to the "City" (Fort-de-France) where he finds a camp for the displaced inhabitants. Eventually, he follows one of its workers, Adrienne Carmelite Lapidaille, home. She lives in the "Quarter of the Wretched" in Fort-de-France with her blind twin sister, Idoménee, with whom he eventually has his child, Marie-Sophie. Like the Dungle in No Telephone to Heaven, the Quarter of the Wretched offers a barren landscape where "[t]he poor harvested windfalls: a box of wrapping paper to line a hutch, a pan to reinforce a shaken facade, a fork, a cracked plate . . ." (172).

After WWII, as part of the modernization project, the mayor of Fort-de-France sells off plots of land in the Quarter. Esternome is unable to obtain a plot and Adrienne's hutch is destroyed to make room for a road (193). Marie-Sophie explains how they were forced to rent a hutch from a local con-artist, Lonyon (193). When Idoménee dies, Esternome and young Marie-Sophie are unable to earn enough to pay the rent, and contend with Lonyon's "Bosses" who each "governed an inviolable space. One proceeded onto another's domain only to declare war" (198). Faced with the prospect of uprooting himself yet again, Esternome slowly begins to die. Marie-Sophie explains that "My Esternome was being replaced by a shadow, disintegrating in odors, urine, bowels emptying from under him" (201). Esternome's loss of place is reflected in the decay of his dying body. However, there is a gap at this point in the narrative where the Word-Scratcher interjects with a note to the "Source" (Marie-Sophie): "As you asked me, I have not related the part where you spoke to me of the death of your father, Esternome

Laborieux. . . .Of course, I also hope you will forever refuse; writing is to be fought: in it the inexpressible becomes indecency” (202).

Esternome’s death signals a major shift for Marie-Sophie’s orientation with the world. After her father’s death, Marie-Sophie decides to “penetrate City” where she goes to work with Monsieur Gros-Joseph and it is there that she becomes literate and begins to admire written French as Monsieur Gros-Joseph teaches her to read French classics. Her esteem for the written word continues that “The Nouteka of the Hills in [her] was as if erased” (241).

Aime Cesaire’s election as mayor of Fort-de-France serves as another life-altering moment for Marie-Sophie. Cesaire marks the beginning of a new era since he is the island’s first black man elected to power. While he has a mastery of the French language and was educated in France, he also uses his French to denounce France and claim Africa. On the night of his election, Marie-Sophie leaves her employer’s house to found Texaco. When she returns to work, her employer, Monsieur Alcibiade, “a greased-down blackman” and deputy secretary of the Public Works Bureau and defender of colonialism (245), punishes her for supporting Cesaire by brutally raping her (254). But once Monsieur Alcibiade descends into madness (at the thought of a black man (Cesaire) running the government) and rapes her (254), she realizes that “Without knowing it, I was learning about City: that crumbled solitude, that withdrawal inside the house, these millstones of silence on the pain next door, this civilized indifference. Everything that made the hills (the heart, the flesh, the touching, the solidarity, the gossips, the jealous butting into others’ business would fade before the coldness of the City’s center” (257).

Marie-Sophie has an abortion after she is raped by Monsieur Alcibiade. Whereas

pregnancy and maternity are linked to the landscape for Clare Savage's mother and grandmother, Marie-Sophie's abortions (she has two others when she becomes pregnant by an unfaithful lover) represent her precarious relationship to the City. Her alienation worsens the longer she stays in the Alcibiades' home where she becomes increasingly isolated. Madame Eléonore locks all three of them into the house and nails the windows shut. Marie-Sophie remarks that "I found myself in a sort of tomb" (259). Finally, Nelta, Marie-Sophie's lover, rescues her and brings her to his home in Morne Abelarde. Marie-Sophie has gone blind during her incarceration--a result of being cut off from the community and land. Papa Totone, a healer, is brought in to help heal her (265).

Marie-Sophie eventually wants her own piece of land to build her own hutch on--to put down roots (275). She chooses a space to build her hutch in Texaco (297). She becomes a squatter because she settles on the beke's land (298-99): "Word about the place blew about like the wind. Since every day brought with it a flood of would-be City people, it was soon known that there was room by Texaco. What's more, I went around saying it everywhere, along the warehouses where I did my odd jobs, hoping to get a few people around me so as to get a tighter hold" (300). However, after a close-call in which one of the residents nearly sets fire to her hutch with her drunken pedophilic husband inside, the béké sends the police out to destroy Texaco. They "barged into the hutches, unwedging doors and throwing out tables, sheets, bed rags, children, and all kinds of things. As soon as they emptied a hutch, the soulless-blackmen would go at it with crowbars, smashing the crate wood, splintering the asbestos. They unnailed the tin sheets, laughing like dumb beasts, and threw them down the hill" (307). Marie-Sophie contends with this six times, six times rebuilding her hutch: "Sometimes I would manage

to raise my hutch up to the point of asbestos, but it would be destroyed as soon as I'd turn my back. . . So I swayed between the Doum and the slope for a good numbers of years . . .” (310).

## Part 2: Written in Stone

More than any other section, the last chapter of the novel, “The Age of Concrete: 1961-1980” focuses on the writing down of Marie-Sophie’s narrative. Marie-Sophie is inspired to write down her stories after seeing Texaco grow: “Writing meant finding my Esternome, listening once again to the echoes of his voice lost in me, building myself slowly around a memory, out of a disorder of words both obscure and strong” (321). This disordered remembering parallels the building of the quarter amidst the chaos of hutches. She continues, “I learned to draw some straight lines in order to guide my hand. I learned to draw margins and respect them” (321). But in writing down her memories, Marie-Sophie begins “to die a little” (321). Not only is writing in French and not the Creole that she spoke everyday difficult, but “The feeling of death became even more present when I began to write about myself, and about Texaco” (322). Ti-Cirique, the Haitian scholar, shows up in Texaco as she begins writing and he critiques her use of French: “*My God, Madame Marie-Sophie, this tongue is dirty, it’s destroying Haiti and comforting its illiteracy, . . .*” (323). He becomes more involved as Marie-Sophie explains that “He developed the habit when time allowed it of sitting by me, reading my notebooks, correcting my horrors, giving sense to my sentences. He brought me his vocabulary, awakening in me a taste for the precise words I never mastered” (325). Ti-Cirique sees language and literature as separate from Texaco, from daily suffering.<sup>24</sup>

Eventually Césaire finally visits Texaco and officially recognizes its existence as a legitimate quarter of the city. By this time, concrete is everywhere. Concrete not only serves as building material, but it signifies the stagnation of Martinique's culture as modernization occurs and France assimilates the island into its body politic.

Whereas Clare Savage's body becomes burnt into the landscape, Marie-Sophie's body becomes part of her notebooks (359). She experiences birth pangs simultaneously while her body decays (370-72). It is as if in "giving birth" to the story of Texaco, Marie-Sophie suffers a kind of death--especially upon writing her story down. She explains,

The feeling of death became even more present when I began to write about myself, and about Texaco. It was like petrifying the tatters of my flesh. I was emptying out my memory into immobile notebooks without having brought back the quivering of the living life which at each moment modifies what's just happened. Texaco was dying in my notebooks though it wasn't finished. (322)

Writing signifies a slow death for her because it removes her from her community and forces her to stabilize the oral and fluid nature of her (hi)stories.

In the epilogue to Texaco, the "Word-Scratcher," Oiseau de Cham, explains that he stumbled upon the Texaco quarter of Fort-de-France where he was introduced to "an old cypresse woman" who became "the Source" for his novel (386-87). He explains that "She told me her stories in a persnickety way. Sometimes, though she hid it from me, she

had memory gaps, repeated or contradicted herself” (387). Eventually, after getting to know her, she entrusts Oiseau de Cham “with her innumerable notebooks, covered with an extraordinary, fine handwriting, breathing with the gestures, rages, shivering, the stains of a whole life caught in full flight” (387). He further explains that when narrating her lifestory “She mixed Creole and French, a vulgar word with a precious word, a forgotten word with a new word . . . , as if at any given point she were mobilizing (or summarizing) her tongues” (388). Ultimately, Chamoiseau tells us that “I did my best to write down this mythic Texaco, realizing how much my writing betrayed the real, revealing nothing of my Source’s breath, nor even the density of her legend” (390). Coming at the end of the text, this passage illustrates the recognition that words/print cannot capture Marie Sophie’s story, because it cannot capture the corporeality of storytelling. In a moment of metafiction, she asks, “Can you, Oiseau de Cham, write these futile nothings which make up the ground of our living spirit. . . a smell of burnt wood in the alize . . . that would be satisfaction. . . or else, the sun brushing the shivering skin . . .” (310-11).

In this novel, testimony serves the function of constructing the space of Texaco literally since the Urban Planner listens to Marie-Sophie’s testimony in order to rebuild the quarter. Marie-Sophie’s legacy is Texaco and the influence that she has had over the Urban Planner who states, “Out of the urban planner, the lady made me a poet. Or rather, she called forth the poet in the urban planner. Forever.” (341). The Urban Planner recognizes that his plans for the city must incorporate the stories and lives of its inhabitants. In this sense, he comes to see his job as not just building sturdy homes with running water, but about creating “spaces” out of “places” (de Certeau).

Marie-Sophie reveals that her secret name is “Texaco” (382). She is the space.

### **Conclusion**

Come back to the negritude/creolization debate of the introduction to this section. In a way, the ending to Marie-Sophie’s narrative is utopian--in the sense of being a “no place”--a place that no longer exists in Martinique. While it is at times nostalgic for this place, in the epilogue Oiseau de Cham explains that “City’s progressive absorption of that magic place returned me to my loneliness” (390). He reminds us that the non-place is in some ways also reflected in the novel: “I did my best to write down this mythic Texaco, realizing how much my writing betrayed the real, revealing nothing of my Source’s breath, nor even the density of her legend”.

While in this section, I have explored the notion of a native culture in a Caribbean place where “native” has in some senses become elusive as France has sought to modernize the island, in the next section, I will analyze the representation of the indigenous as “native” to the Caribbean.

### III. Discourses of Endo/Exogamy: Mythic Transmutations of the Native in Pauline Melville’s The Ventriloquist’s Tale

Postcolonial theory has shown us the ways in which colonial discourse has constructed modernity vis-à-vis pre-modern notions of the “primitive”.<sup>25</sup> The legacy of these colonial reinventions of the primitive persists in the idea of an essentialized archaic and primordial identity that has been thrust upon indigenous communities worldwide. As many scholars have pointed out, modernist art and travel and other literatures have

contributed to this primitivizing discourse. Peter Hulme and Eric Chefitz attribute such textual constructions of the native in the Americas to Columbus's translation of the world "cannibal" for "carib" in his logbooks.<sup>26</sup> More recently, in some parts of the Caribbean, a static indigenous heritage has been evoked by nation-states as a way of denying the African heritage.<sup>27</sup> These constructions of the indigenous relied upon the fact that in such places, there no longer were, nor had there been for centuries, extant indigenous populations. In her 1997 novel The Ventriloquist's Tale, Pauline Melville makes a significant intervention into discourses around the "primitive" by disrupting First World readers' expectations of the native "script" when she combines myth, realism and post-modern narrative strategies to represent Amerindians. Melville's novel is significant for the manner in which it reimagines Amerindian interactions with both colonial British Guiana and the independent Guyanese nation-state<sup>28</sup>.

The Ventriloquist's Tale offers a counter-discourse that is two-fold in its response to modernist literary constructions of the primitive. The novel responds to British modernist Evelyn Waugh's construction of the natives of British Guiana as portrayed in his novel A Handful of Dust (1934) and travel account Ninety Two Days (1934).<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Melville's novel critiques Brazilian modernist Mário de Andrade, who appropriated Amerindian myths of Brazil to construct a Brazilian national identity in his 1928 novel Macunaíma.<sup>30</sup> The Ventriloquist's Tale struggles with questions of indigenous identity in the interstitial space between tradition and modernity by a retelling of the Macunaima<sup>31</sup> myth that Andrade made famous in Macunaíma (which I discuss below) although perhaps because of historical accident, this rendering is told in English, not Portuguese.<sup>32</sup> Macunaima is part of a complex mythic tropology which offers various

retellings of an Amerindian creation myth in which the brothers Macunaima and Chico cut down the tree of life from which a huge river burst forth flooding the savannahs of the Amazon region (114). I argue that Melville uses elements of the myth to complicate facile constructions of indigeneity as “pure” and “authentic” and more specifically, to generate competing discourses of endogamy--a withdrawing inside a culture’s boundaries, and its opposite, exogamy--a moving beyond cultural boundaries. These endo/exogamic discourses raise questions about the future of Amerindian communities--should they remain detached from non-native peoples or should they mix? Melville explores these questions through characters from two generations of an Amerindian-Scottish family--some of whom reside in Amerindian villages of the Rupununi savannahs while others migrate to the capital city of Georgetown for employment and with at least one character migrating to Canada<sup>33</sup>. Macunaima appears both in endogamous and exogamous narratives throughout the novel--so that he is not completely aligned with either position. Instead Macunaima experiences numerous transformations, constantly evading a fixed identity, and instead becoming a kind of shape-shifter taking on the identity of various characters as he migrates between endogamous and exogamous narratives. The question raised in The Ventriloquist’s Tale becomes what does this shifting “native” identity signify to contemporary indigenous communities globally as well as locally in Guyana? In my reading I assert that representing the evasiveness of the “native” indigenous signals a destabilization of the notion of a fixed indigeneity so that both “native” and non-native European characters temporarily “become” Macunaima.

One of the major mythical elements that the novel reveals is the water-deluge

motif from the Macunaima creation story which circulates throughout the novel to signal disruption of an endogamous narrative and deferral--in that Macunaima is about to be incarnated in another form. This motif serves as a metaphorical symbol of birth, renewal and sometimes disaster for the characters undergoing change.

The second mythic signifier that recurs through the text involves the sun which is linked to the other overriding myth present in the novel--that of solar eclipse--when the moon covers the sun. Various etiological myths explain the eclipse, and they typically involve brother/sister incest. As Paula Burnett points out, the eclipse serves as a symbol of endogamy in the novel as it represents the brother/sister incestuous affair between Danny and Beatrice McKinnon (“Addressing Caribbean Futures”). Variation on this myth involves the sun who imprisons Macunaima in a clay pot until he is released by his brother, Chico. The sun motif signals a disruption of an exogamous narrative and also triggers the reincarnation of Macunaima.

Furthermore, I also chart the function of the native informants in Melville’s text and their relation to endo/exogamic discourses and the related question of the “translatability” of cultures. Macunaima’s evasiveness suggests the difficulty and perhaps impossibility of interpreting indigenous experience for readers. In her book Writing Diaspora: Tactics of Intervention in Contemporary Cultural Studies, Rey Chow explains this conundrum as “untranslatability,”

As we challenge a dominant discourse by ‘resurrecting’ the victimized voice/self of the native with our readings--and such is the impulse behind many ‘new historical’ accounts--we step, far too quickly, into the

otherwise silent and invisible place of the native and turn ourselves into living agents/witnesses for her. This process, in which we become visible, also neutralizes the untranslatability of the native's experience and the history of that untranslatability. The hasty supply of original 'contexts' and 'specificities' easily becomes complicitous with the dominant discourse, which achieves hegemony precisely by its capacity to convert, recode, make transparent, and thus represent even those experiences that resist it with stubborn opacity. (38)

This notion of untranslatability is central to Melville's rendering of the Macunaima myth. Just when we see Macunaima stabilizing into one form or another, the text shifts the mythic character into another incarnation, so that it remains impossible to translate a fixed Macunaima identity.

#### Responding to Modernism(o)

Melville's rendering of a destabilized indigeneity serves as a rewriting of Brazilian modernist Mário de Andrade's 1928 novel Macunaíma. Andrade was one of the major proponents of the Brazilian modernist movement which sought to "defin[e] the meaning of being modern in a peripheral country and proposed several alternative cultural agendas to be followed, among them 'anthropophagy'" (Bellei 88). Anthropophagy served as "a metaphor for the cosmopolitan enterprise of absorbing both foreign and native cultures as the means to construe a hybrid and unique Brazilian identity" (Bellei 91). Andrade's Macunaíma charts the sybaritic adventures of the hero of the same name, who is born a "black Indian of the Tapanhumas tribe" (Ribeiro 66) and

“in the midst of his adventures, [he] magically turns into a white man”. In Zita Nunes’ illuminating analysis of racial discourses in Brazil, she posits that in Andrade’s Macunaima, this discourse is

tied to a metaphoric of the body and an economy of eating, incorporation and sickness. The body politic has a sickness that it must rid itself of. The ‘problem’ with miscegenation is not miscegenation in and of itself, but with miscegenation as the perpetuation of a sickness. In this assessment blacks maintain the status of a foreign body. A healthy body is one which overcomes the weakening effects of an offending organism” (“Anthropology and Race in Brazilian Modernism” 119).

Nunes goes on to show how this “metaphoric of the body” was derived from the “supposed cannibalism of the indigenous population . . . as a model for a different cultural relationship between Brazil and the outside world (defined largely as Europe)--a relationship where foreign influences would not be copied but digested and absorbed as a precondition to the creation of a new, more independent national civilization” (120). The cannibalistic enterprise of Brazilian modernism is rendered in Melville’s novel through the trope of metamorphoses--the many reincarnations of Macunaima. Instead of appropriating a (European) modernist other, Melville reveals a constantly evolving Macunaima to signify indigeneity in constant metamorphoses--as it relates to, among other things, the forces of globalization.

Significantly, one of the differences between Melville’s text and Andrade’s is the

way in which indigenous culture serves the nation. Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei states that Mário de Andrade wrote Macunaíma as part of a project with other Brazilian artists and scholars to establish a Brazilian national identity, based on the “primitive” in reaction to the increased social disparities between the elite class and the poor (“Brazilian Anthropophagy Revisited” 89-90). In the 1926 preface to Macunaíma, Andrade writes:

What undoubtedly interested me in Macunaíma was my ongoing preoccupation with working through and discovering all I can about the national identity of Brazilians . . . The Brazilian has no character. And by character I do not simply mean a moral reality . . . [but rather] a permanent psychic identity, manifesting itself in everything, in the mores, in outward actions, in emotions, in language, in History . . . in good as well as in evil. The Brazilian has no character because he has neither a civilization of his own [civilização própria] nor a traditional consciousness. (quoted in Luís Madureira 113)<sup>34</sup>

In contrast, Melville does not consign the myth to a particular nation, but instead represents the myth as one of many Amerindian variants that circulates beyond national, linguistic and tribal boundaries. In some senses, she reclaims the diversity of the myth’s widely varying indigenous origins that Andrade chose to de-emphasize when he rendered Macunaíma as a Brazilian hero.<sup>35</sup> Ribeiro states,

“Makunaima,” the Taulipang myth, was first read by Andrade in Theodor Koch-Grünberg’s book Von Roroima zum Orinoco (From Roroima to the

Orinoco). Koch-Grünberg (1872-1924) was a German geographer and ethnologist who, between 1911 and 1913, traveled through northern Brazil, southern Venezuela, and Guyana, an area practically unexplored . . . Makuschi, Maiongong, Wapischana, and Yekuana are some of the different ethnic groups Koch-Grünberg met. Given the interethnic contact in this area, Makunaima becomes a hero whose accomplishments are known by different groups. (67-68).<sup>36</sup>

Thus, while Melville revises Andrade's version of Macunaima, reclaiming the diversity of the myth's origins by not privileging one version of Macunaima, she refrains from creating yet another hegemonic "native script".

#### Resurrecting Macunaima

"the needs of the present determine the value and nature of the primitive. The primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it. It is our ventriloquist's dummy--or we like to think."<sup>37</sup>  
Marianna Torgovnick

Andrade's Macunaíma ends with the extinction of Macunaíma's tribe: "No one on this earth knows how to speak the language of this vanished tribe" (167) and that "Only the parrot had preserved in that vast silence the words and deeds of the hero (168). In rendering Macunaíma's tribe extinct, Andrade suggests that the culture and people he represents are also extinct.<sup>38</sup> But as Peter Hulme argues, "extinction" can be a misleading and even dangerous concept when used to refer to indigenous Caribbean peoples, something he argues, which was

closely associated also with the growth of anthropology as a discipline” where “the ‘natives’ are simply the debris left behind by the inexorable processes of modernization. The archetypal text here is the report on the ‘last man,’ the last survivor, the last speaker of the language, a text beautifully exemplified by the story of Alexander von Humboldt scribbling down a few words of a soon-to-be-extinct South American language from its last ‘speaker,’ a parrot. (“Survival and Invention” 50-51)

Andrade’s text replicates the Humboldt narrative: “There in the foliage the man discovered a green parrot with a golden beak looking at him . . . only the parrot had rescued from oblivion those happenings and the language which had disappeared. Only the parrot had preserved in that vast silence the words and deeds of the hero” (Macunaíma 168).<sup>39</sup> Melville, however, offers a postmodern revision of the Humboldt and Andrade narratives by plucking Macunaima out of a constellation in the sky where Andrade left him. The narrator, who calls himself “Chico,” (but who is really Macunaima) specifically targets Andrade’s novel: “Spite impels me to relate that my biographer, the noted Brazilian Senhor Mario Andrade, got it wrong when he consigned me to the skies in such a slapdash and cavalier manner” (1). Melville brings him back to life, explaining that he has the heart of a parrot (4). However, with a narrator like “Chico” one can never be sure of the history being represented. As the title of the novel suggests, The Ventriloquist’s Tale marks the ambiguity of narration and it is not clear whose words the ventriloquist speaks. And here I return to the epigram by Marianna Torgovnick with which I began this paper. Is Chico simply the voice through which

stories flow? Does this native narrator do “what we ask it to do”?

From the outset of this novel, we are asked to question not only the teller of the tale but also the truth of the tale being told. The narrator introduces himself as,

Rumbustious, irrepressible, adorable me. I have black hair, bronze skin  
and I would look wonderful in a cream suit with a silk handkerchief. . .  
My  
name translated means ‘one who works in the dark’. You can call me  
Chico. It’s my brother’s name but so what. Where I come from it’s not  
done to give your real name too easily (1).

By presenting a narrator who is not who he claims to be, and who has no intention of revealing himself to us, Melville disrupts the notion of “native informants” as purveyors of cultural truths. Gayatri Spivak has written much about the complicated subject positions of native informants, arguing that we (North American readers) must try to avoid relying on so-called “native informants” to reveal cultural truths because native informants themselves are subjects constructed through their interactions with ethnographers, anthropologists, etc. As such, native informants begin to function as an alibi for those who stay behind in indigenous spaces.<sup>40</sup> He explains, “We, in this part of the world, have a special veneration for the lie . . . We treat the lie seriously, as a form of horticulture, to be tended and nurtured, all its little tendrils to be encouraged” (3). That he readily admits that he is an equivocating narrator undermines the truth-value of the realist story he goes on to tell--revealing the degree of its “untranslatability”.

Seemingly “Chico” accedes to the realist mode of storytelling: “Because hard-nosed, tough-minded realism is what is required these days. Facts are King. . . Perhaps it

has something to do with protestants or puritans and the tedious desire to bear witness that makes people prefer testimony these days. No, alas, fiction has to disguise itself as fact and I must bow to the trend and become a realist” (9). Yet, even as he says that his narrative must conform to realism, it is clear as one reads on that mythic, magical elements are interwoven into this reality. “Chico” uses his ability to camouflage himself and to mimic all types of human and animal utterances as a strategy of narration, “The narrator must appear to vanish. I gone” (9). He does not reappear until over 300 pages later in the epilogue where we learn that his self-camouflaging skills allow him to blend into the European landscape. However, the continuous transformations of Macunaima throughout the realist narrative call into the question what is truly “real”.

#### Discourses of Endo/Exogamy

Before I continue with my reading of the novel, I will outline the novel’s complex structure and characters. The novel is set in both the early 1900’s in the interior Rupununi district of British Guiana leading up to the solar eclipse of 1919, and in contemporary independent Guyana. The earlier narrative focuses on the McKinnon family which includes Alexander McKinnon, considered an apostasy for taking two Wapisiana sisters, Maba and Zuna, as his wives and living in the interior of the country, and the McKinnon children: Danny, Beatrice and Wifreda. This part of the narrative includes an incestuous relationship between Danny and Beatrice and the birth of their child, Sonny. Wifreda is the first in her family to witness the affair. A Catholic missionary priest, Father Napier, who has come to the Rupununi to convert Amerindians, plays a key role in the disruption of the affair but goes insane and eventually returns to England.

The contemporary narrative follows Chofy MacKinnon, who is married to Marietta with whom he has a son, Bla-Bla. Chofy migrates from the interior to the coastal city of Georgetown because of economic circumstances and begins an extramarital affair with Rosa Mendelson, a white British scholar who has come to the region to research Evelyn Waugh's travels. Additionally, this part of the narrative includes Professor Warmoal, a Czech anthropologist who specializes in the study of Amerindian mythology. Furthermore, Chofy's aunt Wifreda is the only living link to the earlier narrative.

The novel is constructed in five sections: the Preface in which "Chico" introduces himself as the narrator; the realist narrative which is comprised of Part One in which readers are introduced to native characters Chofy McKinnon and his elderly aunt Wifreda, as well as the British scholar Rosa Mendelson and the Czech anthropologist Professor Warmoal; Part Two takes place in the early 1900's and charts the story of the incestuous affair between Danny and Beatrice McKinnon; Part Three returns us to the contemporary narrative of Wifreda, Chofy, and Rosa; and finally the Epilogue where Chico resurfaces as the "visible" narrator.

The first ninety pages of the novel put forth various discussions of tribalism versus nationalism, endogamy versus exogamy in an era of globalization. Macunaima first emerges through forty-year-old Chofy McKinnon. That Macunaima-as-parrot should emerge through a member of the McKinnon family is not surprising since the name of the village in which they live, "Waranawa," translates to "hills of the parrot" and the slope on which the family lived was known as the "hill of the spirit macaw because a great scarlet macaw was supposed to live in the lake" (94). Before his mythic

transformation Chofy feels a desire for change, but had reconciled himself to his life in the savannahs by adhering to an endogamous definition of himself and his people:

He belonged in the savannahs. His existence was tied into the landscape and the seasons, rainy or dry. Like many others, he resented the increasing number of alien coastlanders and Brazilians who were invading the region to settle there. Usually, when he had that sort of feeling, he took off into the bush for a while. (14-15)

When his wife Marietta's parents lose their cattle and their income to a swarm of vampire bats, Chofy is forced to go to Georgetown to earn needed cash--an indication that the indigenous communities are no longer completely self-sufficient but are dependent on the global capitalist economy. Chofy remembers, "when he was a young boy growing up, money had rarely been used. Everything was done by exchange of gifts. But these days cash was increasingly necessary" (22). This change in Chofy's life and the life of the indigenous is signaled by the first water-deluge motif of the story--a storm breaks out: "the air inside the house smelt damp. Then everything went dark. As the storm broke overhead, Marietta ran about the house collecting pails, pans, bucket, calabashes, gourds, anything that could be placed on the earth floor at the points where the rains came through the thatch" (26). The disruption of the water-deluge signals Chofy's shift from endogamy to exogamy. Chofy embodies the water-deluge motif in that his full name, "Chofoye," is translated as "rushing waters" and because his story takes place in Guyana the "land of many waters," he becomes emblematic of the struggle between endogamy

and exogamy.

When Chofy arrives in Georgetown, he does not feel as if he is a part of the city-  
scape, partly due to the way that Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese Georgetown  
inhabitants interpellate him as “different” through the epithets: “‘Hey, buck man,’ . . .  
‘Look at de moon-face buck man.’ . . . ‘Get back to the bush, buck man.’” (31)<sup>41</sup> This  
discrimination signals that the only place for Amerindians to exist is in the “bush,” not as  
part of the modern nation-state, and also serves as a kind of “nativizing” of the “native,”  
where coastland Guyanese can only associate Amerindians with the interior landscape.

Shortly after he experiences this racial and cultural discrimination, Chofy begins  
an extra-marital relationship with Rosa Mendelson, a white British visiting scholar.  
Chofy is temporarily transformed into Macunaima which signals his shifting beliefs  
regarding indigenous survival. He feels that “his whole life had been transformed.  
Endless possibilities opened up before him” (68). In a cosmopolitan gesture similar to  
Macunaima’s at the end of Andrade’s novel, Chofy ponders “go[ing] to live in Europe”,  
“Or perhaps Rosa would come to live with him here” (68). This transformation signals  
the beginning of the debate over tradition versus modernity, the local versus the global  
that “Chico” (Macunaima) continues in the Epilogue.

The debate heats up when Chofy finds himself in a discussion with his cousin  
Tenga who complains that “Amerindians have no chance in this country,” Chofy  
responds by arguing for interracial unions and “development” as the only way for  
Amerindian survival, “I think we have to mix. Otherwise we have no future. We must  
get educated. . . We can’t go backwards. Guyana has to develop.” Tenga responds by  
asserting his tribal identity, “I’m not Guyanese, I’m Wapisiana” (54). It appears that

Chofy has entered into the national and even global sense of modernity through his call for development. On the other hand, Tenga, who lives outside of Georgetown, negates his place in the nation-state and instead aligns himself with his tribal identity. In their reading of Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined communities," Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri point out that "the nation becomes the only way to imagine community! Every imagination of a community becomes overcoded as a nation, and hence our conception of community is severely impoverished . . . the multiplicity and singularity of the multitude are negated in the straitjacket of the identity and homogeneity of the people" (Empire, 107). This theory certainly applies to Tenga and Chofy, who are unable to see themselves as simultaneously Wapisiana and Guyanese, and serves as an example of the way that Melville's rendering of Macunaima departs from that of Andrade for she draws attention to the tension between the indigenous and the nation-state.<sup>42</sup> In his study of the U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Colin Perrin points out that the declaration recognizes the indigenous "right to a nationality" and the "right to belong to an indigenous community or nation, in accordance with the traditions and customs of the nation concerned". Perrin writes that "as citizens of both an indigenous and a modern nation, they occupy 'two places at once'" ("Approaching Anxiety: The Insistence of the Postcolonial in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" 20-21).

The debate between the nation-state and tribe is more abstractly argued by Rosa and Professor Warmoal, a Czech anthropologist and a Claude Levi-Strauss-like figure, whose scholarly paper entitled, "The Structural Elements of Myth" presents a fixed view of Amerindian myth, particularly myths equating incest and eclipse (82-83). When Rosa tells him that she is an "internationalist" and that she "believe[s] in a mixture of the

racess” (78), Warmoal responds that she is “going against the modern grain . . . People want to be with their own kind. Everyone nowadays is retreating into their own homogeneous group. Black with black. Serb with serb. Muslim with Muslim . . . I believe in the purity of the nation” (78-79).

While Rosa’s perspective is more sympathetic to indigenous cultures, her scholarship is limited by what she does not see--what she is not attuned to see. She has come to Guyana to research Evelyn Waugh’s travels there. Yet Rosa’s research results in dead-ends; she is disappointed after a meeting with Nancy Freeman, a former schoolteacher in the Rupununi district, from whom “Rosa had imagined she would uncover a wealth of information about Evelyn Waugh and there was not much at all” (50). Nancy does tell her though that Waugh “missed one story that was right under his nose. . . [it] had to do with Danny McKinnon and one of his sisters . . . I don’t know why Mr. Waugh didn’t write about that. He certainly knew about it” (49). Rosa responds that “Perhaps it was not Evelyn Waugh’s sort of story” (49). This is a telling response because it reveals that Rosa is not willing to look beyond Waugh’s selective representations of Amerindians in his writings. It also reveals Rosa’s own myopia because keeping Waugh as the center of her study, she too “misses” the story of the Rupununi and perpetrates his narrow view of the space and people.

When Rosa visits Wifreda, she is again disappointed when Wifreda offers her no new information about Waugh. In a sense, Wifreda refuses the role of the native informant telling Rosa, “That was a long time ago. I can’t recall too much” (86). At Rosa’s mention of Waugh, Wifreda becomes anxious, remembering that she had told him about Danny and Beatrice’s affair when he visited. Wifreda has accompanied Chofy to

Georgetown to undergo eye-surgery to correct the myopia that has afflicted her since childhood. The memory of the incestuous affair triggers complete blindness-- a physical symptom of looking directly at an eclipse. Only in this case it is the memory of the incest that brings on her total blindness. Eventually, the only thing that she can see is Beatrice's face: "Everything was black as a parrot's tongue. She heard Beatrice laughing as clearly as if she had just walked into the room. The laughter became jumbled up with the parrot's chesty giggle behind her (88). Here Wifreda imagines Beatrice transformed into Macunaima. This imagining harks back to the earlier moment when Wifreda first discovered Danny and Beatrice's affair as a child and Beatrice threatened to blind her if she told anyone (174). Despite her discretion in not revealing the affair, Wifreda gradually loses her sight over the course of her life. This transformation signals a narrative shift to Part 2 which recounts Danny and Beatrice's affair. Wifreda serves as the only living connection between the Danny/Beatrice/Sonny story and Chofy's story.

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In Part 2, Macunaima surfaces as a malicious endogamous trickster-figure when Danny comes to Beatrice in her hammock at night and makes love to her. She assumes that it is the black coastlander, Raymond, who has been flirting with her. In fact, Danny was angered with Beatrice for associating with the coastland blacks who have come to the region to work: "For some reason he could not understand, the sight of Beatrice twirling round with this black boy made Danny feel sick and miserable. He wanted to drag her away" (161). When Danny confronts her, he speaks to her in their native language of Wapisiana, telling her, "I'm shamed of you". Beatrice responds to his attempt to reinforce cultural and racial boundaries by moving further beyond them and

responding in English, “Too bad, isn’t it?”. Later in the invisibility of night he sneaks into her hammock and makes love to her, but in the night Beatrice “could see nothing” and assumes that it is Raymond who has come to her. She does not realize until the next morning that “something was not right [. . .] The hair was wrong. The head that had brushed against hers the night before had hair as smooth and straight as a bird’s feather, not the springy, tight, frizzy hair that sat on Raymond’s scalp like a moss cap” (164). Danny becomes Macunaima (as a parrot) in the seduction-scene with hair “smooth and straight as a bird’s feather”. Beatrice soon figures out that it was Danny and though she is angered with him at first, she quickly forgives him and takes pleasure in the affair. Significantly, Danny’s attempt at keeping Beatrice within their tribal boundaries is achieved through claiming her sexuality when he rapes her and her subsequent consent to their incestuous affair. Paula Burnett points out that the incestuous affair represents a kind of endogamy: “The mythic equating of an eclipse with incest, which Levi-Strauss identifies throughout Amerindian cultures, is related to an earlier brother-sister incest on the savannahs, but also to its seeming opposite, the love affair of a white Jewish woman, Rosa, an English literary scholar, with a Guyanese of mixed Amerindian and European descent, Chofoye (Chofy) McKinnon” (“Addressing Caribbean Futures” 25).

Danny’s endogamous desire is foreshadowed by a recounting of a variation of the Macunaima myth when he is a young boy who is teased by his cousin for having a white father (Alexander McKinnon). His Macusi grandmother, herself an “outsider” in the Wapisiani village, appeases him by telling him a mythical story about the etiology of race. The story begins with the sun going to bathe in a stream where he sees a water spirit who promises to send him a wife in exchange for her own freedom. The spirit

sends him a white woman, a black woman and a reddish-bronze woman. He finds the white woman “useless” when he learns that she is “made of white earth” when she “collapsed into a little heap of clay” in the stream (105). The black woman melts when she gets too close to the fire because she is made of wax. The reddish-bronze woman does not collapse or melt and the sun marries her and they have several children, including Macunaima and Chico (105). Danny’s grandmother ends her story by claiming Danny’s Amerindian identity through his skin color: “You’re a reddish brown. You talk Wapisiana. You belong in the savannahs with us” (104-105). In this sense, Melville demonstrates that the “natives” are not exempt from producing their own essentialized native scripts. Danny accepts his grandmother’s native script by denying his paternal racial heritage stating, “I hope my father melts . . . away altogether”. Thus, when he sees Beatrice with Raymond, Danny draws on his “essential” Amerindian identity.

The environment of the village conceals Danny and Beatrice’s affair for a time: “No one suspected what was happening because nothing is less suspicious, nothing is more innocent than a brother and sister carrying out certain tasks together. It was a secret perfectly camouflaged by the surroundings . . . Beatrice and Danny were miraculously concealed by their home setting” (170). Yet once they learn that Wifreda and others in the community know of their affair, they leave their village to escape scorn and interference, heading further into the interior of the country where Danny becomes more distant but Beatrice seems to thrive. While at first the interior “bush” landscape is seductive and protects the pair, eventually, it cannot hide them from society. Rumours have spread from village to village about the incestuous couple and when they reach a Wai-Wai village, Danny feels that there is an invisible barrier around it that he cannot

cross because of his growing shame over his relationship with Beatrice (196). This barrier becomes a symbol of the Danny's inability to reconcile himself completely to his endogamous relationship.

The secrets that have characterized the affair culminate with the ultimate concealment of the solar eclipse, when the moon covers the sun. At the moment of the eclipse Danny and Beatrice have sex and yet "Neither Beatrice nor Danny were aware that an eclipse had begun" (203). Yet they both personify the eclipse because as the skies darken, Danny embodies the moon as he is "seized with a terrible icy coldness all through his gut" despite Beatrice's attempts, as a signifier of the sun, to warm him (204). That Beatrice's warmth cannot penetrate him is significant because she, since adolescence, has embodied the sun. In fact, her sexuality is inextricably linked with the sun: "The sun burned even more fiercely and as the sun grew in intensity, so the darkness inside her turned into a delicious fizzing feeling that just teetered on the edge of an explosion and then died away again" (126).

### Transformations

The concealments that mark Danny and Beatrice's love affair are revealed once the eclipse takes place. The pair's Scottish father, Alexander McKinnon, learns of the eclipse from reading an outdated London newspaper. He does not suspect that the eclipse and his children are somehow connected until his wives, Maba and Zuna, explain the mythic link between eclipse and incest. Maba has had suspicions for months which are confirmed when she finds the tapir constellation in the sky: "What made her uneasy was that the patch of tapir stars seemed to be getting brighter as she watched. Everybody knew that the sniffly-snouted, short-sighted, night trotting tapir was too lazy to mate

outside its own family. The stars seemed to be confirming what she suspected” (176). When McKinnon finally learns of the incest from his wives, he sends his nemesis, the British missionary priest, Father Napier, to find the children.

Napier’s search takes place during the rainy season, the ultimate symbol of the water-deluge motif. This water-deluge signals a momentous shift in the novel as indigenous and Euro-Christian cultures clash. Life-altering changes result for both Danny and Beatrice as well as Father Napier himself. The shift begins when Father Napier experiences disorientation in the wet landscape as he embarks on his journey into the interior to search for the couple: “He kept looking towards the horizon to try and find his bearings but the rains obliterated the rim of the earth and stirred the land into the sky. He had no idea where he was and relied entirely on his Indian escorts. Roads turned into rivers and plains into lakes. The Indians told him that the rains heralded invisibility and change” (215). For a while, the flood protects Danny and Beatrice from discovery: “Thousands of inlets and tiny tributaries and creeks notched the banks of the river. It was a hopeless task to search for anybody in this giant wilderness” (219). Yet, the rains signal change for Danny and Beatrice as they are engulfed by the mass flooding: “The pair of them clambered up the slope, slithering back every few steps. Ropes of water twisted around them, transparent lassos ensnaring their arms, legs and necks, tugging them back towards the river” (219). The change comes when shortly after this Father Napier finds them and persuades Danny to end the affair and return to Waranawa. The greatest transformation comes with the end of the affair and the subsequent reversal from endogamy to exogamy which is epitomized in Danny’s marriage to Sylvana, a non-Indian Portuguese woman from Brazil. In an attempt to put the affair behind him, he not only

chooses a mate outside his tribe, but someone from another race and nation. Thus, if Danny and Beatrice's affair represented a kind of cultural survival by maintaining the boundaries of the tribe, Danny's marriage to Sylvana represents a dissolving of those boundaries in favor of cultural mixing.

### Mythic Reversals

Yet, this shift from endogamy to exogamy does not come without consequences. In a kind of geographic and psychic subversion, Beatrice seeks revenge on Father Napier for turning Danny against her and the subsequent end of their affair. In a reversal of the search that Napier undertook, Beatrice hunts Napier through the savannahs, attempting to reverse things back to endogamy through her mythic connection to the sun. This time instead of journeying through the flooded landscape, she journeys through an "arid wasteland" (242). She becomes Kanaima, the spirit of revenge, and with the help of the local shaman, Koko Lupi, secretly poisons Father Napier with toxic yams. Koko Lupi tells her, "I don't like him either. He tries to strike the sun out of the sky. Him with his dead god on a stick. He thinks he can stand between the sun and the moon. Give him this and leave the rest to the sun. The sun will finish him off" (240). Koko Lupi's referral to the sun who "will finish him off" has a double meaning since Beatrice herself symbolizes the sun.

Once poisoned Father Napier slowly descends into madness and is tormented by the heat of the sun (248). In a misguided attempt to alleviate his suffering he decides to "fight fire with fire" by setting fire to sixteen of the twenty-two missions he had founded: "The priest's progress through the savannahs had been marked by beacons, blazes, burning timbers, fires, flames and furnaces" (250). In one sense, it is as if "Indian ways"

have overtaken him as he behaves in the same way as the Amerindians who set fire to their dwellings and move on to a new location (187). Similarly, Father Napier erases the material markers of his own missionary work.

The sun (Beatrice) indeed takes over his mind as “[h]owever he tried to pray and keep the image of Christ before him, the stories told to him by the boys always surfaced in his mind: the sun dressing the jaguar in yellow to represent him on earth; the sun disguised as a red macaw; the sun selecting a brown wife from those offered by the water spirit [. . . ]” (256). He becomes more and more confused and disoriented and when he is finally discovered wandering the savannahs without any clothes, it is Danny who takes him to Georgetown to be placed in an asylum. It is ironic that Danny is the one who facilitates Father Napier’s “imprisonment” in the asylum and ultimately the Macunaima myth because he represents a successful Christian “conversion” to the priest. In fact, Father Napier’s obsession with the sun culminates on the boat trip in which Danny takes him to Georgetown: “From where he lay in the bottom of the boat, Father Napier could look up into Danny’s burnished copper face, eyes narrowed into slits against the bright light. His face was surrounded by a halo of suns and for the first time Father Napier recognised Danny as an Indian” (emphasis added, 258). Beatrice (the sun) is thus successful in reversing exogamy back to endogamy because once Father Napier’s mind enters into her mythic reality he acknowledges Danny’s ethnic identity.

While in the asylum, the Macunaima myth completely overtakes Father Napier’s mind so that, in a sense, his transformation into Macunaima becomes complete: “He felt that he had been captured, like the sun, and was being held in a dark pot, waiting to hear the crack of Chico’s gun that would shatter the clay and release him, pale from

incarceration, to make his way back into the sky” (256). Father Napier first learned this myth when he was in the village of Zariwa, where he became infatuated with one of the young Indian boys, whom he christens “Ignatius”. It is Ignatius who explains the elements of myth to him, that “all animals had a master or owner who protected them on earth as well as in the sky” (150). Father Napier cannibalizes the myth, using its tropes to introduce his own “master” of Christ: “With that information, Father Napier, subtly, like a cancer virus mimicking the workings of a cell it has entered gradually introduced to the Indians the idea of his own all powerful master” (150).<sup>43</sup> When Father Napier decides to hold a mass on top of a mountain and Ignatius dies shortly after, his father tries to explain that the mountain is a sacred place, believed to be a tree where Macunaima and Chico found the tree and cut it down, releasing “a huge river burst out of the trunk and flooded the savannahs” (153). A culminating moment of “untranslatability” occurs as Ignatius’s father desperately tries to explain the myth in his native Macusi language, which Napier does not (want to) comprehend. Ignatius’s death is a result of this untranslatability not only in the sense of language, but in the sense of cultural values. Ignatius dies in part because he served as a native informant by betraying his culture’s sacred boundaries by taking Father Napier up the mountain and translating the elements of his culture’s mythical beliefs to him. Beatrice’s revenge then is not only her personal revenge, but also a cultural vengeance so that the priest who initially exploits the myth in order to impose Christian doctrine, is later unable to escape it.<sup>44</sup>

Eventually, Beatrice is expelled from the community because of rumours of her role as a Kanaima, not because of her incestuous affair with Danny. Thus, despite her desire to remain in the village with other Indians, she must leave Guyana altogether to

begin a new life in Canada. So while Danny leaves behind the endogamy of the affair by marrying a Brazilian, Beatrice leaves behind endogamy (literally by leaving behind Sonny, the child of the affair) by migrating to Canada and marrying a white man. Yet, the night before her departure, she has one last endogamous moment with Danny when he shows her

A field of fireflies, caught by the sudden shower, had settled on the ground. They winked in the blackness, as brilliant in the dark underfoot as the stars in the sky above. It was as if the vast night sky had unfolded under their feet as well as over their heads and they were suspended in space. For a long time [Beatrice] stood there, feeling that she was where she was meant to be, standing in the sky with Danny. (270)

This description echoes Andrade's *Macunaíma*, whose narrative ends with his conversion into a constellation in the sky (*Macunaíma* 164).

It is in Canada that Beatrice is forced to confront her identity as an Amerindian and pan-indigenous struggle for sovereignty. It becomes clear that the question of endogamy versus exogamy reaches far beyond the savannahs of the Amazon. She goes to the museum where she sees a preserved Indian head on display, "Beatrice studied the shrunken head. The coloration of the three-inch head was still vivid, almost like stage make-up, giving it an unusual sense of animation. . . The face reminded Beatrice of her grandmother" (274). Beatrice connects this display of "captured" indigeneity with her own family. Similarly, when she attends the circus, she sees a Native American woman

on display as she is placed into an ice coffin:

All eyes were fixed on the coffin. The woman lay motionless inside. The audience remained silent except for the occasional shuffle. After a while, Beatrice began to worry that the woman's air must be in short supply. In a minute or so, surely, she would be unable to breathe. Beatrice could almost feel the anguished burning of the flesh on ice. She tried to see if the woman was still breathing. Astounded and horrified, she stared at the woman in the ice tomb. [. . .] She had no idea how long it was before the two men began to scoop the snow and ice from where they had packed it to seal the cracks. They took away the square block of ice from the end of the coffin. Beatrice took an enormous, involuntary gasp of air as the woman slid out and bowed to the audience. She felt as though she herself had been freed. (277)

Here the Macunaima myth has been recast as a moment of fixed indigeneity on display. The myth has traveled north along with Beatrice so that instead of being imprisoned in a clay pot and burned by the sun, the Indian woman is imprisoned in an "ice coffin". And the myth is acted out as a tourist display--a magic trick, which initially seems to spark Beatrice's indigenous consciousness. She experiences the woman's entrapment as very real and visceral yet, when she encounters the Indian woman from the circus on the street, drunken and beaten, Beatrice refuses to acknowledge a commonality. She does not respond to the woman's question, "Hey are you Iroquois? What people are you

from?" (279) because she is not ready to acknowledge her own past. She is no longer certain of how to define herself. Reiterating the question of Chofy and Tenga's argument, Beatrice "wondered if it was better for her own people to preserve themselves within their own traditions or to allow change" (281).

While Beatrice ponders the questions of indigenous survival outside of her tribal home, the product of her affair with Danny, a male child named "Sonny" serves as a living embodiment of one of the more conservative approaches to indigenous survival. Sonny, whose name invokes the sun, incarnates the eclipse, as he was "entranced by the moon" (288). Sonny is "self-contained" and a "compelling purity" (282) and as the product of an incestuous affair he represents an essentialized nativism, yet we also know that because of his grandfather (McKinnon) he is not "purely" Wapisiani. It is significant however that he is an elliptical character whose increasing ellipses marks his disappearance from the text. Sonny was "a secret made flesh" and "turned away from all embraces, even his mother's and did not seem particularly attached to anybody" (268). This description suggests that Sonny embodies an absolute endogamy--his incestuous origins not only represent a withdrawal inside tribal boundaries, but a withdrawal inside himself so that he eschews all attachments. His teacher notes that

what Sonny wanted more than anything else was to keep himself secret.

In an era of discovery, revelation and the examination of every aspect of life, an era where every part of the world was being photographed, filmed, rediscovered, analysed, discussed and presented to a voracious public; when communications and networking were speeding up, when all

previously inaccessible tribes were being brought out into the open, investigated and put on display, all Sonny wanted was concealment, secrecy and silence. (emphasis added, 285).

Sonny's desire for silence and secrecy demonstrates his repudiation of the role of native informant. Instead of offering a definitive native script, he speaks in many different voices. When a hunter tracks him through the forest, all that he discovers are voices, "each seeming to come from the same place as the laughter--a toucan with its yelp like a puppy; the whoop-whooping of a tree-frog; and the mouse-like chirpings of bats in broad daylight, which disconcertingly dissolved into giggles. The only constant was the waterfall clamouring in the background" (291). The hunter decides that what he hears is "either a parrot or some sort of ventriloquist" (292), which signals that Sonny has been transformed into Macunaima. Further evidence of this is that at the waterfall, the hunter discovers "an elegant cream suit" (292) and "a pair of expensive dark glasses with gold frames" which we later find out is the costume of "Chico" the narrator (1). Just as "Chico's" magical realist voice disappears into the realist narrative (9) Sonny "cease[s] to exist gradually" (290). That he is no longer detected in the text suggests that Sonny and the endogamy that he represents are no longer translatable to the reader. That Sonny and Chico could be the one in the same suggests that the novel as a whole operates on a level of untranslatability of indigeneity. If Sonny can no longer be rendered visible to the reader, but Chico reemerges from the text in the epilogue, has Sonny and the endogamy he represents truly vanished? Or, can we just not *see* him because we are still "looking" through a realist lens? Is the language of the text no longer sufficient to represent this

native? These possibilities along with the continuous reincarnations of Macunaima demonstrate the impossibility of ever establishing a definitive indigeneity within the text.

### Untranslatable Native Scripts

The final section of the realist narrative culminates with a crisis of “untranslatability” and the clashing discourses of endo/exogamy. This notion of untranslatability becomes significant for Chofy when he chooses not to reveal Danny and Beatrice’s story to Rosa after she tells him that she does not believe in superstition, a “script” she associates with the indigenous and readily dismisses. However, he does reveal the meaning of his name to her, a disclosure that renders him a native informant despite his anxiety around revealing cultural meaning: “In deference to Rosa’s clear-headed rationalism, Chofy suppressed his own superstitious fear. He had been brought up either not to reveal his name or not to explain its meaning” (302). He explains to Rosa that his name means “ ‘rapids’ or ‘fast-flowing water’ . If you say it out loud, you can hear it makes the sound of water exploding over rocks” (302). Whereas up until now, the water-deluge has signaled change, the disclosure of the meaning of Chofy’s name--water-deluge--sets off a sequence of disturbing events as a result of his name being erroneously translated and ultimately fatally mistranslated.<sup>45</sup>

The most catastrophic event that is directly tied to Chofy revealing the meaning of his name is the death of his son, Bla-Bla. He dies because of the failure of translation of a single utterance. While Rosa correctly translates Chofy’s name as “explosion of waters” to Professor Warmaal, he translates it to some American businessmen who understand the meaning to be simply “explosion” (309). The dangerous threat that Professor Warmaal represents to Chofy’s family is signaled earlier in the text when Rosa

introduces Chofy to Warmaal at the university where he is to give a lecture, but it is cancelled when during a rainstorm, “the plaster burst overhead and a waterfall descended into the room” (308). It is with his lament at “how rapidly Indian culture is disintegrating these days--contaminated mainly by contact with other races” (78) that Professor Warmaal believes that he is preserving Amerindian culture stating, “I probably know more about the Amerindian peoples than they know about themselves” (78). Warmaal acknowledges that his work is a kind of neo-colonial ownership of Amerindians: “My knowledge of the Indians is a way of owning them--I admit it. We fight over the territory. But it’s better than stealing their land isn’t it?” (80) His intellectual property signals an essentialization of Amerindian culture, a static indigeneity:

I have the entire map of this continent in my head. I know about the history and movements of the indigenous peoples here, their kinship structures, story Europeans have access to all the books and documentation that they lack. And what do I do with it? I become a professor and enrich European and American culture with it. (79)

What Warmaal fails to recognize is that his knowledge is limited coming only from printed documents--especially in relation to orally-based Amerindian cultures. Chico’s discussion of lying, his unreliability as a narrator, counters this dependence on the written. This scene foregrounds the way in which the attempted translation of native meaning becomes hazardous. It is shortly after this that Chofy overhears Warmaal explaining his name to the Americans (309), but Chofy ignores his instincts (what Rosa

calls “superstitions”) which warn him of the dangers inherent in revealing the meaning of his name. The mistranslation becomes lethal when the Americans, who go to the Rupununi district to explore underground for oil, encounter Bla-Bla at the river where they are surveying. In order to warn the boy that they are exploding dynamite underwater near where he is fishing, the Americans shout “Chofoye!” thinking they are warning him of an explosion, but Bla-Bla thinks they are calling the name of his father and he ventures closer to the site just at the moment of the explosion and is fatally wounded. This scene demonstrates that the death of the native (Bla-Bla) is intricately tied to the function of the native informant (Chofy) in the utterance of a single word.

Bla-Bla’s death signals just how much the “outside” world has “penetrated” into his world. He “imagined building defenses around the village to keep intruders away” (318) and practices this defense when he and two friends set a trap in the road for the truck carrying Americans from Hawk Oil (319). While the trap momentarily slows down the Americans when their truck crashes into the ditches, it cannot permanently slow or cease the development of the interior.<sup>46</sup> Chofy feels guilty for “not being able to keep the land safe for his children” (345). Tenga blames Chofy for deserting his family and his people and tells him,

‘You don’t understand. You know what they are saying? One of the Americans saw a little boy in the area and he pointed to the danger spot and shouted: ‘Chofoye. Chofoye.’ He said he was trying to warn him. He thought it was an Amerindian word for explosion. Bla-Bla must have misunderstood and run towards the spot because he thought his father had

come home. The stupid Americans didn't even realise he spoke English--  
let alone we all have different languages anyway' (343-44).

The Hawk Oil workers' mistranslation of the word for explosion suggests that knowledge can be dangerous when it is not utilized in its proper context. Tenga explains that they had "divided the land up into grids. Every hundred yards or so they drill and explode dynamite twenty yards under the earth. It is not supposed to break the surface. But sometimes it does and then again some of the oil men does use dynamite to blow up fish in the rivers" (338). Thus, ironically it is the artificial production of a "water-deluge" that produces the mistranslation of the word for explosion. Both Professor Warmoal's mistranslation of Chofy's name and the Americans' misapprehension of it contribute to a lethal construction of indigenous culture and identity.

Before he dies in the Georgetown hospital, Bla-Bla "drifted in and out of consciousness . . . When he was conscious, he bumbled in Portuguese and Wapisiana and asked for water and he talked to a man he could see in the corner of the room, who had a parrot sitting on his shoulder" (344). That he speaks in his native tongue and Portuguese, not English, perhaps signals a return to Mario de Andrade's Brazilian version of Macunaima. And since this particular version of the myth symbolizes indigenous extinction, Bla-Bla's death signals not only the loss of a child "but a whole continent" (345) as he becomes a kind of parrot in death--Marietta takes a macaw feather from one of his homemade arrows and "fixed it in Bla-Bla's hair, just behind his ear". The fact that Bla-Bla is injured in the interior but dies in the exterior suggests that exogamy will result in the eclipsing of an indigenous future. After all, contact with the outside world

has brought the interference of anthropologists and oil companies.

This reading however is complicated by Wifreda whose blindness is brought on by “looking directly” at the absolute endogamy of incest. While Chofy does not realize the gravity of disclosing his cultural meanings until it is too late, it seems that Aunt Wifreda must reveal the secrets she has been keeping in order to escape blindness. She has remained blind even after surgery and the doctor tells Chofy that she must have “hysterical blindness”. However, Wifreda’s sight returns during the airplane trip back to the Rupununi to bury Bla-Bla (348). Yet, while she is no longer completely blind, Wifreda also does not have clear vision: “The eye which had been operated on was completely clear and functioned normally. The other eye retained its waterfall but she was able to manage better than before” (348). The “waterfall” in her eye serves as a constant reminder of the secrets that made her blind in the first place, as well as a signifier of the Macunaima creation myth. Since waterfall has thus far also always signalled change, perhaps this “waterfall” signals that despite Bla-Bla’s death, Macunaima is not done recreating himself.

Chofy also experiences a new awareness upon his return to the Rupununi, “From a distance, the affair with Rosa began to seem like a sort of bewitchment, something unreal” (349). This is a kind of reversal from his earlier suppressing of his own beliefs, so that the rationalism that Rosa represents signals the “bewitchment,” not his own culture. Chofy’s second “transformation” is signalled when Rosa comes down with a fever that leaves her “drenched with sweat” (331) and Chofy sees her lying in bed with a mosquito net surrounding her, “He thought it was like looking at her through a waterfall” (334).

Wifreda echoes Chofy's inward-looking sentiment when, three weeks after Bla-Bla's death, she burns the contents of Father Napier's trunk which he carried with him throughout his evangelizing mission and "which contained his bible, the baptismal records of the newly converted and his own diaries" (154). In doing so, she eclipses his "native script" and the way in which he interpreted Amerindians through Christian morality. This action serves as the final event in "Chico's" realist narrative, before he again emerges as the narrator. Thus, this ending suggests a return to the tribe, withdrawal from the nation, from internationalism. Chofy returns to the Rupununi, leaving behind Rosa, the city and cultural mixing for the homogeneity of his home. However, he cannot escape the fact that he is of mixed racial origin.

#### Imagining Cosmopolitan Indigeneity

When Chico re-emerges after 300 pages of camouflaging his voice as the realist narrator, he reveals that, unlike Mário de Andrade's rendering of Macunaima, who refuses to go to Europe, protesting, "I'm an American, and my place is here in America. Without a doubt, European civilization would play havoc with our unspoiled nature" (Macunaima 108), he has traveled outside his Amazonian home and "through Europe in search of the parrot who was supposed to be my heart" (354).<sup>47</sup> But what he finds are not the answers to the endo/exogamy debate but that this debate can be found among non-indigenous Europeans as well. Chico explains that the "havoc" that European civilization had on him:

I nearly became fatally infected by the epidemic of separatism that was raging there. The virus transmutes. Sometimes it appears as nationalism,

sometimes as racism, sometimes as religious orthodoxy. . . It was very infectious. . . Chameleon-like I marched amongst them. The Serbs, the Scots, the English, the Basques, the Muslims, the Chechens--everybody was at it. . . I saw the desire to be with your own kind exerts a powerful attraction. . . In an effort to rid myself of the affliction, I used my ventriloquial gifts to reproduce the voice of a dissenting heckler . . . I succumbed. Suddenly, I longed for the golden savannahs and the streaming sunshine. . . Back in my village I debated seriously with myself the appeal of staying with your own kind rather than mixing on equal terms. . .(355-356)

It is interesting to read this passage alongside Zita Nunes' reading of Andrade's narrative as a discourse signifying the sickness brought on to the body politic by miscegenation. Chico utilizes a kind of discourse of disease-- "infected," "epidemic," "virus"-- to signal that it is separatism, not mixing, which is the sickness. Furthermore, it is in Europe, not at home, that Chico encounters some of the most debilitating forms of tribalism. Unable to reconcile the question of tribalism versus cosmopolitanism, Chico explains that he "succumbed" and returned back to the savannahs "to my own people" (356). Yet even as he returns to his home, home is no longer (and it's doubtful that it ever was) hermetically sealed off from the rest of the world, symbolized by the arrival of the "notorious Cosmetics Queen, the tycoon who frequently drops in on my village searching for recipes from indigenous people" and "asked [his grandmother] what traditional recipe she used to keep [her hair] shiny" (356). The indigenous world continues to be mined by the forces

of global capitalism.

Chico decides to return to his constellation in the sky, the only place where he is ever “fixed” as a “native,” but not before teasing the reader by saying that he will reveal the secret of his name “It is Macun . . . No. I’ve changed my mind. But yes. I will tell you the story of the parrot. Another time” (357). Chico does not reveal his secret, signaling yet another kind of deferral. In doing so, Melville removes from the native script its “aura,” which Rey Chow defines as “‘that historical specificity’ which makes it unique to a particular place at a particular time” (45).<sup>48</sup> As a ventriloquist who merely repeats a story, he does not run the risk of again reproducing the native as an object for consumption. In other words, it does not matter which version of the Macunaima myth we are told--Macusi, Wai-Wai, Wapisiana. First World readers’ desire to know the origins of the myth are merely another way of “fixing” indigenous identity. As Chow argues, “The hasty supply of original ‘contexts’ and ‘specificities’ easily becomes complicitous with the dominant discourse, which achieves hegemony precisely by its capacity to convert, recode, make transparent, and thus represent even those experiences that resist it with stubborn opacity” (38). If instead Macunaima continues to be endlessly deferred and reinscribed, he, as the “native,” can never be sufficiently translated. And this suggests another reason that Chico withholds the meaning of his name, he does not want to repeat Chofy’s error. Thus, while the epilogue leaves us in a postmodern narrative moment, Chico’s hesitance at revealing his name suggests that the epilogue cannot erase or allow us to forget the violence that resulted from translation in the realist narrative.

This leaves First World readers to ponder what script we are left with, especially

if the mistranslation of one word could lead to death? In the end, the multiple reinventions of Macunaima is not about the translation of myths, but the untranslatability of language. The realist narrative reduces the impossibility of translation to the most basic level; language becomes more and more minimal so that the mistranslation of one word leads to death and reveals the crucial role of the native informant. One of the questions that we must ask as readers in the First World is what is being mistranslated as we speak, especially in this moment of globalization? Will it (or, has it already) lead to cultural deaths?

Thus, unlike Mario de Andrade's Macunaima which invents the native informant for the purpose of reproducing a national narrative, Melville's rendering of Macunaima looks beyond national borders and through its ambiguity speaks to the quandary of contemporary indigenous communities worldwide who search for the best approach for survival--to remain separate with their own people--or move beyond their communities to participate more fully in global capitalism and racial mixing?

#### IV. Conclusion to Chapter 1:

This study of local formations in Caribbean novels has yielded many complicated nuances on the configuration of nativism. In the case of No Telephone to Heaven, we see that negotiating how the Caribbean "native" place is constructed and who is a "native" takes on added significance with revolutionary movements as well as the increasing number of people migrating out of the Caribbean for economic, political and educational reasons. Texaco demonstrates that there is a need for local constructions from within to counter the the metropole's attempts to erase and/or concretize a local "native" culture. And finally, The Ventriloquist's Tale, by telling a postmodern indigenous story,

demonstrates a nativism that is ever-changing.

While in this chapter I have explored the way in which Caribbean literature constructs and critiques local formations of the “native” Caribbean, in the next chapter I will explore the “rites of passage” that are reflected in U.S. Caribbean literature which focuses on the perilous journeys of Haitian and Cuban migrants out of their native homelands into the precarious danger of the high seas with the hope of arrival in the United States. In particular, I explore how these events are represented in literature and the implications for testimonio.

## Chapter 2: “Rites/Rights of Passage: Haitian and Cuban Migration Narratives”

Unlike the Cubans who came to the United States after 1959 to flee a Communist government unfriendly to the United States, the Haitians came from a government friendly to this nation. Thus, the dilemma: if the United States welcomed Haitian refugees on political grounds, it would have verified Duvalier’s brutal repression of his people, a favorite U.S. charge against Castro. . . The double-standard was most evident during the Mariel boatlift of 1980, when 125,000 Cubans were welcomed to the United States with ‘open hearts and open arms,’ while an estimated 25,000 Haitians, who came into south Florida during the same period and in similar fashion, were denied asylum and threatened with deportation.

Felix Masud Piloto, From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants <sup>49</sup>

Gunther O. Wagner, who headed three INS survey missions, decided that most asylum claims made by Haitians were lies. ‘I feel that 95 to 97 percent of the people obviously have had no problems, and therefore would not be eligible for asylum,’ he recalled telling an asylum officer working at Guantanamo. ‘It is my opinion that most of these cases are fraudulent cases. . . ‘ (emphasis added, Wagner’s quotes are taken from a Deposition given on May 5, 1992, in Washington D.C.)

National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, Half the Story: The Skewed U.S. Monitoring of Repatriated Haitian Refugees

In chapter one I addressed the construction of native Caribbean spaces through the ambiguous testimonials of fictional native informants. In this chapter I continue my exploration of textual trespassing by analyzing narratives that represent Haitian and Cuban experiences of migration. I juxtapose these two groups in particular to highlight the way that testimony functions differently for Haitians and Cubans-- as evidenced in human rights documents which demonstrate that Haitian testimonials are rarely deemed “convincing” enough by U.S. authorities to grant political asylum. The fictional texts I analyze include: Edwidge Danticat’s collection of short stories, Krik? Krak!; Nikòl Payen’s essay “Something in the Water”; Cristina Garcia’s Dreaming in Cuban, and

Ivonne Lamazares' The Sugar Island. These narratives trespass in terms of language, in that the texts I explore are written primarily in English, not Spanish, French or Kreyol. Additionally, the texts I analyze were written from locations in the United States, not the native "home" spaces of Cuba or Haiti, however, they each also serve as texts which move between both native and U.S. spaces, shuttling between the categories of Caribbean literature and U.S. ethnic literature. For these writers, there is a constant negotiation with the local, home space, even as their characters migrate. Often, the native space and the space of migration are rendered through powerful corporeal metaphors of maternity and birth. I will explore how these "transitional texts" gender the issues of political upheaval and revolution in the "home" place and how they negotiate with their new diasporan and/or "American" identities.

Much has been written about the role of migration in Caribbean literature. For writers coming out of the anglophone Caribbean in the 1950s it was necessary to emigrate to England in order to gain exposure to the literary world outside of the region. Male writers such as George Lamming, Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul and C.L.R. James are well known for their evocations of Caribbean exile. For example, in his collection of essays, The Pleasures of Exile, George Lamming writes of the particular necessity of (male) Caribbean writers to go to England to further their literary careers ("An Occasion for Speaking"). West Indian migration to England was in some ways a legitimate migration with migrants, at the time of pre-independence, already having access to England through the possession of a British passport. Of course, this passport did not protect Caribbean emigrants from racial and economic discrimination in England. Migration from the Caribbean to the U.S. has a much shorter history than migration to

England and a much more recent literary connection--with the majority of Caribbean rooted texts being written by women. I focus specifically on literature that reflects the experiences of unsanctioned migrations from Haiti and Cuba, particularly by boat (or makeshift rafts)--as opposed to migrations that take place by more stable means.

Migration by boat or raft poses specific issues for geographic and cultural “trespassing” as boat people or *balseros* attempt to cross illegally into the U.S. by water. In most cases, it is the construction of stories/testimonies of their native places which becomes their passport for entry into the U.S. These migrants encounter obstacles that hinder their access to U.S. society in the form of Coast Guard cutter, INS officials and detention centers.

It is fruitful to compare Haitian and Cuban migration because of their proximity to each other and the United States. Cuba is just 90 miles off the coast of Florida while Haiti is approximately 620 (Lawless)<sup>50</sup>. In fact, it is not uncommon for Haitian refugee boats to stop over in Cuba before continuing on with the harrowing journey to the United States. Furthermore, both nations have experienced tremendous economic and political hardships over the last few decades that have impelled their citizens to attempt to migrate to the United States. And as I will discuss below, these economic and political situations are inextricably linked to the extensive history of United States military, political and economic involvement in both nations.

The question of testimony, of testifying to the native place, raises the issue of health and sickness for migrants seeking political asylum, who must construct their homelands as hostile places, sick with repression and corruption. Disease is a powerful metaphor because it is seen as crossing borders surreptitiously--it trespasses. For Cubans,

this construction of the native space as contaminated has been relatively easy because of the way that U.S. official discourse has constructed communism as a disease to be contained the world over. Typically, Cubans who emigrate to the United States are seen as victims of a brutal communist dictatorship, but as I will discuss below, Haitians have historically not been seen in the same light.

Haitian themselves have been constructed as “diseased” in U.S. public discourse and this image becomes even more deleterious when connected to race. I explore the ways that the U.S. government’s rejection of Haitian claims for asylum marks an attempt to “contain” the threat of “contamination” that Haitian bodies symbolize to the United States. I juxtapose this with Cubans who have traditionally been granted asylum as part of the U.S. policy of communist “containment”.

I begin my textual analysis by exploring Edwidge Danticat’s collection of short-stories, Krik? Krak! which represent Haitian life under the Duvalier regime and the Haitian diaspora in New York City. The first story in the collection, “Children of the Sea” begins with a group of Haitians fleeing persecution in Haiti in a small, leaky boat on the open seas. Several of the stories that follow take place in Haiti, representing specifically the experiences of poor women and their children. The last stories in the collection serve to continue the migration begun in “Children of the Sea” by representing the experiences of women in the Haitian diaspora (dyaspora) in New York.

I compare Danticat’s fiction with fellow Haitian-American writer, Nikòl Payen, whose fictional essay, “Something in the Water . . . Reflections on a People’s Journey” narrates the author’s experiences as a Kreyòl/English interpreter working for the U.S. Department of Justice at the detention center for Haitian migrants at the U.S. military

base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This story is significant for my exploration of testimony and “native informants” as it brings together the legal, literary and confessional aspects of testimony.

Moving on to Cuban migration narratives, I explore how Cristina Garcia’s novel Dreaming in Cuban uses a poetics of disease to explore the del Pino family, which is divided by geography and politics. One part of the family remains in Castro’s Cuba, clinging to the hope of the revolution, while another generation abandons communism for capitalist endeavors in New York. While technically not a “balsero” (boat person) narrative, I have included it because of its retelling of the mass exodus of the Mariel boat lift. The novel reveals important issues around testimonio and matrilineal history.

Finally, I end this chapter with an analysis of Ivonne Lamazares’s novel The Sugar Island which tells the story of a mother and daughter who flee to the U.S. in a makeshift raft and their reception by the Cuban American community in Miami, Florida. Lamazares’s and Payen’s texts each raise important questions for *testimonio* and the position of “native informants”.

#### Haiti/U.S. Historical Connections

A highly publicized example of fleeing the Caribbean by boat was the case of Elian Gonzalez. Yet, while the story of Elian became a media feeding-frenzy, little, if any attention was given to the fate of Haitians who were also fleeing Haiti on boats bound for Miami. For example, the story of Sophonie Telcy, a Haitian-born 6 year-old whose mother died a few months after arriving with her daughter in Miami and whose fate was as undetermined as Elian’s, did not garner the same attention (Boston Globe, April 18 2000). Why was there such a discrepancy? One reason can be found in the

historically contentious relationship between the United States and Haiti. Indeed it was not until 1865 that the United States officially acknowledged the first black republic that was formed in 1804 after the Haitian Revolution despite the fact that “The first refugees who turned up on the shores of the United States were French families fleeing the violence of the Haitian war of Independence at the end of the eighteenth-century” (J. Michael Dash, Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination 136).

The history of U.S. intervention into Haitian politics and its economy--which goes back to the first U.S. Occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934, continued with the election of Francois Duvalier “Papa Doc” in 1957, and throughout his oppressive rule, including the transition to his son, Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier. In fact, the Duvalier regime was seen as an asset to the United States in its campaign against a communist Cuba: “During the Cuban missile crisis, Duvalier offered Haiti’s harbors to the United States and provided the crucial vote to expel Cuba from the Organization of American States” (Ramón Grosfoguel, “Migration and Geopolitics in the Caribbean” 233). Robert Lawless writes that Jean-Claude Duvalier “brought Haiti into close economic tutelage by the United States government, a relationship featuring private investments from the United States that would be wooed by such incentives as no custom taxes, a low minimum wage, the suppression of labor unions, and the rights of U.S. companies to repatriate their profits from their off-shore plants” (Haiti’s Bad Press xxi).

In reaction to Duvalier’s oppressive regime, Haitian migration by boat began in 1963, when twenty-five Haitians arrived in Florida seeking political asylum, but were denied and sent back to Haiti. In 1972: “Poorer Haitians who could not afford exit visas

or air fares but could, by selling their possessions or land, raise the amount charged by boat captains for the 700-mile trip to Florida began leaving in large numbers--the 'boat people' phenomenon was born" (Libète: A Haiti Anthology 180).<sup>51</sup> 1972 also marked when the first detention centers were established and as Michael Dash argues these facilities were "a dramatic reaction to fear of contamination by the unknown and unspeakable" (Haiti and the United States: National Stereotypes and the Literary Imagination 132). While Haitians had also typically emigrated to their neighbor on the island of Hispaniola: the Dominican Republic, or to the Bahamas, there was a shift after 1977 when these nations "became increasingly difficult to enter" and Haitians began migrating more often to the United States (Lawless, 6). Lawless explains that these Haitian migrants had "rather different socioeconomic characteristics than pre-1977 migrants. The earlier immigrants usually traveled legally on temporary visas and arrived by plane. They had access to funds and came from urban families. In contrast to this earlier group, [boat people] . . . were poorer, more rural, and of course arrived without any legal documents" (6). It is estimated that between 50,000 to 70,000 Haitian boat people arrived in Miami between 1977 and 1981, yet instead of being granted refugee status, most were placed in detention centers and eventually deported (Grosfoguel 234)<sup>52</sup>. It is also important to note that this mass exclusion of Haitians occurred at virtually the same time as the Mariel boat lift (1980) which brought nearly 125,000 Cubans to the United States to stay<sup>53</sup>.

Discrimination against Haitian refugees in the United States piqued with the Centers for Disease Control's 1982 decision to place Haitians on the list of those people at "high risk" for contracting AIDS, known as the "4 h's: hemophiliacs, homosexuals,

hypodermic needle-users and Haitians” (Paul Farmer, AIDS and Accusation). This decision comes after a long history in the United States of seeing Haiti and Haitians as “diseased” as Michael Dash points out in his characterization of the relationship between Haiti and the United States in terms of “health” and “sickness”: “Images of the rebellious body, the repulsive body, the seductive body and the sick body constitute a discourse that has fixed Haiti in the Western imagination: the ‘Haitianizing’ of Haiti as unredeemably deviant” (137).<sup>54</sup> Implicit in this notion of Haitian “deviance” is race in that Haitians are predominantly black (going back to the composition of St. Dominigue which in 1789 had a slave population of 500,000, a freedman population of 28,000 and a white population of 40,000--Lawless, 35). Thus, while Cubans typically are seen as “Latino” light-skinned (even though some of the more recent Cuban immigrants have been Afro-Cuban) refugees, Haitians are seen as black migrants. Dash delineates the discursive association of blackness with deviance by U.S. writers citing numerous examples including the accounts of former Marines, which sought to justify the U.S. Occupation such as, John Houston Craige’s Cannibal Cousins (1934) and Black Baghdad (1933) and Faustin Wirkus’ The White King of La Gonave (1931).<sup>55</sup>

### Disembodied Motherland

In the epilogue of Edwidge Danticat’s collection of short stories Krik? Krak!, the narrator positions herself as a witness, whose writings provide a “testament to the way that these women lived and died and lived again” (224). Krik? Krak! consists of a collection of Haitian women’s stories amidst a backdrop of Haitian and Haitian-American experience. She speaks for the women to show that “women like you do speak, even if they speak in a tongue that is hard to understand. Even if it’s patois,

dialect, Creole” (222). It is in this position as a witness that the collection of stories serve a *testimonio* function as they narrate the experiences of those Haitians who are most easily forgotten--boat person, prostitute, maid, immigrant. While I do not have time to explore all of the stories, I have chosen to focus on four of them in order to trace the way in which they represent Haitian experiences of migration. The first story in the collection, “Children of the Sea,” tells the story of a group of Haitians fleeing the brutal Duvalier regime in Haiti, by setting out on a boat on the open sea, hoping to reach the United States and a new chance at life. This story begins the textual transition from Haiti to the United States that culminates in the final story of the collection, “Caroline’s Wedding,” which focuses on the trans-generational experiences of Haitian immigrants in Brooklyn, New York. Yet, I also pause to explore two stories from the middle of the collection, “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” and “The Missing Peace” for the ways in which they represent migration from country to city in Haiti and the immigrant’s return from the U.S. to Haiti. Each of the stories stands on its own, but when read in conjunction with the other stories, one begins to find similar threads running through each of them--a kind of textual trespassing. It is especially the idea of Haitian women’s heritage that has been passed on orally that links these stories together through the representation of various migration experiences as the same female names are repeated through the stories--sometimes in the form of a character’s name, other times as a kind of mantra repeated by female characters. Joan Dayan explains the way that narratives can serve ritual purposes, stating, “The more a detail, scene, or theme is repeated, the more of its meaning is established” (Haiti, History and the Gods xv). Danticat connects her role as a writer to ritual through hair-braiding as a metaphor for weaving together strands of

stories:

When you write, it's like braiding your hair. Taking a handful of coarse unruly strands and attempting to bring them unity. Your fingers have still not perfected the task. Some of the braids are long, others are short. Some are thick, others are thin. Some are heavy. Others are light. Like the diverse women in your family. Those whose fables and metaphors, whose similes, and soliloquies, whose diction and *je ne sais quoi* daily slip into your survival soup, by way of their fingers. (220)

Carole Boyce Davies refers to braiding as a “non-scribal way of storytelling” (Black Women, Writing and Identity 147), thus Danticat’s invocation of the braiding metaphor serves to link her role as a writer with the traditional oral storytelling of Haitian women, whom she refers to as “kitchen poets” (222).

In an essay titled “AHA!,” Danticat describes the position of Haitians who leave Haiti:

In Haiti, people like me are called diaspora, meaning we are members of our country’s Diaspora. We can also belong to something that is called the Tenth Department. Haiti has nine geographic departments, which are actual entities. The tenth department is not concrete land. It is not a specific place, but an idea to which Haitians can belong, no matter where we are in the world. We of the Haitian diaspora maintain a very long

umbilical cord with our homeland. People who live in the United States for twenty-five years still want to return to Haiti and run for government office. (emphasis added, 42)

Danticat's notion of a "diasporan tenth department" is a useful metaphor for conceptualizing the space in-between the native home space and the United States--both psychologically and geographically.<sup>56</sup> The umbilical chord becomes a significant metaphor for imagining the imbrications of maternity, migration and nation--and for understanding the various types of relationships of diasporans to Haiti--sometimes Haiti is the nostalgic motherland, at other times it is a space that brutally expels its inhabitants.

Each of these stories recalls the notion of "obscene visibility, of a deviant physicality" that "have haunted Haiti and Haitians since the early 1960s" that Michael Dash argues has become part of a Haitian literary aesthetic (Dash 118). In Krik? Krak! however, this "obscene visibility" and "deviant physicality" becomes linked to maternal bodies that give birth to dead or malformed babies, babies that cannot be nourished or kept alive by the mother. These representations signal a deeply-embedded ontological anxiety. Specifically, in each of these stories the prenatal as well as postnatal mother-child relationship has been corrupted in some way. In "Children of the Sea" the bonds between mothers and their children are represented as being desecrated from violence as symbolized by the mothers who are forced by soldiers to sleep with their sons, a mother who carries the decapitated head of her son as her evidence of his death at the hands of the Macoutes, and Celianne, a fifteen-year old refugee who is pregnant after having been gang-raped by Macoutes. In "Between the Pool and Gardenias" Marie's body refuses to

bear children and she, in her desire to nurture something, constructs a maternal relationship with a dead baby that she picks up off the street in Port-au-Prince. “The Missing Peace” traces Lamort, whose mother died giving birth to her. She encounters a female journalist, Emilie, who is searching for her own mother who had gone missing after the military coup ousting Aristide. Emilie, who holds an American passport, suspects that her mother is buried in the mass grave near Lamort’s home in the country. Finally, in “Caroline’s Wedding,” Caroline is her parents’ “child of the promised land, our New York child, the child who has never known Haiti” while her sister, Grace was her parents’ “misery baby,” born during her parents’ “lean years” in Haiti (189). Yet, Caroline was born missing a forearm which serves as a symbolic representation of the Azile family’s migration to Brooklyn. Danticat’s linking of “obscene visibility” with representations of mother-child relationships signals questions of blood ties and heritage amidst violence and one’s link to the homeland when one becomes a citizen of a new country.

### Diaspora

Letter-and journal-writing figure prominently as a narrative device in “Children of the Sea” and as such serves the testimonial function of the story. In the story, a young couple who have been separated record their experiences through writing--the young man writing in his journal from the boat bound for America, while his girlfriend writes to him from Haiti, where she remains. That we are not told their names suggests that their narratives are not just individual stories, but represent all of those undocumented Haitian experiences. Writing serves as a ritual which inscribes both of the characters subjectivities as well as testifies to their experiences of state-sponsored violence in Haiti

and the miserable existence on the boat. The young man has fled Haiti in order to avoid certain death at the hand of the Tonton Macoutes, for his participation in a politically dissident youth radio program. Yet, the narrator worries that he will not make it to America, that his testimony will be lost in the ocean: “I dream that the winds come of the sky and claim us for the sea. We go under and no one hears from us again” (6).

There is also a dis-ease that comes from being black migrants as the narrator explains that “the faces around me are showing their first charcoal layer of sunburn. ‘Now we will never be mistaken for Cubans,’ one man said” (8) and instead of passing into the realm of American identity, the narrator explains that “I am finally an African” because of the darkening of his skin by the sun (11) and that “I feel like we are sailing for Africa” (14). Skin tone becomes a marker which seems to steer the course of the boat so that instead of sailing to the United States, a place where black migrants are not welcomed; Africa is imagined as the only place in which they could imagine being “home”. The narrator explains that one man

was once on a boat with a group of Cubans. His boat had stopped to pick up the Cubans on an island off the Bahamas. When the Coast Guard came for them, they took the Cubans to Miami and sent him back to Haiti. Now he was back on the boat with some papers and documents to show that the police in Haiti were after him. (8)

The female narrator in the story writes “haiti est comme tu l’a laisse. yes, just the way you left it. bullets day and night” (4), indicating the reasons why the refugees could

no longer remain in their homeland. Her sections of the narrative serve as testimony to the ongoing oppression in Haiti as she describes the brutal violence of the Tonton Macoutes (12, 14-15). She recounts how her neighbor, Madan Roger, inconsolable with grief, wanders the streets carrying her son's decapitated head as evidence that he was murdered by Macoutes. This obscene visibility serves as her only testament to her son's death, but because of it she was beaten to death by the Macoutes while the girl's father kept her and her mother hidden: "you can hear madan roger screaming, they are beating her, pounding on her until you don't hear anything else" (17).

For the people on the boat, the notion of home has been disrupted. When they sing of Haiti, "Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you. I had to leave you before I could understand you" Haiti, as a homeland is already out of reach or perhaps gone forever. The space on the open sea in a flimsy boat evokes a kind of rootlessness as the male narrator describes, "I don't know how long we'll be at sea. There are thirty-six other deserting souls on this little boat with me." The sea serves as a space in-between their homeland and their new home, so that they are suspended in limbo between "homes".<sup>57</sup>

Obscene visibility is prominently displayed as the marker of the refugee boat as "White sheets with bright red spots float as our sail"(3). The bloodied sheets signal a loss of innocence that resonates with the group as their journey becomes more and more precarious. The "virgin" sails also become a symbol of the pregnant 15-year old on board, Celianne, whose horrific story of being gang-raped by Ton Ton Macoutes haunts the narrator's journal entries. We eventually learn that Celianne fled Haiti once she learned that she was pregnant by the rape. Her presence on the boat represents the contentious relationship between the refugees and their native homeland. Celianne's

baby, instead of symbolizing innocence and rebirth, is born dead. The baby's silence serves as a kind of mute testimony of what is to come for the refugees. It stands in stark contrast to Celianne's repeated testimony:

She keeps repeating the story now with her eyes closed, her lips barely moving. She was home one night with her mother and brother Lionel when some ten or twelve soldiers burst into the house. The soldiers held a gun to Lionel's head and ordered him to lie down and become intimate with his mother. Lionel refused. Their mother told him to go ahead and obey the soldiers because she was afraid that they would kill Lionel on the spot if he put up more of a fight. Lionel did as his mother told him, crying as the soldiers laughed at him, pressing the gun barrels farther and farther into his neck. Afterwards, the soldiers tied up Lionel and their mother, then each took turns raping Célianne. . . That same night, Célianne cut her face with a razor so that no one would know who she was. Then as facial scars were healing, she started throwing up and getting rashes. Next thing she knew, she was getting big. She found out about the boat and got on. She is fifteen. (23-24)

Celianne's testimony is related by the journal's narrator, but her continuous repetition of the story signals a repetition of the trauma that she endured without the kind of psychological transformation that testifying can sometimes produce, especially since she tells her story to other Haitians--none of whom ever makes it to U.S. shores to repeat her

story. Célianne's self-inflicted scars represent her attempt to obliterate her own identity but also to reclaim her own body after it had repeatedly been possessed by soldiers. By altering her face, she inscribes her identity with her own mark in an attempt to overwrite the inscriptions of rape and the phallic power of the Macoutes and thus, offer her own corporeal testimony. But Celianne's own inscription is overwritten by the mark of pregnancy, which, as we know, is not always indelible, for she might have aborted the foetus, but there still would have been an internal (psychological and physical) "trace" of the pregnancy. By instead fleeing with her pregnancy intact, her body serves as a reminder of the rape to herself and others--a body whose growth through pregnancy serves as a kind of diseased "growth" or tumor. Despite one fellow refugee's remark that "at least [the baby] will have its mother's breasts"(18), Celianne does not symbolize a nourishing maternity, in contrast, the narrator has "never seen her eat" (10).

There is a paralleling of Celianne's water breaking and the influx of water on the boat through its multiplying cracks. When she goes into labor, "The captain asks the midwife to keep Celianne steady so that she will not rock any more holes into the boat" (18). This juxtaposition of the slowly sinking refugee boat and Celianne's delivery is foreshadowed earlier when the narrator describes how "She woke up screaming the other night . . . Some water started coming into the boat in the spot where she was sleeping" (10). Such a paralleling of birth and the leaky boat has several implications: the boundaries of the boat and of woman are crossed simultaneously, the sea is thus configured as a kind of womb, so that when Celianne gives birth to a dead baby girl, who never cries, it foreshadows the way in which the Haitians on the boat, instead of given the chance at a new life, a rebirth (in a new country), drown in the "womb" of the sea. This

sea-as-womb is represented by the dream that the narrator recounts in which he imagines himself “at the bottom of the sea. . . You were there with me too, at the bottom of the sea. . . I tried to talk to you, but every time I opened my mouth, water bubbles came out. No sounds” (12). Just as Celianne’s baby does not cry so does the narrator imagine that he has no voice.

This imagined voicelessness signals the narrator’s anxiety that he will soon have to throw his notebook overboard in order to make the boat lighter (20). Yet, Celianne’s child is the true “dead weight,” the tumor that needs to be extracted from the boat, but the narrator remarks that “Celianne’s fingernails are buried deep in the child’s naked back” (25) and “She just cannot seem to let herself throw it in the ocean” (23). When Celianne finally does throw the baby overboard she immediately jumps in after it “and just as the baby’s head sank, so did hers” (26). Shortly after this, the narrator is forced to throw his notebook out. He explains, “It goes down to them, Celianne and her daughter and all those children of the sea who might soon be claiming me” (27). This act is symbolic as it signifies the way in which the refugees stories will not be transcribed for posterity. The narrator writes, “I can’t tell exactly where we are from [America]. We might be barely out of our own shores. There are no borderlines on the sea. The whole thing looks like one. I cannot even tell if we are about to drop off the face of the earth” (6). These passages suggest that there is no way to geographically “mark” or historically “remember” this kind of migrant’s passage--especially since the male narrator is forced to throw his notebook into the sea. There is a paralleling between Celianne’s inability give birth to a living child and the narrator’s inability to bring his story, his testimony to fruition. Once his notebook is gone, his and his fellow refugees’ existences are erased.

The lack of definitive boundaries on the sea becomes a kind of metaphor for the indeterminate identities of “diaspora”. Danticat describes “diaspora” as “the floating homeland, the ideological one, which joins all Haitians living in the diaspora” (“Introduction” xiv). The story’s unresolved ending leaves readers to ponder when does one “become” an American? For how long does one remain Haitian? Is citizenship of one country or another determined by the official governmental recognition of that country? Where are the testimonies of those refugees who never it make it to the shores of their “new” country? The fact that this story ends in limbo on the open-sea suggests a link between the precarious position of black refugees and the middle-passage.

### Abject Maternity

The focus for “Between the Pool and Gardenias” shifts the reader back to Haiti where a baby is lying on the curb of a Port-au-Prince street: “wrapped in a small pink blanket; a few inches away from a sewer as open as a hungry child’s yawn” (91). Barely nine pages in length, this story explores the position of both a woman and a baby discarded from society. The protagonist, Marie, has come from her village in the country after having several miscarriages, leaving behind her husband, who has “ten different babies with ten different women” (96). Marie describes how Rose “looked the way that I had imagined all my little girls would look. The ones my body could never hold. The ones that somehow got suffocated inside me and made my husband wonder if I was killing them on purpose” (92). Plagued with a body that is unable to sustain life, Marie cannot live up to patriarchal expectations of women as biologically reproducing mothers. Serving as a kind of reversal of Celianne’s pregnant body which serves as her sole testimony, Marie’s body, because it cannot reproduce, cannot establish her subjectivity as

“woman”. While fertile women are often claimed as symbols of strong nationhood, Marie’s body could, in this sense, only symbolize a nation that cannot sustain life. More specifically, Marie’s barren body does not adequately represent the rural countryside, which she explains is a place where fertility is organically connected to the land: “you cannot even throw out the bloody clumps that shoot out of your body after your child is born . . . You have to save every piece of flesh and give it a name and bury it near the roots of a tree so that the world won’t fall apart around you” (93). This corporeal connection to the land is lost in the environment of the city. It is in the context of urban decay that Marie associates Rose’s abandonment with the city, explaining, “When I had just come to the city, I saw on Madame’s television that a lot of poor city women throw out their babies because they can’t afford to feed them” (92). Thus, Rose represents the alienation of the city as a place where women specifically are in the precarious position of being unable to care for their children.

As the story continues, it becomes clear that Marie is nurturing a dead child as the body begins to decay and Marie futilely attempts to care for her: “I had to bathe her constantly to keep down the smell” (97) and “I watched her skin grow moist, cracked, and sunken in some places then ashy and dry in others” (98). Nurturing this child becomes an exercise in abjection. In her book The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism, Rey Chow links French philosopher Julia Kristeva’s theory of the abject to the ethnically marginalized: “the often culturally tabooed condition of an excessive, rejected being that nonetheless remains a challenge to the body that expels it” (148). If we read Rose as an excess which is expelled by her society, her presence in the text challenges that same society’s attempt to obliterate her. Kristeva argues,

What is abject, . . . the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me toward the place where meaning collapses. . . . And yet, from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master. . . .

. . . Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.

It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (qtd. in Chow 148)

When Marie finally decides to bury Rose, she does so lovingly--bathing and dressing the baby in a dress she had made for her own children (98). If we recall the “un-burials” of Mavis and Christopher’s grandmother in No Telephone to Heaven, Marie’s attempt to bury Rose signifies an attempt to give the baby a subjectivity that would otherwise “rot away” had she left the decaying abandoned corpse in the street where she found her. Yet as she is burying her, the Dominican groundskeeper catches her, thinking that she has killed the child, and restrains her until the authorities arrive. The story ends with Marie’s imagining that she has finally become part of a “family,” but it is a distorted, malformed family: “Over her little corpse, we stood, a country maid and a Spaniard grounds man . . . We made a pretty picture standing there. Rose, me and him” (100). It is a final attempt to create a subjectivity for herself that has thus far eluded her. For Marie, Rose serves to temporarily restore an order to her life by allowing her to

become a “mother”. At the same time Rose’s presence “disturbs the order” the society that has expelled her.

### The Missing Peace

“The Missing Peace” continues to explore the issues of maternal bonds, violence and testimony, which were raised in “Children of the Sea”. This story, set in the rural village of Ville Rose, raises questions about who will record the violent history of the military coup which slaughtered thousands of Haitians, particularly those whose bodies were never found? There are echoes of the character of Marie from “Between the Pool and Gardenias,” in “The Missing Peace”. The story tells of Lamort, a fourteen-year old girl, who lives in Ville Rose (also the village where Marie is from) with her grandmother, who gave her a name which means “death” after her mother died giving birth to her. Lamort explains that her mother’s name was “Marie Magdalene” and since this story immediately follows “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” we are left to wonder whether or not Lamort’s mother is somehow connected to Marie from that story. Furthermore, Lamort’s name resonates with the dead children of Celianne and Marie and recalls the abjection that those beings symbolize. That this young woman is so named would seem to suggest a kind of futility--that her voice will never be heard, she will never give life to her story.

Whereas “Between the Pool and the Gardenias” represents a woman’s migration from rural to urban environment, “The Missing Peace” represents the reverse migration of Emilie Gallant, who returns from the United States to Ville Rose in search of her mother, a journalist from Port-au-Prince who is missing after coming to the region to report on the military coup that has swept the country. Her apparent death leaves a

silence where her voice would have testified to the violence of the coup.

Lamort takes Emilie to the mass grave near her home where unknown and unclaimed victims of the army's massacres are buried. Emilie's mother's missing body becomes a metonym for the many anonymous corpses buried there by the army. When Emilie asks Lamort about shootings during the coup, Lamort responds, "There were no bodies . . . That is to say no funerals" (112). Again, without proper acknowledgement of their deaths or material "proof," the subjectivities of the "bodies" are completely erased, which signifies the ultimate power that the army has over the people.

Out past the army's imposed curfew, the two women are already trespassing. They encounter a soldier, Toto, who, though he is the same age as Lamort, represents the violent masculinity of the army as he is equipped with a rifle and refuses to let them pass into the graveyard, despite Emilie's explanation that she is an American journalist and the presentation of her U.S. passport. While they are detained, Lamort and Emilie see soldiers "dragging the blood-soaked body of a bearded man with an old election slogan written on a t-shirt across his chest: ALONE WE ARE WEAK, TOGETHER WE ARE A FLOOD. The guards were carrying him feet first, like a breech birth" (117). Similar to the rendering of Celianne in "Children of the Sea," Danticat again parallels violent brutal death with difficult birth. When Emilie tries to see the body more closely, the guard demands, "Repeat after me. You see nothing" (117). Toto's attempt to erase the record of the brutal death is thwarted when Emilie refuses to repeat his command. Instead Lamort speaks for her "I see nothing" and when Emilie protests "How can that be nothing?" (118) Lamort repeats what she has been told is the password, "peace," but the password is ineffective. Toto finally lets the two women go only after Raymond, also a

soldier and a childhood friend of Lamort, vouches for the women and tells Lamort to “stop saying ‘peace’” because the password has changed. Yet, he does not say what the new password is, indicating that the two women will remain prohibited from access to the burial ground, as well as from the masculine power of the army.

Emilie and Lamort return to the house where Emilie is staying when they do not find Emilie’s mother’s body. The mother’s missing body evokes the “unburials” of Mavis and Christopher’s grandmother in Cliff’s No Telephone to Heaven. In lieu of burying her mother’s body, Emilie pieces together a quilt for her mother, made from scraps of fabric from different garments her mother wore. Remembering her mother’s heritage is enacted through the material piecing of a quilt. Furthermore, Emilie records the death of her mother by soldiers through the act of writing the names of Toto and Raymond on the back of a photograph of her mother and giving it to Lamort, telling her to “keep this for posterity” (122).

The story ends with Lamort returning to her grandmother’s home after spending the night with Emilie. Lamort attempts to memorialize her own mother when she tells her grandmother, “I want you to call me by her name. I want you to call me Marie Magdalene” (122). Naming establishes Lamort’s subjectivity which suggests that along with the photograph of Emilie’s mother, she will be able to offer a testimony of the atrocities.

### Rites of Passage

While Celianne’s pregnancy and the subsequent birth of her dead baby symbolize the violence inflicted upon Haitians by the brutal regime, the final story of Krik? Krak!, “Caroline’s Wedding,” also uses the mother-daughter corporeal connection to symbolize

the notion of “diaspora” to the adopted country and the native homeland. This story explores the tensions for those Haitians who do gain entry into the United States through the rites of passage of two sisters, Grace and Caroline Azile. Grace is becoming a U.S. citizen; Caroline is getting married. The story’s placement towards the end of the collection serves as a kind of fulfillment of the migration begun in “Children of the Sea,” the characters in “Caroline’s Wedding” serve as representative Haitians who do end up in the U.S. Yet, this too was not an entirely legitimate migration since Grace and Caroline’s father participates in a marriage of convenience, paying a woman to marry him, so that he could emigrate and later send for the rest of his family after divorcing the woman.

The story begins with the narrator, Grace Azile, at the Brooklyn courthouse where she has just received her naturalization papers. When she calls home to tell her mother, her mother urges her to immediately get her passport because “A passport is truly what’s American” (158). The passport represents the means to establish a “legitimate” subjectivity. Grace continues “In my family, we have always been very anxious about our papers” referring to her mother’s imprisonment after an INS raid of the sweatshop in which she was working. When Grace returns home, Ma celebrates the occasion by making bone soup, her ritual for celebrations and cures. Grace, is her parents’ “misery baby,” born to them when they were still living in Haiti, struggling so much to survive that Grace recalls, “When I was a baby, my mother worried that I would die from colic and hunger” (189). This image also recalls Rose, the “misery baby” of “Between the Pool and Gardenias,” so that Grace signifies the harsh life of Haiti. Caroline, is their “child of the promised land, [ . . . ] the child who has never known Haiti” (189). Yet, Caroline’s good fortune for having been born in the U.S. is tempered by the sacrifice that

she has also made: she was born missing a limb. Grace explains that her mother was pregnant when she was arrested in the sweatshop raid and “a prison doctor had given her a shot of a drug to keep her calm overnight. That shot, my mother believed, caused Caroline’s condition” (159). Even though Caroline is the “child of the promised land,” this passage reveals that a pregnant immigrant woman is just as vulnerable to precarious conditions in the United States as in Haiti. In fact, Grace remarks that Caroline was fortunate to have only been missing a limb, “She might not have been born at all” (159). In fact, while Ma recognizes the benefits that Grace will have now that she is a U.S. citizen, she is less pleased that Caroline, is “too” American, symbolized by the fact that she is not marrying a Haitian man (160). New “American” rituals like throwing a bridal shower and marrying a non-Haitian clash with Ma’s Haitian traditions. Ma relies on her traditional Haitian rituals, like making bone soup which she “believed . . . could cure all kinds of ill. She even hoped that it would perform the miracle of detaching Caroline from Eric, her Bahamian fiance” (159).

On the eve of her wedding, Caroline buys a prosthetic arm to wear to the ceremony, explaining to her mother and sister that “I often feel a shooting pain at the end of my left arm, always as though it was cut from me yesterday. The doctor said I have phantom limb pain [. . .] a kind of pain that people feel after they’ve had their arms or legs amputated. The doctor thought this would make it go away” (198-199). Despite the fact that Caroline’s forearm was never amputated, that she has pain signifying that she at one time did have a limb symbolizes her loss of cultural connection to Haiti. For example, when Caroline wonders why her mother bothers going to a memorial service for deceased Haitian “boat people” because “It’s not like she knows these people,” Grace

responds, “Ma says all Haitians know each other” (169). The false arm symbolizes the new connection that Caroline is making by marrying Eric, despite Ma’s protests that he is not Haitian. Thus, the false arm also serves also a metaphorical severing of Caroline’s ties solely to Haiti as homeland--even though these ties had already been more tenuous than those of either Grace or Ma. Furthermore, it is significant that she has this pain so close to her wedding, when she will be moving out of her mother’s home.

When she awakes on the morning of the wedding, Caroline feels so much pain in her arm that getting married seems “impossible” (200). Ma, who was against Caroline’s marriage all along, attempts to calm her daughter’s fears by preparing a healing bath. In fact, Ma says that she felt similarly ill on her own wedding day: “My limbs all went dead on my wedding day” (201). What results is a kind of ritual cleansing between mother and daughter--a rebirth where Ma prepares Caroline to leave the family and go off into the world: “Caroline groaned as Ma ran the leaves over her skin“ (201). The bath becomes a metonym for the amniotic fluid of childbirth. This ritual serves to disconnect Caroline from Ma in a way that Ma could not articulate verbally. Ma explains her resistance to Caroline’s marriage, stating that “She is my last child. There is still a piece of her inside of me” (162). The bath serves as a rebirth in which unresolved “pie(a)ce” inside Ma does not keep Caroline from moving forward in her life. It is yet another sacrifice that Ma must make for her children. When Caroline goes to marry Eric later that day at the courthouse, the judge teases them that the ceremony is “like a visit to get your vaccination . . . short and painless” (204). The juxtaposition of marriage with inoculation recalls the shot that Ma received when she was imprisoned and provides a powerful image for the change in ties that she and Caroline experience upon her marriage

to a non-Haitian.

Reminders of Haiti and of those Haitians who die en route to U.S. shores are everywhere. Grace accompanies her mother to a church service where “the priest . . . recited a list of a hundred twenty-nine names, Haitian refugees who had drowned at sea that week” (167). Presumably, these are the same Haitians on the boat in “Children of the Sea” who did not survive, especially since the priest says a special prayer for “A young woman who was pregnant when she took a boat from Haiti and then later gave birth to her child on that boat. A few hours after the child was born, its precious life went out, like a candle in a storm, and the mother with her infant in her arms dived into the sea” (167). The prayer service serves as a memorial to those who died at sea and a reminder to those who arrive safely the tremendous sacrifices of immigration: “During the Mass, Ma tightened a leather belt around her belly, the way some old Haitian women tightened rags around their middles when grieving“ (168). In fact, Ma has experienced her own sacrifices in immigrating. The attachment to her husband was irreversibly changed with his migration to the United States. She explains that upon receiving his letters, “I knew he had stopped thinking of me the same way” (212).

One of the last scenes in the story is Grace’s receipt of her U.S. passport in the mail. Thus, the narrative has followed not only the events of Caroline’s engagement and wedding, but of Grace’s becoming an “official” American citizen. She states: “For the first time in my life, I felt truly secure living in America. It was like being in a war zone and finally receiving a weapon of my own, like standing on the firing line and finally getting a bulletproof vest” (213). The language of warfare is telling because even though her family has left the violence of Haiti behind, Grace feels the need to protect herself

from the violence of her “new” country. And yet, she recognizes the sacrifices that come with her citizenship: “We had all paid dearly for this piece of paper, this final assurance that I belonged in the club. It had cost my parent’s marriage, my mother’s spirit, my sister’s arm” (214).

### Conclusion

By “braiding” these stories together, Danticat makes sure that the residue of violence is not easily forgotten. It lingers on from one story to the next, from mother to child, and from the spaces of Haiti on to the United States. The “peace” that is missing in Haiti becomes re-membered in migration through those “missing pieces” such as Caroline’s limb in the diasporan space and Ma’s bone soup. “Misery’s baby” recurs as a signifier from Celianne’s baby, to Marie’s “daughter” Rose cast aside on the streets of Port-au-Prince and finally lives on in Grace Azile in Brooklyn. Danticat compels us to remember that the “dyaspora” entails all of these experiences.

### No Trespassing: Haitian Boat People and the U.S. Government

Danticat validates Haitian stories that have been erased from official discourse. The need to endorse these stories becomes even more urgent when we look at human rights reports on Haitian refugees. Before I continue with my literary analysis of Nikol Payen’s short story, “Something in the Water . . . Reflections on a People’s Journey,” I would like to explore two reports published by Lawyers Committee for Human Rights and the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees which clearly demonstrate that the testimonies that Haitian migrants have offered have overwhelmingly been turned down as the majority of Haitians have been repatriated to their native country. Here, the discrepancy between who tells what story and to whom becomes significant. Most often,

despite migrants' ability to testify to persecution in their homeland, their ability to construct Haiti as a life-threatening native place, has fallen on deaf ears as the majority of Haitians picked up by the U.S. Coast Guard have been repatriated.

My analysis relies upon the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights' report Refugee Refoulement: The Forced Return of Haitians under the U.S.-Haitian Interdiction Agreement and a human rights report put out by the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees titled, Half the Story: The Skewed U.S. Monitoring of Repatriated Haitian Refugees which looks at the legal questions of the interviewing, detention and repatriation of Haitian "boat people" by the U.S. government. Both of these reports raise serious questions about the intersections between national borders, territoriality and testimony--in seeking asylum in the U.S.

Upon reading Refugee Refoulement, it becomes clear the significant role that testimony plays for those Haitians who are interdicted at sea.<sup>58</sup> Published in 1990, the report "describes the establishment and operation of the U.S.-Haitian interdiction program. It makes recommendations to enhance the legal protection of the Haitian asylum seekers who are subject to interception and return by U.S. Coast Guard vessels. The Lawyers Committee sent fact-finding delegations to Haiti in July and December of 1989 to investigate the interdiction program" and interviewed Haitian officials and Haitian returnees (1). In the Introduction, the report explains that the U.S.-Haitian interdiction program

was established in September of 1981 by the Reagan Administration in an effort to stem the movement of undocumented Haitians by boat to the

United States. Under this program, U.S. Coast Guard vessels are allowed to stop and board Haitian and unflagged vessels on the high seas, determine if their passengers are undocumented aliens bound for the United States, and if so return them to their country of origin, in this instance, Haiti. . . . According to the bilateral agreement, an INS examiner and interpreter are stationed on board a designated Coast Guard cutter to interview the intercepted Haitians. If a person is found to have a reasonable fear of returning to Haiti, that person is to be taken to the United States to seek asylum in accordance with refugee law. (3)

The report also states however, that “of the 21,461 Haitians who have been intercepted since the beginning of the program, only six have been taken to the United States to apply for asylum” (3). Thus, only six have testified convincingly enough to INS officials to be allowed to continue onto to the United States.<sup>59</sup> Yet, the report also explains that Haitians are rarely given sufficient time or privacy in their interviews, nor are they assured of confidentiality (21). The INS examiners have used a questionnaire containing seventeen questions, but “sometimes found it too time consuming to write down all the answers” (emphasis added 22).<sup>60</sup> Furthermore, the establishment of trust between the INS examiner and the Haitians often determined the kind of responses the Haitians would give: “For some, only indirect probing will reveal whether the Haitian fears persecution in Haiti. Such indirect questioning has proven essential in eliciting information from refugees who, for a variety of reasons, are unable to express opinions and beliefs for which they have previously been made to suffer” (23). The conclusions of the

Committee's investigation is that "Haitian refugees are simply not likely to reveal their claims in the brief encounters with officials provided under the interdiction program" (3).

Published on June 30, 1992, Half the Story: The Skewed U.S. Monitoring of Repatriated Haitian Refugees reveals that the issues surrounding Haitian refugees' ability to testify to their persecution in order to seek asylum in the United States had grown even worse with the mass exodus of Haitian boat people following the coup of September 30, 1991 in Haiti. The report states, "Determinations of whether Haitians met the 'credible fear' standard were based on five- to ten minute interviews held aboard Coast Guard cutters, often after the Haitians had been without food or water and exposed to the elements for days" (5). What is implied here are the ways that Haitian bodies, in a weakened condition after being on the open seas, are unable to testify convincingly enough for U.S. authorities. This situation represents what Edouard Glissant refers to as a "forced poetics" which he defines as "any collective desire for expression that, when it manifests itself, is negated at the same time because of the *deficiency* that stifles it, not at the level of desire, which never ceases, but at the level of expression, which is never realized" (Caribbean Discourse 120). Since only 6 out of 21,000 Haitian testimonies for political asylum were granted, it seems that they collectively constitute a forced poetics. Only after the Miami-based Haitian Refugee Center filed a lawsuit challenging the original interdiction program was a temporary refugee camp established at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. Yet, even then, U.S. government officials "claimed that the adjudicators were deceived by human rights groups and the Haitians themselves to believe that persecution continued in Haiti, when in fact calm had returned to the country". Here, one gets the feeling that no matter how much interview conditions were

improved, Haitians would not be able to construct convincing enough stories when their audience of U.S. authorities already believes them to be liars. The report continues “a review of the reports emanating from the Embassy monitoring effort in Haiti reveals that its primary purpose is to discredit repatriates’ stories. The purpose is evident even in the selection of investigators: many of them experts in the detection of fraudulent claims, rather than experts on conditions in Haiti or in the process of conducting human rights field investigations” (6). The committee argues that the purpose of discounting Haitians’ claims of persecution served to legitimize U.S. foreign policy which did nothing to curb the Duvalier regime’s oppression and in fact aided in perpetuating it.

I would like to read Payen’s story against the findings of the Lawyers Committee reports in order to ask what kind of testimonial intervention her fiction offers? What are the rites of passage that the Haitians must go through in order to “become” American in this text? How are these rites of passage also a question of human “rights”?

Rights of Passage: “Something in the Water. . . Reflections of a People’s Journey”

Nikòl Payen’s non-fiction story “Something in the Water . . . Reflections of a People’s Journey” provides an example of the ambiguous position of “dyasporeans”. Payen serves as a native informant who works “both sides”--Haitian and American--in her role as an interpreter for the U.S. Department of Justice at the U.S. military naval base at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, strategically located literally between Haiti and the United States. However, Payen is ambivalent about her position in-between two worlds.

Significantly, the story opens with the narrator explaining her hospitalization for an unknown bronchial illness, which is symbolic since as a translator her breath is literally what enables her to translate the oral language of Haitian creole. She explains

that the medication she is being treated with “paralyzed [her] tongue” (66). She hopes that an earlier diagnosis of bronchial asthma is correct as it “was beginning to seem mild now that I was up against possible heavy hitters like tuberculosis, PCP pneumonia and HIV” (66). Echoing the paranoia surrounding Haitians as carriers of deadly contagions, she reflects on the possible influences to her current condition: “I struggled to pinpoint exactly when and why my body broke down” (66). But just as it seems that she has contracted an illness from the tropical climate or the Haitians themselves, she describes the “5 a.m. dosage of pesticide the military used to wage the war against bugs. When it was kind, the fumes tickled your nostrils. Otherwise, you went into a choking cough that could rage for twenty minutes” (67). This passage suggests that perhaps her illness is a manmade one, not a tropically-grown organic one. This challenges the U.S. discourse which sees Haitians as diseased, and instead sees the United States, particularly the military, as causing illness in the region.

Viewed in a Foucauldian sense, the military base becomes the gatekeeper for containing the “plague” of immigrants in that it is outside the shores of the United States. And given the U.S. government’s history of seeing Haitians as “diseased” the spatial partitioning of Haitian refugees in offshore detention centers serves as a way to patrol the epidemiological border of the nation and keep the threat of contamination at (Guantanamo) bay. The narrator describes the ways in which refugees are “processed” to bring order to the chaos: the refugees are all “photographed, fingerprinted, and given identification cards” along with “acquisition of an ID bracelet, marked with a bar code similar to those found on the side of household products” which she also describes as a “ritual”: “the stamping of the refugees with the marks of ownership” (70). The narrator

expresses ambivalence at being able to move more freely into and out of the detention center, although her actions are also scrutinized by the military as when she interacts with a 7 year-old boy who has been put into a steel cage, placed there by a soldier for “making trouble” (71). Payen describes how “High up, a guard sat post in a twenty-foot tower equipped with a rifle, a gun, binoculars, and a video camera. He recorded my interaction while adjusting his walkie-talkie” (72). Like Foucault’s description of the panopticon in Discipline and Punish: Birth of the Prison System, the layout of the military base replicates that of the prison (as well as echoes the plantation) in order to facilitate optimum surveillance of detainees. She explains that the military enacts strict rules against “fraternizing with the ‘migrants’” (74) thus, theoretically limiting the contact that she has with the Haitians. One testament to the conditions of the detention center is that the narrator tells us, “three-hundred and fifty people drowned trying to escape to ‘Castro’s’ Cuba to see if communism could offer a kinder hand” (71).

Her description of the detention center echoes that of the slave ship and concentration camp, where individuals are objectified: “The scent of sweaty bodies thickened the already damp air. . . Bodies lay in rows on olive-green cots, all their worldly possessions on the concrete floor beside them” (67-68). Unlike the Haitian refugees being detained, she has the right to move more freely between the detention center and the military base. It is this ability to move about more freely, and especially the ferry ride from the town where she lives to the naval base, that “reminded [her] of her outsider status” (72). Movement is further compounded by the U.S. military’s “strategic design of the island” which included “acres of land mines . . . a deterrent for Cubans who were curious about democracy” (73). The space of the military base serves as a telling

reminder of the U.S.-Cuban relationship as Roger Ricardo describes this place: “A sign proclaims ‘Republic of Cuba. Free territory in the Americas.’ Facing it, a few steps farther on, is the emblem of the U.S. Marine Corps. The northeast gate provides the only access to the base from unoccupied territory, flanked by a sentry box where Marines keep watch. A few dozen meters away is the sentry box of the Border Patrol of the Cuban Armed Forces” (Guantánamo: The Bay of Discord 3).<sup>61</sup> And with the base serving as a detention center for thousands of Haitians who were intercepted at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard, Guantánamo Navy Base becomes a site of state power negotiation.

### Confessions

This is a testimonio characterized by hesitancy, reluctance and remorse. The narrator explains that “Kreyol, the language whose purpose in my life up until now had been to pain and confuse me” now “became [her] passport” and that “The Justice Department would use me as a medium . . . to execute its mission” (67). Payen’s narrative serves as a kind of testimonio, only in contrast to the role of testimonio as solidarity-building with first world readers, and Payen, while a kind of native informant, is clearly not a subaltern because of her literacy and ability to move in and out of U.S. military and governmental systems (and she also goes back to Haiti). What this testimonio reveals is an ambiguity, where the interpreter’s language skills (in Haitian Kreyòl--language of peasantry) is both part of the hegemony of the U.S. government bureaucracy and the language that gives her access to other Haitians, who are like her in national origin, but dissimilar to her in so many other ways. She is at times repulsed by her own position, and yet yearns for “home,” which becomes connected to the unhealthy morning ritual of “gobbling down a sausage McSomething or Another not for any reason

other than to reconnect me to home, where such rubbish would never touch my lips” (73).

The narrator’s ambiguous state becomes compounded when she is asked to escort a boatload of refugees who are being repatriated back to Haiti. She writes, “I reluctantly volunteered to accompany them back. The two-day journey promised to be a grueling experience, but I was prepared to make any sacrifice to return to my homeland after fifteen years of unintended absence” (74). Again, she serves the in-between status as an interpreter--so she benefits from her position in that she has a private cabin, but the refugees must stay up on deck. In some ways, the space of the repatriation ship becomes a freer space than the detention center: “En route, clandestine discussions held by the refugees and me in the camp were openly voiced here on the ship” (75). While nostalgia can often be attached to the idea of returning home for migrants, for the Haitian refugees, return signals the dread that their lives would again be in immanent danger. The narrator finds solidarity with them in their

mutual distrust of the asylum process. I had often overheard conversations corroborating these allegations from higher-ups. Programmed to spit out whatever numbers Washington entrusted them to produce that day in the name of efficiency and a job well done, these functionaries lost neither sleep nor appetite over the desperate accounts of a people whose destiny lay in their hands. (75)<sup>62</sup>

She has access to both U.S. bureaucratic discourse as well as to the refugees’ discourse. It is also on board the repatriation ship that she hears testimonies of an emaciated twelve-

year old boy whose parents were killed by soldiers in Haiti (75-76) and “the woman whose community group was plastered with photos of a rooster and Aristide, thereby making her a candidate for death” and “Young men [who] complained that Haiti was so plagued politically that their congregation for any reason, even for church, left them suspect of political activities” (78). All of these stories were apparently not convincing enough to qualify them for political asylum in the United States. In a scene eerily reminiscent of Celianne in “Children of the Sea,” the narrator witnesses the restraining of a fifteen-year old girl who tried to jump overboard, rather than return to Haiti: “Servicemen tied her feet together. Eventually she was subdued with her hand and foot securely tied to a pole on the flight deck” (77). And this scene is also reminiscent of the middle passage, which the narrator remarks on: “Witnessing two hundred fifty bodies enroped in slave-ship fashion on deck to be baked by the summer blaze or soaked by impulsive skies if nature willed left me feeling helpless and uneasy. We seemed to be going backward--in time--in history” (78).

When they arrive in Haiti’s harbor, the refugees “were instructed to return their yellow I.D. cards” (79) despite “concerns about being followed home by the same would-be attackers who had been responsible for their initial departure”. When the ship was nearly vacant, I caught a U.S. State Department staff member handing the bag of I.D. cards to Haitian soldiers” (79) so that “ownership” of these repatriated refugees had now been given over to Haitian soldiers.

On the return trip back to Guantanamo, the narrator explains that the “ordeal cast me into a four-day bout with insomnia” (80) and “back in the captain’s dining room I began wondering to what I owed the honor of past-life luxuries--cloth napkins, sterling

silver flatware, and china". In reaction to a conversation to "size up the distance I would go for my people and my two countries, one that had my allegiance as a birthright, the other hoping to win it," she volunteers "to be lowered by rope from the cutter into a tiny motor raft in an attempt to negotiate with prospective refugees on behalf of the United States government"(80). She negotiates with a young man who represents the boat of eighteen Haitians headed for Miami. He asks her, "Why should I go on the ship, why should I trust you?" (81) She explains, "I was lost for an adequate response except, *I'm all you've got here and you have to believe in my good intentions.* And besides, I was unprepared to watch them drown" (81). Her inability to persuade the refugees is compounded by the boy's mother who "wore only the bottom half of what used to be a dress. . . With dark spots and welts all over her back, her hair was ravaged and she spoke in a delirium, a blur." The link between testimony and territorial boundaries is evident in that the Haitians who are intercepted at sea by the U.S. Coast Guard must undergo an interview to determine whether or not they qualify for asylum<sup>63</sup>. The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights argues that the process is compromised by the lack of privacy and short time period of the interviews. The result of these interviews are fragmented, partial testimonies which subsequently fail to obtain asylum. That these interviews take place in such difficult conditions on the high seas outside of national boundaries compounds the refugees' ability to testify to persecution, when the persecution itself could dramatically hinder a witness's ability to testify. Instead the Lawyers Committee argues that the bureaucracy impedes the process. The committee's report explains that the circumstances of the interviews "may not be private; the Haitians may be hungry, are definitely ill-at-ease and have no idea why they are being asked

questions. It is impossible to ask and get minimal, let alone adequate, responses to the seventeen questions in a brief interview, particularly since both questions and answers must be translated” (Refugee Refoulement 22).

When the narrator in Payen’s story finally convinces the Haitians in the boat to come aboard the Coast Guard cutter, she confesses that “A conspiratorial chill raced through me as I watched their craft along with all their worldly possessions set afire, a ritual that branded a mental scar on these victims and on me” (82). The burning of the refugees’ belongings serves as an ominous rite of passage; instead of signaling hope for the future, it suggests the vulnerability and powerlessness of the Haitians.

She ends the narrative by asking, “Did this really just happen? Was I partly responsible for someone’s impending death?” She ponders the effects of these events on herself: “Its effect on me, at that point, was apparent in emotions only, like the sharp pain that registers that a finger has been burned. It is not until days later, when the wounded area darkens, that the effect actually becomes visible” (emphasis added 82). Again, we return to the notion of “obscene visibility” with the wound whose degree of damage is not evident until it becomes visible. Perhaps this offers an explanation to the narrator’s unknown illness which she begins her narrative with--that this illness is linked to her ambivalence over translating--of which the implications are now only becoming visible as she reflects on the events in which she participated.

#### Rites/Writes of Passage in *Dreaming in Cuban*

Whereas the corporeal representations in Krik? Krak! and “Something to Declare” can be understood both within the history of Haiti’s repressive politics and the United States’s hegemony, Dreaming in Cuban represents the contentious relationship between

capitalism and communism, the United States and Cuba through tropes of sickness. As an ethnic writer in the United States, Cristina Garcia represents Cuba and Cuban-American communities in a way that is not typically seen. Dreaming in Cuban offers an alternative to the vehemently anti-Castro rhetoric espoused by the dominant voices of the Cuban-American community. In his book Dance Between Two Cultures: Latino Caribbean Literature Written in the United States, William Luis points out that while there had been a tradition of Cuban writers, such as José Martí and Cirilio Villaverde, who were born and educated in Cuba and wrote in exile in the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth-century, “Cristina Garcia represents a new wave of writers, born or raised in the United States, who write in Spanish but also in English” (215).<sup>64</sup>

Both Dreaming in Cuban and The Sugar Island raise questions of testimony, health and disease for Cuban migrants seeking political asylum, who must testify to their native homeland as a hostile place, sick with repression and corruption. Yet the construction of Cuba as a diseased space also predates the Castro regime. During the U.S. military occupation of the island after the Spanish-American War (1898), the Platt Amendment was drafted to provide guidelines for United States-Cuban relations. In addition to allowing that the “United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence,” the Amendment stipulated

That the government of Cuba will execute, and as far as necessary extend, the plans already devised or other plans to be mutually agreed upon, for the sanitation of the cities of the island, to the end that a recurrence of epidemic and infectious diseases may be prevented, thereby assuring

protection to the people and commerce of Cuba, as well as to the commerce of the southern ports of the United States and the people residing therein. (emphasis added, The Platt Amendment [www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1901platt.html](http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1901platt.html))

Thus, the United States made the containment of a “diseased” Cuba a matter of foreign and economic policy long before the advent of Castro’s communist revolution.

Dreaming in Cuban’s focus on the appearance and disappearance of family traits and family members also reflects international relations between Cuba and the United States. In On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality and Culture Louis A. Pérez Jr. explains the pre-revolutionary cultural and economic links between the two nations: “Cubans and North Americans occupied a place in each other’s imagination and in their respective fantasies about each other“ (6). In “The End of Exile? A New Era in U.S. Immigration Policy Toward Cuba” Lisandro Perez emphasizes the frequency of Cuban migration to the United States by quoting U.S. Senate Committee on Immigration hearings held on December 28, 1892, in which the U.S. Consul-General in Havana, Ramon O. Williams explains to an incredulous Senator Redfield Proctor, “You must understand, Senator, that [Cubans] look upon Florida almost as part of their own country” (emphasis added, 197)<sup>65</sup>. Indeed, the United States had a military presence on the island on two separate occasions: 1899-1902 and 1906-1909--whose role enabled U.S. expansionism. Prior to the Cuban Revolution, Cuban migration to the U.S. was common for the upper-class elite, who often sent their children to U.S. boarding schools and universities (Louis A. Pérez Jr. 32-36). During this time, U.S. interests increasingly

controlled Cuban land and companies. In 1959, the Cuban Revolution led by Fidel Castro overthrew the Batista dictatorship and ushered in a revolutionary socialist government that nationalized Cuban lands and companies, thereby severing certain economic relationships with U.S. interests. While the U.S. had a prominent presence on the island in the early part of the twentieth-century, with the Cuban revolution, that presence was virtually eliminated. Ruth Behar vividly explains the shift in the U.S. cartographic imagining of Cuba after the revolution: “Once upon a time, Cuba was such a commonplace of the United States’ imagination that it was included in maps of Florida. After the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and Fidel Castro’s declaration that Cuba would be resculpted a communist nation, the United States sent the island into exile” (“Introduction” 399). Whereas at one time Cuba was practically speaking a part of the U.S. body politic through economic and political ties, the island-nation virtually *disappears* from the United States’ worldview after 1959.

Cuba reappears as part of the U.S. body politic with the influx of Cuban refugees seeking political asylum. Initially, those Cubans who emigrated to the United States after 1959 were part of the white elite, whose lands had been confiscated and nationalized by the revolutionary government and who previously had strong ties to the U.S. interests on the island. As Masud-Piloto argues, these Cubans were welcomed with “open arms” into the United States as they were seen to be fleeing communism. This sentiment was made policy with the 1966 Cuban Refugee Adjustment Act which encouraged Cubans to immigrate to the U.S. by “convert[ing] the status of Cubans from refugees to permanent residents, the Act continues in effect and has been the legal basis for admitting Cubans into the United States” (Lisandro Pérez, 198). While the initial period of migration was

performed mostly by airlifts (1965-73), a shift occurred in this migration pattern with the 1980 Mariel boat exodus in which 125,000 Cubans left Cuba. From that point on, Cubans who have emigrated have done so by the precarious means of small boats or makeshift rafts known as *balsas*. Migration by boat or raft poses specific issues for geographic and cultural “trespassing” as boat people, known as *balseros*, attempt to cross illegally into the U.S. by water and yet once they reach U.S. shores they are automatically given political asylum.

A shift in migration occurred with the Mariel boat exodus in which 125,000 Cubans left Cuba because “the U.S. electorate did not view the arriving Cubans as a special case of Cold War refugees but simply as yet another group knocking on the doors of the United States” (199). Additionally, while Castro claimed that “marielitos” were the criminals and homosexuals that he was “purging” the island of, it is also significant that this wave of Cuban immigrants included for the first time a larger number of Afro-Cubans. According to Masud-Piloto, the racism they encountered in the Cuban American community in the U.S. which was largely made up of “white” Cubans of Spanish origin. (From Welcomed Exiles to Illegal Immigrants 85-87). Aguirre and Silva write that typically white Cubans have fled the country by more precarious means of “balsas” (rafts), perhaps because these migrants have more contacts already in the United States to serve as a support network once they arrive, whereas Afro-Cubans have typically gone through the bureaucratic means of migration in applying for exit visas (“Does Race Matter Among Cuban Immigrants?” 321).

#### Rites/Writes of Passage in *Dreaming in Cuban*

I want to suggest that what we uncover in *Dreaming in Cuban* is what I refer to as

a “poetics of disease.” With the phrase “poetics of disease” I am recasting Caribbean scholar Edouard Glissant’s notion of “forced poetics” that I discussed earlier in relation to Haitian refugees who were overwhelmingly refused political asylum in the United States. I consider how the tropes of sickness highlight the difficulties of expressing the fraught political relations between family members in the novel as well as between the two nations. At the same time, I assert that by unpacking the tropes surrounding illness and disease one sees that Garcia’s use of a “poetics of disease” gives great eloquence to these migrant narratives.

In the novel, illness becomes a discourse through which familial separation, political conflict, and geographic separation are imagined. The overdetermination of diseased figures in the novel as each character confronts an assault on the boundaries of her/his physical body from outside elements: cancer, syphilis, tuberculosis, spiritual possession, pneumonia, rape, physical assault, insanity and even, passion. The result is that these corporeal boundaries undergo various metamorphoses, such as when the symptoms of disease appear on the body, the boundaries of one individual’s body merges with other bodies, or bodies vanish altogether. These corporeal trespassings are juxtaposed with a political discourse tinged with metaphors of sickness: communism as a cancer, capitalism as hyper-consumption. Coupled with the representations of disease are questions of the science of genetics as some family members attempt to “contain” their family’s afflictions through science. Genetics also raise the question of what afflictions are inherited, and whether or not ancestral traits are passed on when families are geographically fragmented? At times, symptoms recede only to surface a generation later. The question over what traits are inherited foregrounds pregnancy--a prominent

theme in the novel--and a condition that demands the health of mutually dependent bodies, but also raises questions about health and sickness because when mother and child are physically linked, there is the potential for passing on illness.

Another crucial element in the poetics of disease that I mark is the capacity or failure of language to facilitate optimum expression. Many of the characters in the novel, especially the female characters, struggle to find optimum forms of articulation that enable attachments with their families and communities. For example, with her family dispersed throughout the world, Celia must rely on creative means of communication--the most prominent of which are the telepathic "conversations" that she has with her granddaughter, Pilar, living in New York. At times Celia also experiences difficulty in communicating with various members of her family due to geography, the passage of time, or emotional strain. The failure of communication manifests in both Lourdes and Felicia. For Lourdes, the obsession with food and her body marks yet another version of the poetics of disease as they become sites of expression instead of appropriate language. But it is Felicia's mental illness that proves to be the most debilitating manifestation of a poetics of disease.

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While on one level, illness signifies the unhealthy political and economic relations between the U.S. and Cuba after the Cuban revolution, the onset of initial illness for Celia del Pino, the family's matriarch, predates the revolution. As a young woman she becomes ill when her lover Gustavo leaves for Spain in 1936. Celia is so tormented by his absence that she takes to her bed for eight months and her body begins to decay: "Soon she was a fragile pile of opaque bones . . . The doctors could find nothing wrong

with [her]” (36). A *santerø* brought in as a last attempt to try to heal her, tells her “Miss Celia, there’s a wet landscape in your palm” (7). The “wet landscape” functions as a paradox of Celia’s ambivalent desire to both maintain and disrupt boundaries throughout her life.

Celia marries Jorge del Pino while she is still pining for Gustavo, and he urges her to write him a letter to bring closure to the affair. However, the letter-writing becomes a ritual for Celia; it is where she records her innermost thoughts and as such they represent a subjective history of the island which is eventually passed onto Celia’s granddaughter, Pilar. Instead of leaving Cuba, writing becomes a cathartic monthly ritual that sustains Celia throughout her adult life leading up to the Revolution. She writes letters to Gustavo which she never sends; instead they become a testament to her interior life, especially during her time spent at an insane asylum. The letters are told through Celia’s first person voice, whereas other parts of the narrative pertaining to her are told in third person narrative. Not only do her letters to Gustavo record her personal struggles, but in them she records the political events leading up to the Revolution. In a letter she writes to Gustavo shortly after he has gone to Spain in March 1935, leaving her heartbroken, she says, “I wish I could live underwater. Maybe then my skin would absorb the sea’s consoling silence. I’m a prisoner on this island, Gustavo, and I cannot sleep” (49). Celia’s imagines her escape as a kind of corporeal osmosis. Evoking the santera’s prophecy, water becomes a symbol of departure and disappearance. Having lived most of her life next to the ocean, water symbolizes both healing and exile for Celia. She is a porous membrane who absorbs elements of the sea, as well as the sorrows of others.

Yet while Celia lives next to the sea for most of her life, it is the men in her life

who have the freedom to traverse it. While he initially does not leave the island as Gustavo did, Jorge travels around the island selling vacuum cleaners, leaving Celia to contend with his mother and sister who despise her. When she becomes pregnant with her first child she continues to equate maleness with freedom and escape,

Celia wished for a boy, a son who could make his way in the world. If she had a son, she would leave Jorge and sail to Spain, to Granada. [. . .] If she had a girl, Celia decided, she would stay. She would not abandon a daughter to this life, but train her to read the columns of blood and numbers in men's eyes, to understand the morphology of survival. (42)

When her first child turns out to be a daughter (Lourdes), Celia suffers a mental breakdown--unable to escape her life and the island-- "She held their child by one leg, handed her to Jorge, and said, 'I will not remember her name' (43) before Jorge sends her off to an asylum.<sup>66</sup> A male child would be able to survive without her while females are necessary to maintain the cultural and national boundaries imagined as "columns of blood" and Celia cannot face training her daughter for this. In her letters, Celia describes her baby as a kind of monster who "lives on venom. . . the baby is porous" (50). In this description Celia casts herself as a contaminated mother who could pass her "venom" to Lourdes in the womb. Pregnancy represents a permeability that threatens the boundaries that Celia has been trained to uphold.

In the opening scene of the novel, Celia is shown upholding the nation's boundaries as she scans the shoreline with binoculars to "spot another Bay of Pigs

invasion before it happened” (3). Along with Gustavo, Celia associates the sea with the departure of her husband Jorge who goes to the United States for medical treatment late in his life. It is significant then that while she watches the shoreline, she spots the image of Jorge on the horizon, crossing over geographic, national and metaphysical boundaries as he, “walk[ed] on water in his white summer suit and Panama hat” (5). Jorge’s appearance on the horizon is precluded by his death in a New York hospital. Thus, while Celia maintains the seashore boundary, she simultaneously yearns to cross it. Upon seeing Jorge return in her dream, Celia goes into the sea, “The water laps at her throat. She arches her spine until she floats on her back, [. . .] A cool wind stirs Celia from her dream. She stretches her legs but she cannot touch the sandy bottom. She has lost her shoes. A sudden wave engulfs her, and for a moment Celia is tempted to relax and drop” (8). Her allegiance to the Revolution eventually motivates Celia to bring herself out of the water when she remembers that she is the only person guarding the shoreline. Yet, her corporeal metamorphoses have already begun though as “Seaweed clings to her skull like a lethal plant. She is barefoot and her skin, encrusted with sand, is tinged a faint blue” (10).

Despite being unable to physically cross the ocean, Celia communicates through dreams with her granddaughter in the United States so that it does not seem to matter quite as much if Pilar does not speak fluent Spanish. The potential for Celia to connect with her granddaughter telepathically is present because they share a “disregard for boundaries” (176). In fact,

Celia knows that Pilar wears overalls like a farmhand and paints canvases

with knots and whorls of red that resemble nothing at all. She knows that Pilar keeps a diary in the lining of her winter coat, hidden from her mother's scouring eyes. In it, Pilar records everything. This pleases Celia. She closes her eyes and speaks to her granddaughter, imagines her words as slivers of light piercing the murky light. (7)

Celia recognizes Pilar's ability to record history, but Pilar's writings remain hidden from the world. However, after years of being geographically separated Celia and Pilar's telepathic connection ceases: "Celia understands now that a cycle between them had ended, and a new one had not yet begun" (119).

#### Rites of Obscurity/ Rituals of Clarity

While Lourdes's bond with her mother was severed from birth, Felicia appears bonded with Celia through shared traits. In fact, Felicia represents the permeability that Celia also desires. Like her mother, as a child Felicia, "loves the sea. Her skin is translucent, much like the fish that feed along the reefs (52). Moreover, in many ways Celia and Felicia suffer from the same afflictions--while Celia pines for Gustavo and nearly dies when he leaves, Felicia suffers from delusions which "commence suddenly, frequently after heavy rains" (39) after her husband, Hugo Villaverde, leaves. Like Gustavo, Hugo has a freedom of movement as a merchant marine who "sails around the world" (84). While it would seem that Felicia has inherited her mother's mental infirmity, Felicia's delusions are also connected to the syphilis that Hugo brings back after being abroad, which ultimately imprisons Felicia in her own delusional mind. Yet where there is a repetition of similar symptoms and circumstance, there is also a

difference between Celia's and Felicia's afflictions. Celia has a means of expressing her afflictions through letter writing and dreaming, but Felicia spends her life searching for a means of expression.

Felicia's inability to find sufficient language for expressing herself is linked to her namesake, Celia's roommate in the asylum. This roommate, who killed her husband by lighting him on fire, dies "burned in her bed" (51) so that all that is left of her are ashes and bones and a "trail of white liquid" (51) that Celia "could not read". While her body dissolves in the fire, her spirit seems to live on in Felicia when she tries to kill Hugo by setting his head aflame. This immolation can be read as an attempted purification of Hugo's diseased body. Felicia does not kill him, but manages to severely maim him, leaving him unable to leave the island in his work as a sailor anymore.

As the syphilis takes over her mind, Felicia performs various enigmatic rituals which become more and more incomprehensible to the people around her. Her words no longer make sense. She spends one summer making and eating coconut ice cream, believing "the coconuts will purify them, that the sweet white milk will heal them" (85). It is significant that the only child to share in this decontamination is her young son Ivanito because it was while Felicia was pregnant with him that she became infected with syphilis. In fact, it was the disruption of morning sickness which "gave her a clarity she could not ignore" (82) and she sets Hugo's head on fire. Ivanito remembers that, "His mother claims that he almost died because of Papa, from a venereal disease that infected him when he was born" (84). The purifying "sweet white milk" of the coconuts symbolizes a kind of mother's milk that Felicia's contaminated maternal body could not produce. The venereal infection serves as a symbolic connection which abnormally binds

Ivanito to his mother so that when Felicia believes that her mother is trying to poison her with the food she brings, Ivanito also refuses to eat it for fear of “betray[ing] his mother” (87). The amalgamation of the tropes of food, nourishment and maternity comes to a terrifying climax when Felicia prepares an elaborate meal for Ivanito and herself--lacing their dessert of coconut ice-cream with poison (89). While the two survive, it also serves as cataclysmic rupture in their relationship as Felicia is sent off to be reformed into a “New Socialist Woman” and five-year old Ivanito is sent to boarding school to be “integrated” (107). But Felicia finds the language of the revolution lacking, “all she sees is a country living on slogans and agitation”.

Felicia’s bond with Ivanito stands in stark contrast to her alienation from her twin daughters, Luz and Milagro, who complain that she only provides them with “Pretty words. Meaningless words that didn’t nourish us, that didn’t comfort us, that kept us prisoners in her alphabet world” (emphasis added, 121). Felicia’s insufficient language includes such queries as “Do you know the meaning of shells?” The twins speak of their mother and brother in terms of a discourse of disease, watching Ivanito for “symptoms” of their mother’s illness. As if to counter the permeability that they see threatening Ivanito’s health, they manage to remain hermetically sealed from the rest of the world: “Their world is a tightly sealed box. [They] are afraid of letting anyone inside” (229). Their quest to remain uncontaminated throughout their lives is symbolized by their interest in science, especially Milagro who wants to be a “mycologist, specializing in tropical fungi” (121).

Eventually, Felicia finds some solace in the rituals of *santería*. For a time, it even appears as though she has finally found a language which suits her as her friend,

Herminia, explains how the ceremonies “were a kind of poetry that connected her to larger worlds, [. . .] Our rituals healed her, made her believe again” (186). Felicia becomes initiated undergoing a rebaptism: “On the morning of her initiation, sixteen santeras tore Felicia’s clothes to shreds until she stood naked, then they bathed her in river water, rubbing her with soap wrapped in vegetable fibers until her skin glowed. The women dressed Felicia in a fresh white gown and combed and braided her hair, treating her like a newborn child” (187). The physical boundaries of Felicia’s body are crossed as she loses consciousness during the ceremony and is “possessed by Obatalá” (187). According to Cuban scholar, Miguel Barnet, Obatalá is “the god of purity and justice” and “in the liturgy of Santeria he is the head, birth, that which stands high, pure, and clean . . . a symbol of what is born pure in life” (“La Regla de Ocha: The Religious System of Santeria” 93). Santeria allows her to cross over spiritual boundaries into a different reality in which she is accepted. Yet, even though she undergoes purification, Felicia is still unable to find a voice: “the santeras had made eight cuts on her tongue with a razor blade so that the god could speak, . . .[yet] Felicia could not divulge his words” (187). While Herminia explains that it was after her initiation ceremony that Felicia had “finally found her peace” (188), this peace is not reflected in her body. Felicia becomes increasingly ill, her body covered with lumps and carbuncles, “[her] eyesight dimmed until she could perceive only shadows, and the right side of her head swelled with mushroomy lumps,” (189) until she dies. Felicia’s physical symptoms serve as a language of that which she cannot articulate. It is not until the final rites of santeria are performed on Felicia’s body after her death that she finally achieves the purification she has been seeking most of her life. Herminia describes how “they passed colorful

handkerchiefs over Felicia's body, all the while grieving in low voices to purify her corpse. By the time they finished, the terrible lumps on Felicia's head had disappeared, and her skin was as smooth as the pink lining of a conch" (214).

### The Politics of Disease

Unlike Celia and Felicia's penchant for the sea, for Lourdes, the ocean only serves as a reminder of her unwelcomed birth: "She imagined herself alone and shriveled in her mother's womb, envisioned the first days in her mother's unyielding arms" (74). Her distance from her mother extends to her feelings for Cuba. This lack of belonging in her native land is compounded by her rape at the hands of revolutionary soldiers while she attempts to defend her husband's land from them. Shortly before the rape, her body had begun to reject the fetus growing in her womb when she was thrown from a horse. But it is in protecting her husband and his land against the revolution, that her miscarriage reaches its final stages: "Lourdes felt the clot dislodge and liquefy beneath her breasts, float through her belly, and slide down her thighs. There was a pool of dark blood at her feet" (70). The soldiers return to deliver the official paper that declares their farm the property of the government. Again Lourdes defends her husband's land against the revolution and when she tears up the orders to confiscate the land, the soldiers rape her: "When he finished, the soldier lifted the knife and began to scratch at Lourdes's belly with great concentration. A primeval scraping. Crimson hieroglyphics. [. . .] Not until later, [. . .] did Lourdes try to read what he had carved. But it was illegible" (72). The soldier inscribes Lourdes's body with his own power. The confrontation between the revolutionary vision of Cuba's land and that of the wealthy land owners becomes inscribed on Lourdes' body, leaving her without a voice. Thus, the inscription of the rape

on her body is intricately tied to the severing of her ties to the land as shortly after it, Lourdes, Rufino and Pilar leave Cuba.

Lourdes's entry into U.S. society is facilitated by her complete emotional disengagement from Cuba. She ambitiously makes her way in capitalist New York having left behind communism and everything else that Cuba represents. For Lourdes, becoming an American involves discarding her Cuban identity and immersing herself in "American" rites:

Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention. Lourdes relishes winter most of all--the cold scraping sounds on sidewalks and windshields, the ritual of scarves and gloves, hats and zip-in coat linings. Its layers protect her. She wants no part of Cuba . . . no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her (73).

While Lourdes experiences a kind of silencing in Cuba, she sees speaking in the new language of her "adopted country" as an opportunity to reclaim her voice. Furthermore, Lourdes nourishes her family on the processed foods of their new country, which her daughter questions: "Mom makes food only people in Ohio eat, like Jell-O molds with miniature marshmallows or recipes she clips from Family Circle. And she barbecues anything she can get her hands on. [. . .] Like this is it? We're living the American dream?" (137). Even as Lourdes adopts new rituals, a new language and new foods,

Pilar's remarks underscore that despite the surface changes, the family experiences a deficiency in the U.S.

Pilar explains her mother's equating of communism with disease: "Mom says 'communist' the way some people say 'cancer', low and fierce" (26). The equating of communism with a disease that is potentially fatal is reflected by her father who comes to the United States for treatment of his stomach cancer. For Jorge, his cancer would seem an apt manifestation of living under what he sees as the corruption and inefficiency of the communist system. Jorge's admiration for the U.S. way of doing things goes back to his days as a salesman for a U.S. company before the revolution: "He'd wanted to be a model Cuban, to prove to his gringo boss that they were cut from the same cloth" (6). He represents the pre-revolutionary economic connections between Cuba and U.S. corporations. Jorge's emulation of American ways is manifested through his war on germs, which he sees proliferate in the tropical Cuban climate. For him, even the word "*microbios*" "lit a fire in his eyes. 'They are the enemy!' he used to bellow. 'Culprits of tropical squalor'"(21-22). Lourdes remembers how "[f]or her father, conquering *microbios* required unflagging vigilance" (22). Yet there is a breakdown in what Jorge imagines as the superiority of the American system when he is in the hospital in New York, being treated for his cancer. Lourdes remembers how,

her father despaired at the incompetences and breakdowns in procedures, at the rough, professional hands that prodded him. Once a nurse inserted a suppository to loosen his bowels and did not return, although he cramped his finger ringing the buzzer, until after he had soiled

his pajamas. Lourdes knew then her father would die. (22)

He would die because his fantasy of an efficient and hygienic American system proves false.

When Jorge arrives in New York for medical treatments for his stomach cancer, eating and sex become compulsions for Lourdes: “The more she took her father to the hospital for cobalt treatments, the more she reached for the pecan sticky buns and for Rufino” (20). Despite being near the parent she favors, it is as if his ailing presence reminds Lourdes that she lacks a kind of nourishment. Lourdes uses food and sex to nurture herself as her father’s illness grows beyond her control: “Lourdes was reaching through Rufino for something he could not give her, she wasn’t sure what” (21). But Lourdes’ compulsive eating is also related to her rape in Cuba since through eating she transforms her body in a way that does not attract male attention. It is as if she is trying to fill up the void left by the rape, her miscarriage, the absence of a maternal connection, and the possibility of losing parent she is closest to. Furthermore, if communism is imagined as a “cancer” and “poisonous,” Lourdes’ compulsive eating also signals that capitalism is just as unhealthy in its hyper-consumption. That she never manages to get “filled up” no matter how much she consumes symbolizes a political system marked by perpetual deficiency despite the continuous consumption on the part of its citizenry.

Significantly, while Lourdes has an insatiable appetite during her father’s illness, she quits eating when her father dies: “She envisions the muscled walls of her stomach shrinking, contracting, slickly clean from the absence of food and the gallons of springwater she drinks. She feels transparent, [. . .]” (167). Here Lourdes parallels

Celia's and Felicia's desire for "transparency" through infusing her obese body with water. She refuses to nourish her body. She is so repulsed by the smell of food that "[s]he can't even look at it without her mouth filling with the acrid saliva that precedes vomiting". Instead of symbolizing nourishment, food now signifies illness. Moreover, Lourdes also discontinues having sex with Rufino. She imagines her former sexual appetite in terms of revolting cannibalism, "a life-craving whore who fed on her husband's nauseating clots of yellowish milk" (169). Her dieting is imagined as a kind of cleansing and rebirth so that she has to be "weaned" back on food, like an infant after which she says she feels "pure, absolutely clean" (173). The liquid diet that Lourdes ingests is a "bluish fluid that comes in tubes like astronaut food. It tastes like chemicals" (170). The parallel between Lourdes's bluish liquid protein and her father's "cobalt" radiation treatments signals their view of the world which must be sanitized of communist contamination. But the irony of radiation therapy is that it kills good cells in order to also kill the cancerous ones. Thus, Lourdes's and Jorge's attempts to inoculate themselves from communism can only be accomplished by denying themselves or denying connections to their family members still tied to Cuba.

Lourdes loses a total of 118 pounds but just as Felicia's purification does not last, Lourdes regresses to her former physical self. When Pilar returns home from college over Thanksgiving break and mentions the possibility of moving back to Cuba, Lourdes refrains from arguing with her but ingests her anger and "eats, eats, eats, like a Hindu goddess with eight arms, eats, eats, eats, as if famine were imminent" (174). The loss of control over her consumption is exacerbated when Pilar takes Lourdes to an art museum where she "is mesmerized by the greenish water, by the sad, sputtering fountain, and a

wound inside her reopens” (174) as she recalls her miscarriage. The memory of the baby that died inside her, which had to be flushed from her body with saline solution, serves as the wound which reopens and she again tries to fill with food.

While her mother guards the Cuban shoreline from North American invaders, Lourdes patrols the streets of her Brooklyn neighborhood as an auxiliary policewoman (127). Instead of guarding the shoreline to the sea, Lourdes “works her way along the length of river that forms the western boundary of her territory” (133). Although she remains estranged from her mother, communicating with her father becomes part of her daily ritual even after he dies: “Her father visits her regularly at twilight, on her evening walks home from the bakery, and whispers to her through the oak and maple trees” (170). This communication parallels Celia and Pilar’s telepathic communication. But after awhile the connection between Jorge and Lourdes begins to wane: “Trees and buildings interfere with her reception, so Lourdes seeks quiet, open places to speak with her father-” (193). Jorge advises Lourdes to return to Cuba when Felicia dies, urging her to reconnect with Celia. When she does return, Lourdes visits what was once her husband’s family’s ranch, the place where she was raped by soldiers: “What she fears most is this: that her rape, her baby’s death were absorbed quietly by the earth” (emphasis added 227). Lourdes fears that her rape and miscarriage have simply disappeared from the island’s history. The boundaries of Lourdes’s body become more permeable once she returns to Cuba as symbolized by her profuse sweating and excessive showering, which suggests that the boundaries that she has constructed between herself and Cuba are beginning to dissolve (234). More importantly, when Lourdes revisits the site of her husband’s family’s ranch she finds that the site of abuse has been turned into a hospital. Perhaps it

also indicates the possibility for healing in Cuba for Lourdes. The erasure of the original site and its transformation to a place of care under a socialist government could imply that the site does not have to remain a site of pain for her.

### Disappearing Acts

Celia's relationship to her son Javier, is very different from that of either of her daughters. Javier, who left the island surreptitiously to escape his father's scorn for communism, returns from Czechoslovakia after being away for years. He decides to return after his wife leaves him and takes their daughter. A lump appears on his neck and a scar on his back--apparent physical manifestations of his emotional loss--and Celia "falls on [him] like a lover" (156) to nurse him back to health. Celia wonders whether the physical symptoms are a sign of the reappearance of her own traits: "Could her son, have inherited her habit of ruinous passion. Or is passion indiscriminate, incubating haphazardly like a cancer?" (157) Javier's symptoms parallel her own:

Celia remembers how her own eyes were once like her son's hollow sockets that attracted despair like a magnet. But in her case, neighbors had kept their distance, believing she was destined for an early death and anyone she touched would be forced to accompany her. They were afraid of her disease as if it were fatal, like tuberculosis, but worse, much worse. (157)

When Javier's condition continues to deteriorate as he becomes alcoholic, Celia tracks down the santera who helped her when she was grieving Gustavo's departure. But while

the santera had predicted a “wet landscape” for Celia, the santera’s body spontaneously combusts while she is praying for Javier. Celia notes how the santera whose

face is black and puckered and oily now and seems to breathe all at once like an undersea creature . . . positions herself under the pawpaw tree in the front yard. She prays every Catholic prayer she knows in quick, calm succession. . . Her body starts to sway, and her clasped hands rock beneath her chin until it seems she is all loose, swinging angles. And then, as Celia watches, the little *santera*’s moist eyes roll back in her dwarfish head until the whites gleam from two pinpricks, and she trembles once, twice, and slides against Celia in a heap on the sidewalk, smoking like a wet fire, sweet and musky, until nothing is left of her but her fringed cotton shawl. Celia, not knowing what else to do, folds the *santera*’s shawl into her handbag, and enters her home. (emphasis added, 160)

The description of the santera’s incineration recalls that of Celia’s roommate in the asylum. One is not quite sure what to make of the disappearance of this body. Has the santera, through the rituals of prayer and spiritual possession, inhabited Javier’s body-- which has become “flammable” with his ingestion of alcohol? One could read it this way because when Celia returns home, Javier has once again vanished. Or, one might also argue that the combustion of the santera’s body allows for corporeal trespassing to occur between Javier and Celia’s bodies so that with Javier’s disappearance Celia “feels a lump in her chest, compact as a walnut. A week later, the doctors remove her left breast. In its

place they leave a pink, pulpy scar like the one she'd discovered on her son's back" (160). Whereas Javier's lump and scar symbolized his broken marriage and alienation from his daughter, Celia's cancerous lump and scar symbolize disconnection from another of her children.

### Inheriting Cuba

While the means of sufficient expression seem to elude both Felicia and Lourdes, Pilar, who has lived most of her life in the U.S., inherits her grandmother's ability to express herself creatively which she does by painting. Pilar feels a intense connection with Celia, remembering her from when she was a little girl and longing for her presence instead of her mother's. She explains that despite their geographic separation, "Abuela Celia and I write to each other sometimes, but mostly I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep. She tells me stories about her life and what the sea was like that day" (29). This telepathic communication creates a crisis of place and identity for Pilar: "Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out. If I could only see Abuela Celia again, I'd know where I belonged" (58). And she sets out on a journey, leaving home and taking a bus from New York to Miami, from where she hopes to make it on to Cuba. Her plans are thwarted however when her relatives in Miami send her back to New York.

One reason that Pilar runs away is that she feels smothered by her mother's anti-Castro obsessions. She is skeptical of Lourdes' zealous patriotism for the United States. When Lourdes asks her to paint a mural for the grand-opening of her second bakery, Pilar responds by painting a punk version of the Statue of Liberty, where "Liberty's torch floats slightly beyond her grasp" and "black stick figures puls[e] in the air around

Liberty, thorny scars that look like barbed wire. . . at the base of the statue I put my favorite punk rallying cry: I'M A MESS. And then carefully, very carefully, I paint a safety pin through Liberty's nose" (141). Pilar reimagines the icon that is supposed to symbolize freedom for the immigrants and in doing so, refigures the immigrant's dream of coming to a welcoming, nurturing land of plenty<sup>67</sup>. Furthermore, the painting's image of a maternity that is not nurturing also symbolizes Pilar's alienation from her own mother.

Pilar shares such traits with her Aunt Felicia as a penchant for Beny Moré records and the rituals of santería. In fact, the impetus for Pilar's return to Cuba begins when she goes to a botanica where the santero recognizes her as a "daughter of Chango," the god of fire and lightning in the Afro-Cuban religion Santería. The Santero tells her that she "must finish what [she] began" and prescribes herbal baths for nine consecutive nights. While she is on her way home from the botanica, Pilar is molested by a group of boys in Central Park. The violent violation of her assault echoes Lourdes' rape as well as Felicia's abuse by Hugo (81). Simultaneously, she experiences a spiritual awakening that is also corporeal as she undergoes Santería bathing rituals. These permutations of Pilar's body signal a pivotal moment in the novel that is significant to herself, her mother and grandmother since they facilitate her return to Cuba with Lourdes. The fact that Pilar and Lourdes do return to Cuba signals yet another kind of "trespassing". The return signals an attempt at reconnection and reconciliation with the past, with family, and for Pilar, the politics of the Revolution. In this sense, the novel "trespasses" across many boundaries considered taboo by many Cubans in America who will not return to the island until Castro's death.

Although Pilar and Lourdes's return to Cuba traverses some significant boundaries, Pilar also finds that certain boundaries remain impenetrable when she reaches her native land. She realizes that reconnecting with her grandmother is not as easy as she had imagined: "I have this image of Abuela Celia underwater, standing on a reef with tiny chrome fish darting by her face like flashes of light. Her hair is waving in the tide and her eyes are wide open. She calls to me but I can't hear her. Is she talking to me from her dreams?" (220) Pilar confronts her nostalgia for Cuba and in doing so, comes to realize that her visit to her native country will not completely reconcile her to it or her grandmother. Instead of thinking of herself as an "exile" she begins to think of Cuba as, "a peculiar exile. . . an island-colony. We can reach it by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it at all" (219). Pilar encounters the difficulty in returning to her nation of origin. It is not as she had imagined her "homeland" would be--instead "home" for her is an ambivalent space as she acknowledges that "sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong--not instead of here, but more than here"(235). Significantly, despite this realization, Pilar begins to dream again and this time in Spanish: "I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. There's a magic here working its way through my veins" (235). Despite the obstacles that she has encountered upon returning to Cuba, Pilar continues to experience a permeability that facilitates her cultural and familial bonds.

### Testimonial Trespassing

Near the conclusion of Dreaming in Cuban, Lourdes and Pilar both have a role in facilitating Ivanito's exodus with the Mariel boatlift. After having a premonitory dream

about people leaving Cuba in boats, Lourdes secretly takes him to the Peruvian embassy where defectors are gathering. She leaves him there with \$200 and a piece of paper on which is printed in English her address and phone number. The note reads,

MY NAME IS IVAN VILLAVERDE, I AM A POLITICAL REFUGEE  
FROM CUBA. MY AUNT, LOURDES PUENTE, OF 2212 LINDEN  
AVENUE, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK, WILL SPONSOR ME.  
PLEASE CALL HER AT (212) 834-4071 or (212) 63-CAKES. (239)

This note serves as a kind of testimonial fragment reminiscent of the opening of many testimonios<sup>68</sup>. Despite being written in English, a language that Ivanito does not understand, it will serve as his passport into the dominant discourse. This testimony is significant for its brevity. It establishes Ivanito's identity through a minimal amount of words, and in a language that he himself does not speak or read. Yet we don't know for sure whether or not Ivanito arrives in the United States, as readers, we might assume so given the fact that 125,000 Cubans were granted political asylum during the Mariel exodus.

Initially, Pilar goes to find Ivanito, hoping to return him to Celia, but once she sees him in the crowd she changes her mind. Pilar has no way of explaining what she encounters at the Peruvian embassy: "Nothing can record this, . . . Not words, not paintings, not photographs" (241). It is interesting to read this passage alongside a Cuban American memoir which does attempt to document the Mariel exodus. In Before Night Falls, Reinaldo Arenas recounts his own experience of escaping Cuba in the Mariel boat

lift. He describes having to pass a test to “prove” that he was homosexual, “At the police station they asked me if I was a homosexual and I said yes; then they asked me if I was active or passive and I took the precaution of saying that I was passive. . . They made me walk in front of them to see if I was queer. I passed the test, and the lieutenant yelled to another officer, ‘Send this one directly’”(281). The crossing over of accepted standards of Cuban masculinity allows Arenas to pass out of the borders of the nation. The nation does not “want” to contain him and his “diseased” body is allowed to move into another space . He describes eluding the State Security authorities as he waits in line to depart:

Before entering the area for people already authorized to leave the country, we had to wait in a long line and submit our passports to an agent of State Security who checked our names against those listed in a huge book; they were the names of people not authorized to leave the country. I was terrified. I quickly asked someone for a pen and since my passport was handwritten and the e of Arenas was closed, I changed it to an i and became Reinaldo Arinas. The officer looked up my new name, and of course never found it. (283)

For Arenas, he must manipulate the text of his identity in order to leave the island. These two moments are significant because of the relationship both draw between the ability to construct one’s subjectivity in a way that allows them to pass into the U.S. They are incomplete testimonials, but even these fragments are sufficient (we assume) to allow their entry into the U.S.

In Dreaming in Cuban, the combination of mother and daughter enabling Ivanito's escape signals a shift in their previously polarized relationship. William Luis reads this scene through the lens of familial regeneration in that Pilar and Lourdes "save" Ivanito because he is the only male family member left to carry on the family name (233). I would argue that Ivanito and Pilar together will carry on the family history which is significant since one of them was raised in Cuba and the other in the U.S. Most significantly, when Pilar finds Ivanito in the crowd at the embassy, together they experience a connection beyond words as she describes how when she embraces him, "I can feel my cousin's heart through his back. I can feel a rapid uncoiling inside us both" (242). This connection is striking because while we don't know for sure whether or not Ivanito makes it to the United States, what we do know is that he has no real connection to family left on the island. Ivanito does not dream or have a telepathic connection with any other family members; he tries to make contact with the outside world with his radio: "My mother never speaks to me, but sometimes I sidestep along the beach until I pick up radio stations in Key West" (191). His mother is dead, his grandmother is dying, and he does not have a relationship with his father. His sisters have their own hermetically sealed connection to each other. Leaving Cuba provides the possibility for connection with Pilar and Lourdes, who sees in him a chance at reconciling with the past. But perhaps what is most remarkable about Ivanito is what he represents in his position in-between Cuba and the United States. When he grows up he wants to be a translator for world leaders (230). This suggests his potential for bridging not only linguistic, but cultural and political boundaries--he signifies the ultimate trespasser. Yet, the role of translator as a native informant is fraught with ambiguities. Paired with his cousin, Pilar,

who carries her grandmother's letters-as history--to the United States, they represent the future generation of Cuban "native informants" who will complicate the existing Cuban-American discourse. But we are also left with the fact that we do not know for sure whether or not Ivanito arrives in the United States. He disappears from the text when Pilar tells Celia that she "couldn't find him" (240).

It is clear that Pilar is the grandchild designated by Celia to carry on the family's history as she bequeaths her with her collection of letters which predate Pilar's existence. Celia's final epistolary entry (also the last page of the novel) dated January 11, 1959 explains, "The revolution is eleven days old. My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. . . I will no longer write to you, *mi amor*. She will remember everything" (245).

#### Wet Landscapes

The novel ends with Celia's self-submersion into the sea which has sustained her throughout her life: "Celia steps into the ocean and imagines she's a soldier on a mission-for the moon, or the palms, or El Líder. The water rises quickly around her. It submerges her throat and her nose, her open eyes that do not perceive salt. Her hair floats loosely from her skull and waves above her in the tide. She breathes through her skin, she breathes through her wounds." (emphasis added, 243). William Luis reads Celia's suicide as her giving up after having been betrayed by Pilar and Ivanito, but I would argue that this is too pat a reading for the sea is too complex a metaphor to be reduced to a singular representation. It represents many contradictory images to Celia. For one thing, it is as if she has finally achieved the "wet landscape" of the santera's prophecy. By giving herself over to the sea, Celia is finally able to leave the shoreline

and the boundaries of her body becomes completely porous. She is no longer maintaining the boundaries of the land and sea, or the nation. One could also argue that she becomes the goddess Yemaya, “the queen of the sea and salt water” (Barnet 92). This is signified since throughout the novel Celia has been associated with the color blue and Yemaya’s color “is navy blue with some white, symbolizing the foam of the waves” (92). Thus, if configured as Yemaya, one does not have to read Celia’s final departure into the sea as solely negative, but as a reclaiming of the sea.

Aquatic imagery, shades of blue and dreams are constant reminders of the altered reality that Dreaming in Cuban depicts. The magical realist elements of the novel serve to highlight the parallels and connections within the del Pino family across time and space. Dreaming becomes a way to reconnect family that has been estranged through geography and political beliefs. Dreams serve as the modus operandi for various members of the del Pino family to psychically cross over geographic boundaries. Thus, dreaming becomes a ritual through which members of the del Pino family imagine the Cuban diaspora. While magical realist elements such as dreams and aquatic imagery represent attempts to heal the wounds of familial, political and geographic fractures, Garcia’s text also demonstrates that the scar left after the attempted severing of ties between the United States and Cuba is “suppurating, always suppurating”<sup>69</sup>.

#### Testimonial Trespassing: *The Sugar Island*

In recent years, especially since the fall of communism in the U.S.S.R., and the U.S. economic embargo, life in Cuba has become increasingly difficult. The combination of economic hardship and governmental blocks on emigration has resulted in an increase in the number of people fleeing the island clandestinely on makeshift rafts and small

boats. In 1994, the U.S. Coast Guard rescued 36,791 rafters, the majority of whom were, for the first time in Cuban migration history, held at the Guantànamo Naval Base, while some (4,000) were sent to U.S. military camps in Panama for up to eighteen months (Lisandro Pérez 206). Despite this shift in official policy, Lisandro Pérez states that, “Cubans who manage to set foot on U.S. territory are eligible for permanent admission to the United States,” which includes rafters who can evade authorities. The most highly publicized example of fleeing Cuba in this fashion was the case of Elian Gonzalez.

When the story of Elian Gonzalez broke in the U.S. media over Thanksgiving weekend 1999, it was no surprise that Elian quickly became the object of both a political as well as a familial battle between his father back in Cuba and his relatives in Miami, exiles from Castro’s Cuba. Elian was one of the only survivors on an aluminum boat that set out from Cuba for Miami. His mother was among those who died. After being rescued and brought to Miami. The question became would Elian’s identity remain Cuban or would he become (Cuban) American? Which side would be able to claim his story?

The potential that Elian’s story had to mobilize the Cuban American community in Miami says much about the growing political power of this group of immigrants. Ivonne Lamazares’s first novel, The Sugar Island, published in 2000, bears some interesting similarities with the Elian Gonzales story--only this story charts a mother and daughter’s migration from Cuba on a *balsa*. The novel’s representation of the ability to manipulate a Cuban immigrant story successfully enough to not only gain political asylum in the United States, but also for economic security, raises questions about immigrant stories that circulate and become commodified in the United States. For the

characters in The Sugar Island the issue of health and sickness is directly linked to the construction of a convincing *balseraes* testimony--one that elicits sympathy from the Cuban American community. Lamazares's novel raises important questions for *testimonio* and the position of "native informants" as the testimonial construction of Cuba becomes a passport for entry into the U.S.

The novel opens in 1958, with the narrator's mother having returned from fighting with rebels in the mountains: "One day Mamá said life was about to start and ran off to the mountains to become a rebel *guerrillera*. No one knew exactly where she had gone until she came back pregnant a year later on a burro" (3). This passage serves as a kind of parody of the *testimonio* genre. Guerrilla training in the mountains is a typical trope of *testimonios* which recount revolutionary participation.<sup>70</sup> However, the fact that this recruit is female and returns to her home because she "got knocked up by a rebel cook so they sent her home on a jackass" does not continue the typical *testimonio* format (4). Mamá has little to tell of revolutionaries other than: "El Che was a 'beautiful man,' Raúl Castro a 'uniformed rodent,' his brother Fidel a 'Marxist-Leninist Opportunist' " (4).

The narrative quickly jumps ahead to 1966 when Mamá explains to her thirteen-year old daughter, Tanya, her plans for escaping Cuba: "At midnight Cousin Romy from Cojimar will take us for a ride on his boat, *La Quintana*" (6). The motivation for this decision has little to do with fleeing communism and more to do with the fact that Mamá learns that El Gambao Casals, Tanya's father, defected "as in he stayed in Panama" while a shipmate on a Russian tanker (7). While Celia and Felicia del Pino face a similar situation when the men in their lives leave Cuba, Mamá is determined not to be left

behind. In fact, she wants to take her children with her on the treacherous journey. Tanya explains, “I wanted to tell her *el Norte* wasn’t for us. We weren’t yankees. We weren’t rich *gusanos* getting back our country club” (10). Instead of escaping in Cousin Romy’s boat, Tanya’s mother is arrested and imprisoned when the authorities discover her escape plan and Tanya and her brother Emanuel are sent to live with their father’s great aunt Melena, a nearly-blind piano teacher (15). When her mother returns after a summer in prison, she again becomes restless and makes plans to journey to Miami along with five others in a makeshift raft. While she tries to convince Tanya that she must leave to escape the “burden” of the revolution, Tanya confesses, “I tried but I couldn’t feel such a burden . . . I wasn’t willing to pay such a high price for a change of scenery” (145). These remarks stand in stark contrast to the strong emotions that the revolution evokes from the del Pinos in Dreaming in Cuban. What weighs most heavily on Tanya’s mind is leaving behind her younger brother, Emanuel. Mamá argues that they can send for him once they are settled in the U.S. (146). Ultimately, Mamá forces Tanya into taking the dangerous trip, telling her “I’m your mother, . . . And I can still speak for you” (148). The voyage is led by brothers Romulo and Martin:

They repeated the rules: the women were lookouts, the men would row in shifts. Nestor spread a map on the ground and outlined the route to a place name Cay Sal Bank. The yankee Coast Guard was most likely to spot them there. But only the brothers Romulo and Martin had really trained for the voyage, spending whole nights on an inner tube pretending to fish while studying the griffins’ surveillance schedule and trying to overcome

their fear of sharks. No one else knew anything about the sea. Teresa could barely swim. (147)

Like the Haitian refugees in “Children of the Sea” once they are out to sea, the Cubans experience disorientation: “But here we were, lost in the ocean where north looked like south and east looked like west--a skinny line dividing sky and water” (152). When a storm comes up, the raft is flipped over, the rafters spilling out. Tanya describes how “above the racket of the waves and the rain and crisp thunder I heard my full name, Tanya del Carmen Casals Villalta, spoken like a promise. [. . .] My limbs felt heavy, they way they do before sleep, and I watched myself sliding, a Storm Captain going over in a six-foot wave, choking in Yemaya’s grip” (153). Tanya wakes up in a hospital bed after having been “unconscious at sea for hours” next to her mother who “shed sunburnt skin like a rattlesnake” (157). She encounters a Dominican nurse and a Puerto Rican intern in the hospital and Mamá informs her that “the city was full of us--hundreds who’d crossed the same ocean in homemade contraptions. I wanted to run down the long white hallway and out to the streets to knock on doors, shake hands with survivors. I wanted to shout we’d made it” (158).

### False Witness

The initial triumph of their arrival in Miami is mitigated for Tanya when, before they have even been released from the hospital, Mamá begins to cash in on their story. When a reporter from a local television station interviews her, Mamá tells her, “Well, Alicia, we came here for freedom, as you can understand, [. . .] So my daughter could have a better life” (159) and while “Mamá told the story of our voyage and rescue on the

high seas,” Tanya explains, “I remembered nothing after the raft had flipped. Whenever I tried to, my mind turned dim and I could feel only the pull of a hand lifting me from the waves” (159-160). The story that Mamá tells the reporter is one of a mother who does anything she can so that her daughter will survive: “She’d caught me, Mamá told the reporter, by the hair as I slid down into the water, after my head hit one of the oil drums. We’d drifted, she said, the two of us alone on a small bobbing scrap of canvas and inner tubes, me unconscious, scalp bleeding a little, Mamá holding on, sobbing, hysterical” (160). As her mother wipes away a tear while telling her story to the reporter, Tanya is already skeptical of her mother’s story as she recognizes its hyperbole, “This was high drama, the greatest of our lives. [. . .] She was a hero.” Yet, the official version of their story that appears in the newspaper is signified by the headline which reads:

MOTHER SAVES DAUGHTER IN SAVAGE OCEAN; MIRACLE AT  
SEA: A SURVIVOR’S STORY; A MOTHER’S GIFT” (161).

The story that Mamá tells constructs her as the ultimate mother who sacrifices everything to save her child, a far cry from the mother who forced her daughter to risk her life to accompany her on the journey. It is this story of selfless motherhood that becomes so attractive to the community of wealthy Cuban exiles. Mrs. Walter-Prado tells them, “Your story has power. It reaches people” (166) and invites them to be the guests-of-honor at a luncheon with fellow Cuban American women where Mamá “told again the story of our rescue. She told it as if it were her first time, slowing down in places, looking into the darkness” (176). Tanya recognizes her mother’s manipulation of the

emotions of Cuban-American exiles. One of the women responds, “One thing is to read about this tragedy, [. . .] Another to see it firsthand” (177). For a time, Mamá is rewarded for her story with checks, furniture, clothes and other items. However, Tanya is tormented at having left Emanuel behind in Cuba. She is also hesitant about being in the U.S. herself: “people seemed no better here, only luckier to have landed on the easier side of history” (182).

Tanya learns the truth when she encounters Martin, one of the Cubans from the raft, who her mother told her had died. Martin tells her that it was his brother, Rumolo who saved her from drowning in the ocean: “he grabbed you as you went down and hauled you to your mother’s tube. The raft came apart, you know, the oil drums, the ropes broke off, everything. Nestor and me grabbed on to another tube. My brother swam over to us. He was a very good swimmer. But he didn’t make it here” (198). Martin’s story serves as the “true” testimonio, but its truth-value does not hold the economic value that Mamá’s own constructed testimonio does. It is after she learns the truth about her own rescue that Tanya decides to leave her mother for good.

Years later, when Tanya confronts her mother’s lies, Mamá explains to her that “I wanted our lives to count. We weren’t supposed to count, you know. We never mattered, not to the Communists and probably not to the gringos either. But now we’re here. I did what I had to do. I made your life count” (204). Thus, while we may be dismayed that Mamá would use her daughter’s near-drowning for economic gain, one must also recognize that at the same time, Mamá does not allow herself to be caught up in an allegiance to either nation or political system. She recognizes that regardless of which system they are in, she must do what she needs to for their survival. Perhaps the greatest

difference for testimonio as it crosses borders into the United States is that its urgency becomes tied to its economic value. The story that Mamá tells binds her with Tanya in a way that Tanya decides is ultimately unhealthy. In contrast to the attempts at mother-daughter reconciliation in Dreaming in Cuban, the mother-daughter relationship is ultimately severed in The Sugar Island despite the fact that Mamá and Tanya survived the precarious journey together.

### Conclusion

What I have attempted to show in my analysis of Dreaming in Cuban and The Sugar Island is how these narratives reflect the highly charged political atmosphere of U.S.-Cuban relations in such matters as communication, family, and physicality. When considering these narratives as ethnic American literatures, one must simultaneously regard them as literatures of the Americas because of their transnational scope and engagement with such issues as refugees, migration, and political asylum that reach beyond U.S. borders and reflect the history of U.S. foreign policy. Garcia and Lamazares subvert easy notions of migration which see becoming “American” as the ultimate goal. Instead we are forced to contemplate those whose migration is haunted by the desire for their native country. By reflecting the complexity of Cuban-American experience these narratives challenge current public discourse about Cuba which tends to be reduced to the stale rebuke of Castro. We must remember the multiple crossings that Cubans make when they migrate--geographic, linguistic, cultural, political, and familial. Immigrant stories become sites of complex power negotiation when they articulate a poetics of disease as in Dreaming in Cuban, or reflect a testimonial commerce as in The Sugar Island. I have tried to show in my exploration of these issues the complex manner in

which the fractures of Cuban migration are imagined.

### Conclusion to Chapter 2: Rites of Passage

As we have seen throughout this chapter, water unites Haitians and Cubans in their migrations. Towards the end of Dreaming in Cuban, the narrator alludes to this:

Four fresh bodies are floating in the Straits of Florida. It's a family from Cardenas. They stole a boat from a fisherman. It collapsed in the current early this morning. A boatload of Haitians will leave Gonaives next Thursday. They will carry the phone numbers of friends in Miami and the life savings of relatives. They will sail to the Tropic of Cancer and sink into the sea. (217)

Danticat, Payen, Garcia and Lamazares subvert easy notions of migration which see becoming American as an ultimate ends. Instead we are forced to remember those who never make it, the "children of the sea," as well as those who desire to return to their native country.

What I have attempted to show in this chapter is how testimonies, testimonials, become places of complex state power negotiation, whether this is represented fictionally or in non-fiction texts. Furthermore, my exploration of health and sickness in these texts reveals the complex ways in which the fractures of migration are imagined. While this chapter has begun to look at questions of immigrants as native informants, in the next chapter, I explore this subject position in much more detail by looking at the fiction of

Dominican-born Julia Alvarez and Nelly Rosario.

There are also connections that can be made between the precarious migrations represented in the narratives I explore in this chapter and those represented in Francisco Goldman's The Ordinary Seaman, which I will explore in chapter 4. While Goldman's text focuses on the forces of globalization on the migration of a group of Central American men to a ship in Brooklyn harbor, there are many connections to be made in terms of the position of those migrants between nation-states.

### Chapter 3: The Native Informants of Dominican-American Fiction

In an August 26th, 2002 broadcast of the National Public Radio show “The World,” Arab-American writers spoke of their position having to “explain the Arab psyche” to Americans, after the events of September 11, 2001. One writer remarked, “we’re all potential informants on our Arab brethren”. The situation of these Arab-American writers reveals one of the myriad ways in which writers become implicated in producing knowledge surrounding their ethnicity and national origin. Clearly, the strategies that ethnic writers use in performing the role of the informant takes on added significance in the current political climate. For as the writer’s remarks above demonstrate, one of the predicaments that contemporary U.S. ethnic writers face in their role as informants is that in revealing cultural information they risk betraying their culture.

In chapter two I explored the trespassing narratives of Haitian and Cuban migrants who must testify to their native spaces as dangerous and uninhabitable in their attempts to gain asylum in the United States. I looked at how Edwidge Danticat, Nikol Payen, Cristina Garcia and Yvonne Lamazares trespass across the invisible boundaries of American/U.S. literature as well as the linguistic boundaries dividing “francophone,” “hispanophone” and “anglophone” Caribbean literatures. In this chapter, I address texts which represent the voices of the native space in the Dominican Republic as told through first-generation Dominican immigrants to the United States. The authors and texts I examine include Nelly Rosario’s Song of the Water Saints, Julia Alvarez’s Yo!, Loida Maritza Perez’s Geographies of Home, and Angie Cruz’s Soledad.

As I discussed in my analysis of Texaco and The Ventriloquist's Tale in chapter one, the narrator-as-informant can be fraught with ambiguity even within the “native” or home space. In this chapter, I am using the trope of “native informants” as a frame for my analysis because I would like to analyze the ways that Dominican American women writers serve as informants on Dominican culture--whether willingly, unwillingly, consciously or not--since their novels are published in the United States, their readers are largely in the United States. The fact that these texts are written by women, representing women's experiences highlights the significance of gender in relating native culture. In this chapter I focus solely on Dominican-American writers in order to explore the multiple ways that writers represent the native Dominican space. Each of these texts reveal the manner in which an immigrant's location in the United States impacts her account of the native space and her ability to perform the role of native informant. As Janus-faced native informants they must trespass across racial, ethnic, social class and linguistic borders in order to negotiate the terrains of local Dominican experiences with that of ethnically-determined spaces in the U.S. More specifically, I explore the complexities of race and class in the native space as well as in the “new” space of the United States and the implications of racial and social trespassing in the texts. A number of these texts follow the structure of the bildungsroman and rely on the traditional narrative of mobility and ascension through education.

I begin by exploring the rendering of the “native” in Dominican-born Nelly Rosario's Song of the Water Saints (2002) and the way in which the U.S. military occupation of the Dominican Republic, 1916-24, serves as historical context for the exploitation of “native” peoples through photography. While up until now I have been

most concerned with how the native gets inscribed through language, Rosario's novel reveals the imperial desire to capture the native visually, specifically through the technology of photography. The emphasis on photography foregrounds the artificial construction of racial categories in the Dominican Republic. The novel reveals that these racial constructions are influenced by external forces such as the U.S. military occupation as well as through the colonial consumption of the eroticized/exoticized other. Rosario's novel shares with some of the texts in the previous chapter, the discourse of disease. But while the diseased discourses present in Dreaming in Cuban signal the inability of the characters to find optimum expression, in Song of the Water Saints disease becomes a symbol of outside intervention in the native Dominican space. Dominican women's bodies, in particular, prove to be most vulnerable to these deleterious external forces.

In the second part of the chapter I analyze the role of Dominican-born Julia Alvarez who overtly positions herself and her narrators as "native informants" for U.S. Latina literature and identity in novels such as How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents and Yo! as well as in her collection of essays, Something to Declare. I have argued elsewhere that while critics have taken Alvarez's fiction as representative of a collective Dominican experience, she, in fact, represents a specific elite segment of Dominican society in her historiographic fictional representation of the Trujillo Regime, In the Time of the Butterflies<sup>71</sup>. I would argue that the same is true of her depiction of Dominican immigrant experiences in the United States. Specifically, I address Alvarez's use of ethnographic tropes in both her fiction and non-fiction essays. These tropes hold a particular significance for Alvarez as an ethnic writer in the United States and I link this with Gayatri Spivak's theory of the "New Immigrant-as-Native Informant."

Finally, against Alvarez's rendering of the immigrant native informant, I read other Dominican-born authors now residing in the United States. Loida Maritza Perez's Geographies of Home (1999) and Angie Cruz's Soledad (2001) explore the struggles of Dominican immigrant women for whom the Dominican Republic cannot readily be claimed as "home." More specifically, Perez and Cruz reveal not only the linguistic terrains that Dominicans confront in their transition from the Spanish-speaking island to the United States, but they also explore the racial boundaries that Dominicans who do not fit easily into a "Latino" complexion, and are instead seen as "black" in the U.S or conversely, are resented for being too light-skinned.

#### New Immigrant as Native Informant

One of the most comprehensive studies of the political, cultural and historical implications of native informant can be found in Gayatri Spivak's book A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present:

My aim, to begin with, was to track the figure of the Native Informant through various practices: philosophy, literature, history and culture. Soon I found that the tracking showed up a colonial subject detaching itself from the Native Informant. After 1989, I began to sense that a certain postcolonial subject had, in turn, been recoding the colonial subject and appropriating the Native Informant's position. Today, with globalization in full swing, telecommunicative informatics taps the Native Informant directly in the name of indigenous knowledge and advances biopiracy. (xi)

Spivak aims to chart the Native Informant from “colonial discourse studies to transnational discourse studies” (x). In doing so, she addresses the role of what she terms the “New Immigrant” who has emerged with the drastic changes in migration since the 1970s, in which vast numbers of migrants moved from “Third World” to “First World” places, especially the Caribbean, Latin America and South Asia. She argues that “Increasingly, there is the self-marginalizing or self consolidating migrant or postcolonial masquerading as a ‘native informant’” (6). Spivak cautions against relying too heavily on the New Immigrant as native informant because once the native has left the native space, their relationship to the native culture dramatically shifts. While Spivak is referring primarily to “Third World” postcolonial critics in the U.S. academy, I would like to link Spivak’s theory of the New Immigrant to the role of U.S. Caribbean fiction writers. While ethnic writers occupy a less theoretical/critical role, they reach a wider audience as interpreter/translators of culture in their writing. I will analyze how the writers I explore represent the New Immigrant/native informant textually-- when they resist this role and when they readily adopt it.

#### Historical Relations Between the Dominican Republic and the United States

In order to situate the Dominican-American writers I explore later in this chapter, it is necessary to address the history of political relations between the United States and the Dominican Republic. In her essay, “Left Alone With America,” Amy Kaplan writes, “The study of American culture had traditionally been cut off from the study of foreign relations”. The literature in this chapter (as well as that of chapters 2 and 4) highlight the urgency of addressing the history of U.S. foreign relations throughout the Caribbean and Central America. Just as the United States had a long history of involvement and

intervention in Cuban and Haitian affairs, so too did the U.S. have a long history of involvement with Dominican affairs. Thus, it is necessary to look at these writers through the context of Manifest Destiny and U.S. expansionism throughout the Caribbean and Latin America.

Throughout the nineteenth-century, the United States made several attempts to annex the island of Hispaniola. As Eric Roorda explains, “Ships on their way into the Caribbean Sea most often navigated through the Windward and Mona passages flanking the island of Hispaniola, which would have to be defended in the event of war. For this reason, the acquisition of a naval base, or ‘coaling station,’ at Samaná Bay in the northeast Dominican Republic was one of the main objects sought by a succession of American envoys to Santo Domingo beginning in 1854” (The Dictator Next Door 11). When the Dominican government, under the power of Ulisis Heureaux, took on massive debt secured through the Dutch Westendorp Company, which then went bankrupt in 1892, a group of U.S. investors bought the Westendorp Company (Roorda 12). When Heureaux was assassinated in 1899, “the American investors of the San Domingo Improvement Company controlled” the nation’s foreign debt and the unfinished railroad. By 1904, European interests threatened to descend on the Dominican Republic, and in response, “to preempt intervention in the western Atlantic by any nation other than the United States, President Roosevelt added a new dimension to the Monroe Doctrine (1823), which pledged security for the Latin American republics against European imperialism” (Roorda 13). This interpretation became known as the “Roosevelt Corollary” and in it the president, “asserted that it was the duty of the United States to play the role of an ‘international police power’ when the ‘impotence’ or ‘wrongdoing’ of

regional governments attracted the attention of European warships” (13). By 1905, Roosevelt “used executive power to conclude a ‘modus vivendi’ with the Dominican Republic. . . which legitimized U.S. control of Dominican finances” (14). The arrangement became formalized through a 1907 treaty. For obvious reasons, the United States became a much more visible diplomatic presence in the Dominican Republic, whose representatives were of the same interests as the elite. With the assassination of yet another president, Ramon Caceres, “U.S. diplomats moved from a position of influence to one of decisive authority” (15). In the years that followed, the U.S. sent its warships to police the region and the Wilson administration demanded “that the Dominican government turn over control of its budget, public works and armed forces to the United States” (15). What followed was a U.S. military occupation of the country that lasted from 1915-1924. Among other things, the U.S. Marines “pursued the goal of complete civil order in the towns, where an indignant Dominican polity resented the loss of sovereignty, and in the countryside, where nationalist guerrilla resistance persisted” (17). One of the tactics used by the Marines was to “gather the rural populations into ‘concentration,’ where they used military bands to entertain the campesinos and speeches to convince them of the occupation’s benevolent intentions” (18). The Marines also trained Dominican men to be soldiers, one of whom, Rafael Trujillo, went on to become the dictator who controlled the country for nearly 30 years. When the U.S. pulled its military troops out in 1924, due to protest of Dominicans, the U.S. then adopted a non-interventionist “Good Neighbor Policy” based not so much on “gunboat diplomacy,” but instead on “pan-Americanism” that promoted “policy coordination, economic symbiosis, cultural appreciation, shared heritage and intertwined destiny” (28).

Today, Dominicans represent the largest group of immigrants from the Caribbean in the United States. While Dominican migration to the U.S. began as early as the 1920s, the current massive migration began in the early 1960s and peaked in the 1990s. Throughout the Trujillo dictatorship (1930-1960) there were severe restrictions placed on travel for Dominican citizens. Max Castro notes that between 1988-1998, 401,646 Dominicans were admitted to the U.S. Castro states that Dominican migration “does not fit easily into convenient narratives of the right or the left. Unlike Cuba, the DR has a free-market economy, representative government, and, at least in recent years, increasingly fair elections. Unlike Haiti, the country has not suffered under brutal military rule in recent years” (5). While much of Dominican migration “occurs through safe, normal, legal channels” there is also “a large clandestine movement of Dominican boat people from the DR to Puerto Rico” (Castro 5).

“Cultures Do Not Hold Still For Their Portraits”

Set amidst the United States military invasion of 1916-1924, Song of the Water Saints traces the lives of three generations of Dominican women: Graciela, her daughter Mercedes, and granddaughter Leila. Rosario’s novel begins with the U.S. invasion that precedes Trujillo’s rise to power and 30 year dictatorship. Challenging Trujillo’s nationalist rhetoric of a pure “Spanish” nation, Rosario depicts the multicultural population of the Dominican Republic--which includes Haitians, Turks and Syrians. Furthermore, the novel also reveals the imposition of external (U.S. and European) racial categories on native Dominicans. In doing so, the narrative returns to the captured images of eroticized natives--providing another kind of narrative of the native-informant. Photography becomes a trope that recurs throughout the novel to explore racial relations

between strangers as well as among family members.

The novel opens with a description of an arresting visual spectacle-- a postcard image:

They are naked. The boy cradles the girl. Their flesh is copper. They recline on a Victorian couch surrounded by cardboard Egyptian pottery, a stuffed wild tiger, a toy drum, and glazed coconut trees. An American prairie looms behind them in dull oils.

Shadows ink the muscles of the boy's arms, thighs, and calves. His penis lies flaccid. Cheekbones are high, as if the whittler of his bones was reveling when She carved him.

The girl lies against the boy. There is an ocean in her eyes.

Clouds of hair camouflage one breast. An orchid blooms on her cheek. (3)

The postcard image reproduces a simulacra of an eroticized native other, lacking specific details regarding the identity of the subjects, their national origin, or even geographic location. The postcard is simply titled, "Scene and Type #E32." The contextual information is spare: "White border-style postcard/Country Unknown, CA. 1900/ Printed by: Peter J. West & Co./Otto Nather Co./Hamburg, Germany". Seemingly, the image could have been documented anywhere at any time "circa 1900". The image collapses time and space through the juxtaposition of "Egyptian pottery," an 'American prairie' and "glazed coconut trees". Amidst all of these signifiers are the anonymous boy and girl who are identified only through their nude "copper flesh". In her book, Imperial Leather:

Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, Anne McClintock describes how photography became central to the imperial enterprise, especially through the circulation of photographs and postcards of the colonized “native”. She explains how photography helped to construct the colonial other as “exotic”:

In the photographic studio, exotic time was reproduced as exotic spectacle, as image of palm trees, or next to a Grecian pillar, the sitter seems subtly to inhabit a different temporal zone. In colonial postcards, primitive icons and atavistic relics were arranged around sitters to metonymically signify an anachronistic relation to the technological time of modernity. In the colonial postcard, time is reorganized as spectacle; through the choreographing of fetish icons, history is organized into a single, linear narrative of progress. Photography became the servant of imperial progress. (125)

The “native” was reproduced through mass production, sometimes as pornographic images to be consumed by the public. If rendered as “premodern,” postcards of the native thus served to reaffirm the metropolitan space as “modern.” Furthermore, the postcard introducing Rosario’s text also constructs the colonial other as eroticized—their nudity portrays them as “uncivilized.”<sup>72</sup> In The Colonial Harem, a study of the production and circulation of postcards (cartes postales) of Algerian women during French colonialism, Malek Alloula locates the “Golden Age of the colonial postcard” in the early twentieth century, between 1900 and 1930 (5). Alloula writes,

The postcard is ubiquitous. It can be found not only at the scene of the crime it perpetrates but at a far remove as well. Travel is the essence of the postcard, and expedition is its mode. It is the fragmentary return to the mother country. It straddles two spaces: the one it represents and the one it will reach. It marks out the peregrinations of the tourist, the successive postings of the soldier, the territorial spread of the colonist. (4)

Thus, postcards are trespassers which transport images of eroticism and exoticism across time and space.

Rosario ties the project of “scopic imperialism” (McClintock’s term) specifically to the U.S. military invasion of the island by depicting the construction of the postcard image that prefaces the novel in the first chapter titled, “Invasions, 1916, Santo Domingo, Republica Dominicana”. The chapter reveals the details leading up to the construction of the image, injecting agency into its native subjects, teenagers Graciela and Silvio, by reversing the gaze so that they see the “yanqui” watching them during an amorous exchange. The couple knows they are being watched, but “Passion burned stronger than fear” and “With her tongue tracing Silvio’s neck, Graciela couldn’t care less that Theodore Roosevelt’s ‘soft voice and big stick’ on Latin America had dipped the yanqui the furthest south he had ever been from New York City” (8). Unlike the objectified image in the postcard, here Graciela maintains power over her sexuality—even flaunting it. The man approaches the couple, informing them that he is not part of the marines and introduces himself as New York photographer Peter West. While explaining that “he had

accumulated an especially piquant series of photographs: brothel quadroons bathed in feathers, a Negro chambermaid naked to the waist” (9) it becomes clear that West’s intention includes “documenting” a kind of racialized eroticism of native Dominican women.

It becomes clear just how carefully these images are constructed when West lures the pair to his warehouse studio “With the promise of pesos” and the young couple are “happy . . . to help this yanqui-man push together the papier-mache trees, to roll out the starched canvas of cracked land and sky” (10). When he finds their skin too shiny, he wipes their bodies with powder which makes them “too light” and “used, instead, mud from the previous day’s rain” (11). Thus, he constructs them as darker-skinned than they naturally are--with the soil of their native land. When he tries to get them to “mimic his pouts and sleepy eyes” he becomes frustrated, telling them, “Like this, you idiots” (10-11). He finally achieves the desired “look” for the couple after fondling the sexual organs of both and slapping their faces. After West hands Silvio the money he had promised, he makes a sexual advance towards Graciela, from which she escapes when Silvio attempts to break the film plate and the couple flees out into the street, but “Graciela and Silvio did not know they had just been immortalized” (12).

If the experience at the warehouse had not been enough warning against the danger that the “yanquis” represented, on her way home after the incident, Graciela witnesses an even more brutal act of violence. After having been warned by a woman to “be careful with those yanqui-men ahead” (13), she crouches on the side of the road “to see how the fearless swan woman would move safely past them” (13). The U.S. soldiers, with their rifles aimed at the woman shout, “Run, you Negro wench!” and

A pop resounded. Through the blades of grass, Graciela could see the white bundle continue down the road in the steady path. The woman held her head high as if the bundle could stretch above the ground. Another pop and Graciela saw the woman drop to the ground. The soldiers milled around the screaming and thrashing in the grass. Some already had their shirts pulled out of their pants. (14)

The U.S. military is implicated in this act of violence so that the invasion of the island becomes parallel to the soldiers impending “invasion” of the native woman’s body. Significantly, this is also done through rendering her a “Negro wench” imposing their racist categories upon her. Graciela flees while she still can and arrives home, where she discovers that the violence has invaded her home space. She finds her mother being held at gunpoint by an American soldier: “Mai knelt by a soldier whose fists entangled her hair . . . A man wearing his mustache in the handlebar style of the yanquis calmly asked Mai where her husband hid the pistols and why he was away in the hills. Mai’s face was marble as she explained that her husband had no weapons, he was a God-fearing farmer” (15). Graciela distracts the soldiers by telling them “Pai don’t got pistols, he only got cane rum” (15). “The man twisted the ends of his mustache. With the same fingers he clamped Graciela’s nose and held it until their was . . . ‘Now you’ve got my aquiline nose, he said, then sucked the rest of her blood from his fingers” (emphasis added, 15). The U.S. soldiers’ exploitation of Dominicans is rendered as cannibalistic through the violent physical imposition of U.S. racial superiority onto the body of the native

woman<sup>73</sup>. In order to understand the soldier's racialization of Graciela, it is important to contextualize the manner in which racial identities have been formed in the United States. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant write in Racial Formation in the United States, "The definition of the terms 'ethnic group' and 'ethnicity' is muddy" (14). They argue,

ethnicity theory isn't very interested in ethnicity among blacks. The ethnicity approach views blacks as one ethnic group among others. It does not consider national origin, religion, language, or cultural differences among blacks, as it does among whites, as sources of ethnicity. . . Blacks are thus aggregated--and treated as the great exception--because they are so clearly racially identified in the U.S. (22).

They assert that it is necessary to look at how race and ethnicity function together in the United States because "the majority of Americans cannot tell the difference between members of these various groups. They are racially identified--their identities are racially constructed--by processes far more profound than mere state policy formation" (23).

Thus, the soldier interpellates Graciela as racially "other" and in doing so, transposes his particular understanding of race onto the Dominican space. As Omi and Winant state, "Everybody learns some combination, some version, of the rules of racial classification, and of her own racial identity, often without obvious teaching or conscious inculcation. Thus are we inserted in a comprehensively racialized social structure" (60).

Each time that Graciela transgresses the boundaries of her life whether they be sexual, gender roles, or geographic--an allusion to the erotic postcards appear. At one

point, fed up with the confinement of her home life, she sets out on her own journey, leaving her daughter and husband behind. It is at this point in the text that we encounter another description of a postcard which appears to be an advertisement reading,

Dear Friend,

As per your request, this is to acquaint you with the advantage being afforded by the Collector's Club for view postcard enthusiasts. We specialize in the *exotique erotique* beauty of racial types. Join us.

Members receive a monthly catalogue during the term of their enrollment. Extra Special Offer--I will send you 10 dainty exotic erotic views, excerpts from Carl Heinrich Stratz's stunning "The Racial Beauty of Women," plus a dictionary containing 30,000 words if you will send 25 cents for a year's trial membership in this popular club. Please do so before expiration date stamped hereon.

Peter West, President

New York, N.Y.

The postcard marks how the eroticized native woman has become part of European male consumer culture. There is a juxtaposition of the scopic imperialism of the erotic image and the accumulation of language. Graciela encounters a consumer of these eroticized images in Eli Cavalier, a German-French man touring the Dominican Republic peddling his message of vegetarianism while also hoping to "sample" the erotic delights of the island. Anne McClintock asserts that there is a

long tradition of male travel as an erotics of ravishment. For centuries, the uncertain continents--Africa, the Americas, Asia--were figured in European lore as libidinally eroticized . . . long before the era of high Victorian imperialism, Africa and the Americas had become what can be called a porno-tropics for the European imagination--a fantastic magic lantern of the mind onto which Europe projected its forbidden sexual desires and fears. (emphasis added, 22)

Graciela encounters Eli while on a train that she takes across the country. Yet even while she transgresses beyond certain geographic borders, she remains ensnared by the voyeuristic gaze of a European man. This time the gaze is not Peter West's but that of Eli, who serves as a kind of anthropological figure, taking notes of his various encounters with the "natives." With a kind of perversely penetrating anthropologist's gaze, "He could tell from the cuticles on her small brown fingers that she was a girl of dark meats. Purplish nipples perhaps. He closed his eyes and saw the gray creases where ass meets thighs" (67). Eli imagines her as an exotic sexual object. In addition to promoting vegetarianism, he is in the Dominican Republic in the hopes of finishing a pamphlet advising on "improving and intensifying the exotic exhalations of the Negress . . . By rubbing her flesh with dry lavender or fresh thyme or a concentrate of the two after a salt bath, he believed the black woman acquired an extremely erotic perfume, quite apart from the insipidness of the white woman" (68). Graciela naively joins Eli when he invites her to stay at an "inn" in Santiago, which turns out to be a brothel run by a woman

named La Pola who, upon meeting Graciela, thinks “Graciela would not command as high a price as the fairer girls. But the naps under the scarf appealed to foreigners like this one” (74). By bringing her to the brothel Eli commodifies Graciela much in the same way as Peter West did. What La Pola’s remarks reveal is an exchange-value based on a hierarchy of desired racial categories of native women.

Graciela soon learns that Eli plans to, in fact, experiment on her body to test his bizarre sexual theory: “From a small pouch he produced some leaves. He opened Graciela’s legs and rubbed the dried leaves into her pubic hair. . . He did the same to her armpits” (78). Graciela questions why he is doing this, to which he responds, “Seasoning for my meal” (78). Just as he is a consumer of exotic photos, so does he intend to “consume” Graciela sexually: “In bed Eli sniffed her. A beast on a hunt” (79). Again, the racialization of the native Dominican woman is rendered as a cannibalistic enterprise of the white European male. After their sexual intercourse, “Eli sat up next to her on the bed and scribbled in a small notebook” (79). For Eli, it is not enough to voyeuristically consume erotic images of native women, he must consume them sexually and record the experience so that he can continue his “consumption” long after he has left the island when he rereads his notes. It is important to note that it is through the transgression of her physical boundaries that allows him to create his “text” of notes. This scene is also significant in terms of readers--when does the “reading/consumption” of the native end? Are we contemporary readers as implicated as Eli?

Despite Eli’s obsession with “Clean body, clean mind, clean soul” (65), he ends up contaminating Graciela with syphilis. As the Haitian maid at the brothel warned her, “Those yanquis, they’re the ones who come bad with the syphilis” (77). One could

argue that there is a paralleling of the military invasion of the island with the invasion of the body politic through the commodified native woman's body that is contaminated by the white male consumer.

Photography continues to figure prominently in Graciela's life even after she escapes from the brothel and Eli. Before returning to her husband and daughter she goes to work for a wealthy newlywed couple, Ana and Humberto Álvarez, whose wealth came from the tobacco and sugar industries: "Ana's marriage to Humberto had brought together two families not far apart in the local gene pool. It was a question of keeping not only the fresh, new money within families, but also the Spanish blood of cousins" (88). When Ana shows Graciela her wedding photo, she explains that she had to ask the photographer "to lighten up Humberto a bit" (89). This lightening suggests the struggle to maintain the appearance of "pure" Spanish origins, but also how such racial formations are easily manipulated. Before she leaves the couple, Graciela steals the photo and takes it with her back to her home, where she stores it in her hatbox. The rest of her life is spent fighting off the syphilis which takes over her body even going so far as to retreat to a convent where she is told that she "must put her flesh to death, so that her love becomes solely focused on God's will" (149).

The wedding photograph becomes significant for Graciela's daughter, Mercedes, long after Graciela has died from the syphilis. In her own anguish over learning that Casimiro, the man whom she believed to be her father is not her biological father, she severs her relationship with him by telling him that he's "too dark" (134). Her remarks reflect the rhetoric of Trujillo, which constructs Dominicans as light-skinned and of Spanish origin. When she finds the wedding photo in her mother's hatbox, Mercedes

constructs a new genealogy for herself by choosing the groom in the photo as her father because of his “lightness”. Yet she does not know that his portrait was, in fact, lightened after the photo was taken.

Despite Mercedes attempts to reconfigure the racial construction of her own past, race continues to haunt her when she finds herself on her own at age thirteen virtually orphaned. Mustafa, a Syrian shopkeeper, allows her to work for him. He too strives to recast his racial identity, telling her, “[the Haitians] took away the honest work from people like his grandfather, a hardworking Syrian who hailed from the Sultans of Spain” (107). Mustafa’s claims to Spanish origins echo the nationalist rhetoric which renders the nation as “purely” Spanish.

Furthermore, while Graciela’s body is marked by the contagion of “yanqui” (white male) sexual predatoriness, Mercedes echoes the nationalistic fear that Haitians are the “disease” contaminating the country. This sentiment is prefaced when, as a child, during a festival which marked Dominican independence from Haiti, Graciela discovered her daughter, “pounding away at a girl who had come in traditional blackface. Never had Graciela seen her quiet child so ferocious: her baby kicked and punched the other girl in tune with the chanting ‘-Beat the Haitian, beat the Haitian!’” (103). Later on, Mustafa reinforces this attitude when he shoos away a Haitian boy who begs for food outside his shop. He counsels Mercedes to “never behave or compare herself to people like that little boy, never to act so hungry, so slave-minded, so indolent, so black . . .” (107).

Mercedes supports the 1937 extermination of Haitians ordered by Trujillo, yet the novel reveals how what Mercedes believes are clear-cut racial categories, are not, when Mustafa becomes a victim of the slaughter. Prior to the massacre, he had left the kiosk in

her charge while he traveled for a few weeks and returns wounded and missing a hand. Mercedes “could not bring herself to ask how he had been enmeshed in the horror out west; the answer was painfully etched in his violet skin, in his inability to pronounce parsley” (182). Mustafa signifies the mutability of racial categories in the Dominican Republic; even though he is not Haitian, he is mutilated because his skin color and language skills do not meet the nationalist standard of Trujillo’s regime.

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Despite the fact that the U.S. military pulled out of the Dominican Republic in 1924, by the time of the 1980’s and Mercedes daughter, Amalfi, is working in free zone, U.S. imperialism still has a hold over the island: “Mercedes finds that Dominicans flee the nation in hordes, feeding themselves to sharks living on both land and sea; that green has become the color of love; that tourism is the nation’s new sugar--in the 1980s, anything is better than Home” (192). Amalfi refuses to migrate to the United States, but instead sends her daughter to live with her parents, Mercedes and Andres, and her brother Ismael, in the Washington Heights section of New York City. Her daughter, Leila, becomes the family’s interpreter, transcribing her grandmother’s letters home to her mother and interjecting her own complaints (206). By writing letters home, Leila offers an unique view of the United States for her mother--as this view is told both in her grandmother’s voice and her own. There is a parallel between the function of these letters as they relate the experiences of two Dominican immigrant women with those of Celia in Dreaming in Cuban.

And just as certain traits and circumstances resurface across generations in Dreaming in Cuban so too does Song of the Water Saints links the experiences of women

across generations. The photography motif reemerges in Leila's narrative when she stops allowing her picture to be taken because "when she saw herself in pictures it was as if she were looking at someone else, not the person she remembers being at the time of the photo" (211).

The novel demonstrates the predatory sexual exploitation of Dominican women continues in the U.S. through Leila, who has her first unprotected sexual encounter with Manuel, an older married man who lives in her building. There is a paralleling of Leila's exposed and brutalized body in New York City with that of her grandmother (Graciela) in the Dominican Republic. Miguel tells her "I could kill you in here, you know? Get a hanger from the closet, wrap it around your neck, and spill you on this bedspread" (233). After he falls asleep and Leila examines the damage to her body: "a splintered face with green around the eyes and purple blotches on the neck. . . Leila washed away the clotted blood. Then she dug her index finger deep into her throat, but none of the poison she felt churned her belly" (234). She briefly contemplates sticking a "long needle into the middle of his chest, . . . Ease into his heart, still and patient, until his heart valves creaked like the gears of a broken clock. He would flinch once. Die slowly" (234-235). She runs a safety pin along his chest while "remembering the unopened condom vial and wondering if a little virus was already multiplying in her own cells" (235), but chooses not to kill him. Again there is a parallel between the syphilis that Graciela contracts from Eli and the possibility that Leila may have contracted a virus from Manuel.

### Conclusion

Rosario demonstrates that the construction of the native of the Dominican Republic has always been fluid and dependent on both internal and external influences on

the nation, especially with the influence of U.S. imperialism in the form of the military occupation and economic imperialism. It is Dominican women who are most vulnerable to the deleterious effects of these constructions.

#### “Absolut® Alvarez”: The Ethnic Writer as Native Informant

Julia Alvarez is one of the most prolific U.S. Caribbean writers to date. She has been hailed not only as a U.S. Latina writer, but a “pan-American” writer (“Real Flights of Imagination”). She has thus far published two collections of poetry, four novels, one novella, one collection of essays and her work has been reprinted in numerous anthologies of Latina and Caribbean literature.<sup>74</sup> Her fiction concerns typically two main themes: the history of the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic (1930-1961) and the migration of her family from the DR to the United States as they fled the regime. Alvarez’s prominence as a U.S. Latina writer is well established, so much so that she has been successful enough (sold enough books) to be able to quit her teaching job at Middlebury College in Vermont and work fulltime on her writing (Something to Declare). Before I engage in an analysis of Alvarez’s novels, I would like to explore the ways in which Alvarez, the writer, has been constructed in interviews and essays as a Dominican “native informant” and how her work, because of her “visibility” as an ethnic writer gets appropriated.

The Spring 1998 issue of GQ magazine included an advertisement for Absolut Vodka entitled “Absolut Alvarez” and featured a brief story written by Alvarez. The ad appeared as part of an Absolut Vodka campaign that focused on writers, Alvarez was the only female writer and the only ethnic writer represented. In addition to GQ, the ad appeared in spring 1998 issues of such periodicals as Conde Nast Traveler, Atlantic

Monthly and Entertainment Weekly, Vanity Fair and The New Yorker. I would like to spend some time unpacking the text and image of this advertisement to discern the ways in which it constructs Dominican native informants and juxtapose it with the photographic construction of the native in Rosario's novel.

The text of the ad is set against a blue background with an image at the bottom of the page of various tropical flora and fauna, and the image of a man walking towards a life-size Absolut bottle. The text of the ad reads:

I went down to the island to do a piece on the uses and misuses of the land and there I met some men and women who wanted to keep the rain forest alive, the rivers clear, the stars in the sky. They said, there is a man who says he is a priest who has been talking the farmers into selling to the Canadians. So we went to see him and his makeshift chapel and there on the altar was an Absolut bottle full of cayennas and birds of paradise. So I said, where did you get the bottle, thinking of the Canadians at the darn settlement. And he said, 'my child, all objects on this altar are religious articles,' the chalice that looked like a wineglass, the oilcloth altarcloth with slices of pink watermelon, the patne like a plate for a spoon with which to stir a concoction, the precious ciborium full of what looked like everybody's least favorite easter candy . . . 'But what about the bottle,' I pointed to the vase of flowers. 'That is latin for God almighty Absolut Absolutorum' he said in piglatin from the playground, spreading his arms as if having said the magic words he

could now take off into the sky.

There is an eerie parallel between the narrator of this text and that of the photographer Peter West in Song of the Water Saints. Peter West is a decidedly imperialist figure, who is aligned with the U.S. military occupation of the island, in the unabashed exploitation of native Dominicans. His capturing of Graciela and Silvio on film and in the subsequent series of postcards renders them anonymous: unnamed, outside of history, and on an unnamed island. In a similar fashion, “Absolut Alvarez” positions a figure from the north going south to discursively “capture” native experience --only now the figure from the North is an investigative journalist who has traveled South to the unnamed island for the sake finding out the “truth” of land “uses and abuses”. While the text indicts the Canadian interests, who are buying up the land, it also indicts the native who sells (his people) out. The “native” islander, the priest, is depicted as deceitful and duping the “real” natives from their land. The Absolut bottle serves as a prop in his “magic”. One wonders if the Absolut corporation see this irony--that their product represents corruption, and if so, would they care? Or, perhaps it merely add to the product’s mystique. And while the narrator is skeptical of this bottle, this skepticism is overridden by the ad itself, which is visually and aesthetically compelling and is ultimately published for the sake of selling liquor in the First World (Seagram’s is the U.S. distributor of Absolut, a product of Sweden). Here we see the way in which the native informant-as-ethnic-writer has been directly linked to the flow of capital. In this sense, the discursively produced native becomes a means to produce capital. Lest I be accused of making more out of this one ad than necessary, I would point out that these ads have a

tremendous circulation beyond the periodicals they appear in--again evoking an eerie parallel to the “pornotropics” postcard series depicted in Rosario’s novel. There are collectors of Absolut ads who buy, sell and trade ads on the internet, so that the ads themselves become commodities (www.ebay.com). Alvarez is certainly not the first writer to become a part of commercial advertising, instead she appears to be part of a trend in which cultural workers become aligned with the marketing of ethnicity.<sup>75</sup> This commodification of the ethnic writer is why it is necessary to address the ways in which global capitalism impacts aesthetics and politics.

In the preface to her collection of essays, Something to Declare (1998), Alvarez establishes herself as a “native informant” who is responding to the questions of her readers: “who have asked me so many good questions and who want to know more than I have told you in my novels and poems. About my experience of immigration, about switching languages, about the writing life, the teaching life, the family life, about all of these combined” (x). Alvarez inscribes herself as “the informant” and her readers as ethnographers asking her questions for clues into her “different” world. Playing on the immigration experience of entering into the United States through its bureaucratic channels, Alvarez labels the sections of the book “Customs” and “Declarations.” The chapters of the book suggest a movement through the bureaucratic levels of immigration--a stark contrast to the Haitian migration narratives I addressed in the previous chapter. In fact, Alvarez appears to feed her readers’ desires to master (minority) texts that Doris Sommer cautions us against. In Proceed With Caution When Engaged By Minority Writing From the Americas, Sommer argues that “Educated readers usually expect to enter into collaborative language games with a range of writers, as if asymmetrical

relationships flattened out on the smooth surface of print culture” (xiii). In this sense, Sommer links the role of the writer with that of the native informant so that readers become complicitous in the production of knowledge about the “other” through their reading and assumptions that they “know” the other simply through reading. Thus, while the writers I explore in this dissertation mimic testimonial narrative structures in their novels, we must not assume that we know the “truth” of the native through reading, just as we can not assume in reading/hearing a *testimonio* that we know everything about the subaltern. In fact, I have shown throughout the dissertation that these novels, despite their testimonial structures, leave readers with more questions than are answered. Sommer points to Rigoberta Menchu’s announcement throughout her *testimonio* that she is keeping secrets from her readers and suggests that “One result of this practice was that no amount of information she shared could establish a mood of intimacy or conspiracy with me as a reader” (4) and concludes, “Maybe that was the point of her performance, . . . to engage me without surrendering herself”. Novels that utilize testimonial narrative structures are even more fraught because they are not a collaboration between an ethnographer and “subject,” but the product of individual writer and in Sommer’s words, readers expect to “learn something . . . Amassing data or dismissing them, either way, we have typically wanted to share so much ground and so many games with the author that we can pretend to assume whatever he or she assumes” (xi). However, Sommer uses Lyotard’s notion of “differend, the stubborn residue that survives on the margins of normalizing discourses” (xiii) to explain how readers must resist the urge to “master” texts (and thus the people and experiences they represent). Instead she argues that “Acknowledging that residue is the precondition for democratic negotiations. Difference

safeguards particularist identities against seamless assimilation, a word that rhymes with neutralization and sometimes also with physical annihilation” (xiii). Sommer contends that reading minority texts should not be about the reader’s ability to comprehend and assimilate cultural signifiers. Responsible readers must commit to “democratic negotiation” by acknowledging the limits of “mastering” a text and accepting the “residues” which can never be sufficiently translated.

Despite her attempts to fill in the blanks for readers, I would argue that there are several “residual” layers in Alvarez’s fiction which remain unassimilable. For instance, readers cannot ignore the way in which the tropes of ethnography keep resurfacing throughout her texts. These tropes become a means by which Alvarez’s characters explore class distinctions among Dominicans and they recur because this issue cannot be easily assimilated by Alvarez as native informant. Furthermore, because Alvarez writes primarily in English, one must concede that there are elements of Dominican experience which can never be readily translated for readers.

### Native Speakers

The fact that the novels I analyze in this chapter are written in English suggests that language allows one to trespass from Dominican to American culture, but also from one social class to another. The issue of language as a passport into U.S. culture plays a significant role for Alvarez and her family for her parents had been educated in the U.S. In her essay “My English” she explains the prominence that English held in her upper-class Dominican family. English was something that her parents spoke “when they had a secret they wanted to keep from us children” (21). Her education in English begins while she is still on the island, “Why my parents didn’t first educate us in our native

language by enrolling us in a Dominican school, I don't know" (23). Alvarez explains that "Spanish had its many tongues" including the "animated *campuno*" that the *campesinos* spoke, which she claims "was my true mother tongue"--the Spanish she learned from the maids (emphasis added 22). And when the family emigrates to the United States, she writes, "Soon it wasn't so strange that everyone was speaking in English instead of Spanish. I learned not to hear it as English, but as sense. I no longer strained to understand, I understood. I relaxed in this second language" (Something to Declare 27). This sentiment is in sharp contrast to the epigraph which prefaces fellow Dominican-American, Junot Diaz's collection of stories, Drown (1996). Drown explores the experiences of a Dominican boy, whose father abandons his family to go to the United States. Readers meet the boy at different moments in his life--both in an impoverished native space and later in the United States where he ends up as a drug dealer living on the streets of New York. Diaz uses a quote from Cuban writer, Gustavo Perez Firmat, to preface his novel:

The fact that I  
am writing to you  
in English  
already falsifies what I wanted to tell you.  
My subject:  
how to explain to you that I  
don't belong to English  
though I belong nowhere else

Unlike Alvarez's facile claiming of English, Perez Firmat's words suggest the impossibility of capturing the experience of immigrants whose native language is not English. That it prefaces Diaz's collection of short stories subverts Diaz's role as a "native informant". Instead of creating a cross-cultural bridge for readers to enter the text, the epigraph serves as a warning, giving the reader pause and foregrounding what Sommer refers to as a kind of "incompetence" which she explains is "to acknowledge the socially circumscribed limits of interpretation, the distances and the refusals that some texts have been broadcasting to our deaf ears" (9). This "incompetence" appears both at the level of the writer, who cannot achieve optimum expression in English, and the reader who cannot assume that she will walk away from the text with an integrated understanding of Dominican culture.

Expressing a similar sentiment to Diaz, the author of Song of the Water Saints, Nelly Rosario writes about the difficulties with language:

I can't say I'm fully comfortable in either language. When speaking to native Spanish speakers, I hold my breath after blurting out a word fashioned out of English when its Spanish equivalent fails me. . . . English, on the other hand, feels so much more liberating, cruder. I curse more, demand more, invent more. Though the language to me is colder, not always as colorful, it's more elastic. Black English, in particular, allows for more movement and expression. Yet around those who chew English like gum, I still find myself faltering (163).

It is significant that Rosario makes a distinction between English and Black English, for it speaks to her ambiguous space between Latino and African-American cultures. This distinction also highlights the manner through which Alvarez's comfort with the English language comes--through class position. Yo explains how her parents met, not in the Dominican Republic, but at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City, where both of them had been sent to be educated (Yo 297). In Alvarez's first novel, How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, which tells the story of Yo and her sisters from childhood through young adulthood, Yoyo explains how her mother knew "boarding-school English . . . She knew the value of speaking perfect English. She had studied for several years at Abbot Academy, flying up from the Island to New York City, and then taking the train up to Boston" (62). Indeed the Garcia girls themselves "lost their accents" through their education at private boarding schools in New England. In Dancing Between Two Cultures, William Luis argues that "In the United States, the Garcia sisters continue to receive the best education money can buy. But the situation has changed; they now experience life in the United States from a different vantage point, not as members of a privileged class associated with the Dominican Republic but as common Hispanic immigrants" (269). I would argue however that the Garcia girls remain privileged despite their changed racial vantage point. For one thing, while the family lives for a short time in an apartment in New York City, the family moves as soon as their father starts to make money in his medical practice, to Long Island, where they have space to move, but also little connection to other Hispanics/Latinos. Furthermore, when the family "imports" a maid from the Dominican Republic, one who had worked for other family members, they

maintain the class position that they had when they were in the Dominican Republic.

### Maids and Muses

In an essay titled, “Of Maids and Other Muses,” Alvarez describes the maids of her childhood as bearers of “authentic” Dominican culture. From them she learned songs, storytelling and merengue dancing so that “something was happening to the little girls as she sang her way through imagination. It took coming to this country for that seed to grow beyond the limited options that these early muses represented for me” (155). Alvarez discusses the maids-as-muse in order to distinguish herself from the “great” male writers and demonstrate that women writers do not necessarily have the same process or sources for finding a literary voice. However, Alvarez’s renderings of maids reveals the way in which race is constructed in the Dominican Republic and how these constructions are sustained (or not) in the United States. As Spivak argues,

Strictly speaking, we have left the problems of post-coloniality, located in the former colony (now a ‘developing nation’ trying to survive the ravages of neo-colonialism and globalization) *only* to discover that the white supremacist culture wants to claim the entire agency of capitalism--re-coded as the rule of law within a democratic heritage--*only* for itself; to find that the *only* entry is through a forgetfulness, or a museumization of national origin in the interest of class mobility; or yet coding this move as ‘resistance’! (398)

For example, throughout How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents, maids are

distinguished from the Garcia sisters in terms of class, race and nationality. The youngest sister, Fifi, remembers Chucha, one of the family's servants in the Dominican Republic: "Chucha was super-wrinkled and Haitian blue-black, not Dominican *cafe-con leche* black" (218). This description of Chucha is significant because it reveals the way that Fifi, as a child, has interpellated the perceived racial distinctions between Dominicans and Haitians, a line of thinking perpetuated by Trujillo's nationalist rhetoric which saw Haitians as a "diseased element" which threatened to "darken" the already mixed racial population of the Dominican Republic. According to Ernesto Sagas and Silvio Torres Saillant, the Dominican government attempted to erase the African heritage of the Dominican nation through the construction of an "indio" racial category for anyone considered dark-skinned ("Antihaitianismo" and "The Tribulations of Blackness"). Chucha was taken in by the family when she showed up on their doorstep seeking refuge on the night of the 1937 massacre of Haitians. In the Garcia girls' memories, she is exoticized for her "voodoo" and her requests that she be able to sleep in her own coffin (218). Chucha's "voodoo" consists of the prayers and rituals that she performs for the family with a wooden statue that Fifi later associates with her college anthropology class. Thus Fifi's understanding of the woman who helped raise her comes through seeing her as an object of study signals a kind of "museumization" of Chucha.

Other maids at the family's Dominican compound are portrayed by the Garcia girls through their racialized physical traits. One maid, Nivea, is described by the girls' mother as being "black, black" and was named for a "face cream her mother used to rub on her, hoping the milky white applications would lighten her baby's black skin" (260). Carla, the oldest sister, describes the maid Gladys as having "kinky hair". When Carla

gives Gladys a toy piggy bank that had been given to her by her father after a trip to New York City, Gladys is assumed to have stolen it when Carla's parents discover her with it. Even after Carla explains that she gave the toy to Gladys, her father tells her that Gladys "can't be trusted" and fires her (273).

One maid in particular, Pila, seems to embody an amalgam of "difference" for the Garcias through her vodou practice and her skin-tone. Yoyo describes Pila: "She had splashes of pinkish white all up and down her dark brown arms and legs. The face itself had been spared: it was uniformly brown, the brown skin so smooth that it looked as if it'd been ironed with a hot iron . . . She was Haitian, though obviously only half . . . She was a curiosity" (280). When she is discovered to have stolen from the family, Mami says, "Pity for her: . . . she won't get far with that skin" (279).

The evocations of the maids in Alvarez's writing stand uneasily against her role as New Immigrant-as-native informant.

#### A Portrait of the Artist as a Native Informant

The title of Yo suggests that this is a story solely focused on Yo's experiences-- and in some senses this is true in that Yo is a professional writer and Yo! is a story about her process of writing. As such, the novel can be categorized as a "Kunsterroman" which follows the life of an artist. Irma Maini points out that the

traditional Kunsterroman highlights the marginality of the artist in its portrayal of the typical image of a sensitive alienated soul at odds with a hostile world. More often than not, it is the artist's unique artistic and intellectual sensibility that leads to this alienation from society. However,

in most *Kunstlerromane* by American writers of color, not only are the artists estranged from society because of that artistic sensibility, but they also suffer extreme marginalization as a result of race, gender, and/or class. Significantly, the . . . marginalized artist-protagonist in these *Kunstlerromane* want to move from the margin to the center or to help change the existing meaning of margin and make it a site of agency and empowerment. (“Writing the Asian American Artist” 1).

*Yo* herself is a textual trespasser--but in a somewhat negative sense because she steals other people's stories and she stretches the “truth” of some stories. But unlike Chico of *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, whose lies serve as a form of indigenous self-protection and cultural survival, *Yo's* lies do not necessarily protect her family or community. In *Yo!* as the narrative is told through the various voices of those people who *Yo* steals stories from, it becomes clear that *Yo's* interest in other people's stories seems to fuel her own self-interest. In this sense, *Yo* is more like Mama in *The Sugar Island* whose cross-cultural savvy allows her to commodify her immigrant story.

*Yo* begins with the reaction of Yolanda Garcia's family and acquaintances to her fictional renderings of them, which have made her a famous writer. She defends herself against their resentment by proclaiming that “Everybody, I mean everybody writes out of his or her own experience!” (9) When her sister, Carla, explains, “Everyone's feeling a little exposed, that's all,” and thinks to herself, “I don't care what it says on that page up front about any resemblance is entirely coincidental, you know when you spot yourself in some paragraph of description” (9). The rest of the novel documents *Yo's* various

encounters with informants who become imbricated in her writing--sometimes, as with her family, they become a part of her stories, at other times there is a clash between what Yo writes and what her "informants" want to say. This is especially true in Yo's interactions with Dominicans who hold lower class positions than her. It is in these particular encounters that class status becomes translated through the anthropologist/subject dynamic. The novel evokes an ethnographic discourse by calling attention to the way that Yo as transcriber/interlocuter "corrupts" the story. But of course, we also know that stories are always already corrupted, they shift and change with each telling. However, drawing attention to the transcription of stories demonstrates the power dynamics of how stories of ethnic "others" get told not only by those outside a culture (anthropologists), but by those who are seemingly "from" a place: New Immigrants.

Spivak traces the way in which immigrants have served as native informants in metropolitan spaces. While she speaks specifically in terms of the position of the "Third World" post-colonial critic in the U.S. academy, I would like to apply her theory to U.S. ethnic writers. She argues that through deconstruction, one has the tools to think about the process of subject-formation (323), in other words, how is the "I" through which we speak a construction of social, political, economic and racial forces? Spivak argues against the desire to see immigrants as informants on their native places. She links the migrations of people from "postcolonial" spaces to their role as informants in the metropolis, arguing,

The postcolonial informant has rather little to say about the oppressed

minorities in the decolonized nation as such, except, at best, as especially well-prepared investigator. Yet the aura of identification with those distant objects of oppression clings to these informants as, again at best, they identify with the other racial and ethnic minorities in metropolitan space. At worst, they take advantage of the aura and play the native informant uncontaminated by disavowed involvement with the machinery of the production of knowledge. Thus, this last group either undermines the struggle by simulating an effect of a new third world, by piecing together great legitimizing narratives of cultural and ethnic specificity and continuity, and of national identity--a species of "retrospective hallucination." (360)

Spivak links the native informant both to the postcolonial space as well as to the role of the "New Immigrant" in the metropole, specifically the United States, arguing that the space allowed for New Immigrants to speak as native informants was inextricably linked to the increasingly global flows of capital. In seeking "to account for the sudden prominence of the postcolonial informant on the stage of U.S. English Studies" (360), Spivak argues, "the indigenous elite did not have an established new informant position" until the 1970's when the "dismantling of nationally based capital" allowed for "a benevolent third-worldist cultural studies impulse" which "began to infect the U.S. academy" (360).

Indeed Yo seems to reflect some (if not all) of Alvarez's own history. As a child her parents emigrate to the United States to escape the brutality of the Trujillo

dictatorship. Yo goes on to eventually become a fiction writer so that the novel represents various episodes of her and her family's life. Others note Yo's role as an interlocuter, resenting that "[they] provided the raw material" for her stories (10). It becomes clear that Yo is an unreliable narrator as we learn from her various "informants" of her inconsistencies. Her mother "want[s] [her] chance to tell the world how [Yo] always lied like the truth is just something you make up" (12).

Yo's mother certainly understands the significance in telling a believable story and testifying to the horrors of the Trujillo regime to INS officers and a social worker who comes to the apartment in New York City. She tells Mrs. O'Brien, the social worker, "We are free at last, . . . Thanks to this great country which has offered us the green cards. We cannot go back. It would be certain death." When Mrs. O'Brien questions whether things are "really that bad," Yo's mother narrates how "I fill her two ears full with what is happening back on the island--homes raided, people hauled off, torture chambers, electric prods, attacks by dogs, fingernails pulled out. I get a little carried away and invent a few tortures of my own--nothing the SIM hadn't thought up, I'm sure" (32). Yet, Yo's mother is envious of her daughter's ability "to speak of what terrifies her. I myself can't find the words in English--or Spanish" (34). Thus, Yo's mother reveals that while she could convince the INS and the social worker of the danger awaiting her and her family in the native space, this does not mean that she can convey the emotions of terror that she lived through in the Dominican Republic.

Papi, who offers testimonial fragments of his involvement with the revolutionary movement in the Dominican Republic, also reveals the anxiety that comes when his stories are written down by his daughter: "Sometimes I get confused as to what exactly

happened. I don't think it is only because I am now an old man. It's also because I have read the story of those years over and over as Yo, has written it, and I know I've substituted her fiction for my facts here and there. Many times I don't even realize I've done so until I get together with my old cronies from the underground" (298-299). Thus, the way that Yo's writing impacts Papi's memories of his own experiences reveals the danger of writing down the story, for unlike oral storytelling which allows for changing and shifting within the story within each retelling, print solidifies the story. In fact, Mami warns Papi against telling too much because "the minute I put the story out there. Yo will write it down" (297). He complains, "When she writes a book, the worst she worries about is that it will get a bad review. We hear beatings and screams, we see the SIM driving up in a black Volkswagon and rounding up the family" (306-307). Thus, Papi and Mami resent the freedom that their daughter exercises in her role as a storyteller who tells their stories from the old country. To her, they are the raw materials which inspire her fiction, to them, the stories remind them of the terror of the regime. This points to a significant difference between the function of storytelling for the New Immigrant as native informant and the testimonial informant who tells her story in order to report atrocities in the native space to raise consciousness and build solidarity with the outside world.

One of the most forceful condemnations of Yo as ethnographer comes from Sarita, the daughter of the family's "imported" maid, Primitiva. The tension between racial and economic stratification in the Dominican Republic is transferred onto U.S. soil when Sarita comes to live in the U.S. with her mother in the Garcia's home. In a chapter titled, "The Maid's Daughter, report" Sarita's voice takes over the narrative explaining "I

was eight years old when my mother left me in the campo with my grandmother to go off to the United States to work as the maid for the Garcia family” (54). Years later, once she too arrives in New York, Sarita “creates a legitimate family” (61) for herself at her school in the Bronx. She lets her classmates misapprehensions about her become “the official story of [her] life” (61). Yo threatens to shatter this facade when she proposes to “study” Sarita’s “acculturation” for a project in her anthropology class “as a way of understanding her own immigrant experience,” presuming that her own immigrant experiences would be the same as the daughter of her family’s maid (62). When Yo asks Sarita’s mother, the family’s maid, for permission, she responds, “My child, we are here at your service, you know that” (62). Sarita explains, “This was her standard response to anything the Garcias asked for” (62). When Sarita informs Yo about her predicament of having constructed a fictional family for herself she promises to keep the secret safe. Yet, Sarita is disturbed when she reads Yo’s report explaining, “I felt as if something had been stolen from me. Later, in an anthropology course I took in college, we read about how certain primitive (how I hate that word!) tribes won’t allow themselves to be photographed because they feel their spirits have been taken from them. Well, that’s the way I felt” (66). The anthropologist/informant dynamic is a powerful way of representing the class differences between these two Dominican immigrant women. One can read this as a scene demonstrating how the New Immigrant woman can eclipse the voices of her “native” sisters.

Sarita decides to steal the report before Yo has a chance to hand the assignment in, but Yo finds it and takes it back, telling Sarita that she is hurt because she thought that she and Sarita “were close” (69). Yo dedicates her report “to all those who had lost their

native land, and especially dedicated to Sarita y Primitiva, parte de mi familia” (65).

Sarita thinks,

I knew exactly what I wanted to do with that dedication. I wanted to write it over, using Mama’s rightful name. More than once, I had tried to get my mother to go back to her real name, Maria Trinidad. But Mama refused. The de la Torres had given her that nickname when she was just a young wild girl just hired out of the campo. (66)

After receiving her grade on it, Yo does give the report to Sarita who then gives it to her mother to take back with her to the Dominican Republic. Thus, Sarita refrains from reproducing the native informant of Yo’s report by remaining silent to us (readers) about the specific information contained in the report. She also gains momentary control over the narrative when she sends the report back to the Dominican Republic with her mother: “For all I knew Abuela used it to light the fire”. Ultimately however, Sarita cannot claim “native informant” status permanently because when Primitiva reveals that her daughter’s father was her employer, part of the de la Torre (Mami’s family) clan, she is shunned by the family for whom she worked most of her life. Without the recognition of legitimacy and with the death of her mother, Sarita has no ties to her native land in the Dominican Republic, which makes her claim to native informant status nearly impossible. This is in stark contrast to Yo who maintains strong ties to the Dominican Republic long after her immediate family has left the island. It is a place where she goes to get two “quickie divorces,” and where she seeks refuge to write, despite the differences she experiences in

being labeled “Americana” by her relatives in the Dominican Republic.

### The New Immigrant Returns to the Native Space

And while Yo’s connection to the island is maintained through writing--as she returns to her family’s compound to write, in doing so, the Dominican Republic is rendered as a kind of tabula rasa onto which Yo transcribes her own story and politics. One of the more troubling aspects of Yo is the collapse between the native space and writing, particularly when viewed through the lens of *campesinos* evoked in the chapter titled “The Night Watchman” which depicts Yo’s interactions with José, a poor Dominican whom she hires when she returns to her family’s compound in the Dominican Republic for the summer to write. The chapter opens by foregrounding José’s illiteracy. A governmental notice has been delivered to him that he cannot read: “Somehow it seemed that if he looked at the paper intently enough, the meaning would communicate itself to him. But all he saw were the neat, furrow-like rows of print, and an insignia on top with the flag. This would have to be a government notice” (241). José’s illiteracy is juxtaposed with his “illegitimate” claims to land as he learns through his neighbor Felipe that “the notice had gone out to all campesinos on the south side of the mountain who were squatting on government lands: the fields were to be flooded when the dam being built north of here was completed. Inhabitants must be evacuated by the end of the year” (242). Faced with the loss of the land that he has worked to provide food for his family, José is desperate for work. The one prospect he has for work, a postman’s job, would require that he be literate, but Felipe tells him that Yo “might need a gardener, a night watchman”. José then ponders the “possibility of getting his papers and going to work in the States” (243). And when Yo hires him he learns that “he was to be paid more money

in a week than he had earned in a month of farming this maldita tierra. It was the first time José had cursed the land his father and his grandfather before him had farmed” (246).

Once he begins working for Yo, he encounters a new world of ideas, “his head spun with the many things that he had worked over the night before. It was like a drug, this thinking, affecting you in ways that made you not yourself” (249). What is troubling about this passage is that José is rendered as a kind of “blank slate” upon whom Yo implants new ideas and information--as if he had never “thought” complexly before in his life. Even more troubling is the notion that José can only relate to Yolanda and other women sexually, “It was a kind of entering and knowing a woman, even if you were at the other end, inside her head instead of between her legs” (250). Literacy and land again are paralleled when Yolanda teaches José to read and in payment José “brought the dona a small handful of soil from his farm for her to take back with her to the States in remembrance of her country, and he could not read the sheet of paper she handed him” (257). She tells him that it is a poem that she wrote for him with her address on it and to “Write me when you can read it” (257). However, reading and writing are never fully realized for José: “When his little girl was born, he named her Yolanda, because that and his own were the only two names he had learned to write by heart” (257).

José does not write to Yo, but instead calls her collect from the Dominican Republic. When her stepdaughter Corey answers the phone, he naively asks her to marry him and bring him to the States (265). In order to appease her husband, Doug, Corey’s father, Yo “recounts her visit to José’s farm up in the mountains. The skinny naked kids, that sad hovel, the barefoot pregnant woman who would not come out to say hello . . . ‘So

you can see why people really want to get out” (265). Once again, Yo serves as the ethnographer recounting her time among the “natives”. Yet instead of acknowledging how her presence, especially her economic “presence,” may have influenced José to want a better life to come to the States, Yo concludes that he put a “spell” on her when he gave her the bag of dirt: “That soil José gave her! No wonder she was reluctant to bury it in her usual spot, finally letting Doug do it in his garden. . . They are bound to José as long as those grain of soil are here and so they must be removed from the property” (268). Yo imagines that somehow “José’s” soil has contaminated her and Doug’s property, which reveals a hierarchy of land that is tied to class and nation. It is as if, in a bizarre twist, that Yo sees José as symbolically “squatting” on her land. Doug thinks “He is not going to tell her that he’s already plowed under the garden. Those grains of soil are everywhere casting their little spells” (269).

While migration is often thought of as something which helps to sustain the native space, through the infusion of dollars that are sent by immigrants home, in Yo, there is another economics of migration at work. Yo brings money to the Dominican Republic and temporarily pays José a wage which sustains him and his family only to then leave again--leaving José without a job or money and desperate. While Yo and Corey are momentarily upset when Doug threatens José, Yo admits that “there’s nothing else we can do for him so far away” (273). But both Yo and her stepdaughter are heartened when Doug reveals that he’s been “thinking maybe we should buy some land there. Maybe José would like to farm it for us. For a salary” (275). The narrative continues, “They like the ending he has given their story”. But one wonders where José’s agency in this story is? The narrative renders the land of the island as a space which allows Doug to

connect to the land in his imagination: “He is on the island on a mountain farm in an upper field by a roaring river. They are planting yucca in long even rows. He is helping another man who face he does not see, or maybe the other man is helping him” (emphasis added, 276). José’s identity and agency are ultimately erased from this narrative of land.

### Nostalgic Informants

While at times, the native informant becomes suspect in Yo, the novel ends with a celebration of the role of the New Immigrant/native informant through the endorsement of Papi. He concedes that Yo’s storytelling is necessary for those Dominicans who have left the island and bequeaths to her the role of the storyteller who will carry on the collective cultural memory of the family. After having punished her as a child for telling stories, Yo’s father explains the need for Yo’s storytelling: “We left everything behind and forgot so much. Ours is now an orphan family. My grandchildren and great-grandchildren will not know the way back unless they have a story. Tell them of our journey” (309). On one level, Yo’s storytelling continues her family’s connection to their Dominican heritage, but as I have been arguing, by publishing her stories, Yo’s stories represent an unbroken connection to the homeland. It is significant that it is Papi who gives his approval to his daughter for storytelling, because he, in a sense, represents the *patria*, or native land. This is in stark contrast to Edwidge Danticat’s rendering of umbilical chord trope that I discussed in chapter two. The stories of Krik? Krak! are haunted by a maternity that is contaminated or cannot be sustained and symbolize the stories of Haitians whose lives are marked by terror and violence and who never make it to the U.S. Alvarez’s construction of the story-as-umbilical-chord eternally sustains New Immigrants in the United States and maintains their connection to the native space.

## Geographies of Home

I will briefly explore two other Dominican-American novels in order to compare the role of Dominicans as native informants with those in Alvarez's writing. Loida Maritza Perez's novel Geographies of Home represents the immigrant experiences of a Dominican family in Brooklyn amidst unemployment, dire poverty, domestic violence, and sexual assault. In addition to negotiating these precarious terrains, the protagonist, Iliana, must maneuver the strict rules imposed by the Seventh-Day Adventist church and her father upon her gender as well as the terrains of race and ethnicity. Thus, as the title suggests, there are many geographies of "home," not all of them welcoming or nurturing. The novel begins with an inscription which signals that the protagonist will not be the same kind of privileged informant as Yolanda Garcia. Instead, on the first page of the novel, readers encounter "the ghostly trace of 'NIGGER' on a message board hanging from [her] door" which "failed to assault her as it had the first time she returned to her dorm room to find it" (1). Even though the word has been erased from the board, the epithet lingers and signals the way in which the narrator has been defined by others solely as "nigger". The epithet serves as a reminder of the racial boundaries she crosses by going to a mostly white private university, as well as the way in which she is inscribed solely through rigid racial categories. Furthermore, this opening sentence establishes the hostile environment with which Iliana must contend while away from home. As the novel opens, Iliana is leaving behind this environment to return to her family's home in Brooklyn. She is compelled to return home "because a voice had been waking her with news of what was taking place at home. The accounts had started several months earlier and, depending on the news, had lasted until dawn" (2).

While I do not have the time or space here to do a complete analysis of all of the issues which surface in the novel, I want to juxtapose the instabilities that recur throughout the text with the stability of storytelling to be found in Yo. Iliana herself trespasses across many boundaries in the United States: racial, gendered, linguistic, class and even religious/cultural. She is confronted with racial and ethnic ambiguity in the U.S.:

Iliana remembered . . . she had yearned to look like the Puerto Rican or black American girls so that she could be easily identified as belonging to either group. She would have traded her soul to have the long, straight hair and olive skin of her Spanish-speaking friends or to wear her hair in cornrows and have no trace of a Spanish accent like the Johnson girls down the street . . . several of her black friends assumed that she claimed to be Hispanic in order to put on airs (190).

The anguish of not “fitting in” follows her when she goes off to college where “no one--black, white, yellow or red--ever asked her out” (5). Her strongest bond appears to be with her gay Mexican friend, Ed, who himself trespasses across many cultural and sexual boundaries. Iliana is also seen as ambiguously gendered. She describes an encounter she has while walking on the street to meet a friend,

I was waiting for the light to change at Astor Place and noticed these two men, good-looking too, staring at me from across the street. When the

light changed and I walked past them, they shouted, 'Drag queen in style!  
And look at her walk!' (74).

Iliana returns to her parents home because of the disintegrating domestic situation there. One of her sisters, Marina, has sunken into a deep depression and paranoid state after having been raped by the black male astrologer from whom she sought spiritual divination (16). Convinced that “something putrid had been implanted deep inside her and emitted its stench through all her pores” (18), Marina “determined to rid herself of the odor and to reclaim her defiled body,” and scours herself with a Brillo pad and disinfects herself with Lysol (19). When Iliana arrives to the family’s home in Brooklyn, Marina does not want to let her enter into the house. Iliana barely recognizes her sister, “She caught whiffs of Marina’s favorite scent and tried to relate the stranger before her to the sister she had known” (27). Marina slams the door in Iliana’s face until her mother, Aurelia, allows her to enter the home. Marina continues to make things difficult for Iliana in their parents’ home. Their differences are manifested in their ethnic and racial outlooks. Marina tells her sister that she “could do better” than dating a black man because “they’re lazy as shit and undependable” (38). When Iliana asks, “What are you saying? That blacks are inferior? Is that what you think about yourself?” Marina responds, “I’m Hispanic, not black.” (39). And yet, during the scene of Marina’s self-cleansing, she reveals that while “she had been able to manipulate her reflection so as to see only her pale skin shades lighter than any of her sisters’ . . . That skin color had blinded her to her kinky, dirt-red hair, her sprawling nose, her wide, long lips” (18). The role that the family plays in constructing racial identities is also illustrated: “Colora--that

was the nickname her sisters had given her for her yellowish skin and the faint trace of red in her dark hair. She had been so proud of these features that, . . . she had relaxed and dyed her hair a brighter orange in the hoped of further embodying that name” (99).

Marina’s obsession with her physical features reflects her desire to appear white--a desire she has inherited from both Dominican and U.S. societies that value whiteness over blackness. Yet as the term “colora” suggests, the version of racial classification learned in the Dominican Republic is different from that in the United States. H. Hoetink elaborates on this predicament explaining the difference between migration to Europe and the United States on racial formations in those places:

in Western Europe (and to some extent Canada as well), the Caribbean migrants together with other new minorities are involved in a slow process that will ultimately lead to some distinctive socioracial structure, but in the United States they must find a niche in a preexisting multiracial structure that has an essentially twofold division between whites and blacks. Each group has, to be sure, a complex internal differentiation, but there is no socially recognized intermediate group of coloreds comparable to that in the Caribbean. (“ ‘Race’ and Color in the Caribbean” 81).

Hoetink continues, “those from the non-Hispanic Caribbean who had belonged to the intermediate grouping of ‘coloreds’ suddenly find themselves defined as ‘blacks’ in their new country, and the same predicament befalls those from the Hispanic area who had occupied intermediate positions on the fluid socioracial scale there, or perhaps had even

been defined as ‘whites’ by social criteria not recognized in the United States” (81)<sup>76</sup>.

After a series of events in which Marina is thrown out of church when she commits the sin of claiming to have seen God’s face (109) and attempts suicide, Marina turns her frustration on her sister, Iliana, when she attacks her in the bedroom they share. What ensues is a violation, Marina’s “hand tore into [Iliana]” and “The world, as [Iliana] had known it, crashed irrevocably around her head as her sister’s hand curled into a fist. Her thoughts screeched mercifully to a halt as that fist crashed against her womb” (284). After her brother Tico, rescues her, Iliana’s first instinct is to deny that anything substantial had taken place: “She told herself there was no need to make a fuss, . . . Bodies recovered. Wounds healed. Scars faded and left no mark” (287). Marina again attacks her and this time it is her parents who have to rescue her (290).

The next day, Sunday, Iliana leaves the house in an effort to understand what has happened to her:

She wanted, more than anything, to belong. Having spent years plotting how to leave only to discover, when she finally did, that she felt as displaced out in the world as in her parents’ house, she had made the decision to return and to re-establish a connection with her family so that, regardless of where she went thereafter, she would have comforting memories of home propping her up and lending her the courage to confront the prejudices she had encountered during eighteen months away. Yet she could not now conceive of being able to interact with the members of her family or even of making her own way through the world should

she again leave the only home she knew. (312)

Iliana's place in her parents' home is again threatened when she returns from her day out, after dark, where "She was conscious not only of having disrespected her parents by staying out unescorted after dark, but also of having committed an unpardonable sin by seeing to her own needs on the one day God had set aside for Himself" (312).

Confirming this anxiety, she is confronted with her father's words "Shameless hussy!" and "Whore!" and a slap on the face when she enters the home. Despite having been physically violated the night before by her sister, all her father is concerned with is that she has trespassed against God and his rules. After this incident, Iliana realizes that she can no longer live with her family and leaves to return to school. This ending suggests that there is no place for Iliana to exist completely comfortably--in stark counter to Yo's easy negotiation between U.S. and Dominican spaces.

### Soledad

Similar to the opening of Geographies of Home, Angie Cruz's novel Soledad begins with Soledad being called home by her family to care for her mother who has lapsed into an "emotional coma". In order to get home, Soledad must travel from her apartment in lower Manhattan to the Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights. The neighborhood itself is configured as a kind of battleground, a "prison-sentence" that Soledad must endure (13). When she arrives at her building after being assaulted with a water balloon, she finds her grandmother carrying her mother, Olivia. Soledad is ambivalent about her heritage and her place in the community. She wonders,

Can it be my mother is dead? Ever since the day my father, Manolo, died,  
I fantasized about finding my mother dead . . . I thought I was  
switched at birth, hoping my real mother would one day appear at the  
door to take me away. I held on to the fact that I don't look like my  
mother. Maybe my lips are the same, full and pink. But my hair falls  
pin straight, my eyes are smaller, shaped like almonds, and my skin is  
fairer. (16)

Soledad's ambivalence is tied to her racial identity and contentious relationship with her mother. Soledad's skin is an ambiguous text, open to multiple, competing interpretations. Her grandmother reads her complexion as a sign of Spanish ancestry, telling her "You have every woman's dream. *Una melena* that will find you a good husband . . . And with lots of *carino* she runs her hands through my hair which reaffirms to her that there is truly some Spanish blood left in her bloodline" (136). In fact, Soledad's racial status is part of the mystery of her past and her parents' tumultuous marriage.

Eventually, Soledad learns that her mother had been a prostitute and does not know who her father was for sure. The only clue that she has is the notebook that her mother has kept with a list of names and nationalities of the men she slept with. The notebook's list of men's names thus becomes Soledad's predominant testimony, but since she doesn't know which of the men listed in the notebook is her father, her testimony as an informant remains equivocal. Soledad's mother, Olivia, came to the United States when Manolo, the Dominican man who "hires" her gets her a fake passport when he learns that she's pregnant (76). Soledad thinks, "I remember the way he would say to my

mother, Your daughter. Not my daughter. Your daughter. Why didn't my mother ever tell me? All these years. All these men." (205). As Soledad reads through the names, their images begin to appear before her: "*Mayo 17 el griego, Super barracho (the Greek man, very drunk), Mayo 18 el suizo bello pero pequeño (the Swiss man, cute but small)*" (203). Gorda, Soledad's aunt, explains, "Soledad, when you write something down, it keeps it alive. There is a certain power to words, memories, ideas when one writes them down. You see, the moment your mother made this list of all these men, she trapped a memory and therefore kept them alive" (206). The implications for Soledad as a New Immigrant native informant are that her testimony is tainted since she cannot trace her heritage solely to the Dominican Republic. Her heritage instead becomes tied to European male consumption of native Dominican women's bodies. With such an ambiguous heritage, what does Soledad represent as a "native informant"? This ambiguity runs counter to Yo as a native informant who must have a story to pass on in order to maintain the native space.

In an effort to heal her mother's emotional wounds, Soledad takes her back to the Dominican Republic, where they take part in a cleansing ritual in which family photos are thrown into a pool of water: "Even if the person is evil or ill, this water has been known to cleanse, rejuvenate, change a whole person's life for the better. The photographs of those that need to be cleansed from all the trappings of life will dip and then float. When we see them float we will know they will be OK" (233). Ultimately, she must destroy the only record she has of her heritage--the list of men. She says, "I want to keep the list. It might be the only trace of my real father I'll ever have. . . My mother snatches it away from me . . . My mother takes the lighter and burns the list. And

while the flame is still strong she throws the list in the water” (234). Yet when Soledad’s photo is placed on the water, it sinks and Soledad dives in after it, hoping to reclaim it (235). The novel ends on a somewhat utopian note when, after nearly drowning, Soledad wakes up in her mother’s arms while Olivia tells her the story of her birth and naming (237). Thus, not only is Olivia cleansed of the memories of a past that haunted her, but Soledad experiences a kind of rebirth.

### Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to interrogate the construction of the native informant in the writings of Dominican-American women. With Nelly Rosario’s Song of the Water Saints, we see native informants, especially female, who are repeatedly silenced in their native space, especially by the machinery of the U.S. military occupation. I also discussed the narrative evocation of photography as technology used to primitivize and eroticize native Dominicans.

For Alvarez, the native informant serves as a literary trope that ultimately attempts to transcend class, racial and geographic boundaries, however, I would argue that at best this rendering is utopian, and at worst, a trope that nostalgizes the New Immigrant when many are left voiceless. Against this vision of a privileged Dominican-American native informant, I argued that Loida Maritza Perez’s Geographies of Home and Angie Cruz’s Soledad question the “space” of the native informant as that which can easily be erased because of racism, and/or what is seen as illegitimacy.

While these writers provide a spectrum of native informant portrayals, it is clear that they each impact established constructions of U.S. ethnic literatures.

#### Chapter 4: Where Have all the Natives Gone? Testimonial Discourse and Transnational Labor

I began this dissertation by examining the role of testimony in fictions of native Caribbean spaces. In chapter one, I argued that the postmodern testimonial narratives of Texaco and The Ventriloquist's Tale disrupt sacrosanct notions of the native. In chapter three, I explored the role of the ethnic writer and the Caribbean immigrant as native informant in the immigrant space. In this final chapter of my dissertation, I assess the role of testimonial discourse in the transnational space of labor and mark the disappearance of the native informant from narratives of transnational labor migration. I begin by examining a 1991 U.S. Congressional Hearings' published document The Plight of Haitian Sugarcane Cutters in the Dominican Republic . The hearings reveal an absence of the native informant in their discussion of migrant laborers. It is fitting that I conclude my study by looking directly at official U.S. discourse about the Caribbean since many of the novels that I explored in previous chapters are responding to U.S. involvement in the region. Furthermore, the hearings' focus on agricultural migrant workers carries a particular resonance with the issues of nativism, land rights and migration that I have been exploring throughout the dissertation. While I have primarily focused on literary texts and the way in which writers use language to evoke these issues, by focusing on the hearings, I analyze the way in which public discourse also constructs "natives" and "native spaces". Ultimately, the hearings' document is a narrative of transnational capitalism and its lack of Haitian canecutter voices speaks to the need to monitor the reach of global capitalism and its commodification of literary discourse.

I compare the hearings with Edwidge Danticat's novel, The Farming of Bones,

which serves as a counter to the absence of Haitian workers' voices in the hearings text. Whereas the hearings purport to provide a space of "objectivity" to discuss the truth about Haitian canecutters in the Dominican Republic, The Farming of Bones offers an overtly subjective portrayal of Haitian oppression in the Dominican Republic by attempting to excavate the stories and memories of forgotten Haitians who were targeted in the 1937 slaughter.

Finally, I offer a reading of Francisco Goldman's 1997 novel, The Ordinary Seaman, which represents the experiences of a group of undocumented Central American ship workers in Brooklyn. In particular, Goldman's novel signals an erasure of the native informant in the sense that the emblematic "native informant" of the text, a nineteen-year old former Sandinista soldier, does not and can not perform the "informant" function of the text. Like The Farming of Bones, The Ordinary Seaman represents the experiences of exploited transnational laborers and reveals a skepticism with the testimonio format. But unlike Danticat's novel, The Ordinary Seaman takes place primarily in the United States and as such implicates the U.S. directly with the exploitation of global capitalism.

Furthermore, Goldman is one of the only writers to address (in English) both the experiences of Central Americans in their "native place" and in the U.S.<sup>77</sup> and as such he represents a new chapter in ethnic American literature. Goldman's novel simultaneously addresses Central American identity formations in the United States, calling into question the category of U.S. "Latino/a" as well as the political struggles of the Central American "native" place. When read alongside the hearings document Goldman's historiographic fictional account signals the manner in which the "truth" and "objectivity" are distorted by revealing the aporias present. In particular, Goldman's novel signals an erasure of the

native informant in the sense that the emblematic “native informant” of the text, a nineteen-year old former Sandinista soldier, does not and cannot perform the “informant” function in the text.

While I want to avoid conflating the experiences of people in Central America with Caribbean peoples, much is to be gained from comparing the situations of these two regions in terms of revolutionary movements, life under police states (which is often linked to U.S. political and military interventions) and migration to the United States. In fact, using Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s notion of the “repeating island” it can also be argued that certain areas of Central America are, in fact, “Caribbean” because of the similar colonial/plantation histories, which includes the history of the banana industry controlled by the U.S.-based United Fruit Company in the region.<sup>78</sup> Benitez-Rojo theorizes,

one can sense the features of an island that ‘repeats’ itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth, while at the same time it inspires multidisciplinary maps of unexpected designs. . . Which one, then, would be the repeating island, Jamaica, Aruba, Puerto Rico, Miami, Haiti, Recife? Certainly none of the ones that we know. That original, that island at the center, is as impossible to reach as the hypothetical Antillas that reappeared time and again, always fleetingly, in the cosmographers’ charts. This is again because the Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago . . . , and as a meta-archipelago it has the virtue of having neither a boundary nor a center. Thus the Caribbean flows outward past the limits of its own sea with a

Further links between Central America and the Caribbean include the existence of African and Carib/Arawak descendents in those parts of Central America which touch the Caribbean Sea, who were deported from their native St. Vincent and Dominica by European colonizers. Additionally, Central American migrants, like Caribbean migrants, also face challenges in fitting into American society in terms of race, ethnicity and class.

#### Part 1: Bearing Witness: Testimonial Discourse in the U.S. Political Arena

Testimonio has become a “trespassing genre” through its various metamorphoses in the academy, literary circles and even in U.S. political discourse. The Congressional Hearings foreground testimonial strategies as a way to legitimize the United States as an advocate of human rights in the Dominican Republic. I contend that we must track such First World institutional appropriations of testimonio because in the process of appropriation the testimonio loses its ability to subvert systems of oppression. Georg Gugelberger argues that, “We must monitor the system’s ever increasing capability and capacity to always turn the ‘anti’ into the ‘pro,’ counterdiscourse into discourse, the anticanonical into the requirement” (Gugelberger 13). Through discourse analysis of the text of the hearings, I attempt to deconstruct the events of the hearings in order to reveal their construction as a moment of seemingly altruistic humanitarianism. In particular, I am interested in how the different “voices” or positions are presented in the hearings, some of which adopt the “unofficial” genre of testimonial narrative. In doing so, the hearings produce what Albert Moreiras refers to as a “poetics of solidarity” which he explains originated in 1980’s Central America as a way to counter the genocidal practices

and civil wars that shattered the region.<sup>80</sup> Obviously, because of the horrendous consequences of the United States foreign policy in Central America at the same time, one has to suspect this co-optation of solidarity language in the 1990s. For this very reason, it is important to keep in mind Gugelberger's warning to be attentive to "how literary discourse functions within the state." (13) One of the most significant differences between the Hearings appropriation of testimonial narrative and the testimonials coming out of Central America is function of the individual testimonial voice. In western discourse, the individual takes on a singular significance so that testimonials may be associated solely with individual victims. In the testimonio tradition, however, the individual voice is representative of a community. Thus, the lack of any individual Haitian canecutter voices in the hearings signals an erasure of all Haitian canecutter voices. Instead of performing the liberatory function that Yudice posits, do the testimonials presented in the hearings, in fact, participate in silencing Haitians (again). Part of this analysis will include exploring the tensions between the literary genre testimonio and the legal definitions and uses of testimony--both as ways of articulating authority.

Nearly half a century after the 1937 massacre of approximately 20,000 Haitians (and dark-skinned Dominicans who "looked" Haitian) by the Dominican Army, Haitians still migrate to the Dominican Republic to work. In fact, one could argue that because of the silence surrounding the events of 1937 (by the Dominican government, especially) that the situation has not been resolved and the Haitians who today migrate into the Dominican Republic to work as canecutters are in just as precarious a situation as they were in 1937. Samuel Martinez refers to those Haitians who work as canecutters in the

Dominican Republic as “peripheral migrants,” or those people who “circulate from one rural periphery to another” instead of migrating to urban areas or the metropolis (Martinez 3). Martinez also notes that the conditions that migrant canecutters work in are poor including 12 hour workdays, denial of basic civil liberties, “round-ups” of Haitians and Dominico-Haitians (second or third generation Haitians living in the Dominican Republic) as well as killings (Martinez 10-11). It is a situation ripe for testimonials because there is “an urgency to communicate” the experiences of exploited canecutters. In 1991, an ABC “Primetime Live” television exposé on the exploitation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic along with the call of Human Rights organizations prompted Congressional Hearings regarding the state of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic. The Hearings’ published document, The Plight of the Haitian Sugarcane Cutters in the Dominican Republic is, ostensibly, a document recording the human rights abuses against Haitian cane cutters working in the Dominican Republic. The Congressional hearings purport to provide a forum for testimonial-giving, yet, the “witnesses” who testify are not themselves subalterns. Instead they are “expert witnesses”, including a representative from the U.S. State Department (Joseph Becelia), a priest from the Episcopal Church (Father Edwin Paraison) or the representatives of human rights organizations (William O’Neill and Holly Burkhalter). Participants in the Hearings include the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Robert Torricelli, U.S. Representative-New Jersey; Robert Lagomarsino, U.S. Representative-California; Joseph Becelia, Office of Caribbean Affairs, Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Department of State; Father Edwin Paraison, Coordinator of the Haitian Ministry, Episcopal Church of the Dominican Republic; William O’Neill, Deputy

Director, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights; and Holly Burkhalter, Washington Director, Human Rights Watch. It is significant to note that while the Dominican government is represented at the hearings, the Haitian government is not. Factuality is established in the hearings through the reliance on these “experts” and their written statements. Thus, these Congressional hearings are limited by the fact that they are a part of the state apparatus. Given this, the hearings rely upon that testimony which is granted authority within the state--expert witnesses. Thus, despite the attempt to frame the hearings as an impartial forum for the discussion of human rights abuses, this discussion is impeded by the lack of actual Haitian witnesses. The result is a kind of political theater where concern for human rights is performed. Early on a binary is set up between “the bureaucrats” and “the people”. Predictably, the testimony given by the State Department spokesperson, Becilia, proves to be evasive in the U.S.’s role and/or responsibility, while Father Paraison claims to speak the truth for “his” people. The spokespeople from the human rights organizations, the Lawyers Committee and Americas Watch claim to be an “impartial observers” merely reporting their findings. Yet, both of the human rights group representatives present at the hearings hold up the U.S. as a kind of barometer on human rights. Furthermore, as several scholars have pointed out, human rights discourse is hindered by the fact that it is limited to the realm of state institutions. William Over argues, “human rights movements cannot transcend the particular power structure they seek to overcome They are instead ‘contaminated’ by the forces they oppose” (Human Rights in the International Public Sphere: Civic Discourse for the 21st Century xxi). Thus, perhaps most important is the text that is “missing” from the hearings--the voices of Haitian cane cutters and the silence surrounding the violence enacted by the United

States upon the Haitian people through its foreign and domestic policies. There is no acknowledgement that the space of the hearings is a place where U.S. hegemony is enacted on a daily basis, including such trade policies as NAFTA and GATT which shape the flow of capital and labor hemispherically. And as Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues in Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History, this silencing is not merely accidental, but intentional in the construction of a history. He writes, “By silence, I mean an active and transitive process: one ‘silences’ a fact or an individual as a silencer silences a gun. One engages in the practice of silencing. Mentions and silences are thus active, dialectical counterparts of which history is the synthesis” (48). The discussion of Haitian asylum-seekers that I presented in chapter two is relevant here. While the 1991 hearings purported to address the violations of Haitian human rights in the Dominican Republic, at virtually the same time the U.S. government refused to grant asylum to over 20,000 Haitian refugees based largely on official INS reports of Haitians’ “unreliability” in the interview process--their testimonies were not considered truthful by authorities. When understood within this context, the reliance upon expert witness testimony in lieu of that of Haitian cane cutters subverts their credibility as witnesses and calls the alleged humanitarian concern of the 1991 hearings into question.

The notion of hearings would seem to call for orality, the voices of victims, to be heard, but the final outcome of the hearings relies upon the written documents submitted and produced--for the review of foreign policy, etc. Furthermore, the record includes the statements that each “witness” makes publicly to the committee as well as a prepared written statement. The record also includes written statements from some who were not present, including one submitted by the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees. There

is also a letter from Jose del Carmen Ariza, U.S. Ambassador to the Dominican Republic, which states,

Since the Committee's rules prohibit my appearance as a witness at the June 11 hearing on the treatment of Haitian cane cutters in the Dominican Republic, I am herewith submitting a statement by Juan Jose Arteaga, the Economic Advisor to President Joaquin Balaguer, for the Subcommittee's consideration (my emphasis, 65).

This statement demonstrates the hearings reliance upon written documents for establishing authority and facticity. Indeed it seems that the oral nature of the hearings is subsumed altogether by the written. Even though the ambassador is not present at the hearings, the fact that his letter is included indicates an understanding that the hearings ultimately result in a written document which takes the place of human witnesses. The evidence is cleansed of its subjectivities and is thus, "objectified" in this process. This movement from the subjectivity of testimony to the objectivity of documentation is not necessarily deleterious in and of itself. I do not want to suggest that subjective testimonials are the only acceptable form of representing experience. But we must question whether or not objectivity is possible in these hearings given the U.S. collaboration in silencing Haitians.

While the hearings do contain some moments of dialogue between the U.S. Congressional representatives on the committee and the authorities chosen to come and speak on behalf of their respective parties, the speakers mostly read from prepared written statements.<sup>81</sup> In this process, the hearings exclude individual voices. While I would not insist that the hearings are completely one-sided, I would argue that because of the presentation of a few select "voices" the scope of the hearings is truncated. Hence,

while there are representatives of the Dominican government and human rights organization spokespeople, there is not, in fact, a single Haitian canecutter present. Significantly, those people offering statements at the hearings are referred to as “witnesses” in the Table of Contents of the Hearings and their statements are referred to as “testimony” (9).<sup>82</sup> But the disparity between these “witness” statements speaks to the ambiguity of the hearings themselves and problematizes the notion of testimony as a mode of truth-telling. Finally, there is no attempt to look at the context of the whole island of Hispaniola. The Hearings deal only with the Dominican Republic, there is very little reference to Haiti and/or U.S. interventions in the region.<sup>83</sup>

#### Re-Membering Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*

I would like to pause here to explore the manner in which fiction offers both a critique of testimonio as it becomes appropriated by nation-states while also serving to create Haitian subjectivities that are elided in the hearings. Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* attempts to excavate the stories and memories of forgotten Haitians who were targeted in the 1937 slaughter. *The Farming of Bones* deconstructs Dominican nationalism and produces a history of the Trujillo era through the fractured and ambiguous testimonial of Amabelle Désir, an orphaned Haitian domestic servant in the Dominican Republic. What becomes clear in reading the novel is that Dominican national history cannot easily be extracted from the history of the whole island of Hispaniola, largely because of the way that the continuous migration of fieldworkers from Haiti to the Dominican Republic binds the two nations together. As the title of *The Farming of Bones* suggests, labor is inextricably linked to corporeality for the Haitian characters who work as canecutters in Dominican sugarcane fields. Specifically, the novel focuses on the period leading up to the 1937 massacre of Haitians (known as “El

Corte” in Spanish) ordered by Trujillo.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the “farming of bones” connotes the back-breaking agricultural labor of the canefields as well as the slaughter of bodies--a kind of cultivation of death where the machete, the canecutter’s tool, becomes the *modus operandi* of the massacre. In my analysis, I focus specifically on how the material bodies represented in these novels serve as sites of memory. As Michel Rolph-Trouillot argues, “history begins with bodies and artifacts: living brains, fossils, texts, buildings” (Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History 29). Danticat demonstrates that remembering the Trujillo regime in Hispaniola entails a confrontation with a history that is corporeal--a “re-membering”.

The novel mimics the *testimonio* format since it is a first person narrative told from the point of view of a Haitian domestic worker who experiences oppression under the brutal Trujillo regime. The novel has two narrative beginnings--and in neither of them does Amabelle Désir begin by telling her own story. In the first beginning, she starts by naming her lover: “His name was Sebastian Onius” (1). The second beginning describes the impending birth of the twins as Valencia’s water breaks--a foreshadowing of the impending disruption of the nation (5). What is significant about these beginnings is that they go against the typical “*testimonio*” format in which a speaker begins by establishing his/her own subjectivity--often by stating his/her own name.<sup>85</sup> The fact that Amabelle does not tell her own story right away disrupts the expectation that her story will sufficiently serve as the “truth” of events. In fact, her narrative reveals her unwillingness to believe that Haitians faced danger in the Dominican Republic. Halfway into the novel, she still refuses to believe the rumors that are circulating about Trujillo’s order to kill Haitians. She instead attributes the talk to the community’s anger over Joël’s

death: “I couldn’t understand why Unèl and the others would consider that death to be a herald of theirs and mine too” (126). And even when Doctor Javier warns her to leave her employer’s house because Trujillo has ordered his army to kill Haitians, she thinks, “It couldn’t be real. Rumors, I thought. There were always rumors. . . This could not touch people like me, nor people like Yves, Sebastien, and Kongo who worked the cane fields. They were giving labor to the land” (140). She believes that because Haitians serve a vital function in the nation’s economy, the labor they perform protects them from harm by the regime.

Amabelle is finally convinced of the immanent danger she and other Haitians are in after she sees Señor Pico and his fellow officers brutalize Haitians they are trying to round-up to deport (157). After searching for Sebastian and finding no trace of him, Amabelle flees into the mountains along with other escapees, hoping to cross the border into Haiti. But as the narrative continues, it reveals the political dangers inherent in language for Kreyòl-speaking Haitians living in Spanish-speaking Dominican Republic. Significantly, it is as the refugees approach the border that language proves fatal. When they arrive in the border-town of Dajabón, Trujillo is giving a speech rallying Dominicans into anti-Haitian nationalist hysteria and Amabelle and Yves, a fellow-Haitian refugee, are “tested” by a crowd of Dominicans. The crowd demands that they pronounce “perejil,” the Spanish word for parsley. The motivation for this “test” is that most Kreyòl-speaking Haitians could not trill the Spanish “r” and would instead pronounce the Kreyòl “pewejil” or “pésil.” What results from Amabelle’s and Yves’ inability to pronounce the word in convincing Spanish is that they are force-fed handfuls of parsley until they choke and are beaten by the crowd. It is not until Amabelle’s own body is implicated in the violence of this scene that her narrative takes on the urgency characteristic of the testimonio genre. Amabelle describes how, “Our jaws were pried

open and parsley stuffed into our mouths. My eyes watering I chewed and swallowed as quickly as I could, but not nearly as fast as they were forcing the handfuls into my mouth” (193). The mouth and the tongue, the sources of enunciation, become the target of the crowd’s hatred and language becomes a tool of torture.

Corporeality becomes part of Amabelle’s testimonial as she describes the physical aspects of her torture: “My whole body was numbing; I sensed the vibration of the blows, but no longer the pain. My mouth filled with blood. I tried to swallow the sharp bitter parsley bubbling in my throat. Some of the parsley had been peppered before it was given to us” (194). These corporeal “texts” become increasingly significant in conveying the events of the massacre so that at times, physical “inscriptions” subsume the oral testimonials. For instance, immediately following her torture, Amabelle has no control over her speech. She describes how she tries to communicate with the other escapees: “I tried to explain. . . . My words ran together, blurred and incomprehensible. They stopped listening, . . .” (199).

Whereas in the first half of the novel the workers’ bodies are marked by sugarcane, in the second half of the text, the altering of Haitian bodies by the machete serves as the culmination of the many previous attempts to contain race and nation. Trujillo’s army was instructed to kill with machetes, so that it would look like rural peasant farmers had attacked the Haitians (263). To make the massacre look like a peasant-led campaign would destroy the possibility for alliances between Haitians and Dominican peasants, however, the novel demonstrates that this agenda was not successful as many Dominicans assisted fleeing Haitians (176). The bodies of Haitians are literally dismembered because of the nationality that they represent. If the body is a metonym for the island, that this dismemberment takes place at the border also symbolizes Trujillo’s attempt to reify the division of the island. Following this corporeal metaphor for the nation, Trujillo’s nationalist discourse portrays Haiti (and Haitians) as a kind of “diseased” element in the island.<sup>86</sup>

The most profound corporeal “texts” are the corpses that Amabelle encounters when she and Yves finally make it to the river-border after escaping their torture in Dajabón. This is the first time that Amabelle has attempted to cross since her parents' drowning years before. She re-encounters death at the river, only this time it is the deaths of refugees murdered trying to cross the border. The army is "throwing corpses into the water . . . An empty black dress buoyed past us, inflated by air, floating upon the water. . . . A man floated past us, face down" (200). These corpses are obvious examples of the success of Trujillo's campaign to eradicate Haitian identity from the nation.

Ironically, Amabelle herself accidentally contributes to death at the border when she smothers a fellow refugee, Odette, as they try to cross the river. Odette, who has just seen her husband shot by Dominican guards, starts to cry out when Amabelle stifles her screams by placing one hand over her mouth and “moved the other one to her nose and pressed down hard for her own good, for our own good” (emphasis added 202). Amabelle explains, “She did not struggle but abandoned her body to the water and the lack of air.” Odette's corpse signifies the price at which Amabelle's own survival comes as explains that “All I had wanted was for her to be still” (205). This serves a sharp contrast to Anzaldúa's celebration of the “survival instincts” of the new mestiza: “Like an ear of corn--a female seed-bearing organ--the mestiza is tenacious, tightly wrapped in the husks of her culture. Like kernels she clings to the cob; with thick stalks and strong brace roots, she holds tight to the earth--she will survive the crossroads” (Borderlands: La Frontera, The New Mestiza 81). If we read Amabelle as a kind of “new mestiza,” we also must recognize that her survival of “the crossroads” comes at the price of other lives lost.

The bodies of the dead, while testaments to the massacre, are also chilling reminders of the limits of verbal and corporeal testimonials for they ultimately are effaced because of their lack of identification. Danticat's prose does not turn away from the grisly effects of the slaughter as Amabelle narrates, “I was taken past a line of people

with burns that had destroyed most of their skin, men and women charred into awkward poses, arms and legs frozen in mid-air, like tree trunks long separated from their branches” (206). Such visceral details unveil the horror enacted by Trujillo’s regime in their attempt to obliterate Haitian identity. Amabelle and Yves realize that when they leave Odette’s body with the priest who is recording deaths, her identity will disappear completely: “We did not ask where Odette would be buried, for we know she would likely have to share her grave with all the others there” (205).

Elaine Scarry explains that regimes use torture not only to coerce prisoners into giving information, but to make their (unstable) power apparent, visible and tangible. She explains that "The physical pain is so incontestably real that it seems to confer its quality of 'incontestable reality' on that power that has brought it into being" (27). One way that Trujillo made his power a reality was to show it on the bodies of Haitians. Individual identity is virtually erased, and pain becomes a collective element that binds the victims together in a shared suffering. For example, even though one of the nuns in the clinic tells Amabelle, "You don't look as bad as some. You look rather well" (206), Amabelle is overwhelmed by the suffering others are feeling so that when she witnesses another woman's leg being amputated, she thinks she herself is experiencing it. She describes how "I closed my eyes against her blood, thinking this would be the last time I would see someone dying, so sure was I that when the doctor said, 'She's not going to live,' he was also talking about me" (207).<sup>87</sup> After their physical torture, survivors are identified not by their names, but by their bodily wounds. Amabelle identifies other survivors as “a young woman with three rings of rope burns carved into her neck” and “the man who . . . had been struck with a machete on the shoulder and left for dead” (210). Yet, while the scarred and dismembered bodies attest to the violence of the massacre, the fact that survivors have to live with the brutal inscriptions of the regime for the rest of their lives lessens their own agency in telling their stories.

At the clinic, many of the survivors begin to talk about their experiences:

As they ate, people gathered in a group to talk. Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, for greater than their desire to be heard was the hunger to tell. One could hear it in the fervor of their declarations, the obscenities shouted when something could not be remembered fast enough, when a stutter allowed another speaker to race into his own account without the stutterer having completed his. (209)

The passage highlights the need for victims of violence to tell their stories not only to begin the individual healing process, but also as a way to make their experiences and suffering “real” to the outside world. While Amabelle’s ability to speak clearly and be understood has proved challenging since her torture, at this point, she completely loses her own voice in the text. This suggests that the narrative is not meant to be solely an individual story, but a collective one which is reflected by the shift to other voices. What results are stories that blend together, acting as a kind of collective testimonio, as each person in the clinic chimes in with their story. Amabelle feels herself blending in with the others: “I looked for my face in the tin ceiling above me as I waited for Yves to return. With everyone lying face up and with their bodies so close together, I couldn’t tell which face was mine” (217). Her response to these (collective) testimonials is corporeal as Amabelle describes that after hearing other victims’ stories, “My skin felt prickly, as if my blood had been put in a pot to boil and then poured back into me” (209). This is in sharp contrast to the apathetic response that the government later offers to the survivors.

In fact, Amabelle herself undergoes a dramatic transformation at the clinic. After losing her ability to speak while listening to other survivors’ stories, her only means of communication is through bodily gestures (213-214). Her outward identity is

transformed so that she no longer wears the dress which signified her position as a domestic; “I was wearing a different dress from the one I’d arrived in, a frock of faded denim made for a woman with a much longer and wider body than mine” (207). She is no longer defined by her labor as she becomes identified with survivors and the dead.

For a short time, the survivors believe that their stories will actually be used to indict Trujillo for his crimes against Haitians: “[They] look[ed] for someone to write their names in a book, and take their story to President Vincent. They wanted a civilian face to concede that what they had witnessed and lived through did truly happen” (236).

However, when the government officials come to document their stories, it becomes clear to the survivors that their testimonials are only part of a bureaucratic process, as one woman tells Amabelle, “He writes your name in the book and he says he will take your story to President Stenio Vincent so you can get your money. . . Then he lets you talk and lets you cry and he asks you if you have papers to show that all these people died” (234). It becomes apparent that the Haitian government is only concerned with the official documentation of the massacre--personal testimonies are only valuable when they can be supported by official documentation of the dead. Indeed, the government stops taking testimonials when all the reparation money from the Dominican government has been distributed. This representation is in stark contrast to the revolutionary potential of testimonio lauded by critics such as George Yudice and John Beverley. Instead of serving as a site of consciousness-raising and social change, testimonials were taken only as long as they could produce capital.

The survivors soon recognize that language is not sufficient to capture the horror of the events. Even when the state does take the testimonies of survivors, many of them recognize that their own words could be used against them, as Yves states, “You tell the story, and then it’s retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, and not yours” (246). Oral testimony is not sufficient for the justice he seeks. Instead, memories are often located in the senses. Describing Yves,

Amabelle explains, “The slaughter had affected him in certain special ways: He detested the smell of sugarcane . . . and loathed the taste of parsley; he could not swim in rivers; the sound of Spanish being spoken--even by Haitians--made his eyes widen, his breath quicken, his face cloud with terror, his lips unable to part one from the other and speak” (emphasis added, 273). Verbal paralysis is part of the legacy of the slaughter for Yves. It is this sensory evidence that gets left out of official accounts. In a culture in which orality is often valued above scribal communication, the material body is an integral part of language as Amabelle notes how, “[she] once heard an elder say that the dead who have no use for their words leave them as part of their children’s inheritance. Proverbs, teeth suckings, obscenities, even grunts and moans once inserted in special places during conversations, all are passed along to the next heir” (266).

For some survivors “El Corte” permanently alters not only their physical bodies, but also their language. In fact, because of the torture experienced at the hands of the regime one survivor, a Haitian priest named Father Roumain, no longer has full control over his own words or thoughts. His sister explains how, “They forced him to say these things that he says now whenever his mind wanders” (260). So instead of testifying to his torture, Father Roumain recites Dominican nationalist rhetoric:

Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? They once came here only to cut sugarcane, but now there are more of them than there will ever be cane to cut, you understand? . . . We, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians. In three generations, our children and grandchildren will have their blood completely tainted unless we defend ourselves now, you understand? (260-61)

Father Roumain’s sister explains that his words are a direct result of his physical torture:

“He was beaten badly every day . . . When he first came, he told me they’d tied a rope around his head and twisted it so tight that sometimes he felt like he was going mad. They offered him nothing to drink but his own piss” (261). Scarry notes the effects that physical torture has on the language of torture victims: “The question and answer [of the interrogation] also objectify the fact that while the prisoner has almost no voice . . . the torturer and regime have doubled their voice since the prisoner is now speaking their words.” (emphasis added, 36)<sup>88</sup>

Whereas the survivors’ oral testimonies are vulnerable to misinterpretation, the bodies of the survivors appear to offer more enduring testimonies to the massacre. The emphasis on the physical reminders of the massacre continues long after the survivors leave the clinic. When Yves brings Amabelle to his mother’s home in Cap-Haïtien she goes to bathe in the yard; “I knew that my body could no longer be a tempting spectacle, nor would I ever be truly young or beautiful, if I ever had been. Now my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament” (227). Amabelle’s body now parallels that of Kongo whose back bore a “map of scars” from working in the canefields. This doubling suggests the connection between political torture and the cutting of cane. Just as Kongo’s “map of scars” is a testament to his lifetime of working in the canefields, Amabelle’s body is a historiographic archive which retains the history of the events of the massacre: “Thinking of Sebastian’s return made me wish for my hair to grow again-- which it had not--for the inside of my ears to stop buzzing, for my knees to bend without pain, for my jaws to realign evenly and form a smile that did not make me look like a feeding mule” (229). It is the material body, not solely oral testimony, that eventually leads to solidarity among the survivors and those who did not endure the massacre. Amabelle describes how, once she arrived in Haiti, “I strolled like a ghost through the waking life of the Cap, wondering whenever I saw people with deformities--anything from a broken nose to crippled legs--had they been there?” (243). The testimony that these bodies offer challenges the manipulation of language and stories of the survivors by

the Haitian and Dominican nation-states. As Amabelle states, “This past is more like flesh than air; our stories testimonials like the ones never heard by the justice of the peace or the Generalissimo himself” (281). It is these corporeal testaments which seek justice by offering an alternative historical narrative. However, one of the survivors in Danticat’s text also notes the fragility of the human body under attack: “It all makes you understand that the flesh is like everything else . . . it is no different, the flesh, than fruit or anything that rots. It’s not magic, not holy. It can shrink, burn, and like amber it can melt in fire. It is nothing. We are nothing” (213). The speaker highlights the inherent fragility of corporeal testaments as the destruction of flesh signals an ultimate destruction of subjectivity. Furthermore, even when these bodies do offer testimonials, the victims did not themselves choose the “inscription” of violence.

Moreover, as “concrete” as survivors’ corporeal testaments would appear to be, even they are subject to interpretation. Years after the slaughter, when Amabelle returns to the Dominican Republic to visit her old employer, the body still functions as a signifier of the massacre. When she returns to Señora Valencia's home, she sees a servant who “When she stretched her neck, I saw that she had rope burns above her collarbone. They were even deeper and more pronounced than those on the woman at the border clinic, a deeply furrowed field” (292). It is significant that Haitians recognize other victims of the massacre, but for upper-class Dominicans like Valencia, the physical altering of Amabelle’s own body causes a mis-recognition. Amabelle states, “That she did not recognize me made me feel that I had come back to Alegría and found it had never existed at all” (294). Valencia’s failure to recognize Amabelle in her altered appearance signals her refusal to “read” the text that Amabelle’s body offers--a testimonial to her country’s role in its altering. However, there is some ambiguity as to where Valencia’s own allegiances lie as she tells Amabelle that she hid several Haitians during “El Corte” even though she had begun hemorrhaging from childbirth--so that her own spilled blood becomes tied to the Haitian blood spilled (299). But she is not willing to give up her

national allegiance, stating, “If I denounce this country, I denounce myself” (299). It seems that at this moment when her identity is nearly effaced by Valencia, for whom she she was so willing to uphold class and racial hierarchies before the slaughter, Amabelle becomes fully conscious of the extent of her own oppression.

### “Solidarity Poetics” and the State

As the moderator of the hearings, Representative Robert Torricelli begins his opening statement by invoking solidarity stating that “we must speak as one voice” and that the nation must be united on the issue of Dominican sugar laborers (11). He implores the urgency of the issue of Haitian workers:

We meet today as two subcommittees, the Human Rights and Western Hemisphere, to discuss the issue of slavery in our own hemisphere. This is not a misstatement. It may not even be an exaggeration. It is 1991, and yet, just few hundred miles from our shores there are allegations that slavery is being practiced for all practical purposes against the citizens of Haiti.” (1)

In this statement, Torricelli adopts a “poetics of solidarity” that Albert Moreiras describes as central to testimonio but warns; “is in perpetual risk of being turned into a rhetorical tropology” (Moreiras 198). As such, Moreiras posits that testimonio can be used as an instrument of colonial domination: “it needs to be asked whether testimonio criticism might end up becoming, or is in constant danger of becoming, a tool for the imperial representational self-knowledge of which it was supposed to be the very opposite” (Moreiras 199). Indeed this appropriation is evident in Torricelli’s statement which echoes the rhetoric of human rights groups--including the Lawyers Committee on International Affairs and Americas Watch which also compare the situation of Haitian

canecutters to slavery.<sup>89</sup> But what does it mean for Torricelli to refer to the situation as slavery? First, it establishes the hearings as an ethical and morally superior space to the issue at hand. “Slavery” as it is evoked by Torricelli calls to mind nineteenth-century notions of plantation slavery--something which, according to official American history, is “in the past”. Therefore, a place which allegedly still practices it is stuck in the past, after all, “[i]t is 1991” and slavery is not part of the modern narrative of progress in the United States. It becomes a way of distinguishing the “progress” of the First World from the Third World, yet elides the history of colonialism and slavery that contributed to the creation of both “worlds”.

As oppressive as the Dominican government continues to be in their treatment of Haitians, in fact, Samuel Martinez warns that the referral to Haitian migrant conditions as “slavery” by human rights groups and through the hearings has caused a backlash by the Dominican government through the largest deportation of Haitians from the country since the 1937 massacre (Martinez 50-51). Martinez notes that

the Haitian bracero differs significantly from that of slaves on nineteenth-century Caribbean sugar plantations. For example, it is neither physical coercion nor the demands of social superiors but economic need which chiefly drives Haitian men to go to the Dominican Republic. . . . the primary means of maintaining labor discipline is not the threat of physical punishment or legal penalty but wage incentives (Martinez 50-51).

By viewing the situation through the lens of “economic need”, it becomes much more difficult for the U.S. to condemn the Dominican Republic because it is complicitous in establishing the capitalist system which the Dominican sugar industry operates in. As Martin Murphy explains, U.S. influence in the region was strengthened by its military occupation in 1916-24 when the military Governor Admiral Knapp facilitated the break

up of communal lands (terrenos comuneros) and registered it as private property. Thus, by 1925, North Americans controlled 81 percent of land used for sugar production. Again in 1965 after the assassination of Trujillo in 1961 and as Murphy notes, “multinational corporate and finance capital dominated the economic scene”.<sup>90</sup>

Furthermore, Torricelli draws attention to documentation as a strategy of the committee and the governments involved to record the situation in the Dominican Republic. Torricelli refers to documents that were not provided to the committee by the U.S. Embassy, but were the basis for the U.S. Trade Representative’s decision to continue sending U.S. foreign aid to the Dominican Republic (sanctions on aid were to be considered by USTR if the Dominican Republic was not shown to improve its conditions for Haitian workers). Since these documents were the basis for this decision, it would only seem fitting that they should be part of the “official record” of the hearings. This withholding of documents becomes even more important when the State Department’s spokesperson makes statements which are based on official documentation of the situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic (2-3).

### Poetics of Evasion

As a representative of the State Department, it is no surprise that Joseph Becelia’s remarks and the prepared statement from the State Department focus on the official documentation by the Dominican government of the situation of Haitian canecutters. Predictably, Becelia rarely veers from officially sanctioned (by the U.S. and Dominican governments) statements. He begins his testimony by reviewing the political relations between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic:

Our friendly bilateral relationship is based on common democratic ideals. Elections have been held every four years in the Dominican Republic since 1966, making it one of the older and more established democracies in the hemisphere. . . Because of this administration’s concern for human rights

around the world, the Department of State, through our Embassy in Santo Domingo, has investigated worker rights conditions in the Dominican Republic (my emphasis, 4).

This reference to democracy assumes that all democratic governments are free from human rights abuses. In her analysis of the UN Declaration on Human Rights, Anne Cubilie argues that “the U.S., France and Britain do not have an unself-interested concern with global human rights abuse. Their responses to particular situations are shaped by past history (like colonial responsibility), economic interest, domestic concerns, and media pressures . . . they cannot be counted upon . . .to consistently push a human rights agenda . . .” (Anne Cubilie The Limits of Culture, 136, unpublished dissertation). The question of whether or not the Dominican Republic is, in fact, a democracy is a question inextricably linked with the status of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. Andre Corten and Isis Duarte note that in recent Dominican elections, “fraud is virtually a rule of the game” especially when it comes to the question of whether or not Haitians and Dominico-Haitians are granted citizenship and are allowed to vote (Corten and Duarte 5). They continue, “During the May 16, 1990, elections, Balaguer’s Christian Socialist Reformist Party (Partido Reformista Social Cristiano--PRSC) distributed numerous identification documents to Haitians, whether or not they were Dominico-Haitians, in exchange for their votes” (Corten and Duarte 5).

In the State Department’s written document, “Worker Rights--Cane Cutting in the Dominican Republic,” that follows the statements of Becelia, questions about human rights violations are evaded. He refers only to documents and what the Dominican government has officially sanctioned or stated (12-13). This is contrasted by other remarks Becilia makes which are couched in vague language. Becilia refers to the “measurable progress” of the Dominican government (10), a “new will” of the Dominican government to “do something” (10), a “certain element of good faith” on

behalf of the Dominican government (11). At one point in the discussion, Becilia states that he “cannot speak with great authority to the precise situation in any one of these locations . . . I cannot speak precisely to the presence of armed guards and what their precise role in this context might be” (my emphasis, 12-13). This use of opaque language signals a kind of poetics of deferral and denial--carefully spoken and written to avoid any implication of the U.S. or Dominican governments in discriminatory labor practices. It is never clear exactly how authority on the issue is established or who can “speak precisely” about the issues of Haitian canecutters in the Dominican Republic. One is left wondering why Becilia chooses to speak at all if he cannot make any definitive statements about the issue?

Ultimately, Becilia’s statements result in an apology for the Dominican government. While supposedly speaking from a point of “objectivity” on behalf of the U.S. Embassy in the Dominican Republic, he defends the Dominican government stating,

The Government of the Dominican Republic (GODR) strenuously denies the allegations [made by the ABC “Primetime Live” television show] and in response to the ABC program and other international criticism, President Balaguer has ordered the repatriation of all undocumented aliens working in the sugar fields under age 16 and over 60. Based upon our continuing review of the Bracero issue, we believe that the GODR does not have a policy of exploiting Haitian youths in slave-like conditions. To the contrary, the GODR is taking meaningful steps to curb abuses, although much remains to be done. (my emphasis, 15).

Again, we see a poetics of deferral operating where indirect language is used to evade the question of how aware and/or involved the GODR is in the exploitation of Haitians. While Becilia states that the GODR does not have an official policy of exploitation, he

evades the question of whether the government passively condones such practices.

Furthermore, Becilia states that,

We [the State Department] do not believe that the GODR has a policy of exploiting Haitian youths in slave-like conditions. Our own observations, including numerous visits to sugar plantation communities (Bateys), and countless private discussions with knowledgeable sources indicated that the trend in the Dominican Republic is clearly away from the such practices. (my emphasis, 16)

What this statement suggests is a contradiction, a slippage in the “official” perspective. On the one hand, Becilia states that the State Department does not believe there has been exploitative conditions, in the next breath (literally!), he states that the government is “clearly away from such practices”--a statement which suggests that such exploitation did exist at one time, or that it still exists but is being phased out.

Becilia repeatedly chastises the ABC program for not putting “existing problems into their historic and social context” (16) and yet, he himself completely elides this context. Nowhere in his statement (verbal and prepared) does he refer to the complex history of the Dominican and Haitian nation-states. Furthermore, he does not refer at all to the ongoing conflicts between the two countries--including the 1937 slaughter. And he certainly never refers to U.S. occupations of the island. Apparently, to Becilia, “historical context” includes a brief comparison of wages and living conditions for Haitians and Dominicans, but nothing more. Yet another contradictory statement:

The program correctly depicted work in the cane fields as hard and the pay as low. (It is precisely for these reasons that Dominicans shun working there and that large numbers of Haitians have been brought in to perform

the harvest.) This must be viewed in the context of the Dominican Republic's overall economic situation and wage levels. (my emphasis, 17)

This statement directly contradicts the Dominican government's allegation that Haitians flood into the Dominican Republic on their own (see page 28). It is not clear why Dominicans shun working in the canefields if the wages that canecutters receive are "comparable" to that of Dominicans.<sup>91</sup>

### Silencing the Present

Becilia's testimony ends with dialogue with Torricelli over the withholding of documents by the State Department that Torricelli refers to in his opening statements. Torricelli asks, "Where are the documents, the information, that led to the USTR [U.S. Trade Representative] to make its judgment?"(9). This in itself suggests the ambiguity of so-called "official documents" that governments rely on--if they are not able to be accessed then how can they be used to make state policy? And yet, after Becilia has made his statement, Torricelli remarks,

I think we have had a fair and frank exchange of views. I hope it is the last. This is simply a confrontation that is unnecessary. There is no reason for us to have differences of opinions on such a fundamental question. I regret that the administration has handled this issue to date in this manner. But it is certainly not too late to begin helping those who want to put an end to this practice and doing so in the absolute strongest language. There is nothing here that is worthy of this administration or anyone in this country defending. (19).

Here again, Torricelli reiterates the moral authority of the United States and the Bush administration.

Father Edwin Paraison: Voice of the People?

Whereas Becilia represents the interests of the states involved, Father Edwin Paraison represents the interests of the Haitian canecutters. As coordinator of the Haitian Ministry of the Episcopal Church of the Dominican Republic<sup>92</sup> Father Paraison worked closely with Haitians in the Dominican Republic, collecting and videotaping testimonies from many children. He thus begins to function both as a native informant and as a kind of ethnographer who observes the canecutters and mediates their testimonies. He opens by stating:

I would like to first offer my thanks to you, Mr. Chairman, and to the rest of the subcommittee, for offering me this opportunity to testify on behalf of my brothers and sisters, the Haitian laborers of the Dominican Republic. I think that my presence before you indicates real proof of interest that the international community, and particularly in this case, the United States, has shown towards the working conditions of the Haitian laborers in the Dominican Republic. I am especially pleased that the Haitian sugarcane cutters can be listened to and understood by the Dominican Republic Government officials. . . I am not here to just condemn the Government of the Dominican Republic. I would like to bear witness to a situation that is no longer acceptable. (my emphasis, 20)

Evoking the solidarity poetics of testimonio, Paraison claims to speak for the collective community of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. Thus, his role in the hearings is significant. But at that same time, his above statements indicate that he has trust in the ability of the U.S. and Dominican governments to “hear” the plight of Haitians and to do something about it. Whether or not these statements are merely political etiquette they illustrate the level of restraint that is on display in the hearings. He is not condemning

either governments, but thanking them for their “interest”. One has to wonder about Paraison’s ideological affiliations and the role of the Church in the Dominican state. He claims to “testify on the situation of my fellow countrymen and brothers in Christ, the Haitian laborers . . .” (23). Nation and religion are inextricable. Paraison’s language is couched in the poetics of solidarity, yet what I find problematic is not only that he claims to speak for Haitians, but also that in the process Haitians will be “listened to and understood”. It seems as though Paraison operates out of a kind of liberation theology: “The campaign to improve the conditions on the plantations cannot be claimed as a campaign to discredit the Dominican Republic. The churches have their pastoral responsibility to make known the subhuman conditions in which the cane cutters live and work as well as the treatment they receive” (my emphasis, 31-32). And yet it is important to remember the historical connections between religion and imperialism on Hispaniola (and elsewhere throughout Latin America).

What is most perplexing about Paraison’s statements is that he repeatedly quotes President Joaquin Balaguer in support of his own statements. Yet, Balaguer did, in fact, perpetuate the racist national policies against Haitians begun during the Trujillo regime. Ernesto Sagas states that “Joaquin Balaguer served as one of the [Trujillo] regime’s most efficient and outspoken apologists”. Balaguer, who was president of the Dominican Republic on six occasions until 1995, wrote in his bestseller, La Isla al Reves (1947) that “If the racial problem is of great importance for all countries, for Santo Domingo . . . the issue is of an immense significance, since on it depends, in a certain way, the very existence of the nationality that for more than a century has been struggling against a more prolific race”<sup>93</sup>. Here the racism of Dominican nationalism is evoked; Haitians are not seen as citizens of a neighboring country but as a race, a biological element, to be kept at bay. One has to ask what kind of ethos Paraison gains from quoting Balaguer?

Despite the ambiguity of his opening remarks, Paraison goes on to contradict much of what Becelia (and the State Department’s written document) testified to by

citing the forced recruitments of Haitians, a lack of freedom of movement for the workers between the two countries, child labor and the Dominican government's refusal to give citizenship to Haitians who were born in or have lived much of their lives in the Dominican Republic, known as "Dominico-Haitians":

Since 1916, and even earlier, tens of thousands of Haitians have been born in the Dominican Republic and have a right to Dominican citizenship, but it has been proven that due to their ethnic origin, and frequently because their parents' status was not registered, there exists a huge number of people without a country. These people do not have a definite nationality. These people are known as 'Dominico-Haitians' (children of Haitians or of mixed marriages born in the Dominican Republic). (my emphasis, 25)

However, the Dominican government's letter challenges such statements by arguing that,

The traditions of liberty and the pride that all Dominicans take in their country are too important to be trivialized by anyone. Indeed, the fact that so many foreigners, including over one million Haitians, have chosen voluntarily to leave their own lands to live and work in our country is perhaps the best testament to the quality of life and liberty that all of us enjoy" (my emphasis, 67).

Paraison uses the testimony he has collected from 187 repatriated Haitian laborers to challenge the discursive authority of the State Department. For the first time in the hearings there is reference to what Haitians themselves actually said. Nevertheless, it is important still to question why Paraison's voice becomes the voice of truth and not the individual voices of the cancutters. Is it because of his evangelical affiliations? Does

the church lend him the authority he needs to be heard?

It is clear that language is used as a tool to silence Haitians in the hearings and in the Dominican Republic--even when that language is their own. Paraison notes that because of the high illiteracy rate among the Haitian laborers, the contracts, even if they are in Creole, are “incomprehensible to Haitians”-- “The 187 repatriates affirm that they did not personally sign the contract, not because they do not know how to write, but because in many cases the contracts were given to them already signed” (26). This statement prompts one to ask, what is the language of the migrant worker? It would seem that migrant workers do not have the kind of “fluency” necessary for negotiating the structures of global capitalism.

#### Human Rights and National Allegiance

One would expect that the testimony of human rights organizations would offer the most persuasive evidence of the mistreatment of Haitians. And while it is a significant part of the hearings, the testimony of human rights organizations becomes obscured by the fact that the U.S. again becomes a barometer for migrant laborers' rights. As a result, the testimony of human rights organizations further serve to eclipse Haitian subjectivities. William G. O'Neill, representative of the human rights organization, The Lawyers Committee on International Affairs, begins his testimony by establishing his organization's judicial authority when he calls on international law:

The committee works to promote international human rights and refugee protection. The committee's work is impartial; we hold every government to the same standards as enunciated in international law, especially the international human rights treaties (my emphasis, 36).

After establishing his ethos, O'Neill, like Father Paraison, claims to speak for Haitian canecutters, relying on interviews of mostly children (37).

O'Neill offers some of the most critical testimony when he cites the U.S. government's history of involvement in the Dominican sugar industry (43). He also challenges the discursive authority of the contracts that are given to Haitian canecutters as documents of truth (42) and challenges the bureaucratic maneuverings of the Dominican Republic (and even the State Department): "the Dominican Republic showed itself to be quite adept at passing decrees proposing reforms and labor codes, but has fallen far short in the application or implementation of any of these decrees or laws" (35).

However, where the testimony of the human rights organizations begins to falter is when the United States is called on as a kind of moral barometer for workers' rights. Like Torricelli's opening comments, Holly Burkhalter, Washington Director of Human Rights Watch invokes the American nation as a moral compass on the treatment of Haitians in the DR:

The fact is that the [Dominican] government is presiding over a system of near slavery . . . If that fact were known by the majority of the American people, and that the sugar that they were pouring on their cereal in the morning was being produced by wretched individuals who get no health care, who are in the fields barefoot, in the blinding sun, wielding machetes . . . Americans would be very, very unhappy about that fact.

Burkhalter continues to ignore the complicity of the U.S. in establishing the present-day Dominican sugar industry:

it should not escape notice that the Dominican Republic enjoys quite the largest share of the U.S. sugar quota of any country in the world. Now the Dominican Republic is not the only country in the world that produces sugar, but by a quirk of history they bring it in in the largest

quantities” (my emphasis, 46).

By referring to the economic relationship between the U.S. and the Dominican sugar industry as a “quirk of history”, Burkhalter fails to question the imperial system by which the Dominican Republic came to provide sugar to U.S. markets in the first place. This “quirk of history” actually involves a complex set of economic and political factors beginning in the 1890’s when the first trade agreement was made by which the U.S. became the largest importer of Dominican sugar in return for reduced and sometimes eliminated tariffs on U.S. products exported to the Dominican Republic. Martin Murphy notes that this was the beginning of U.S. hegemony in the region where, “the market needs of the sugar industry transform[ed] the economic, political and international relations of the entire [Dominican] nation” (Martin Murphy 15).

When asked to compare the situation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic to other canecutters around the world, the notion of universal human rights deteriorates as Burkhalter responds,

Well we have a little problem in the United States. The conditions of work for Haitian migrants and other black migrant workers in the south, and particularly in Florida, are very bad . . . We do not have a perfect situation here. (63, my emphasis)

Here, Burkhalter sounds almost as evasive as Joseph Becilia in his testimony. What does she mean by “a little problem”? O’Neill follows up on this comment by distinguishing between ages of canecutters in the Dominican Republic and the U.S.:

As bad as it is for the primarily Jamaican cane cutters in our own cane fields in Florida, they are experienced grown men, who have cut cane. . .

the conditions are abysmal. But when they go out in that cane field, they have goggles, they have gloves, they have boots, they are experienced, and they are grown men. In the Dominican Republic, you go out into the cane fields and you see children, teenagers and adults, most who have never cut cane before. (63)

He then goes on to advocate revising the Dominican Labor code to include cane cutting. This is ironic considering that O'Neill begins his testimony by chastizing the Dominican government's tendency to pass decrees to appease their critics without enforcing them. Again, the U.S. becomes an implicitly morally superior place where workers are not (as) exploited. One is left wondering what happens when those asking for the enforcement of universal rights and international labor laws are themselves bound by their own national biases? By establishing a U.S./Third World binary Burkhalter and O'Neill fail to expose the real reason behind the exploitation field workers--the system of global capitalism whereby Dominican and U.S. transnational corporations exploit cheap migrant labor.<sup>94</sup> Furthermore, to base the distinction between Haitians laborers in the Dominican Republic and Jamaican workers in the U.S. on age suggests that the exploitation of child laborers does not occur within the United States.

### Conclusion

What is ultimately missing from the Congressional Hearings are the actual voices and material bodies of the Haitians workers. The absence of Haitians "in-the-flesh" signals a silencing; they are without agency in this process. As John Beverley points out, "testimonios are texts whose discourses are 'still warm' from the struggle and hostility . . . . But they are . . . still also just texts and not actual warm or, in the case of the victims of the death squads, not-so-warm bodies" ("Second Thoughts on Testimonio" 3). This is significant because as hearings where "witnesses" "testify" to their knowledge on the subject of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, one would think that Haitians themselves

would testify. And yet, clearly the U.S. Congress had no intentions of bringing Haitian canecutters in to testify. Perhaps because to do so would interrupt the coherence of the hearings (in terms of language, etc). The question remains as to how the witnesses were chosen to speak in the hearings. Their silence and the mediation of their “voices” through the filters of Father Paraison--and the erasure of them by the State Department speaks, I think, to the long history of U.S. silencing of Haitians, while at the same time, commodifying their actual physical bodies.

The fact is that despite the testimony of expert witnesses and the threats of Torricelli when he chastises the State Department’s statements regarding the “progress” of the Dominican government in reference to the canecutters issue:

But if a message is going to be sent to the Dominican Republic, let it be this. I am not interested in good intentions, I am not impressed by any additional’ promises. There is not a person in this country who would want one dollar of our taxpayer’s money to go to any government that condones any of these activities at any level. As long as I am chairman of this subcommittee and able to muster a majority, it will never happen again, not a dollar. This next year is either going to witness the most remarkable progress in human relations in Dominican history, or it will mark the end of American assistance to the country. (11)

Yet, the United States did not, in fact, cut foreign aid to the Dominican Republic.

If, instead of looking solely at the testimony and written documentation of the hearings, we were to trace the exploitation of the material bodies of Haitians, we would find a very different historical narrative of U.S.-Haiti relations. In addition to the exploitation of migrant workers are the more overt examples of U.S. discrimination against Haitians. A direct example of this discrimination was the placement of Haitians

on the list of groups at “high risk” for AIDS by the Centers for Disease Control in 1982 and the Food and Drug Administration in the late 1980’s. What these policies did was to reify the stereotype of Haitians as disease-ridden and make “official” the discrimination of Haitians for the purpose of “national security”.<sup>95</sup> Like the Dominican Republic’s national policies of racial discrimination, the United States also made discrimination based on race and national origin an issue of national policy.<sup>96</sup> U.S. economic and military/strategic interests in the region have created the situation in which both the 1937 massacre and the current hyperexploitation of migrant workers occur.<sup>97</sup> The Plight of Haitian Sugarcane Cutters in the Dominican Republic is a narrative of transnational capitalism and ultimately speaks to the need to monitor the travels of global capitalism and commodification of literary discourse.

## Part 2: The Ordinary Seaman

While the U.S. Congressional Hearings critique the treatment of Haitian laborers in the Dominican Republic, the fact is that the hearings elide the history of United States’ involvement in political and economic affairs of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic, which have contributed to the migrations of Haitians to the Dominican Republic. When seen through the lenses of Central American workers on the periphery of U.S. society--those who contribute to U.S. economy but are not protected from exploitation--the potential of the U.S. as a space of liberation becomes much more dubious. Similar to U.S. involvement on Hispaniola, the U.S. has a long history of intervention in Central America going back to the Monroe Doctrine of 1820 in which the United States declared that all affairs within the hemisphere were part of U.S. national interest. Thus, despite becoming an independent nation in 1838, Nicaragua remained vulnerable to U.S. interests--as did other Central American nations. In 1856, a U.S. citizen, William

Walker, seized the Nicaraguan presidency. For a time the U.S. considered building a canal through Nicaragua, but later decided on Panama as the site. From 1912-1933 the U.S. maintained troops in Nicaragua and battled the Sandino rebel forces. When the Somoza family took power, they maintained close ties with the United States throughout its brutal dictatorship (1936-79). When the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) came to power in 1979 after defeating the Somoza regime, the United States lent military support to the counterrevolutionaries (contras).

The Ordinary Seaman addresses the ramifications of the Nicaraguan Revolution on the life of a soldier who comes to the U. S. in search of work, hoping to leave the revolution behind, but instead ends up in Brooklyn harbor stranded with a group of Nicaraguans, Guatemalans and Hondurans on a merchant marine ship that does not function<sup>98</sup>. The owners of the ship, one a U.S. citizen, the other an adventure-seeking cosmopolitan of British and Greek descent, evade international trade and labor laws and eventually abandon the migrant laborers when it is clear that the ship will never be seaworthy. The novel foregrounds the culpability of the United States by paralleling the issue of the exploitation of migrant labor in the United States with that of the revolution which has failed at “home“ --due in large part to U.S. intervention and military aid to the contras. Furthermore, the novel presents an infinite number of borders that the seaman encounter--national, linguistic, racial, sexual, ethnic, geographic, etc.

Just as Edwidge Danticat’s Krik? Krak! and Nikol Payen’s “Something in the Water” function as testimonials for those Haitians who are denied political asylum in the United States, so too does The Ordinary Seaman serve as a testimonial novel for those Central Americans who suffered under regimes supported by the United States and who

were subsequently denied political asylum in the U.S. Ana Patricia Rodriguez points out that

Throughout the 1980s, most Central Americans were denied legal political asylum. Although the United States led a decade-long economic blockade and 'contra-revolutionary' war in Nicaragua and granted Nicaraguan immigrants political asylum from the Marxist Sandinista government, Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Hondurans in flight from right-wing military dictatorships and war conditions funded by the United States were not granted political refugee status. The 1980 Refugee Act, which established political refugee and asylum classifications in the United States, all but rejected most Central American applicants. ("Refugees of the South: Central Americans in the U.S. Latino Imaginary" 388)

As Goldman explains in the acknowledgements, the idea for the novel came from a 1982 "news story buried in the inner pages of the New York Daily News" which reported that

Seventeen abandoned sailors have been living in a floating hellhole on the Brooklyn waterfront for months, aboard a rat-infested mystery ship without heat, plumbing or electricity [ . . . ] The sailors had been lured here from Central America with the promise of good wages but instead found

themselves abandoned, unpaid and trapped on the ship of horrors. (383)

Goldman, who is both a novelist and a journalist, interviewed members of the crew:

Our conversation--a few hours in the Institute's basement cafeteria--took place so many years ago now that I remember very little of what we actually talked about, though some of the things they told me have been a part of my attempts to reimagine the story from the start. I owe a special debt to the waiter, Bernardo Iván Carrasco M. He wrote a twelve-page account of the travail, which he titled, 'Los Ultimos dias de un viejo lobo de mar,' and gave it to me, urging me to make good use of it. (384)

Goldman's novel, along with recent films such as La Ciudad, not only represent Central American voices of U.S. society, but they signal a kind of fiction of the Americas in which the native space, the transnational laborer space, and the immigrant space are represented concurrently. However, as I will discuss below, this is a testimonial novel in which the native informants ultimately disappear from the text.

The novel hints at the disappearance of the native informant even before Esteban Gaitàn leaves his native Nicaragua. As the plane carrying him to New York takes off from Managua airport, he catches a glimpse of the ground below and sees reminders of the war that has not ended:

He saw five green military ambulances parked in a row, rear doors open,

canvas stretchers on the tarmac, figures in fatigues and medical whites standing around waiting . . . So helicopters and planes were still flying mangled and bullet-punctured bodies in heated, vibrating pools of blood over jungles, mountains and plains. Despite the cease-fire and all the talk of peace. (7)

This scene is significant as it represents the native space and native bodies that have been shattered by war. This, along with the extreme poverty of the war-torn country, is what propels Esteban to leave his native space. Accompanying him to New York City are other Central Americans who have been hired to work as seamen. Among them is a sixty year-old Nicaraguan, Bernardo, one of the only men who has any experience on board a ship. When the group arrives in New York and are taken to the ship, Urus, they find it to be “A dead ship, a mass of inert iron provocatively shaped like a ship” (38). Esteban and Bernardo find themselves, along with several other Central American men, stranded on this ship. Instead of sending money home to support families as they had hoped, the men find themselves struggling to survive without sufficient, food, water, shelter or medical attention.

The immobile ship holds particular significance for literatures of the Americas where ships have traditionally signaled migration within and out of the region. Ships symbolize movement and mobility, but also arrival to a destination. Ships travel. Ships are some of the earliest symbols of modernity, of the flow of capital and goods from one part of the world to another. Ships ushered Columbus to the New World and later transported human cargo from Africa to the Americas. Later, ships carried hopeful

natives back to the metropole. The ship symbolizes this hope in such Caribbean texts as George Lamming's The Emigrants, Sam Selvon's The Lonely Londoners, and V.S. Naipaul's The Middle Passage. As Antonio Benitez-Rojo argues,

Antilleans, . . . tend to roam the entire world in search of the centers of their Caribbeanness, constituting one of our century's most notable migratory flows. The Antilleans' insularity does not impel them toward isolation, but on the contrary, toward travel, toward exploration, toward the search for fluvial and marine routes. One needn't forget that it was men from the Antilles who constructed the Panama Canal. (The Repeating Island 25)

One of the most noted articulations of the ship metaphor in Caribbean thought is in Paul Gilroy's The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organizing symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship--a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion--is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons . . . Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political

artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs. (4)

Given this literary history, the fact that the Urus does not travel signals a new turn in literatures of the Americas. It becomes emblematic of transnational labor, where many people migrate in hopes of “moving up” in the world, by moving away from poverty, war, etc. only to become “stuck” upon reaching their First World destination--stuck in an underclass of workers. The men onboard the Urus are not just “stuck,” they are out of time, symbolized by the absence of any timepieces on the ship, except for a watch that Esteban covets and hides from the others because it was given to him by his deceased Sandinista girlfriend. They are cut off from the rest of society.

Chapter one of the novel, begins one-hundred eleven days after their arrival at the Urus, with Esteban, “shivering in two rank T-shirt and jeans and rotted socks under his thin blanket on his mattress on the floor” (33). He contemplates escaping the ship. But the men are wary of leaving the vessel because of their illegal status. When they first arrived at the *Urus*, they were told that

onboard they were in Panama, contracted seamen protected by that country’s sovereign laws. Onshore they were in the United States, where, of course, for the next four days, until their seamen’s transit visas expired, they were perfectly legal. But they all knew what rough places port cities could be, and this was one of the most dangerous, especially once they left the port yard and entered the streets around ‘los proyectos’” (25-26).

Juxtaposed with the stagnation of the seamen onboard the *Urus*, is the mobility of the ship's captain, Elias, and first mate, Mark (who the reader learns are the ship's owners), both of whom come and go as they please and live off the ship in Manhattan. Captain Elias's life has been defined by a restless and adventurous itinerancy--his "father is British and his mother Greek, and mainly he's lived in London, right here in New York, and all over Latin America, in the Amazon even, that's why his Spanish is so good" (43).

Eventually, out of desperation, some of the crewmen do venture off of the ship, and while this reveals a certain permeability of U.S. national boundaries, for the undocumented Central Americans, this permeability also brings vulnerability as the men are beaten up by a group of black youth they encounter in "los proyectos" bordering the harbor (page #). This episode is emblematic of the racial, linguistic and cultural borders that the men confront in trying to enter into U.S. society once they are off the ship-- since onboard the ship they comprise their own relatively homogenous society. Despite the humiliation of this first attempted escape, Esteban, continues to take excursions off the ship by himself, each time venturing further and further into the Brooklyn neighborhoods which surround it: "Every night he walks, not knowing the names of the neighborhoods he walks through, though that week he ranges as far as Sunset Park and Owl Point in one direction, through Red Hook to the petering waterfront edge of Cobble Hill in the other" (195). Eventually Esteban also permeates the borders of capitalism: "Truck-loading docks are most vulnerable when there's a way in from the harbor shore. He winds up and down the streets, back to the harbor, probing for weak points, using wire cutters, Esteban

snips two cases loose from a packet pallet on a loading dock before he knows what they hold” (196). By these means, he can provide the crew with food and clothing they would otherwise not have.

### Revolution

There is an parallel between Esteban’s former life as a soldier, where he struggled to stay alive, and his ability to survive by penetrating the borders of the city. But while many of the crew pass time by reminiscing about home, Esteban is reluctant to talk openly about his native land particularly because of his participation in the Sandinista movement. Nicaragua is not a nostalgic homeland for him, but is filled with traumatic memories of a native space that has been desecrated by war. While *testimonio* has been associated with leftist movements such as the Sandinista Revolution, Esteban’s refusal to testify about his life as a Sandinista soldier signals an anti-*testimonio* moment in the novel which one could compare to the parodying of *testimonio* in The Sugar Island that I discussed in chapter two. For instance, when the others onboard are telling stories about their lives at home, Esteban says nothing (79).

He’s never told Bernardo, never told anyone onboard, about the volunteer nightmare battalion from León, about la Marta and her sister. Once he told the viejo about Ana, the German shepherd tracking dog, and he kicked up such a hysterical fuss Esteban swore never to mention war to him again. (40)

His memories of his time in the army remain internalized. He remembers the one-year

anniversary commemoration of the death of his girlfriend, Marta, a fellow Sandinista soldier, "Speak to me, Martita . . . What am I supposed to feel? What do I owe you? Why this nothing inside?" (80). These remarks reveal another reason why Esteban refuses to testify to his participation in the war--the purpose, meaning that it is supposed to have is absent for him. His refusal to describe the events of the war also suggest his inability to articulate them--he does not see a purpose in telling his story. This signals a kind of "forced poetics" similar to Lourdes's and Felicia's inability to find optimum expression in Dreaming in Cuban. Throughout the novel Esteban attempts to come to grips with the war, with his role as a Sandinista and with Marta's death. His interior monologue is fragmented, revealing a confrontation with the traumatic memories of war and Marta's horrific death (203). Esteban's disjointed interior monologue is juxtaposed with the official news of Nicaragua which comes across the radio on board the ship, "the man on the radio was saying that despite the Sapula agreement and the cease-fire, both sides were quibbling over terms and supposed violations" (80). Esteban's difficulty in articulating his experiences as a soldier become even more evident when compared with the postulations of Elias, the captain of the ship, who denounces the U.S. government's role in Nicaragua,

And el Capitan was loudly asserting that the United States caused the betrayal of the revolution's ideals by suffocating it with an illegal war, . . .

And now el Capitan looking down at Esteban again and saying that back in '79 during the insurrection against Somoza he'd really wanted to join the Sandinista International Brigades fighting on the Southern Front but he'd

had a business in the Amazon going, and the he said, ‘You were a soldier, Esteban? Is it true you were right in the middle of it?’ I’m not going to say a word, thought Esteban, . . . ‘I’m honored to have you onboard, Esteban. . . Truly, I am. You *muchachos* kicked *culo* on an army backed and trained and led by the greatest military power on earth! (emphasis added, 80-81).

For Elias, the Nicaraguan revolution serves as a fantasy in which he enacts his penchant for adventure. The fact that Esteban is hearing official reports about Nicaragua and finding “solidarity” for the revolution from Elias while he’s trapped on board the *Urus* is particularly ironic. Elias can easily denounce the U.S. government’s role in Nicaragua and claim solidarity with the Sandinistas while at the same time disenfranchising the Central Americans who work for him.

### Disappearing Informants

The novel reaches a climax when, after months struggling to survive aboard the ship, the crew suffers a casualty. Bernardo, the eldest crew member, is severely injured when he spills hot cooking oil on his leg. Elias attempts to heal him using homeopathic remedies that he learned in the Amazon (page #). However, when Mark sees Bernardo’s condition and realizes that it could get him into legal trouble, he dumps him at the entrance to an emergency room before getting on a plane himself to escape to Mexico (322-323). Elias tells the rest of the crew that the owners of the ship have sent Bernardo home, but he himself does not know where to find him. In fact, Bernardo dies abandoned in a hospital emergency room: “Yet another indigent, dirty, with messy, sweat-matted

hair and stubbled chin. . . Another corpse destined for Potter's Field, the indigent's cemetery on Hart Island" (330). Bernardo becomes the unidentified indigent, the disposable migrant, the body that disappears in this text--similar to Mavis in No Telephone to Heaven, Célianne in "Children of the Sea" and Romulo in The Sugar Island. It is most ironic that Bernardo should be the one member of the crew who disappears from the ship (and the text) because it is his testimony to an Argentinian couple whom he encounters strolling along the harbor next to the ship, which ultimately brings the Ship Visitor to the Urus. When the couple becomes alarmed by his story of abandonment on the ship, they contact the Seaman's Institute. Despite this however, Bernardo does not go on to tell his own story when the Ship Visitor finally does arrive, because by that time, he has been left for dead at the hospital. It is also important to note here the choice that Goldman has made in fictionalizing the account. As stated previously, Goldman drew on the written account of a "real" Bernardo who was part of the "real" crew. But the fact that he chooses to have the fictionalized character Bernardo die, when in fact the "real" Bernardo does not, offers a sobering picture of the potential of testimony and testimonio in changing the conditions of transnational laborers.

In fact, Esteban, who shared a room with Bernardo, never knew his last name.

Bernardo's disappearance triggers Esteban's consciousness:

And trying to imagine this mysterious abyss that has somehow swallowed Bernardo, he suddenly realizes that it isn't something that's been done only to Bernardo. It's something that's been done to all of them, and that they never even knew or suspected the truth makes it all the more

terrifying. And makes it also too much like what happened to la Marta and to how many compas, everyone he's lost so far, another thing he's never understood until right now. (369)

So perhaps Esteban cannot testify to his time in the army until he connects it with his time on the ship?

### Testimony and Diaspora

Testimony is most effective for Esteban when he tells his story to members of the Latino community in Brooklyn that he meets. Although this too at first, is not effective, when he first meets Joaquina and tells her about the situation he's been living in on the Urus, she tell him, "that doesn't happen here. . . It's a story. I don't believe a word of it" (211). Her statement reveals that Joaquina is invested in the narrative of the U.S. as a land of freedom, there is no space for narratives of exploitation here. However, testimony becomes a way to connect with other displaced Latin Americans in Brooklyn. For Esteban, this first happens in the all-night diner where he waits to meet Joaquina. Once he tells the waitress about his experiences on the Urus, she offers him help and connections to others. When he moves in with Joaquina, she takes him to a Salvadoran restaurant where he gains a sense of solidarity with other Central American immigrants: "He's met refugees from the Salvadoran and Guatemalan wars and death squads there" and "One of the cooks . . . was from Nicaragua too: she had a son who died fighting in a BLI, another still living in the contra camps, and two more children with her in Brooklyn" (361-62). Solidarity comes in telling their stories to each other which helps to create a diasporan community outside of the native space.

Many people, there in the restaurant on Friday nights, and elsewhere in Brooklyn, when they learn of Esteban's ambiguous refugee status from a phantom ship on the Brooklyn waterfront, offer him a temporary place to stay, a couch or a floor to sleep on until he and Joaquina can find their own apartment. He always writes their names, addresses, and telephone numbers into a little pocket-size notebook Joaquina gave him just for this purpose. (emphasis added, 363)

If anything, it is the notebook that Esteban records the names of those he meets in New York, that is his testimony. Otherwise, the possibility of Esteban's story to create change for other transnational laborers is minimal.

Just as Mama in The Sugar Island recognizes the need to construct communist Cuba as diseased, so too will Esteban have to renounce the socialism of the FSLN to gain asylum in the United States (footnote how many Nicaraguans came to the U.S.). Gonzalo, a gay Cuban who cuts Esteban's hair, reminds Esteban that he will have to tell a different story if he is to remain in the United States legally: "it will be much easier for you to get legal status here when you tell them you're fleeing those maldito Sandinistas. If you say the opposite, chico, you won't stand a chance" (267).

In the meantime, a Ship Visitor from the Seaman's Institute arrives on the Urus after receiving information about the conditions the crew was living in. At first, the Ship Visitor seems to offer the potential to transform the men's lives. But as his title suggests, the aid that he can offer the crew is fleeting at best--he merely "visits" ships but cannot

offer lasting solutions. The testimonies that the men have given him are virtually worthless, since most of the crew leaves the ship with Esteban to go into Brooklyn to try to find jobs and survive as illegal immigrants. Readers do not know what happens to them, whether they survive or not. The value of their stories remain only on the individual level for the Ship Visitor, who tells them to his lover, Ariadne: “Well, I’ve sure as hell got a story for her tonight . . . A ship visitor’s gotta find his poetry where he can get it, right?” (381). In a sense, John, the Ship Visitor, becomes a kind of interlocutor in the text, telling the stories of what he sees on a daily basis to impress Ariadne and her friends, who represent the educated cosmopolitan elite:

“. . . Fast as can, custom of the port,” the Ship Visitor will find himself explaining, having hit upon without even really trying to a certain gruff and drawling intonation that isn’t really his, in response to this unprecedented interrogation from Ariadne’s friends about the nature of his work, which will have been going on for quite some time already, prompted by his observations on how the sudden breakup of the East Bloc was affecting ships from those countries. . . (149).

But his storytelling hardly results in raising the consciousness of his audience. Ariadne tells him, “I just don’t see how, Johnny, you can spend your life around people like that, complete dupes, people so incapable of helping themselves” (379). In fact, the Ship Visitor’s descriptions of the various ship societies he has encountered reads like an anthropological text:

A ship is a ship is a ship? Not at all. Soviet ship's a whole different world from, say, a Korean one. Russian captains almost always invite you up to their cabin for vodka; they like to shoot the shit. There's this one container ship comes in about three times a year, flies a Maltese flag, captained and crewed entirely by women, women from everywhere, a very well run ship-. . . There's this other ship crewed by criminal fugitives. . . . And another entirely by Portuguese monks" (152).

While there are some parallels between the Ship Visitor and Father Paraison, who testified on behalf of Haitian canecutters at the 1991 Congressional Hearings, the reality is that the Ship Visitor will not testify to anyone. When it comes to the men on the Urus, the Ship Visitor and the Seafarer's Institute he represents, can do very little, especially when they learn that the Urus has "become a stateless vessel" and even while it was under a Panamanian flag, "The crew was never Panama's responsibility . . . They're unlicensed seafarers . . . Apparently, they never signed shipping articles" (154-155). Furthermore, the same anonymity that "disappears" Bernardo (no contract, no shipping papers, passport confiscated by the owners) allows Elias and Mark to remain free from prosecution as Elias thinks, "But they won't find his name on a single piece of paper. And the Panamanian Registry has no legal culpability, because they were never licensed seamen . . . It's easy to hide" (371). Thus, even though the Ship Visitor does eventually hear the crew's testimonies, they are not enough to seek reparations or justice because the ship remains outside of any state jurisdiction and the owners are able to evade detection:

“ But they tried to give the Ship Visitor as clear a picture as they could of el Capitan and el Primero, and about everything that had happened since June, trying to get it all in order, interrupting each other, everyone wanting to give his own version of certain events so that [he] sometimes had to hear the same story told over and over, which was when, claro, he would seem to be no longer listening” (emphasis added, 339-340). That the novel ends with the Ship Visitor’s point of view, not that of Esteban or any of the other crew members signals a couple of things. First, it suggests that Goldman has not reproduced a native informant for consumption. Instead readers are left with the voice of the Ship Visitor, who is ultimately a powerless and rather ineffective advocate for this crew and all other crews. This suggests a shift similar to that of Melville’s The Ventriloquist’s Tale which also does not reproduce a fixed native identity for consumption. But while Melville’s text signals an endless deferral of the native (informant), Goldman’s text signals a disappearance of the ethnic/native informant. What I want to suggest is that instead of serving as a kind of resistance narrative, this disappearance indicates a symptom of global capitalism that cannot easily be integrated into testimonial narrative. Thus, while in some senses Goldman is coming out of a Central American tradition of *testimonio*<sup>99</sup>, there is a sense throughout the novel that testimony and *testimonio* are ineffective in the global marketplace.

### Conclusion

When Torricelli asserts, “It [slavery] exists in the form of jobless Haitians, . . . who are lured to the Dominican Republic by unscrupulous recruiters with false promises of lucrative jobs in the sugarcane fields” (Hearings, 1), his remarks could just as easily apply to the Central Americans on the *Urus* (and the real men whose story inspired

Goldman's novel). What I have attempted to demonstrate by reading Goldman's fictionalization of history alongside of the Congressional Hearings is how the boundaries between fiction and the "real," literature and political discourse, are blurred.

Whereas the Hearings signal an erasure of the native informant, The Ordinary Seaman, while itself serving as a testimonial novel<sup>100</sup>, also questions the ability of *testimonio* and testimony to transform the oppressive conditions of global capitalism. The narrator explains, "[The crew] knew they should have been paid, in a combination of checks and cash . . . but who was there to protest to?" (emphasis added, 60). This speaks to the quandary of undocumented transnational laborers in the United States and elsewhere.

If testimony has been lauded as the site of nation-building, whether in post-apartheid South Africa or Guatemala, when testimony is separated from nation-building, that is, when it testifies to what happens outside of the confines of nation-states and national laws, testimony becomes less effective<sup>101</sup>. Just as human rights organizations are limited by nation-state paradigms, so too is the Seaman's Institute hindered by an inability to enforce international or national laws on a vessel that remains extraterritorially outside of the law. As my analysis of the Congressional Hearings illustrates, the discourse of human rights can just as easily become confined and/or co-opted by the nation-state. Furthermore, often testimony is only valuable to nation-states when there is an exchange-value attached to it.

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<sup>1</sup> Farming is, as much as other types of labor, ethnicized (to borrow Rey Chow's term). That is, farming in the United States is seen as a white occupation, and particularly an occupation constituted of white nuclear heterosexual families as exemplified with the phrase "family farm"-- while other racial/ethnic groups are associated with the land in much more tenuous ways and are typically seen as "trespassers" on the land. Obviously, because of the history of slavery, African American history includes slave plantation labor and their post-emancipation disenfranchisement from the land--sharecropping. Latinos are also not seen as owning the land, but as (migrant) workers on the land. Also, Asian Americans have a similarly tenuous history with U.S. land--as migrant field workers, railroad construction workers and, with the internment of Japanese Americans during World War II--an ultimate disenfranchisement from the U.S. landscape--in a fashion similar to Native Americans on reservations.

<sup>2</sup> "After 1820, dozens of tribes, including the Ho-Chunk, Potawatomi, Kickapoo, and Sac and Fox were forced by treaty to move their homes in Wisconsin to lands in the West. The Menominee and Chippewa Nations successfully resisted removal orders and established reservations by treaty in the 1850s. The St. Croix and Sakaogon Chippewa treaty negotiations secured reservations in 1934. Individual Potawatomi and Ho-Chunk tribal members returned to Wisconsin on their own. . . The Ottawa, Kickapoo, and Sac and Fox were unable to return to their homelands and today reside on reservations in Oklahoma." Great Lakes Intertribal Council Native American Tourism of Wisconsin website. <http://natow.org/heritage.html>.

<sup>3</sup> I use the term "native", "nativist" and "nativism" as opposed to "indigenous" because in the Caribbean, the term "indigenous" evokes the specific history of Caribs, Arawaks and Tainos, most of whom were exterminated on the islands. The exception is on the islands of St. Vincent and Dominica, where there is a small community of native Caribs (Hulme and Whitehead, 3). Also, the term indigenous is used by the existing native peoples on the South American continent, of which the northern coastal countries of Guyana, Suriname, French Guiana are considered part of the Caribbean. Thus, the term "indigenous" evokes specific groups of people in the Americas. The terms "native" and "nativism" are more flexible terms which can evoke the native indigenous peoples in the Caribbean, as well as the Africans who were enslaved and brought to the region to work as free labor on plantations, but who now consider themselves the "natives" of the islands. "Native" in this sense evokes notions of self-governance and nationalism as opposed to colonialism. The idea of nativism suggests that there are non-natives, which I invoke in my study with the term "trespassing".

<sup>4</sup> Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds. Cultures of United States Imperialism (Durham: Duke UP, 1994). Lisa Lowe, Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics (Durham: Duke UP, 1996).

<sup>5</sup> Among the various tropes used to articulate a Caribbean regional ethos has been a reassembled broken vase (Walcott), a repeating island (Benitez-Rojo) and submarine/submerged history (Glissant/Brathwaite). As Walcott wrote in his Nobel speech, "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars" (What the Twilight Says, 69).

<sup>6</sup> Orlando Patterson argues that the Caribbean has long served as U.S. economic colonies in "The Emerging West Atlantic System: Migration, Culture, and Underdevelopment in the United States and the

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Circum-Caribbean Region,” Population in an Interacting World, ed. William Alonso, (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987) 227-260.

<sup>7</sup> Numerous scholars have argued for a reconfiguration of the notion of “America”. See José Martí’s “Our America” José Martí Reader: Writings on the Americas, eds. Deborah Shnookla and Mirta Muniz, (New York: Ocean Press, 1999) 111-120. See also, Peter Winn’s Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> Writers such as Michelle Cliff, Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Diaz, Cristina Garcia, Jamaica Kincaid, Paule Marshall, Audre Lorde, Loida Maritza Perez, Patricia Powell, Judith Ortiz Cofer and Esmeralda Santiago.

<sup>9</sup> These tactics include: the use of multiple narrators to tell historic events, diary entries, newspaper clippings, a story told to a fictional “interviewer,” and a focus on an event in which characters are imprisoned, tortured or silenced by an oppressive regime

<sup>10</sup> See John Beverley’s Against Literature, Marc Zimmerman’s and George Gugelberger’s introduction The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America ed. Georg Gugelberger (Durham: Duke UP, 1996). See also Georg M. Gugelberger, “Remembering: The Post-*Testimonio* Memoirs of Rigoberta Menchú Tum” Latin American Perspectives 25.6 (Nov. 1998) 62-68.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, see Carr’s critique of the interlocuter of Rigoberta Menchú’s *testimonio*, Elizabeth Burgos-Debray.

<sup>12</sup> For further discussion of Retamar’s “Caliban” essay, see also Peter Hulme’s Introduction, Cannibalism and the Colonial World and Hortense Spillers, “Introduction: Who Cuts the Border? Some Readings on ‘America,’” Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text.

<sup>13</sup> Janet L. Finn addresses the problems facing “native” anthropologists as informants in her essay, “Ella Cara Deloria and Mourning Dove: Writing for Cultures, Writing Against the Grain.” Women Writing Culture. eds. Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon.

<sup>14</sup> Writing Culture has come under strong criticism from feminist anthropologists both for the lack of substantial inclusion of women anthropologist voices, and also for “sanctioning” what some women anthropologists had already been doing and yet not crediting these women for their seminal work. A feminist response to Writing Culture was the collection of essays Women Writing Culture. In her introduction to the collection Ruth Behar contends “The Writing Culture agenda, conceived in homoerotic terms by male academics for other male academics, provided the official credentials, and the cachet, that women had lacked for crossing the [disciplinary] border. Even the personal voice, undermined when used by women, was given the seal of approval in men’s ethnographic accounts, reclassified in more academically favorable terms as

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‘reflexive’ and ‘experimental’” (Women Writing Culture 4).

<sup>15</sup> The text is further mediated because it was originally written in both French and Creole; thus the translation of both of these into English serves to further destabilize the truth-value of the testimonial.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Moreiras, “The Aura of Testimonio,” The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America, ed. Georg M. Gugelberger (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 196.

<sup>17</sup> Except for the Amazonian interior of the Caribbean nations on the South American mainland, and the Caribbean coast of Central America, and a small community of existing Caribs on the islands of St. Vincent and Dominica.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth DeLoughery delineates the significance of various flora and fauna for constructing a kind of Caribbean nativism in No Telephone to Heaven. (unpublished dissertation)

<sup>19</sup> One can see this trope in testimonios of the Cuban Revolution as well in which guerrillas go to the Sierra Maestra Mountains to undergo revolutionary training.

<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, in an essay on Edwidge Danticat’s The Farming of Bones, I have analyzed how Dominican state power was inscribed onto the bodies of Haitian workers with machetes during the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. “Re-Membering Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat’s The Farming of Bones” MFS 2002.

<sup>21</sup> The fact that we are not told Paul's family's surname signifies Cliff's attempt to break down the hierarchy or origins. That Mavis does not have a last name is not even an issue for Paul until he has to bury her. That we are not told Paul's family's last name creates a parallel between them and Mavis.

<sup>22</sup> The legacy of slavery in Jamaica is this racial stratification in which lighter-skin is valued above darker skin. Colin Palmer describes the rise of Rastafarianism in reaction to the "shade of skin" politics in Jamaica where light-skinned people have historically obtained greater economic power than darker-skinned people. For example, Palmer writes, "Jamaicans had long been accustomed to the existence of 'shade' prejudice whereby individuals who had a 'lighter' skin color were favored for certain jobs, particularly at the managerial levels." "Identity, Race and Black Power in Independent Jamaica," The Modern Caribbean ed. Franklin W. Knight and Colin A. Palmer (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 114.

<sup>23</sup> For another reading of this scene in Abeng, see Meryl F. Schwartz’s “Imagined Communities in the Novels of Michelle Cliff,” Homemaking: Women Writers and the Politics and Poetics of Home eds.

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Catherine Wiley and Fiona R. Barnes. See also Maria Helena Lima and Françoise Lionnet and Elizabeth DeLoughery. (Need citations)

<sup>24</sup> Glissant echoes this in Caribbean Discourse, stating, “Our landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history.” (11) He also evokes Braithwaite’s notion that “the history of the Caribbean is submarine”.

<sup>25</sup> See Torgovnick’s Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives, Past the Last Post: Theorizing Post-Colonialism and Postmodernism eds. Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (Alberta: U of Calgary Press, 1990), Chow’s Writing Diaspora, Kwame Anthony Appiah’s In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture.

<sup>26</sup> Cheyfitz explains, “Roberto Fernandez Retamar argues that *canibales* is a direct deformation of carib, which occurred because Columbus, searching for the Asia of the Great Kahn (*El Gran Can* in Spanish), had a vested interest, no matter how phantasmal, in hearing ‘n’ for ‘r,’ which would confirm the imminent discovery of the Asia of gold and spices he longed for” (41).

<sup>27</sup> For example, the Dominican Republic has a long tradition of national policies that deny the nation’s African heritage by calling those of mixed racial ancestry “Indio”. See Silvio Torres-Saillant’s “The Tribulations of Blackness: Stages in Dominican Racial Identity.” Callaloo. 23:3 (2000) 1086-1111.

<sup>28</sup> Amerindians make up approximately seven percent of the population, the connection between the indigenous and the nation-state is much more tenuous than the romantic idealization of indigeneity found in other parts of the Caribbean. While Guyana was granted independence in 1966, Amerindians remain in an internal colonial situation as they continue to be denied land rights even after independence. (Colchester)

<sup>29</sup> Paula Burnett describes The Ventriloquist’s Tale as “writing back” to European culturalists such as Evelyn Waugh and Claude Lévi-Strauss, who both travelled to Amazonia and constructed the place and Amerindians in their writings (“Addressing Caribbean Futures” 23). Waugh’s construction of native Amerindian of British Guiana and Brazil came both in Ninety -Two Days and A Handful of Dust, published 1934. Ninety-Two Days is an account of Waugh’s travels to British Guiana. It constructs Amazonia for British readers “at home” in England. A Handful of Dust offers a fictionalized account of the journey--and an even darker outcome in which the British traveler to the Amazon, Tony, does not return to England from his travels--but remains in the Amazon the captive of an insane “native”. The title of the novel is, in fact, taken from a line of T.S. Eliot’s The Wasteland, the epitome of the modernist movement.

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<sup>30</sup> It is important to note that national boundaries do not necessarily reflect tribal boundaries and that some indigenous peoples routinely cross over these boundaries.

<sup>31</sup> I am using the spelling of “Macunaima” that appears in The Ventriloquist’s Tale, except for when I am referring to Andrade’s text which incorporates an accent over the “i” --“Macumaíma”.

<sup>32</sup> It is a historical “accident” that this part of Guyana was colonized by the British (as opposed to French or Portuguese) and therefore English became the dominant language, whereas Brazil, being colonized by the Portuguese, has a dominant language of Portuguese. Despite the linguistic differences, and the fact that I am reading Andrade’s text in translation, I shall try to address how Andrade’s and Melville’s texts “speak” to each other across linguistic and national boundaries. Marcus Colchester explains that frontier agreements were generally made without indigenous consent and that the British colonial strategy to define borders took place “under the pretext of protecting the rights of Amerindian subjects” (Fragile Frontier 22).

<sup>33</sup> That Melville is herself a Guyanese-born writer living in Britain further complicates the question of who can speak as a “native”.

<sup>34</sup> Nunes argues against a reading of the text as “a celebration of Brazil’s ‘indigenous past.’ In fact, she argues “the indigenous past is merely a repository of possible paradigms” (121).

<sup>35</sup> Brazilian anthropologist, Gustavo Lins Ribeiro explains that Andrade based his rendering of Macunaima on a blending of myths from various Amerindian tribes, but especially that of the Taulipang (“Macunaima: To Be and Not to Be, That is the Question” 64). In the biography of Andrade offered in the English translation of the text, we are told that Andrade “took part in trips to the remoter regions of Brazil to collect the folk songs of the people and make films of their customs and activities before they disappeared” (Macunaíma trans. E. A. Goodland, New York: Random House, 1984) 169.

<sup>36</sup> In fact, Ribeiro states “‘Makunaima’ could well have been collected as a myth in what was then a part of the British Empire” (69). However, Mário de Andrade argued that Amerindian texts were not his only sources, but in fact that he cannibalized from many different sources: “Not only did I copy the ethnographers and Amerindian texts, but . . . I included entire sentences . . . from Portuguese colonial chroniclers . . . Finally . . . I copied Brazil, at least insofar as I was interested in satirising Brazil through itself” (quoted in Madureira 113).

<sup>37</sup> Torgovnick 9.

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<sup>38</sup> In the biography of Andrade offered in the English translation of the text, we are told that Andrade “took part in trips to the remoter regions of Brazil to collect the folk songs of the people and make films of their customs and activities before they disappeared” (Macumaíma trans. E. A. Goodland, New York: Random House, 1984) 169.

<sup>39</sup> Zita Nunes argues that “Mario de Andrade was always clear that in writing Macumaíma he owed a great debt to Teodor Koch-Grünberg” (121).

<sup>40</sup> Spivak argues, “We cannot ‘learn about’ the subaltern only by reading literary texts, or, mutatis mutandis, sociohistorical documents” (142).

<sup>41</sup> Amerindians make up approximately seven percent of Guyana’s population and reside primarily in the interior of the country where Afro and Indo Guyanese reside along the coastlands (Colchester). In his study of the Caribbean society, The Middle Passage, V.S. Naipaul explains that the tensions between Amerindians and Afro-Guyanese goes back to slavery when Amerindians were paid by the colonizers to catch runaway maroon slaves (105). Yet, in the case of Guyana, it is not simply a question of the nation versus the indigenous, because state of the national infrastructure is such that many Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese citizens are as economically disenfranchised as indigenous peoples.

<sup>42</sup> For example, while Guyana gained independence from Britain in 1966, Amerindians remain in an internal colonial situation as they continue to be denied land rights by the nation-state after independence. And yet, while there may be a desire to see indigenous people as outside or beyond the realm of the nation-state, I also want to stress the very “real” material ways that indigenous communities must negotiate their positions in the nation-state within whose geographic borders they live. For example, while in most Latin American countries, Amerindians have negotiated a place in state constitutions (Guatemala in 1985, Columbia in 1991, and Paraguay in 1992, “Indigenous Rights in the Constitutions of Countries in the Americas” online) in Guyana, Amerindians have no representation in the constitution, which has led to the exploitation of the Amazonian interior’s resources by transnational corporations. Although there is the Amerindian Act of 1976, it is mainly written in favor of the nation and states that Amerindian lands can be taken away for “disloyalty to the state” (“A Plain English Guide to the Amerindian Act”, 8) . This situation differs from that of other indigenous populations in the world because of their specific relation to the nation-state. While in recent years, the UN Declaration on Indigenous Rights has been drawn up, it usually depends on the state to enforce these rights--or if global human rights organizations step in they still need to negotiate with the state. See Colin Perrin’s essay, “Approaching Anxiety: The Insistence of the Postcolonial in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples” .

<sup>43</sup> Ribeiro notes an interesting point that comes out of Koch-Grünberg’s research:

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“English missionaries translated the word for the Christian God as ‘Makunaima’ (“Macunaíma: To Be and Not to Be, That is the Question” footnote 9).

<sup>44</sup> In fact, this is not the first time that Napier succumbs to the Macunaima myth. Before he finds out about Danny and Beatrice’s affair, when he was traveling across Wapisiana country on his evangelizing mission, he hears his Amerindian guides tell their different tribal versions of the eclipse-incest myth which cause involuntary sexual excitement in himself (193-195).

<sup>45</sup> Shortly after this scene, back in the Rupununi where his wife Marietta and son, Bla-Bla remain, the family’s parrot disappears (316) as if foreshadowing the danger to come when Marietta comes to Bla-Bla’s school to ask him about it, the schoolteacher beats Bla-Bla for speaking his native language with his mother and not the English taught to him at school.

<sup>46</sup> For the Amerindian communities of Guyana, the situation has grown more urgent as the Guyanese government, under direction of the IMF and World Bank, has given mining and lumber companies virtually free reign to the interior (Colchester 86). The disappearance of land and resources that Amerindians are facing begs the question of how they will continue to define themselves and what kinds of resistances there are to such practices.

<sup>47</sup> Melville deals with this topic in an earlier short story, “The Parrot and Descartes” in which a parrot is captured by an Englishman in 1611, who is traveling up the Orinoco River. The Englishman ships the parrot off to Queen Elizabeth in England, where the parrot is forced to watch a production of Shakespeare’s The Tempest and because of his “genetic construction” remembers it all (The Migration of Ghosts 102). Eventually, the parrot travels to Prague to witness the separations of “science and magic” and laments when he learns that ideas from Europe (Descartes) were spreading back home in his own territory (114). In the 19th century the parrot is taken by a group of German Jewish actors to North America, where, chained to a cardboard tree with his wings clipped, he will assist them in performing fragments of The Tempest. The fact that the parrot is forced to participate in this particular Shakespearean play points to the place that the play had in the colonized/colonizer paradigm and early notions of nativism.

<sup>48</sup> Chow is provides a reading of Walter Benjamin’s “A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” and expands Benjamin’s theory to include not just art objects, but human beings.

<sup>49</sup> Masud-Piloto continues that “Haitians were not the only refugees having trouble proving their fears of persecution to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. From 1979 to 1985, more than 500,000 Salvadorans, Guatemalans, and Nicaraguans entered

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the United States in search of political asylum” (120). I will explore Central American migration to the United States further in chapter 4 in my analysis of Francisco Goldman’s The Ordinary Seaman.

<sup>50</sup> In fact the Lawyers Committee reports a strong connection between Haitian “boat people” and Cubans in that “The majority of Haitian sailing vessels carrying migrants leave from the northwestern coast of Haiti. They sail west to Cuba, follow the Cuban coast, then head north to Florida, a distance of 90 miles. Many of the vessels stop in Cuba for repairs and reprovisioning before continuing their journey” (Refugee Refoulement 16).

<sup>51</sup> The editors of Libète: A Haiti Anthology write, “During the 1970s between 50,000 and 80,000 boat people arrived without authorisation in Florida” and by 1981 “with up to 1,000 Haitian boat people arriving in Florida each month, the US concluded an interdiction agreement with the Duvalier regime that permitted the US Coast Guard to intercept Haitian vessels and return ‘irregular’ migrants to Haiti. The interceptions and forcible repatriations by the US Coast Guard achieved the desired effect of reducing the numbers leaving Haiti by boat, but still thousands attempted to beat the blockade. Over a ten-year period some 23,000 Haitians were interdicted and sent back. Thousands more, told that they had arrived on US soil by the trip organisers, were prematurely put ashore on remote islands in the Turks and Caicos and the Bahamas. Unknown numbers died as overcrowded and leaky boats sank, while others were simply thrown overboard by the crew.” (Libète: A Haiti Anthology 180) See also Alex Stepnick et. al. “Shifting Identities and Intergenerational Conflict: Growing Up Haitian in Miami,” Ethnicities, Ruben G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes, eds., Berkeley: Univ. of CA Press, 2001, 237.

<sup>52</sup> While thousands of Haitians were fleeing by small boats, on February 7, 1986, “the United States provided the Air Force cargo plane that spirited away Haiti’s President for Life, Jean-Claude Duvalier, before angry Haitians could get their hands on him” (Dash 137).

<sup>53</sup> According to Grosfuegel, approximately four-thousand Cubans were detained in U.S. prisons.

<sup>54</sup> Alex Stepick et. al. assert “Repeatedly, local southern Florida and national officials have identified Haitians as a health threat: In the late 1970s, tuberculosis was allegedly endemic among Haitians” (“Shifting Identities and Intergenerational Conflict: Growing Up Haitian in Miami,” Ethnicities, Ruben G. Rumbaut and Alejandro Portes, eds., Berkeley: Univ. of CA Press, 2001, 237)

<sup>55</sup> There is also a long history within the Caribbean of seeing Haitians as “contaminated”. The Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, has from its independence sought to eradicate the “darker element” from its society. As Ernesto Sagas and Silvio Torres-Saillant have shown, the Dominican Republic has discriminated against Haitians, Haitian-Dominicans and darker-skinned Dominicans in terms of its national policies.

<sup>56</sup> Danticat continues, “In spite of our own nostalgia, the term diaspora can also be a painful epithet aimed at those of us who return to Haiti from abroad, acting as though we know all the answers to a country from which we had been absent during the most difficult times.” (“AHA!” 43)

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<sup>57</sup> For a more comprehensive discussion of this notion of in-between-ness in the context of migration theory (particularly that of Paul Gilroy), see Elizabeth DeLoughery's essay in Thamyris.

<sup>58</sup> . The Lawyers Committee was established in 1978 "to promote international human rights and refugee law and legal procedures in the United States and abroad" (inside title page).

<sup>59</sup> In fact, the report states that "Of these, two had lived in the United States before and were presumably somewhat familiar with U.S. legal procedures and three were relatively well educated teachers able to articulate their claims" (Refugee Refoulement 23).

<sup>60</sup> The questions asked include: "What is your name? Where were you born? What is the date of your birth? What is your current address? What is your country of citizenship? Do you have a passport? When you left Haiti, to what country did you intend to go? Why did you leave Haiti? What kind of work do you do? Why did you wish to go to the United States? Have you belonged to any organizations in Haiti? Have you done anything in Haiti which you believe will result in problems for you if you return? Have you ever been detained or sent to jail in Haiti? Do the conditions in Haiti affect your freedom more than the rest of the population? Have you or your family been mistreated by the authorities in Haiti? Is there any reason you cannot return to Haiti? Is there anything else you would like to say?" (Refugee Refoulement 22)

<sup>61</sup> Guantanamo Naval Base was established in 1903, following the Spanish-American War. See Roger Ricardo's Guantanamo, the Bay of Discord: The Story of the U.S. Military Base in Cuba trans. Mary Todd (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1994).

<sup>62</sup> The story serves as a stark contrast in testimony from Payen's essay as well as Refugee Refoulement and Half the Story. See also Cuban-American Achy Obejas's short story, "We Came All the Way From Cuba so you Could Dress Like This?"-- a memoir of her family's migration from Cuba to the United States in the early 1960's. The story opens with the family having recently been rescued at sea and taken to an INS processing center. The narrator explains that "[her] parents are being interrogated by an official from the office of Immigration and Naturalization Services. It's all a formality because this is 1963, and no Cuban claiming political asylum actually gets turned away" (180). When asked to explain why they came to the U.S., the narrator's father points to his daughter and says, "We came for her, so she could have a future" (180).

<sup>63</sup> In fact, the interdiction program began in 1981, when "The Reagan Administration determined that the movement of undocumented Haitians to the United States had become a 'serious national problem detrimental to the interests of the United States,' despite the fact that Haitians comprised less than 2 percent of the undocumented population in the United States. The President announced in September of that year the creation of a program designed to prevent the arrival of Haitian boat people." (Refugee Refoulement 4).

<sup>64</sup> Luis explains that Garcia was "born in Havana but educated in New York during the important decades of the sixties and seventies" (215).

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<sup>65</sup> Lisandro Perez goes on to explain that “Until August 1994, Cubans who wished to enter the United States were not stopped from doing so. In fact, Cubans were always allowed into the country. This was true during the many years of Spanish colonialism, as Consul-General Williams testified. The free migration of Cuban workers was the very basis of the Key West and Tampa cigarmaking communities in the latter part of the nineteenth century a migration flow that was permitted despite concerns, legitimate although exaggerated, regarding the health risks involved. The open door policy toward Cubans continued during the Cuban Republic from 1902 to 1958” (“The End of Exile? A New Era in U.S. Immigration Policy Toward Cuba” 197).

<sup>66</sup> This scene echoes Celia’s own abandonment as a child when her parents divorced and she was sent away to live with a great-aunt in Havana: “on the long train ride from the countryside, Celia lost her mother’s face” (emphasis added 92). The disappearance of her own mother’s face is recast in the disappearance of the baby from Celia’s memory.

<sup>67</sup> For another reading of Pilar’s painting of Lady Liberty, see William Luis Dance Between Two Cultures p. 218-219.

<sup>68</sup> See for example, the opening to Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonio in which she asserts her own subjectivity by stating, “My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty-three years old. This is my testimony.”

<sup>69</sup> I borrow this phrase from Antonio Benitez-Rojo who has written of the creation of the Caribbean plantation system as a “wound” borne out of European colonialism in the region (The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective 5).

<sup>70</sup> Marc Zimmerman discusses the characteristic traits of Guatemalan *guerrilla testimonios* as “the formation and full emergence of revolutionary commitment under the most grueling circumstances,” and “[m]atters are spatial, events tend to be anecdotes that better help define the space, the jungle, and the actual or potential actors. Thus, in human terms, the first question is apprenticeship in the jungle” (“Testimonio in Guatemala: Payeras, Rigoberta, and Beyond” 105-106).

<sup>71</sup> See April Shemak, “Re-Membering Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat’s The Farming of Bones,” Modern Fiction Studies 48:1 (Spring 2002) 83-112.

<sup>72</sup> For one of the few analyses of the role of postcards in the U.S. imperial enterprise see David Prochaska’s “Postscript: Exhibiting Hawaii” Post-colonial America ed. C. Richard King.

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<sup>73</sup> The tension that comes in negotiating racial and ethnic categories is explored an essay by Rosario, “On Becoming”:

In the United States 'culture' and 'race' seem to be Siamese twins. High school peer and intellectual-bully-on the-down-low Dana Hale forced me to reconfigure what I identified as. Dana herself was a contradiction. She preached blackness a la Malcolm X in green contact lenses and peroxide hair. I wasn't Dominicana, she maintained with authority, I was black--our only difference being that our slave owners spoke different languages. Black not only meant race but also culture (the Siamese twins), whereas for me black referred to race, not necessarily culture. I considered myself Dominican, not black in the sense of African-American. “Latino” and “black” didn't have to be such oxymorons. I refused to accept blackness on African-American terms, as if they had a patent on the concept. (160)

<sup>74</sup> Her widely acclaimed novel, In the Time of the Butterflies, which offers a history of the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic was recently made into a Showtime feature film. Most recently, a portion of Yo! has been adapted for film to be shown in the “American Voices” series on PBS (set to air in Fall/Winter 2002).

<sup>75</sup> Maya Angelou's recent line of products produced by Hallmark comes to mind.

<sup>76</sup> I want to note the difference between the categories of “coloured” and “black” in the Caribbean context as opposed to the U.S. context. In the U.S. these are terms used to describe one racial category (and “coloured” takes on even more derogatory connotation), while in the Caribbean (varying from island to island) they represent at least two, if not more, distinct racial categories.

<sup>77</sup> Ana Patricia Rodríguez analyzes U.S.-based Latino writers (including Goldman) who incorporate Central American refugees into their texts. See “Refugees of the South: Central Americans in the U.S. Latino Imaginary” American Literature 73.2 (2001) 387-412.

<sup>78</sup> Aviva Chomsky has studied Jamaican laborers who were imported to Costa Rica by the United Fruit Company to work on its banana plantations. Aviva Chomsky, West Indian Workers and the United Fruit Company in Costa Rica, 1870-1940, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996).

<sup>79</sup> Benitez-Rojo continues, “I have emphasized the word repeats because I want to give the term the almost paradoxical sense with which it appears in the discourse of Chaos, where every repetition is a practice that necessarily entails a difference and a step toward nothingness (according to the principle of entropy proposed by thermodynamics in the last century); however, in the midst of this irreversible change, Nature can produce a figure as complex, as highly organized, and as intense as the one that the human eye

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catches when it sees a quivering hummingbird drinking from a flower.”(3)

<sup>80</sup> Albert Moreiras, “The Aura of Testimonio,” The Real Thing: Testimonial Discourse and Latin America, ed. Georg M. Gugelberger (Durham: Duke UP, 1996) 196.

<sup>81</sup> This reliance on written statements is initiated by the rules of the hearings themselves. According to the Rules of the Committee on International Relations, 105th Congress, “each witness shall file with the Committee, at least 48 hours in advance of his or her appearance, a written statement of proposed testimony and shall limit his or her oral presentation to a brief summary of his or her views.” online. [www.house.gov/international\\_relations/Rules.htm](http://www.house.gov/international_relations/Rules.htm)

<sup>82</sup> The Rules of the Committee on International Relations state that hearings are “open to the public except when the Committee or subcommittee . . . determines by rollcall vote that all or part of the remainder of that hearing on that day should be closed to the public because disclosure of testimony, evidence or other matters to be considered would endanger the national security, would compromise sensitive law enforcement information, or otherwise would violate any law or rule of the House of Representatives.” online. [www.house.gov/international\\_relations/Rules.htm](http://www.house.gov/international_relations/Rules.htm)

<sup>83</sup> The U.S. invasions are briefly mentioned in Father Edwin Paraison’s statements. See page 24 of the Hearings.

<sup>84</sup> Both Haiti and the Dominican Republic have struggled to assert their independence as nation-states while also negotiating the space of the island with each other. This negotiation has been complicated by the linguistic and racial demographics of the island--Haiti’s population is largely of African heritage and French Kreyòl speaking, while the Dominican Republic is Spanish-speaking with a mulatto population. Furthermore, these nations have repeatedly had to defend themselves against U.S. economic and political hegemony as well as the literal invasion of their national/island borders by the U.S. military. For a more in-depth history of the two nations see Samuel Martínez’s Peripheral Migrants: Haitians and Dominican Republic Sugar Plantations (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1995).

<sup>85</sup> For example, Rigoberta Menchú’s testimonial begins, “My name is Rigoberta Menchú. I am twenty three years old. This is my testimony.” I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala, ed. Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, trans. Ann Wright (New York: Verso, 1984) 1.

<sup>86</sup> The Dominican intellectual and contemporary of Trujillo, Manuel A. Peña Batlle, expresses the sentiment of Haitians as “invaders”: “There is no feeling of humanity, nor

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political reason, nor any circumstantial convenience that can force us to look indifferently at the Haitian penetration. [Talking about the typical Haitian immigrant] That type is frankly undesirable. Of pure African race, he cannot represent for us any ethnic incentive. Not well nourished and worse dressed, he is weak, though very prolific due to his low living conditions. For that same reason, the Haitian that enters [our country] lives afflicted by numerous and capital vices and is necessarily affected by diseases and physiological deficiencies which are endemic at the lowest levels of that society.” Manuel Peña Batlle, quoted in Sagas, 3. The bracketed remarks are Sagas's.

<sup>87</sup> Here, the Marasa doubling motif can be seen in terms of the victims of the massacre. In the clinic, Amabelle and the amputee become twins for a moment in Amabelle's mind.

<sup>88</sup> Danticat avoids portraying Dominicans as inherently fascistic by illustrating that nationalism itself, whether Dominican or Haitian, can be detrimental. Man Rapadou, Yves' mother, confesses to Amabelle that years earlier she had poisoned her own husband for the love of her country. She argues, “I could not let him trade us all, sell us to the Yanquis” (277). And Haitians are also just as capable of romanticizing their own nation as when one survivor expresses nostalgia for past Haitian revolutionary leaders: “When Dessalines, Touissant, Henry, when those men walked the earth, we were a strong nation” (212).

<sup>89</sup> Lawyers Committee Statement and Americas Watch statements from hearings.

<sup>90</sup> Murphy, 19-21. Murphy also notes that this was part of U.S. expansionism--the 1920 Land Registration Law in the Dominican Republic was modeled after one used by a U.S. occupation government in the Philippines.

<sup>91</sup> It is more likely that the growth of global capitalism effects why Haitians migrate to the Dominican Republic. As Corten and Isis point out, in the late 1970's and early 1980's “The Haitian poor left for the Dominican rice fields and coffee and cocoa plantations replacing the Dominicans who had gone to work in the international free-trade zones and the New York factories.” (4)

<sup>92</sup> There is very little information to be found on Father Paraison. I do know that in 1994, Father Paraison won the Anti-Slavery Society's Award for his work on behalf of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. While he doesn't make explicit reference to it, I am also assuming that what he does can be defined as liberation theology (in the Latin American tradition).

<sup>93</sup> Joaquin Blaguer, La Realidad Dominicana: Semblanza de un Pais y de un Regimen (Buenos Aires: Imprenta Ferrari Hermanos, 1947), translated by and quoted in Sagas, 3.

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<sup>94</sup> In fact, Catherine Orenstein compares the situations of Mexican migrant workers in the U.S. with Haitian canecutters in the Dominican Republic in “Illegal Transnational Labor” *Journal of International Affairs*, 48:2 (Winter 95). She concludes that Mexican laborers are no better off than Haitian laborers in the DR.

<sup>95</sup> Paul Farmer, *AIDS and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 218. What is even more paradoxical about the U.S. discrimination of “diseased” Haitian bodies was that in the 1970’s Haitian blood was regularly sold on the U.S. market as Noam Chomsky explains, “Precisely such a commerce was assured by the Hemo-Caribbean and Co., financed with U.S. and international capital and organized by cronies of the dictator-president Francois Duvalier. North American hemophiliacs, who needed factor VIII, a coagulant then distilled from the plasma of thousands of donors, were for years the indirect beneficiaries of the trade. Chomsky quotes a journalist’s 1972 account of the trade: “The donors receive \$3 for a liter of plasma. If they have a series of tetanus shots, the plasma is more valuable . . . They then receive \$5 a liter. Some sell their plasma once a week and earn \$150 to \$250 a year.” Noam Chomsky, Introduction. *The Uses of Haiti*, 49.

<sup>96</sup> There is also the example of the early 1990’s round-ups and detention of Haitian “boat people” by the U.S. Coast Guard, which serves as a parallel situation to the of control, coersion, and forced containment of Haitians on Dominican bateyes. And yet, at the same time, according to William Over, North American multinationals are more than happy to establish maquiladora factories in Haiti during the Duvalier dictatorship. (Over, 143)

<sup>97</sup> According to Paraison, the first wave of Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic took place in 1916 to work in “public construction undertaken by the U.S. occupation troops, and others worked in the sugar industry, whose primary capital came from the U.S. (24). See also, Martinez’s discussion of the U.S. occupation and dispossession of thousands of Haitian smallholders off their land (*Peripheral Migrants*, 57-58).

<sup>98</sup> Goldman’s first novel, *The Long Night of White Chickens*, addresses the hybridization of identity as the semi-autobiographical Jewish-Guatemalan narrator searches to find the “truth” behind the murder of his stepsister, a Guatemalan Indian named “Flor” who was adopted by his Boston family. After returning to Guatemala to run an orphanage for Indian children, Flor is found murdered for allegedly selling babies to wealthy American and European couples. The narrator returns to Guatemala seeking answers to his sister’s death, but is confronted with the task of trying to sift through the information given to him by various informants, including the official stories from the U.S. embassy and Guatemalan governments, newspaper stories, rumors and outright lies.

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<sup>99</sup> See Ana Patricia Rodríguez, Linda Craft, and Marc Zimmerman.

<sup>100</sup> Ana Patricia Rodríguez locates the novel within the genre of testimonial novels coming out of Central America: “The Ordinary Seaman seems to suggest that its narrative of homelessness and exploitation must be told in the tradition of Central American testimonial” (404).

<sup>101</sup> For a more detailed discussion of the role of *testimonio* and testimonial literature in Central American nation-building, see Linda Craft, Novels of Testimony and Resistance From Central America (Gainesville: UPress of Florida, 1997).

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