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Caribbean Bodyscapes: The Politics of Sacred Citizenship and the Transpersonal Body

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

CARIBBEAN BODYSCAPES: THE POLITICS OF SACRED CITIZENSHIP AND
THE TRANSPERSONAL BODY

By

Josune Urbistondo

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

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THE TRANSPERSONAL BODY

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When an individual is unintelligible to the nation, whether because of gender, sexuality, and/or race, the promises of the nation are foreclosed. In this project I explore the relationship of sacred citizenship as an alternative and at times overlapping form of politics that creates a possibility of belonging for marginalized identities in Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic women's writing. All the novels examined in this project, Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting* (2004), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (2001), Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998), Mayra Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* (2001), Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* (2006), and Dáina Chaviano's *The Island of Eternal Love* (2008), depict protagonists that practice restricted versions of national citizenship. Due to varying degrees of marginality, the protagonists, therefore, construct alternative and qualitative citizenship practices. Belonging through sacred citizenship strikes a balance among acknowledging the materiality of the body, how one produces sacral spaces for the self, and the physical, spiritual and psychological crossings that push against long-standing epistemic frameworks of being and understanding.

For Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting* and Daína Chaviano's *The Island of Eternal Love* I examine their efforts for recuperating the Chinese-Cuban identity. Their novels construct cross-cultural, syncretic spaces and present memory as a shared and accessible vehicle for belonging. While García nearly silences the Creole voice, Chaviano's novel not only represents the Chinese-Cuban identity but also expands representation to both African and European identities within the Cuban social landscape. Chaviano's use of mythic figures and doubling scenes counter singular notions of remembrances all the while granting sacred belonging outside time. For instance, Chaviano's portrayal of love as a vehicle for representing political change juxtaposes our main love story between Pablo and Amalia occurring in pre-revolutionary Cuba with the 1990's Special Period and the *Balseros* crisis.

When moving into Anglophone Caribbean, I read Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* as offering complementary versions of accessing the sacred. While in Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms* there are what Michael Warner calls "publics" and "counterpublics" where the protagonists feel safe to negotiate their identities, Powell's *The Pagoda* depicts Mr. Lowe as tirelessly constructing a physical safe haven never available in the scope of the novel (66). The garden and the alm's house in *Cereus Blooms* allow Mala, Tyler, and Otoh diasporic crevices that become sites for contesting their sexual and gendered identities. *The Pagoda*, however, does not offer Lowe a safe physical space. His efforts at belonging through erotic couplings force him to find solace through his body, the very medium of his pain and abuse. Lowe's practice of sacred citizenship is thus sacrificial.

The erotic as emancipatory is also depicted in Mayra Montero's *The Red of His Shadow*, and Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt*. One distinct difference is that while the sacred functions as an evocative presence in the previous chapters, in *The Red of His Shadow* and *Erzulie's Skirt* I examine how the protagonists practice belonging by directly engaging with traditional forms of sacred practices through Vodou worship. Both novels depict protagonists whose spiritual prowess and affiliation with loa, Erzulie, guide their physical and otherworldly realities.

All the novels share a common investment in challenging linear and dominant histories that marginalize subjects. By introducing complex temporalities pregnant with sacral opportunities, the novels critique earlier discourses written on historical experiences and invest value in intimate acts usually abjected by dominant society. All the sacral moments experienced during flexible temporalities allow the protagonists to imagine inter-subjective belonging and transpersonal coalition through physical, gendered and sexual crossings as well as cosmological and mystical practices. Regardless of how the sacred is accessed and/or produced, all the novels examined reach a coming to terms with the need for an active, different, and collective understanding of self and community that prompts the sacred self to reside within a critically intimate position to *other othered* bodies as well as their socio-economic realities (Ahmed 109). All the examples noted above depict the protagonists as productively moving away from their initial position of marginality, and, through their multiple sacred engagements, producing a space that re-imagines socio-political belonging.

For the newly minted Elejabarrieta family...and the Owl.

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Introduction

According to Benedict Anderson, the nation is an “imagined political community” (7). Individuals imagine their belonging within the nation because those from even the smallest of nations can never all meet and acknowledge one another. Therefore, there is a creative process in constructing one’s belonging within such a space. Homi K. Bhabha argues that there is an ambiguous and constant tension between producing the nation’s mythic past and the contemporary moment of the nation’s people. He states,

We...have a contested conceptual territory where the nation’s people must be thought in double-time; the people are the historical ‘objects’ of a nationalist pedagogy, giving the discourse an authority that is based on the pre-given or constituted historical origin in the past; the people are also the ‘subjects’ of a process of signification that must erase any prior or originary presence of the nation-people to demonstrate the prodigious, living principles of the People as contemporaneity: as that sign of the present through which national life is redeemed and iterated as a reproductive process. (208)

Since there is a continuous contest between remembering and living national belonging, individuals within the nation must not only recall the nation’s mythic past but it must also correspond with the present of the nation’s people. As theoretical constructs, both Anderson and Bhabha’s conceptual nation building allude to an act of homogeneity. This homogenous collective accesses the nation’s bounty through citizenship. It is the act of citizenship, however, that ironically creates tiers of belonging.

Thomas Janoski and Brian Gran define citizenship as an individual’s membership in a nation “with universalistic rights and obligations at a specific level of equality” (14). However, Janoski and Gran argue that there are a few aspects to practicing and enjoying citizenry, stating,

First, citizenship begins with determining *membership* in a nation-state, which means establishing ‘personhood’ or who out of the totality of

denizens, natives, and subjects of a territory are recognized as being citizens with specific rights...Second, citizenship involves *active* capacities to influence politics and *passive* rights of existence under a legal system...Third, citizenship rights are *universalistic rights enacted into law and implemented for all citizens*, and not informal, unenacted or special rights. (14)

Janoski and Gran's initial offering of citizenship is a point of exclusion. National citizenship is determined through membership, they argue, by individuals "establishing 'personhood'" out of the total number of individuals residing within the nation-state. This discourse aligns the process of individuals being recognized as worthy of national belonging with moving into personhood. The definition belies a pernicious side to national citizenship, stripping away humanity from individuals who do not fall in line with national ideology.

While I find Anderson and Bhabha's arguments on imagining belonging within the nation productive, I believe Janoski and Gran's more detailed assessment of how citizenship is controlled is much more in tune with everyday practices. When individuals are unintelligible to the nation for whatever reason be it gender, sexuality, race and/or religion, then the promises of that imagined community is perpetually out of reach. One main reason for exclusion remains gender and the uneven access granted to women and other effeminized gender identities. Anne McClintock positions national citizenship as always gendered arguing that "all nationalisms are gendered...nations are contested systems of cultural representation that limit and legitimize people's access to the resources of the nation-state, but despite many nationalists' ideological investment in the idea of popular *unity*, nations have historically amounted to the sanctioned institutionalization of gender *difference*" (89). In this project I explore sacred citizenship as an alternative and, at times overlapping, form of politics that creates a possibility of

belonging for marginalized identities in Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic women's writing. Sacred citizenship, as a concept of alternative belonging, is the sense of belonging through an intimate, physical, metaphysical, and shared state.

There is a tendency in anticolonial Caribbean texts for the male bildungsroman to represent the emerging national collective while the female body retains the colonial properties of bearer of culture, propriety, and reproduction. According to Belinda Edmondson, Anglophone Caribbean writing by men has been historically preoccupied with writing the nation while simultaneously writing into existence the West Indian male "founded on the interpellated meanings of manhood and cultural authority..." (5). West Indian women writers, on the other hand, have had an "over determined relationship either to black (male) aesthetics or (white) feminist aesthetics models..." (Edmondson 12). My focus on functions of the sacred and the erotic as freedom speaks to these women writers participating in a larger, critical, and creative effort to articulate women writing beyond masculinist constructs of the nation. It is their representation of Caribbean identities as multi-ethnic and multi-gendered that facilitates my reading them in conversation with Hispanophone Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic women writers.

All the novels examined in this project – Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting* (2004), Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (2001), Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998), Mayra Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* (2001), Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* (2006), and Daína Chaviano's *The Island of Eternal Love* (2008) – depict protagonists that practice restricted or constrained versions of national citizenship. Due to varying degrees of disenfranchisement, the protagonists construct alternative and qualitative citizenship practices. This becomes available by unhinging the notion of

citizenship from the nation and presenting cultural, psychological and performative adaptations of socio-political belonging. Étienne Balibar calls the denationalization of citizenship, “Transnational citizenship,” which he states has “progressively divorced the two concepts of *citizenship* and *nationhood*” (viii). Renato Rosaldo, who has written on Southeast Asian cultures and Latino communities, discusses the importance of linking cultural practice and citizenship politics, arguing that “cultural citizenship has to do with the kind and extent of participation by varied groups and individuals with different social projects” (13). Linda Bosniak also points to the psychological aspect of political belonging, stating, “...when citizenship is approached psychologically, as an experience of identity and solidarity...people increasingly maintain central identities and commitments that transcend or traverse national boundaries...it includes, as well, the experiences of migrants who live in various diasporic and other cross-national communities” (26). I argue that the protagonists in the novels imagine these opportunities for performative and psychological belonging through their engagements with sacral connections and evocations. By expanding how individuals access citizenship and what citizenship entails, social and personal spaces like the home, one’s neighborhood, and the marketplace become socio-political pockets where individuals experience and create for one another “substantial political recognition and social value” (Bosniak 12).

Exclusion, and by extension, re-inclusion through sacred citizenship can be experienced by citizens and non-citizens alike. Due to their social otherness, some individuals reside on the fringes of citizenship or political non-belonging. While non-citizens, residing within or beyond the nation-space, can be considered perpetual strangers. For instance, in *Cereus Blooms*, Tyler is a cross-dressing nurse who was born

and raised on the fictional island, Lantanacalara. As a birth right, he is a citizen of the space; however, due to his sexual and gendered otherness, other citizens do not regard him as representative of the space and he does not feel welcomed. An example of non-citizens occurs in *The Red of His Shadow* when Haitian-born protagonists live and work on the sugarcane plantations on the physical border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Zulé and her family work and produce for the Dominican Republic, yet they are not recognized as belonging to the space and are constantly in a state of threatened deportation.

In the novels I examine, the performance of sacred citizenship allows the marginalized subject to reflect upon and re-signify their perceived sense of otherness. Through direct and evocative functions of the sacred, they are able to transform their current states and present their bodies and identities beyond the conventional socio-political discourses that cast them as other. The protagonists access private and public sacral spaces as well as engage with the politics of the erotic in order to circumvent their present socio-political reality. These two threads of sacred citizenship make available alternative forms of intimacy and coalition despite state-sanctioned discourses of difference and historical tools that force a singular and oppressive mode of knowledge and meaning production. When applying sacred citizenship as a literary lens, the dynamic processes of alternative socio-political belonging shatter temporal, geographic, and cultural boundaries, reconstructing identity based on a politics of ethics, affect, and mutual interdependence.

The sacred in each of these novels is grounded in spirit-making and not an abstract form of divinity presented to the self. Making spirit can be one or a combination

of a force to acknowledge, an act one can produce, and a space to be constructed. In all three forms, encounters and productions of the sacred are intimate, active, and amenable to accommodating difference. Sacral energies can be found as syncretic physical spaces that house both statues of Buddha and Yemayá as in García's *Monkey Hunting*. In Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Mala's garden becomes a spiritual safehaven when protagonists produce sacral energies that evoke the pre-wedding Hindu ritual of the Matikor. Both instances are physical spaces supporting "memory as a sacred dimension" where the past and the availability of the future become vehicles that can alter present states of self (Alexander 14).

The sacred practice of relearning through physical, intellectual, and spiritual crossings evokes Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of "nepantalism" as it denotes a physical and psychical space of being. Nepantalism becomes the space one can return to where two or more cultures meet and accommodate one another. AnaLouise Keating discusses nepantla as an in-between space indicating "temporal, spatial, psychic, and/or intellectual point(s) of liminality and potential transformation. During nepantla, individual and collective self-conceptions and worldviews are shattered. Apparently fixed categories...begin eroding" (xvii). Nepantla captures the dual work of sacred citizenship: one, the recognition of the oppressive socio-historical markers at work, and two, the physical and psychical in-flux space that accommodates difference and celebrates opportunities for re-signification. In *Monkey Hunting*, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *The Pagoda*, *The Red of His Shadow*, *Erzulie's Skirt*, and *The Island of Eternal Love*, the question of where the protagonists – who are all in their own way marginalized identities

– feel “at home,” is bound up with notions of embodiment, intelligibility, and the making of a space that allows for self-creation.

These moments of sacral crossings, mutual recognition, and alternative belonging are experienced within nepantla-like physical spaces that trouble the public/private dichotomy. Addressing the complexity of such a dichotomy, Michael Warner differentiates between “the public as a kind of social totality” and “a public” as a specific audience, “[that] has a sense of totality, [but is] bounded by the event or by the shared physical space” (66). This locked in and bounded public becomes the persons engaged in sacred belonging and the witnesses to sacred citizenship through the physical spaces afforded within the novels. When these publics are not reflective of the dominant public, however, these hybrid or controlled publics depict Warner’s notion of the counterpublic: “A counterpublic maintains at some level, conscious or not, an awareness of its subordinate status. The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one” (119). These more tolerant spaces where the marginalized protagonists are granted space to be can become “...spaces of circulation in which it is hoped that the poesis of scene making will be transformative, not replicative merely” (122). For these writers, the novel provides an opportunity to construct public and counterpublic spaces that afford the protagonists a space to inhabit an identity otherwise unavailable within the larger, dominant society. For instance, in *Monkey Hunting*, Chen Pan and Lucrecia create a counterpublic within their home and antiques store, The Lucky Find. Their cross-cultural spiritual space predates the public’s acceptance of their union; however, they are able to nourish their spiritual selves and personal relationship within their physical space in order to then integrate into Cuban

society. In each novel, the reader encounters various complexities attached to each counterpublic where not all are as triumphant as in García's *Monkey Hunting*. For instance, in Montero's *The Red of His Shadow*, the sugarcane laborers living within an already ostracized socio-political space construct their own strained counterpublic intolerant of Zulé's sexual agency. Although already marginalized from Dominican society, their physical space reproduces a patriarchal and oppressive public that hinders her ability to perform self and remain safe.

When the protagonists lack safe physical spaces to negotiate self, I argue that these novels present the reintegration of the erotic as a different mode of expressing aspects of the sacred. Audre Lorde vehemently argues against the dichotomy imposed upon the secular and the sacred, claiming that the spiritual is not only political but necessary; further, the erotic, which becomes the bridge between the political and the spiritual is, according to Lorde, the "lifeforce" that guides us back to live within the body and to "stretch beyond the indeterminacy of the Body from internal spaces rather than external directives that keep us docile and oppressed" (280). Therefore, two threads germane to acknowledging and experiencing the sacred are: "knowing who walks with you" as well as the power of embracing the erotic as emancipatory (Alexander 300).

Since most of the novels analyzed are products of the "third wave" generation of Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic women writers, the politics of the erotic become a vehicle through which citizenship is negotiated. According to Donette Francis, one way third wave Caribbean women writers are reclaiming self and re-writing the nation is by vehemently critiquing the historical silences surrounding sexual abuse in the region: "Foregrounding women's bodies and the stories embedded there...third wave writers

revisit Caribbean national histories to uncover those silences that have been relegated ‘too horrific to disturb’ yet are foundational to structuring the everyday lives of Caribbean women in the region and the diaspora” (3). With the absence of empire(s) as mediator through which ideologies traffic, this generation of women writers moves beyond colonial and post-colonial narratives of either historicizing sex for reproductive purposes or sexualizing second-class subjects. These writers not only expose sexual and psychological abuse, but I argue they also explore multiple intimate and sexual freedoms. The novels in this project, thus, bring the erotic into the public sphere, articulating the multiplicity of intimacies that are already occurring and have historically occurred. Ultimately, the writers explore erotic and intimate experiences not as secondary to matters of the sacred but as already operating in tandem with the spirit.

In the novels, sacral encounters through the erotic concurrently link both personal and collective memory as well as interethnic coalition with one’s spirit and flesh.

Elizabeth Freeman links eroticism with historical production and memory stating that

Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter. Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. (96)

Freeman’s term bridges the potentiality of the erotic to effect memory with the introduction of a different historical perspective. These engagements with historical artifacts are mediated through the body, and it is the sensorial feelings produced that facilitate the self to “a form of understanding.” The novels analyzed in this project introduce the body as a historical artifact in and of itself. The body is not only the locus

of pleasure and pain, but it is also the vessel through which history is imagined anew. The term, “erotohistoriography” allows for each erotic encounter introduced in the novels as symbolic of a rewriting of intimacies historically unacknowledged. Thus, the possibilities of the erotic in this project depict a part of sacred communion and belonging because the novels become the repository for past, present, and future bodies to imaginatively reconstruct their intimacies into existence.

In the novels, I argue that the protagonists have two specific modes of the erotic available: one is the promise of the erotic as seen in Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms* where Tyler and Otoh defer sexual coupling beyond the scope of the novel. This manner of representing the erotic is productive because of the way in which the body becomes the site of transforming how intimacies are imagined. For instance, Tyler and Otoh’s relationship casts a couple with reproductive capabilities as queer through non-normative gender performances and desires. The second is the erotic through a specific sexual act which is available in Powell’s *The Pagoda*, Montero’s *The Red of His Shadow*, and Lara’s *Erzulie’s Skirt*. This mode of the erotic is usually depicted in the novels within the physical spaces of safety; however, in their articulation through the novel as public space, it circulates non-normative erotic couplings presenting multiple desires and intimacies. Through both modes of the erotic there is a pushing against long-standing critical discourse demanding new language through which to acknowledge multiple forms of intimacies and desires. The novels cast physical and emotional intimacies as conduits through which to understand one’s self and one’s role within a community of and beyond this world. Further, both deployments of the erotic are effective in recognizing self as

separate from physical and psychological marginalization which allows the subject to claim one's sexual and social self as intelligible.

Reflecting a facet of Freeman's "erotohistoriography", the erotic in the novels at times produces transpersonal¹ experiences where the intimate encounters allow for the protagonists to share psychic and emotional terrains. The boundaries of these bodies and the manner in which lived memory is then experienced is no longer conceptualized as an individual practice but a collective, shared state. I am using the term "transpersonal" because within a metaphysical depiction it has the possibility to bridge Warner's notion of the counterpublic with queer temporalities to imagine intersubjective connection between a counted few outside time, space, and place; realizing that one only needs another to feel and perform presence. When protagonists form collectives across temporal divides the doubling scenes evoked allude to Alexander's concept of palimpsestic time. She states, "The idea of the 'new' structured through the 'old' scrambled palimpsestic character of time both jettisons the truncated distance of linear time and dislodges the impulse for incommeasurability, which the ideology of distance creates. It thus rescrambles the 'here and now' and 'then and there' to a 'here and there' and 'then and now...'" (190). The writers in this project reshuffle and complicate temporality and thus

¹ In *The Absent Body*, Drew Leder argues that transcendence is realization that an (individual) lived body can form "one-body" with the world. Leder's relational theory does not eradicate difference; on the contrary, he states that "to be embodied is to inhabit a particular place and time, to have a unique history, physiology, and perceptual perspective" (162). He expands his notion of the "one-body" by defining the transpersonal as bodies having access to the world and vice versa through sensory modalities: "In each case the lived body can unlock realization of the transpersonal only because *it already is a transpersonal thing*. In eating, breathing, perceiving, moving, the body transcends itself through its commerce with the world" (172). In addition, Susan Wendell in *The Rejected Body* reads Leder's definition of the transpersonal as bodies in relation to other bodies through "compassion, aesthetic absorption, and spiritual communion" (178). For my readings of the texts, I will add the erotic as another mode of how to experience self in relation to other(s).

who can practice emotional and political intimacy where seemingly distant experiences endured by seemingly different subjects from themselves become immediate and recognizable.

Sacred citizenship requires the reader to ask how we come to know and what we decide to accept as knowledge; I also borrow the concept to investigate the power that emanates from the space of the marginalized other. Donna Haraway states that “Feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge...it allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (583). This call to arms for contemporary feminism demands specificity and accountability. For transnational feminism, crossing multiple borders and re-defining self, social positioning, and perspective is usually the initial raw material of study. Partial knowledges, then, grant an in-depth, always incomplete approach to learning “how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life” (Haraway 580). This “situated knowledge” has the potential to create a theoretical space through which culture, knowledge, and power are challenged, exposing the very fissures of their tenuous control. Édouard Glissant points to this when he writes that, “History is written with a capital *H*. It is a totality that excludes other histories that do not fit into that of the West” (75). He continues, “One of the most disturbing consequences of colonization could well be this notion of a single History, and therefore of power, which has been imposed on others by the West” (Glissant 93). It is the very notion of singularity in experience and historical account that forces the production and performance of a body politic, and by extension national citizenry, which delegitimizes marginalized or unpopular experiences. This practice also temporally, culturally, and

politically distances our present self from our sense of accountability towards an intimate belonging to past, present, and future collectives.

The collectives formed gesture towards what Raymond Williams calls “structures of feeling,” pre-emergent, pre-political recognitions that introduce “*changes in presence*” (132). Williams explains,

The term is difficult, but ‘feeling’ is chosen to emphasize a distinction from more formal concepts of ‘world-view’ or ‘ideology’...we are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal systematic beliefs are in practical variable (including historically variable), over a range from formal assent with private dissent to the more nuanced interaction between selected and interpreted beliefs and acted and justified experiences.
(132)

These feelings, while seemingly spontaneous and organic in the manner in which they are brought into being, also become an informal system that, in their manifestation, contest formal ideological systems. The novels examined in this project create Warner’s notion of “a public” and complex “counterpublics” within and across temporal divides to allow the marginalized identities to be. Within these spaces these marginalized identities experience encounters, connections, and intimacies that are in many ways structures of feeling. These seemingly private and idiosyncratic processes allow the protagonists to depict Williams’ “pre-emergent” construct. Their exchanges not only shed light on the value of the lived experience but also what should be considered political. For these novels, the multiple publics constructed offer active moments of re-organizing experience first and foremost for the marginalized protagonists. And, it is my argument that the novels themselves become cultural offerings to the present and future readership in order to continue this kind of “pre-emergent” social work across temporalities and geographic spaces. Therefore, the doubling scenes that allude to Alexander’s palimpsestic time also

evokes the relationship between writer and reader where the writer as historian casts the readership in a moment of witnessing and engaging in a critique of what counts as political. These writers and their use of the sacred, the erotic, and flexible temporalities within the novels imagine structures of feeling while the protagonists confront similar glimpses of change in epistemic formulations.

So far, sacred citizenship as a concept and Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing* have been discussed primarily within U.S. Women's Studies conversations for its engagement with the erotic as well as its concrete applicability to national and global social activism. While Tracy Robinson focuses on memory constitution as the cornerstone message of Alexander's book, Faith Smith emphasizes intelligibility as spiritual entitlement along with epistemic accountability as the text's most laudable contributions. Smith states that "*Pedagogies* places...the need to ask over and over, how we know what we know – and what are the spiritual and emotional resources that undergird our moral and intellectual identities, and our hopes for the future" (138). Both Robinson and Smith prioritize the manner in which *Pedagogies* facilitates a deeply personal account of the self and the connections one can forge with past, present, and future collectives.

Michelle Rowley, on the other hand, presents a mixed account of the sacred's possibilities and limitations to effect concrete political change. In her critique, Rowley questions how exactly the sacred could accomplish trans-disciplinary movements and whether matters of the spirit can concretely affect feminist scholarship. Rowley discusses the Thisbe/Kitsimba example in *Pedagogies* as an occasion to argue against the efficacy

of the sacred.² Rowley argues that the limits of this experience rest on Alexander's "ethnographic formation" as a subject and writer:

...her [Alexander's] discussion of the Sacred reflects a profound and intimate knowledge, practice of, and immersion into a very *particular* religious space. As such, Alexander's immersion into what is represented as the Sacred in the text is not just an ethnographic engagement. Rather, her discussion of the cosmological possibilities of this practice of the Sacred seems to defy translatability unless there is a proselytizing effect; that is to say, unless the researcher/writer becomes similarly immersed in a set of similar (not identical) forms or practices. (144)

I believe Rowley constructs a limiting formulation of sacred potentiality here. Departing from Rowley's assertions that this experience is much too personal to be translatable, I argue that since the intersections between the material and the metaphysical are already present, then the sacred is available to all. Rather, it is learning to engage with multiple methodologies and tools that assists in making the sacred accessible and intelligible.

When the sacred is accepted as pervasive in all human and non-human interactions, then "...all kinds of variation may occur, which is where the business of interpretation, subjectivity, history and just plain human difference and intractability traffic. The form of expression is variable, multiply linked to the circumstances of geography, the operations of culture and class, and indeed the vagaries of the market" (Alexander 159). By introducing all these potential permutations for the sacred in any one's life, the subject and their community determine how past, present, and future ideas, memories, and history are ceremonialized and hence re-presented within the now.

I look to Alexander's concept as providing a critical framework that invites multiplicity, asking that the critical conversation encourage the exploration of alternative

² After not finding Thisbe, an enslaved woman, in conventional legal and missionary documents, Alexander expands her research and considers "excised cosmologies and subjugated knowledges" to bring Thisbe back to presence. "Kitsimba" is the identity that emerges once Alexander draws from her intimate work in the Lucumí and Vodou practices.

modes of political articulation and belonging. This practice seeks to deconstruct what we know about citizenship and belonging in order to measure the qualitative moments of the lived experience as possibilities to counter otherness. For the most part, the critics I engage with – such as Alexander, Anzaldúa, Lorde, Warner, and Williams – are already posing questions surrounding matters of the sacred and/or the lived experience. This project brings these critics together to read Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic literature that is presenting a similar kind of work through fiction. Therefore, I argue that in García, Mootoo, Powell, Montero, Lara, and Chaviano’s works there is the availability of a relearning through sensual, psychical, and intersubjective connections. I value these connections because they challenge singular discourse that marginalizes ‘digressive’ subjects, ideas, and politics. Thus, a relational experience between the literature that engages in sacred belonging and critical conversations that suggest intersubjective connectivity prompts “collective conversations in which we map the genealogies of our own disavowals...” (Alexander 160). Tracking the disavowals pushes against any sort of critical convention ingrained as necessary to be part of the academy, such as casting aside the erotic and the spiritual.

In chapter one, “‘Traveling through the Flesh:’ Embodiment and Belonging in Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting*,” the sacred energies available in García’s novel productively destabilize the traditional Cuban narrative in order to recuperate the marginalized Chinese-Cuban figure. *Monkey Hunting* is a multi-generational novel chronicling a Chinese, Chinese-Cuban, and Afro-Cuban family. Chen Pan, the forefather of the novel is an antiques shop owner and former Chinese indentured laborer. Chen Pan and his wife and former slave, Lucrecia, create their home above their shop, the Lucky

Find, as a sacral space of mutual respect and acceptance. Their syncretic and cross-cultural space accommodates his Buddhist beliefs along with her Santería devotions. Their home becomes an intimate space for belonging and mutual recognition that allows them to construct individual identities and then a collective, unadulterated sense of how they fit within Cuban cultural politics. This space grants Chen Pan entry into a Cuban cultural identity while it affords Lucrecia her Chinese-African identity. Future generations such as Domingo Chen and Chen Fang, however, lack stable sacred spaces that enrich the self, leaving them perpetually searching for belonging. These protagonists access sacred citizenship, instead, through their ephemeral erotic encounters. Their depictions in the novel represent what Giorgio Agamben³ terms the politics of potentiality. Although they never realize their belonging like Chen Pan and Lucrecia, Domingo Chen and Chen Fang cast memory reconstitution and language as a form of extending their self. Sacred citizenship in *Monkey Hunting* is available through the protagonists' engagements with syncretic, multi-vocal spaces such as the plantation and the Lucky Find, as well as the ephemeral pleasure and multiple crossings afforded through the politics of the erotic and potentiality.

In chapter two, “*Accessor(‘I’)zing Gender and Sexing Desire in Shani Mootoo’s Cereus Blooms at Night and Patricia Powell’s The Pagoda,*” I return to issues of marginality by assessing the racial, sexual, and gendered crossings that are at the heart of colonial and post-colonial contests. Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* focuses on three “queer” protagonists – Mala, Tyler, and Otoh – as they actively and defiantly reside outside heteronormative spaces. The novel begins with an elderly and decrepit Mala

³ For more information on the politics of potentiality, please see Giorgio Agamben’s *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*. Ed, trans., intro. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. Print.

Ramchandin, who is sent to the alms house when the police raid her house and find her living in squalor along with her father's decaying corpse. It is in the alms house that Tyler, a cross-dressing nurse outcast by his colleagues, strikes up a liking to Mala and makes it his mission to tell her story. The novel is framed by Tyler's open letter to Mala's sister, Asha, who left their town, Paradise, never to be heard from again. From this present, the reader is privy to Mala's past experiences which range from her mother, Sarah, abandoning her children to leave with her lover, Lavinia, young love with Ambrose Mohanty, and years of incest and abuse at the hands of her father. Symbolically, though, the highest crime is the collective social silence the town practices which allows such abuse to continue. However, there are protagonists who challenge her marginalization. Otoh, Ambrose's transgendered child assumes his father's clothes and identity and delivers his father's monthly food package to Mala. Among Mala, Tyler, and Otoh, queer identifications are multiple in the manner in which they disidentify with a heteropatriarchal structure. Sacred citizenship is accessed in this novel similarly to *Monkey Hunting*, since it is Mala's garden at her home and then the alms house that prompt a sense of safety for the protagonists to practice self with limited socio-political opposition.

Chapter two also explores sacred crossings and political belonging in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda*. Set in 1890s Manchester, Jamaica, the story centers on Chinese protagonist, Mr. Lowe, who has worked in a small grocery for over thirty years. When he arrives in Manchester in 1860, he was the only Chinese person in the community. On the surface, he lives a quiet life with wife, Miss Sylvie. The narrative introduces Mr. Lowe starting a letter to his daughter in order to reveal his "true" self as well as her parentage.

As the reader learns, Mr. Lowe was born a girl, but cross-dresses to board the ship, the *Augustina*, which took him from China to Jamaica. However, while on board, Cecil, a white English man, discovers Lowe as a stowaway. Cecil then organizes the present masquerade as he arranges for Mr. Lowe to become a shopkeeper and husband to Miss Sylvie, an octoroon woman passing as white. Through multiple flashbacks, Lau A-Yin's past is revealed through an unidentified narrator. Mr. Lowe later links his identity to that of Lau A-Yin's, but the novel resists consolidating both personas. After his shop burns down and Cecil perishes, Lowe finds himself free and simultaneously a bit lost. He sets out to build a pagoda, a Chinese cultural center that would serve as a home space for people like his daughter, grandson, and future Chinese and Chinese-Jamaicans on the island. His construction of this space occurs amidst his multiple sexual and gender negotiations with other characters such as Miss Sylvie, Joyce, and Omar.

I pair *Cereus Blooms* and *The Pagoda* together because they depict an inverse access to the sacred with disparate results. While in chapter one García's *Monkey Hunting* makes available both safe physical spaces for sacred belonging as well as the erotic explorations without a constant physical space, *Cereus Blooms* and *The Pagoda* each offer one side of this progression. In chapter one, Chen Pan and Lucrecia's union is by far the most successful because of their sacred progression that initiates with a physical space of "nepantalism," while Domingo Chen and Chen Fang's erotic crossings never fully grant them belonging. According to these novels, then, intelligibility and intersubjective coalition through the erotic, is not as effective as the construction of a physical space one can turn and return to. The erotic is less sustainable because these

subjects' bodies have been the very vehicle specious body politics use to marginalize them.

Through *Cereus Blooms* and *The Pagoda* I can read the tensions that arise when this logic is disrupted. While in *Cereus Blooms* there are physical pockets where the protagonists feel safe to negotiate their identities, *The Pagoda* depicts Mr. Lowe as tirelessly constructing a physical safe haven never available in the scope of the novel. The garden and the alm's house in *Cereus Blooms* allow Mala, Tyler, and Otoh diasporic crevices that become sites for contesting their sexual and gendered identities. It is in these spaces that Tyler and Otoh assert their selves and their intimacy as intelligible. Their union indicates the promise of the erotic as emancipatory. *The Pagoda*, however, offers the inverse relationship. Since Mr. Lowe perpetually lacks a space to be throughout the novel, his efforts at belonging through erotic couplings force him to find solace through his body, the very medium of his pain, abuse, and betrayal. His practice of sacred citizenship is thus sacrificial, in that in the narrative's present he can only practice erotic belonging, while his relentless vision of a pagoda allows for the promise of future bodies like his to safely integrate into nineteenth century Jamaica.

Chapter three, "Bodies Scared Sacred at the Crossroads: Vodou and Sacral Intelligibility in Mayra Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* and Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt*," examines the relationship between ahistorical and underdeveloped physical pockets and their relationship to metaphysical spaces. In *The Red of His Shadow*, the Dominican Republic's bateys are company towns where sugar laborers live. The Haitian sugar cane laborers who work and live there are politically non-existent yet perform back-breaking, soul-crushing work no respectable Dominican would. Vodou

practices and sacral identities become the mode of their godly existence beyond their inhospitable lives.

Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* tells the story of the highly-policed life of Vodou priestess Zulé Réve. After a number of their closest family members drown due to an "amarre" (a Vodou spell), a shy, awkward twelve-year-old, Zulé, and her father, Papa Luc, decide to immigrate to the Dominican Republic. In the Dominican Republic, Zulé and Papa Luc join his much younger brother, Jean-Claude, and Jean-Claude's Dominican wife, Anacaona, working the cane fields in Yerba Buena. Once in the Dominican Republic, Zulé reveals her innate spiritual gift and soon thereafter, Papa Luc escorts Zulé to a Gagá ritual, a ceremony conducted by a Vodou clan that also functions as a sub-society with spiritual and political council elders. Zulé evolves into a precocious and exceptional *manbo* (Vodou priestess), word of her powers reaching individuals from other rural areas across the country. The narrator introduces Zulé about to lead her own Gagá on a spiritual and physical pilgrimage during Holy Week. Her Gagá crosses paths with Vodou priest and former Tonton Macoute, Similá Bolosse, who desires to traffic drugs through her batey. Similá's insatiable greed to increase his powers within the physical and metaphysical realms overshadows Zulé and Similá's once sexual and spiritual connections. I read Zulé's sacred citizenship through Hortense J. Spillers' discussions of the captive body as well as the Afro-Dominican concept of Liborismo, an anti-capitalistic stance that grew popular with sugar cane laborers in the early twentieth century. Together these ideas offer dichotomous experiences of self-construction that reveal Zulé's complex and intimate connection to the Vodou goddess she worships and is continuously mounted by loa, Erzulie.

Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* also evokes Erzulie as the guiding force for both Miriam and Micaela, the main protagonists of the novel. In Vodou doctrine, Erzulie is a contradictory loa representing femininity and virginity, but also lust and excess. Represented in a more regal light than in Montero's *The Red of His Shadow*, in *Erzulie's Skirt*, Erzulie is depicted as the goddess of the sea and is responsible for telling the reader Miriam and Micaela's story. Miriam is the daughter of Haitian parents who work the cane fields along the Dominican/Haitian border. She grows up on the plantation and when she gets pregnant, she runs off to the city. Micaela is born in Santo Domingo and grows up tending to domestic chores while her brothers access formal education outside the home. When her youngest brother drowns while in her care, her mother casts her out of their home. Miriam and Micaela meet and immediately strike up a friendship and develop a lifelong companionship. Together they eventually open a small market, a colmado, where they sell everyday goods but also take in an apprentice, Yealidad, whom they teach their Vodou practice. The Vodou rituals in the novel serve to advance the protagonists' pursuits. Through a fungible sense of temporality, the loas and mortals enjoy parallel experiences which become instructive. Departed family members also guide the women through difficult moments. Both sets of protagonists in *The Red of His Shadow* and *Erzulie's Skirt* are already discounted as fully realized citizens within their respective communities. Through Vodou rituals, they ascend these othering circumstances and negotiate anti-capitalist and capitalist practices respectively in order to insist and negotiate publically acknowledged and respected identities.

Chapter three also pairs two novels together in order to examine the value of integrating the physical space with a metaphysical connection all the while negotiating

capitalist practices. I offer a complementary reading of both novels because it allows me to think through the inverse tensions. In *The Red of His Shadow*, Zulé assumes a Liborista attitude towards unchecked capitalism in her batey while Miriam and Micaela, although exploited at first, embrace the marketplace as their “nepantla” space for accommodation and spiritual nourishment. In both instances, the metaphysical elements of Vodou transmit into the protagonists’ present states of physical and social realities. However, Miriam and Micaela are able to access sacred belonging in a way that Zulé is not because of her doubly marginalized status.

Further, I examine Zulé in order to test the limits of sacred citizenship and challenge its seemingly utopic aura. What I find particularly interesting about reading this novel through sacred citizenship is that Zulé is first and foremost part of the Haitian cane laborers collective who are marginalized within Dominican society. Her position within this collective is doubly marginalized as her spiritual powers and abounding sexuality cast her as threatening to the patriarchal milieu. So in this instance, similarly to Mr. Lowe in *The Pagoda*, Zulé is being persecuted through the very conduits one would usually practice sacred citizenship through – matters of the spirit and the erotic. Nevertheless, Zulé manipulates both her spiritual prowess and her erotics to force a space for her self if even ephemerally.

The final chapter, “To Dream, To Be: *The Island of Eternal Love* and Mythical Postmemory” returns to Cuban and Cuban-American politics, thus bringing the project full circle. The previous three chapters have all considered anti-linear physical and metaphysical temporalities as impacting the manner in which marginalized subjects are afforded a space to be. As a celebrated science fiction writer, Chaviano engages with

similar critical concerns regarding sacred citizenship – constructing alternative forms of belonging through unadulterated spaces and the body. She suspends linear temporality in such a way that introduces fantastical elements as conduits for notions of political belonging. The narrative present introduces Cecilia, a news reporter working the Miami beat in the 1990's. While following a lead on a mysterious ghost house that keeps appearing in random historical sites across the city, Cecilia meets a lonely old woman at a bar. Through the pair's conversations, the novel explores the three major migrations to Cuba – the Spanish, Chinese, and African. In the novel, Chaviano depicts how these racial groups come to form one single family. While a Galician family immigrates to Cuba after the imp, Martinico, who only the women see, ruins their lands, the Chinese family travels to Cuba after their rice fields are confiscated and burned in the 1911 Chinese Revolution. Although already in Cuba, the African couple fall in love and are manumitted with the October 7, 1886 abolition of slavery decree. It is the descendants and their stories that bring the three families together.

Through the politics of love, Chaviano embarks on a metaphysical voyage to counter contemporary and singular notions of belonging. One of the anecdotes the elderly woman tells Cecilia is about star-crossed lovers (Pablo and Amalia) in pre-revolutionary Cuba who, while experiencing an intimate moment, hallucinate the future *Balseros* crisis of the 1990s. *Erzulie's Skirt's* Miriam and Micaela's experience while crossing the Mona Strait and summoning the Middle Passage evokes a similar doubling effect. Both sets of protagonists represent specific historical constructs and re-center the humanity lost when history's linear focus distances global events. In both instances, the doubling of experience occurs with the underlying sentiment that through the body memories and

histories are constructed. Joy M. Lynch's concept of memory as an inescapable manifestation echoes strongly in this scene as she argues that "...our bodies carry personal and historical memory forward...our bodies may [also] be the conduits through which our subjectivity becomes integral to the landscape which bears memory as well" (190). Pablo and Amalia's love and Miriam and Micaela's survival reiterates the centering of humanity in memory production and political representation.

This project is concerned not only with how the sacred is deployed in these novels, but with how, and to what degree, sacred citizenship allows us to imagine alternative forms of categorization and belonging. There is sustained danger in just reading these texts as a lens through which the writers construct a space for empathy, because empathy can elicit a self-centric understanding that preserves the power relations that allow systemic abuse to persist. Saidiya Hartman locates empathy as a problematic emotion because it is "...a projection of oneself into another in order to better understand the other or 'the projection of one's own personality into an object, with the attribution to the object of one's own emotions'...Empathy [ultimately] fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead" (20). In failing to "expand the space of the other," empathy maintains the location of violence and subjection; to acquire knowledge about the other is to change the epistemology of how the reader and communities at large regard these abjected bodies. Therefore, the representations of sacred citizenship in these novels deconstruct the initial power dynamic that seeks to other. In its place my readings imagine a different mode of engagement where othered subjects are not simply summoned for the subject's imaginative colonization, but rather, are granted advocacy within their respective power structures.

Sacred citizenship is a recognition of life, of presence among animate and inanimate objects, queering temporality whereby the past and the future become available spaces for re-creation. Ultimately, these Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic bodies carry forward multivalent socio-political memories, all the while positing new vehicles through which to access memory as these bodies shape and are shaped by anti-linear temporality, globalization, political change, and syncretic Afro-Caribbean religions. In writing these liminal bodies into re-existence, García, Mootoo, Powell, Montero, Lara, and Chaviano write singular, marginal bodies as an occasion to stage plurality and inclusivity as an organizing principle when writing the Caribbean body. Through varying investments in sacred citizenship, these marginalized identities come to be, shedding light on multiple manners of conceiving corporeality, practicing alternative belonging, spirituality, and erotic awareness.

Chapter One: “Traveling through the Flesh”: Embodiment and Sacred Spaces in Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting*

This chapter discusses the manner in which cross-cultural and cross-racial alliances prompt new forms of belonging through syncretic sacred practices in Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting* (2003). In my analysis, I argue that the novel affords all the protagonists the opportunity to claim a sense of belonging through sacred citizenship where their identities and selfhood are no longer an isolated concept but a shared, transpersonal experience. The sacred elements in the novel serve as cultural artifacts that suggest the protagonists’ abilities to create coalitional belonging. For instance, the sacred is initially evoked with Sanfancón when Chen Pan is a maroon under the ceiba tree. Once living with Lucrecia, their Buddha and Yemayá statues (both laden with personal offerings) points to their active devotion to both deities. For Domingo Chen and Chen Fang, however, their use of language and memory reconstitution affords them the ability to connect across generations. These experiences are part of the larger scope of connectivity available through sacred citizenship, but the connections are performative and not directly belonging to any one system of belief and worship. Thus, syncretic physical spaces that house sacred elements and activities as well as memory reconstitution become vehicles through which to access sacred citizenship. These physical and psychical crossings serve as a means for the protagonists to draw on a wide range of potential identities.

Monkey Hunting portrays a Cuban-Chinese-African family and their collective life. Traversing physical space and generational time, García’s protagonists are constantly negotiating their identities and asserting subjectivity while combating marginalization within intimate, national, and transnational spaces. Chen Pan, the patriarch of the family,

and his mulatto wife and former slave, Lucrecia, practice the most enduring and productive form of sacred citizenship in the novel. In their home above their antiques store, the Lucky Find, Chen Pan and Lucrecia call upon both Santería and Buddhist and Chinese mysticism rituals to keep their lives balanced. Their coalitional state of existence nurtures their collective sense of self and assists them in coming to terms with their past and realizing how they envision their present and future. Ultimately, their sacral accommodations allow them a more permanent space to be within both national and transnational scripts.

The other main protagonists and Chen Pan and Lucrecia's descendants, Domingo Chen and Chen Fang, have more difficulty establishing a stable sacred space and therefore have difficulty asserting self within national and transnational spaces. Domingo Chen, for instance, suffers from a fragmented identity, never successfully engaging with any one place or space. He lacks self-placement within familial accounts exacerbating his loss of self. In addition, Chen Fang, Chen Pan's queer granddaughter, never reaches Cuba. Her life in Revolutionary China embodies a systemic social violence. Chen Fang's un-intelligibility within the nation is intimately tied to her transgressive gender and sexual identities. Perpetually looking to Cuba as the space and place for belonging, her body becomes an inhospitable dwelling and, like Domingo Chen, she only finds fleeting moments of sacral, inter-subjective belonging through erotic encounters and memory reconstitution.

I position Chen Pan as theoretically contrapuntal to both Domingo Chen and Chen Fang since Chen Pan practices trans-cultural negotiations even before his union with Lucrecia. His experiences as an indentured laborer and then Chinese "*cimarrón*"

(maroon)⁴ allows him the time to choose which Chinese elements to take with him into Cuban society. During this period his cross-racial alliances serve as a precursor to his life with Lucrecia. Chen Pan's sacred citizenship fully materializes, though, through his crossing cultural, spiritual, and psychical borders within his home with Lucrecia. Domingo Chen and Chen Fang lack these opportunities; however, like Chen Pan, their bodies and selves are nonetheless sacred. Despite the inequities in identity construction and sacral belonging, the protagonists all construct moments of recognition which allow them to be other. Therefore, what sacred citizenship ultimately affords is the politics of possibilities, a transformative potentiality that can shift epistemic notions of how a body once rendered vulnerable and othered can imagine self and belonging through a dynamic and fluid identitarian framework that eludes exclusionary socio-political systems.

For Chen Pan and Lucrecia, sacred citizenship is living amidst a *mélange* of different elements existing in harmony through their union. There is a realized sense of peace to their union beyond personal tragedy and socio-political upheaval like the death of Lucrecia's son, Víctor Manuel, or Cuba's Ten Year's War. Domingo Chen and Chen Fang, however, are tragic figures in their personal quest for belonging yet representative of what Giorgio Agamben describes as the relation of potentiality to actuality. Agamben states, "To be potential means: to be one's own lack, *to be in relation to one's own incapacity*. Beings that exist in the mode of potentiality *are capable of their own impotentiality*; and only in this way do they become potential. They *can be* because they

⁴ According to Richard Hart, the Spanish term *cimarrón* was in use in the sixteenth century prior to "maroon" in Jamaica which was first used around the eighteenth century. And prior to African slavery, the term *cimarrón* came to describe the Amerindian population connoting wildness: "One of the earliest official usages of the word Cimarron was in relation to Cuba in a royal order dated 11 March 1531. In this order the Spanish queen, replying to a report of the previous September from the governor, said: 'I am very pleased with your tidings that the island is almost devoid of Cimarron Indians...'" [Franco 38]. With the decline of the Amerindian population the term was later applied to escaped African slaves and their descendants" (37).

are in relation to their own non-Being” (182). Agamben brings to bear a productive point of departure for reading Domingo Chen and Chen Fang. He presents the notion of potentiality as a relationship between the self and their unrealized being. Although Agamben’s initial definition seems to present potentiality as having one manner of representation, Leland de la Durantaye deconstructs potentiality as having two modes. He states,

The first...[is] *the potentiality to be*. For a thing to be, it stands to reason that it must have first been possible (for if it had been *impossible* it could never have come to be). The second mode in which potentiality exists...[is the] ‘potentiality to not-be,’ or ‘impotence,’ is not to be understood as a privation, as an actual weakness or incapacity, for the reason that it is not to be understood in the context of actuality *at all*. It denotes the possibility for a thing *not* to pass into existence and thereby remain at the level of mere – or ‘pure’ – potentiality. (5)

In *Monkey Hunting*, Domingo Chen and Chen Fang reside within these dual modes of potentiality. While they never realize belonging and self-making agency, their mere existence shapes socio-political systems that, in order to oppress them, must first acknowledge them. Most importantly, they represent opportunity without passing into existence and realization. Although they do not fully realize belonging through a sacral space, both protagonists manipulate memories that curb their political and ideological beliefs. While Domingo Chen and Chen Fang never meet Chen Pan, they both believe they come into contact with traces of his being. Domingo Chen obsesses over Chen Pan’s old spectacles which leads him to ponder the very “cross-cultural lusts” which brought Domingo Chen to be in the first place (García 209). Chen Fang, on the other hand, possesses her father’s letters which discuss Chen Pan. She allows her desire for community to take flight and through language extends her sense of self beyond her states of confinement.

On an intimate level, Domingo Chen and Chen Fang negotiate potentiality as a progressive and at times an uplifting engagement with what is currently lacking but not impossible; however, there is a clear sense that the politics of potentiality can be and are used to circulate the very political discourses and systems that keep Domingo Chen and Chen Fang from their self-making realization. Agamben states, “I think that the concept of potentiality has never ceased to function in the life and history of humanity, most notably the part of humanity that has grown and developed its *potentialities* to the point of imposing its *power* over the whole planet” (177). This more insidious aspect of potentiality is indirectly picked up in Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s assessment of how García uses national and transnational discourses arguing that “in García’s telling, *any* form of nationalist consolidation – whether formulated around whiteness, antiforeignness, or hybridity – is the potential foundation of violence” (115). While Caminero-Santangelo makes a striking point, the unique alignment of sacred citizenship and potentiality is the focus on the personal, the embodied sense of history, memory, and identity. With sacred citizenship, everything returns to the intimate, shifting away from top-down political and social constructs. Therefore, keeping de la Durantaye’s evaluation of potentiality’s dual modes in mind, potentiality is the politics of not only violence but also possibility, especially within the realm of the personal. And this complexity is akin to the larger commentary *Monkey Hunting* indeed gestures towards.

***Monkey Hunting* and the Cuban Narrative**

In *Monkey Hunting*, socio-political occurrences shape personal and collective experiences. By recounting the Cuban experience of migration and exile through the marginalized Chinese-Cuban subject, García destabilizes traditional Cuban narratives of

nation within Latino literary discourse. In the novel, García almost completely silences the white, Creole influence and depicts the Chinese and Chinese-Cuban subject as integral to the Cuban cultural landscape. On the literary stage, García's interjections are two-fold: first, she enters a largely male dominant literary realm where, historically, the Chinese-Cuban figure is portrayed as socially, ethically, and culturally inferior to the European.⁵ And, second, by casting the Chinese-Cuban as dominant protagonists, García disrupts contemporary sensibilities of Miami, U.S./Cuban politics of belongingness and Cubanidad.

Cowie Lancelot argues that the Chinese and Chinese-Cuban figures in Cuban literature have historically embodied a negative, caricatured space, suffering racial and social discrimination as the unassimilatable other. Representations of Chinese-Cuban subjects in Cuban literature range from the Chinese indentured laborers in Miguel Barnet's *Biografía de un cimarrón (Biography of Runaway Slave)* (1966), where the Chinese protagonist, Esteban Montejo, is as a separatist, to the Chinese-Cuban as indulging in many vices, like gambling and opium use, in Alejandro García Maldonado's *A la Medianoche en la Plaza del Panteón* (1979). Lancelot even mentions Severo Sarduy's famous novel, *De donde son los cantantes (Where the Singers Came From)* (1970) as describing Chinese (Asian) features with a "negative slant" (141). Ultimately, Lancelot argues that because the depictions offer "narrow, subjective" perspectives, "neither the short story writers nor the novelists explore the psychology of the Chinese. Instead, they offer short glimpses of the life of the Oriental in certain prescribed situations" (146). While I agree with Lancelot's overarching argument and thus position

⁵ García is among a handful of Caribbean and Latina writers to explore the figure of the Chinese-Cuban in a more complex and constructive light. In a later section I analyze Mayra Montero's *The Messenger* (1999) and Daina Chaviano's *The Island of Eternal Love* (2008).

García as disrupting this narrative, I depart from his assertion that there is a specific ethnically derived psychology. Stating that the short story writers and novelists fail to capture “the psychology of the Chinese” is precisely the essentialist language that maintains an othered, biologically driven space of representation. In this project, I consider ethnic and racial categories such as Chinese, Asian American, and Latinidad as social modes of representation that can unify a common sense of political purpose. I also consider the possibility of these categories as limiting, state-sanctioned categories used to group, and thus, curb difference. In novels such as García’s *Monkey Hunting*, we can see an evolution of representation where the Chinese and Chinese-Cuban protagonists are presented as multi-faceted, complex subjects who are actively engaging with not only the Caribbean space as both home and diaspora, but are also participating in a larger network of transnational exchanges within global spaces.

By recasting the Chinese-Cuban figure within national and transnational Cuban politics, García also disrupts the long-held Miami-based Cuban-American narrative. This self-referential narrative positions Cuba as not only functioning as a place of origin, but also as a pre-revolutionary, pre-lapsarian space where racial strife did not exist. This Cuba catered to a respectable white middle and upper-middle class population who controlled the majority of economic and political activities. According to Caminero-Santangelo,

García’s *Monkey Hunting* and Obejas’s *Days of Awe* focus on the Chinese and Jewish diasporas, respectively, *in* Cuba; they force U.S. readers *backward* in Cuban history, to consider the forms of diaspora that saw Cuba as an end point (or perhaps midpoint) rather than a point of origin – as always and already *transnational* – and to appraise forms and functions of Cuban hybridity beyond life on the Cuban American hyphen. (100)

By constructing the literary Cuban space as a socio-political geography that is already cross-racial and cross-cultural well before the 1959 revolution, García challenges the “golden exiles” image of a white, politically conservative Cubanness.⁶ The golden exiles and purveyors of the pre-lapsarian Cuba B.C. (before Castro) were the first wave of exiles to the United States that totaled 250,000 immigrants in just three years. This group, according to James S. Olson and Judith E. Olson were “almost all of them... upper- and middle-class Cubans whose livelihoods had been destroyed, or at least severely compromised, by the revolution” (55). Caminero-Santangelo argues that soon after arriving to the United States this group equated racism and anti-communism “as intricately connected to a self-presentation” which quickly facilitated a narrative of a collective self where “the image of a white Cubanness [was] thus projected backward, onto the home country itself” (97). This uniformity in racial and political representation has allowed for the latter waves of immigration like the Mariel Boat lift of the 1980s and the *Balseros* Crisis of the 1990s – which were primarily of a lower socioeconomic status and for the most part raced as black or ‘darker’ Cubans – to be perceived within the Cuban-American community as suspect, untrustworthy and products of the revolution. Nevertheless, they received the same legal status that previous waves of white Cuban immigrants received.⁷ Therefore, while these subsequent groups have somewhat troubled the white Cuban narrative, they have not dismantled it. García’s ease with discussing

⁶ I borrow the term, “golden exiles” from Olson and Olson in *Cuban Americans: From Trauma to Triumph* (1995).

⁷ Caminero-Santangelo discusses this political phenomenon in relation to Haitian immigration of the 80s stating, “The characterization of Cuban immigrants as primarily white persists even after the Mariel boatlift brought significantly larger numbers of black Cubans to the United States...in 1984 the INS gave legal status to the 125,000 Cubans who had arrived in the United States and in the 1980 boatlift – but not to the 30,000 Haitians who had arrived in 1980 – the decision was reviled by many, including the *Miami Herald*, as ‘racist’ (119), presumably because Cubans, even the Mariel entrants, were by and large still perceived as white, while Haitians were predominantly black” (236).

Cuba and Cubanness through Chinese-Cuban citizens not only reinserts the Chinese presence as integral to Cuban historiography, but also contextualizes these contemporary political rifts as belonging to multiple contentious Cuban and global political moments. García's *Monkey Hunting* is, thus, an interesting interjection that not only discusses formative national and transnational political moments significantly before the 1959 revolution, but also promotes the necessity for multiplicity and multivocality in order to adequately extend notions of Cubanness.⁸ Her focus on the Chinese-Cuban also facilitates a sacred citizenship reading as the protagonists, for the most part, do not enjoy conventional citizenship and political recognition like the Cuban "golden exiles." The protagonists, therefore, construct alternative, more intimate modes of political belonging in order to assert a sense of self.

Sino-Cubano: Chen Pan y su familia si son Cubanos

Monkey Hunting redeploys Cubanness through the intimate and collective experiences of Chinese and Chinese-Cuban subjects. García accomplishes this task through a re-appropriation of sacral elements, their function in identity-formation, and how these experiences enrich Chen Pan and his family. Chen Pan's life frames the text since the end of the novel is the end of his life; however, for most of the text, Chen Pan is a successful antiques shop owner and family man. In order to place Chen Pan as the cultural and sacral ancestor, one must pay critical attention to Chen Pan's time as an indentured cane laborer and then as a Chinese "*cimarrón*" (maroon).

⁸ With *Monkey Hunting*, García steps away from binarized and exhausted narratives of Cuban representations fixed within the last fifty years. For more on how García's literary career disrupts popular communism versus right-wing U.S. freedom discourse, please see Ann Marie Alfonso-Forero's "'A Whole New Race': Chinese Cubans and Hybrid Identities in Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*" (Anthurium Spring and Fall 2009) and Dalia Kandiyoti's "Consuming Nostalgia: Nostalgia and the Marketplace in Cristina García and Ana Menéndez" (2006).

Immediately after arriving at the plantation, Chen Pan assesses his dire situation. He realizes that he is working within a form of slavery “no different from the Africans” and that *the man in the Western suit* that promised exotic sweet treats and imposing blue skies was selling someone else’s reality (García 24).⁹ Rather than dwelling on his predicament, he casts aside his distress and, unlike other captive Chinese, he nurtures unusual alliances across racial lines. The narrator comments that, “Chen Pan liked the Africans. They showed him how to swing the machete, shared the yams they roasted in ashes. Cabeza de Piña, who could knock men senseless with a butt of his head, took an interest in Chen Pan and protected him like a brother” (García 26). While Cabeza de Piña is depicted as a source of brute force, he protects Chen Pan; Chen Pan, in return, is the unassuming and reflective persona who teaches Cabeza de Piña morning exercises to gather strength. Their alliance within the plantation foreshadows Chen Pan’s openness to cross-cultural relationships that leads to his construction of a syncretic space for belonging.

Despite the progressive and sentimental qualities of this unusual friendship, García uses possibly jarring slavery discourse in order to position Chen Pan within this space of abjection. It is at first unclear whether García’s use of slavery discourse seems to create a coalitional sense of affinity or if it conflates historical and cultural difference. Marta Lysik emphatically recognizes *Monkey Hunting* as belonging to a neo-slave narrative tradition because of such thematic overlap. Lysik lauds the novel’s depiction of various forms of slavery including

⁹ Sean Moiles argues that García’s representation of the Cuban sugar plantation operates on two levels: “First, it combats nostalgic visions of pre-Castro Cuba (or, in fact, any place motivated by the accumulation of private property) as a paradise. Second, it suggests an analogy between the brutalities of Cuban sugar plantations and the profitseeking methods of global, neoliberal capitalism—exercised, for example, on outsourced workers in the developing world” (179).

[the] chattel system in Cuba, forced marriages, foot binding and cross-dressing in pre-Cultural Revolution China, and prostitution during the Vietnam war. García... is concerned with slavery under many guises – slavery of the mind, body, and soul, and she positions a classical slave society of nineteenth-century Cuba next to societies practicing slavery-like forms of oppression. (276)

While I agree with Lysik's inclusive interpretation of slavery in order to bring together trans-cultural and trans-geographical modes of oppression, it is important to note the key economic and cultural differences that separate the indentured labor system from the Atlantic slave trade in order to then appreciate the politically-charged and emotionally-driven act of conflating such different social and labor systems.

The Chinese indentured system in Cuba, or *La trata amarilla* (the yellow trade), lasted about twenty-seven years. It first began and stopped in 1847, then started up again in 1853 and continued without interruption until 1874. The Chinese government abolished this treaty with Spain three years later. The indenture system executed term contracts usually lasting between seven to eight years. These contracts were legally binding and recorded in court dockets. Once the term was up, the laborer was supposedly set free and given a sum of money to begin their free life. However, while an indentured laborer, the individual worked under a *patron* who was legally able to sell indentured contracts as well as coerce indentured laborers to "reindenture by raising the cost of freedom to levels that many Chinese found prohibitive" (Dorsey 24). According to Joseph C. Dorsey, Spain counted 124,813 Chinese indentured laborers who arrived throughout the entire period (19).¹⁰ Under Spanish law, the Chinese were regarded as either "asiaticos contratados" (contract Asians) during their indentureship or "asiaticos

¹⁰ There is some inconsistency in the number of Chinese that migrated to Cuba, perhaps because of the number that perished while making the voyage. Nevertheless, according to Kathleen López, "throughout this period the Spanish brought over about 142,000 Chinese" (106).

libres” (free Asians) once free from economic bondage; their interstitial position within contemporary racial discourse labeled the Chinese, whether indentured or free, as “white.” Dorsey argues, “The legal freedom and honorary white status of the Chinese contract worker theoretically punctuated his social and cultural separation from the black slave...[however] according to local and transient observers as well as the Chinese themselves, they were not treated as free people at all” (21).¹¹ Although the Chinese were technically considered white, their access to social and economic benefits were largely unavailable. Schultermandl unpacks this argument with more detail, arguing that the concept of race in eighteenth century Cuba “was based on ‘social and cultural difference[s]’ which did not pertain ‘to transnational groups of people distinguished by biological factors such as skin color but rather to various ethnic groups distinguished primarily by cultural practice’” (98). Therefore, Schultermandl stresses that the various ethnic groups were all primarily from regions in Spain which then based competing notions of whiteness solely on cultural and economic differences and not natal place or skin color. In nineteenth century Cuba, the African population – both slaves as well as manumitted individuals – did not trouble this racial discourse; however, the insertion of the Chinese laborers produced the need to reevaluate who was considered “white” in Cuba and what that entailed.

For the Chinese in Cuba, the potential category of whiteness when free cast them as politically more valuable than the African. Yet on the plantation, during indentureship,

¹¹ Lisa Yun discusses the marginalization of the Chinese (“coolie”) indentured laborer stating, “The coolies in Cuba revealed their lives as intensely violent ones and as unrelenting struggles for not only freedom and bondage, but for transcultural practices and strategic language use, and for racialized and collective consciousness. The emergence of a subaltern body politic and mass mobilization lends an added dimension to antislavery’s history, i.e., an Asian resistance against slavery in the West that lasted several decades. Unlike literary-historical genres of the slave narrative and the immigrant narrative, the words of coolies have remained in the margins of literature and history” (xvi).

patrones “incorporated many of the same oppressive features of the old system of slavery...Chinese were beaten, chained, deprived of food, and forced to work from 15 to 20 hours daily” (López 109). This historical evidence depicts a similarity of abuse that binds Chen Pan and Cabeza’s relationship despite initial hesitations of difference. Therefore, García’s effort in evoking a specific affect for one experience by summoning another set of labor experiences positions Chen Pan and the Chinese laborers along with the African laborers on a similar continuum of oppression that systematically quantifies and reduces human life to units of labor.

García continues to unite the Chinese indentured laborer and the African slave in experience by regarding Chen Pan as a Chinese *cimarrón* (maroon) (García 41). Most notably, this act of naming allows for the first sacred crossing, which occurs within a suspended moment in time. Symbolically taking to the hills, Chen Pan first hides behind a ceiba tree where he rubs the “sacred earth on his face and throat” (García 38). In this moment, Chen Pan remembers what Cabeza had stated that “the tree was their mother; her sap, blood; her touch, a tender caress” (38). According to Begoña Toral Aleman, the ceiba tree is the sacred tree of the island, where:

habitan todos los muertos, los antepasados, los ‘santos’ africanos de todas las naciones traídas a Cuba y los santos católicos. El hecho de que Cabeza de Piña identifique a Chen Pan con el oricha Changó...no resulta ocioso ya que es en la ceiba donde, entre otras divinidades africanas, mora Changó, transculturado en Santa Bárbara en la santería afrocubana. Además, la ceiba es, para los chinos importados durante la época del colonialismo y esclavitud y actualmente para sus descendientes el trono de Sanfancón (Cabrera, 149). (qtd in 88)¹²

¹² My translation is as follows: [According to Begoña Toral Aleman, the ceiba tree is the sacred tree of the island, where:] *the dead reside, the ancestors, the “saints” of all the African nations brought to Cuba as well as the Catholic saints. By Cabeza de Piña aligning Chen Pan with the god, Changó...it is not by coincidence since the ceiba tree represents Changó’s, along with other gods’, earthly dwelling. Further, Changó is a syncretic figure represented by Santa Bárbara in Afro-Cuban Santería. In addition, for the Chinese brought to Cuba during the colonial period, the ceiba tree was significant because, for their descendants, it became Sanfancón’s throne.*

By summoning his conversations with Cabeza, Chen Pan, without being aware of it, participates in his first sacral exchange. García affords Chen Pan a safe haven amidst the ceiba trees that are adorned with traces of past Santería rituals such as the “talismans buried amid the roots” (García 38). Yet not only is the tree a staple of the Santería religion, it also will be the future home to Sanfancón, a syncretic deity intricately linked with the sacred crossings produced from the arrival of Chinese indentured laborers to Cuba.

Sanfancón is a syncretization between the Chinese God of War, Kuan Kong, and the Catholic martyr, Santa Bárbara, who in Santería signals Shangó, the African God of War.¹³ Yvette Fuentes traces the origins of the mythical and syncretic figure to the Chinese Han Period (220-280 AD) “when a brotherhood was formed between three legendary ancestors/warriors/philosophers, Lau Pei, Cuan Yu, and Chiong Fei. The three were later joined by a fourth member, Chiu Chi Long. It is Cuan Yu/Kuan Kong, however, who becomes crucial in the formation of the figure of San Fancón” (par. 11). Sanfancón historically appears with the first clan on the island coming to represent Confucian traditions. Sanfancón is only worshipped among Cubans; he is not known in China or among any other Chinese diaspora. This particularity of worship is relevant on dual registers: first, it suggests the presence of past identitarian negotiations that have allowed transnational sensibilities to reside within the same space. Then, concurrently, it is an example of these transnational practices achieving a transformative level which produces an indigenous Cuban product. These types of processes mark a home space for

¹³ While there are multiple spelling variations for Kuan Kong, Shangó, and Sanfancón, I will continue to use these but preserve whatever spelling usage the critic or writer I cite uses in their text. The variations include, Cuan Con(g), Guan Gong, Kuan Kong, Changó and Shangó, as well as San-Fan-Cón, and Sanfancón.

the Chinese-Cuban subject outside diasporic narratives, becoming integral to the Cuban space.

Coupling Chen Pan's memory of Cabeza dubbing him as protected by Shangó and Toral Aleman's allusion to the ceiba tree as Sanfancón's future throne indicates a flexible temporal and sacral space. Ann Game argues that, "Sacred or divine time abolishes time, suspends profane time and duration. The same primordial mythical moment is *now*, eternally now and then, eternity in the now" (233). Game's notion of the mythical moment within the now is useful here because the scene situates Chen Pan in a site of transformation where he is not only negotiating his personal identity, he is simultaneously evoking the Chinese-Cuban deity, Sanfancón. Personally, Chen Pan as maroon does not exist in any one social structure; therefore, he is currently beyond social constructions of linear time. Chen Pan amplifies this sacred quality when he assumes shelter under Sanfancón's throne symbolically bringing into existence the Chinese-Cuban deity.

This temporal nuance is relevant because it allows for a Chinese-Cuban cultural staple to introduce Chen Pan into Cuban society. The scene offers a doubling of syncretism, since just as Chen Pan is constructing a syncretic identity, negotiating what elements of his Chinese culture he will take into Cuban society, Sanfancón is textually brought to be. As a *cimarrón* (maroon), he has not yet had the opportunity to develop his faith and throughout the novel Chen Pan will worship Buddha without mention of Sanfancón. However, Chen Pan's syncretic self and the ceiba tree as an allusion to Sanfancón indicates the future connections between Santería and Chinese mysticism in Cuba. While the intersections of Santería and Chinese mysticism will be picked up in

chapter four's analysis on Mayra Montero's *The Messenger* (1999), this scene depicts an integral part of sacred citizenship, which is knowing who walks with you while simultaneously shattering neat temporal and historical divides. It is remembering Cabeza's teachings that prompt Chen Pan and Sanfancón to walk alongside one another bringing all three moments – Chen Pan's present as maroon, his re-memory of spiritual conversations with Cabeza, and Sanfancón's eternal dimensions that come to be – within sacred time.

Chen Pan's experience as a metaphorical Chinese *cimarrón* (maroon) centers on the physical and sacral land harboring and sustaining him while he negotiates past and present (physical and spiritual) identities. Although I am lifting the term directly from the novel, I use *cimarrón* metaphorically in order to describe Chen Pan's period of moratorium as a moment that links both his time as an indentured laborer and a reflective episode through which he processes his multiple cultural and social selves. It is pertinent to note that due to Chen Pan's racial and cultural position within Cuba and within the contemporary global circuits of labor, he possesses the luxury of claiming a sense of lineage and cultural past that an African slave or *cimarrón* may not be able to. Although it is Cabeza who teaches Chen Pan the value of the ceiba tree, there remains a sense of cultural and familial fragmentation for Cabeza that is not the case for Chen Pan. The term is, hence, significant in emphasizing the influence Chen Pan's time on the plantation has on his constructing a New World identity.

Once alone amidst the Cuban landscape, Chen Pan combats physical and spiritual obstacles by decisively confronting his past:

There was no moon that first night and for many nights afterward, only the mimicking birds, scattering spirits, the trogons hiccupping in the canopy

of trees. The owls were the worst, shrieking at him in Chinese. One owl – tattered and brown and without markings – followed him for nine months. ‘Unfilial son!’ it scolded again and again. Chen Pan concluded that his mother had died and her ghost had come to haunt him – for running away from China, for not sending her money or producing a grandson. He tried to explain to her why he’d left Amoy, that he’d planned to return to their village and make them all rich. But she wouldn’t listen. (García 39)

The details privileged in this passage are an arrangement of mythical iconography associated with the maternal. The maternal presence in this scene is violent and disrupts the gentleness and safety previously associated with the ceiba tree. The moon, a traditional representation of female fertility refuses to guide his path. This blanket of night may seem fortuitous because the lack of illumination may protect Chen Pan from slave catchers; however, the symbolic resonance of no moon and a relentless maternal ghost as represented by the shrieking owl suggests an autonomous rebirth. García introduces Chinese myth surrounding the owl stating, “In China it was said that owl chicks ate their mothers as soon as they were big enough to fly” (40). The fact that the owl follows Chen Pan for nine months does not require further explanation; rather, the owl’s sudden disappearance is of particular interest when thinking of Chen Pan’s rationalization of the myth. After attempting to coax the “owl’s maternal scourge,” Chen Pan thinks the only way to quiet the ghost is to “hunt [the] tormenting bird, cook it, [and] devour it once and for all” (García 41). The thought of consuming the owl symbolizing his mother’s spirit within this exiled space is emblematic of Belinda Edmondson’s discussion of the “matria.” Edmondson states, “If exile...is predicated on the banishment of the writer by patriarchal authority, the place ‘he’ is banished *from*, the native land, the ‘matria,’ is maternalized. Similarly, Freud equated exile from one’s native land with exile from the mother: the nostalgia for the home country is in actuality a nostalgia for the

mother's body" (146). Throughout the passages quoted above, Chen Pan is fighting for physical and psychological survival against banishment re-evoked due to his escape from the canefields. He is also visited, or rather, haunted, by a maternal presence that connotes his present state of alienation but allows him the opportunity to re-imagine himself outside of these historical and cultural constraints. During this time where he comes to terms with the loss of his "matria," Chen Pan establishes an agential cultural "I" by negotiating a psychical identity outside all that his mother represents – inception, life, and homeland. Therefore, establishing his sense of self amidst these social traumas positions Chen Pan as a creative agent of self and change.

Symbolically, Chen Pan would not only ingest his mother's (and motherland's) spirit, he would assume the role as bearer of culture within his new social and political framework. Yet the cannibalistic act is never committed, since the owl disappears before Chen Pan takes any action, suggesting ambivalence with regards to what Chen Pan culturally leaves behind. Furthermore, his mother's spirit may be allegorical for China as Chen Pan symbolically moves away from his motherland (the ancestral space where he was born) and treads onto a foreign land where he will be able to command a new, independent sense of self. China may have been where he was born, but Cuba will be where he becomes an individual. Chen Pan's mother will be with him, and therefore, China will be alongside him, yet Chen Pan will dictate their level of involvement within his new social existence. While this rhetoric borrows from nationalistic discourse, it is pertinent to tease out the transnational components of Chen Pan's New World identity. Chen Pan, as the cultural transnational hybrid in the making, begins amidst the Cuban (ceiba) trees, sustaining himself not with the shrieking owl but with "wild guavas," which

eventually turn his skin “as red-brown as the island earth” (García 41). The next morning he decides he will remain in Cuba as he has confronted his mother’s spirit and has physically incorporated the Cuban landscape.

Chen Pan is transfigured from a Chinese *cimarrón* sustained by the physical landscape to an active social participant within Havana’s public. His present state as a Chinese-Cuban or a Cuban-Chinese – the hyphen is a notion he wrestles with until the end of the novel (and his life).¹⁴ It is worth noting that Chen Pan experiences his share of racial and social prejudice as his success in Cuba brushes up against long-standing social and political stratification. According to Bosniak, “Citizenship, we tend to think, is *hard on the outside and soft on the inside*, with hard edges and soft interior together constituting a complete citizenship package” (4). In the following description, García captures the public’s disapproving gaze stating, “A *chino* like Chen Pan in a white linen suit and a Panama hat was something of a spectacle, like a talking monkey or a sheep in evening dress. Many people glared at him before turning their heads” (García 65). He embodies a social contradiction that prompts his border status. This passage suggests that individuals of Chinese descent should not have access to or dress in such attire. This clothing connotes a social status that some would not wish for Chen Pan. “...The border effectively follows them [Chen Pan] inside” (Bosniak 4). García, however, allows Chen

¹⁴ There is an interesting subset of critical work surrounding García’s *Monkey Hunting* which identifies or at least wrestles with the thought of identifying the novel as part of an Asian American canon. Critics like Jennifer Ann Ho, Stephen Hong Sohn, Paul Lai, Donald C. Goellnicht, and Eric Hung discuss the validity of this gesture in their work; despite, however, varying opinions on the topics, the common thread is usually Chen Pan and his function as a Chinese Diasporic subject. Jennifer Ann Ho argues that “Chen Pan is neither wholly Cuban nor wholly Chinese. Yet simply hyphenating the two—Chinese-Cuban—does not adequately account for the decisions he makes and the identity he creates for himself as one who chooses to fight for Cuban independence during the Ten Years’ War; as one who chooses to love, until his dying day, a woman not of his race; and as one who chooses a country to die in, far from the bones of his ancestors. Chen Pan is, by the end of his life, part of the Chinese diaspora, and his descendants, particularly Domingo, will also become part of the Chinese as well as Cuban diaspora, making Chen Pan’s legacy not only one of globalization but a truly Asian-American lineage, one originating in China but whose lines crisscross the globe, linking to various Asian as well as American locales. (213).

Pan access to respectable social status and facilitates this through Chen Pan's connections with important *criollos* like the Count de Santovenia. Despite the antagonism between the disapproving and the more open-minded *criollos*, like Count de Santovenia, Cuba's Creole population is for the most part silent. Chen Pan's practicing citizenry is not predicated on the disapproving public. Rather, it is presented based on his productions and iterations of belonging through his social contributions like taking weapons to a Chinese commander during Cuba's Ten Year's War and his cross-cultural home with Lucrecia. Therefore, García keeps at bay the *criollos*' social and political influence and lingers over the narrative of particular minority groups. García not only defends their integral position within the Cuban fabric, but also illustrates their turn to the personal and the sacred as a means to counter such political noise.

Chen Pan's purchase of Lucrecia, a mulatto woman kept and abused by her father and rapist, Don Joaquín, prompts Chen Pan's immersion into the Cuban social structure while marking the beginnings of his claimed sacral space.¹⁵ The reader meets Lucrecia, with her son, Víctor Manuel, at Don Joaquín's front door and after a brief exchange, Chen Pan agrees to pay for Lucrecia and her son. Who she is or where she comes from is not prioritized in the conversation; Don Joaquín rather focuses on her labor potential, what she can physically contribute. Emma R. Garcia discusses this scene through the trope of women as representative of the land, stating, "The incestuous rape she endures from her biological father symbolizes the troubled destruction Cuba suffers at the hands of colonizers. Lucrecia comes to represent the land that was invaded and raped by the

¹⁵ Unlike Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) (which I discuss in the following chapter) where the perverse and abusive relationship between Mala Ramchandin and her father Chandin Ramchandin is conveyed in grotesque detail, Lucrecia's experiences with Don Joaquín are episodic glimpses the narrator shares once Lucrecia is far from that reality.

colonizer in order to reap economic benefits...[her father depicts how] natives are objects to be used, abused, and disposed of” (165). Don Joaquín maintains his social encounter with Chen Pan at the level of an economic exchange, advertising Lucrecia as a slave and her son as a future laborer stating, ““You can cancel the milkman with this heifer in your house...In a couple years you could put him to work as well. Then breed his mother with a few young bucks and populate your own plantation!”” (García 67). Don Joaquín’s advertisement not only sells a slave and her son but also the dream that any man can turn his modest home into his own plantation. This ideology, coupled with Lucrecia’s thematic positioning, as Emma R. Garcia argues, presents an archaic notion of race relations which Chen Pan refuses to participate in. Even though Chen Pan initially participates in this discursive exchange, he immediately looks beyond the confines of slavery, ignoring Don Joaquín’s advice and internally debating whether if he “paid her a small salary, would she still be considered a slave?” (García 68). Therefore, even though Chen Pan and Lucrecia’s relationship begins on unequal footing since he acquires her as a commodity, Chen Pan never regards her as such. In fact, from the outset, Chen Pan shares his home with Lucrecia and her son, never expecting more than her contributions as a hired hand in his shop and around the house.

Chen Pan’s relationship with Víctor Manuel, however, is short-lived, as the child whose birthday falls on the Chinese New Year dies soon after, leaving Chen Pan inconsolable.¹⁶ García parallels this moment of personal grief with the Ten Year’s War,

¹⁶ Víctor Manuel’s death marks a rupture in the novel, as he joins the roll call of ghosts that haunt the narrative. Till this point, though, only adults have passed away – Pipo Chen, Domingo Chen’s father who commits suicide and Chen Pan’s mother and aunt whose deaths are never confirmed. At this juncture in the narrative, Chen Pan is sonless; and furthermore, the next two chapters delve into Chen Fang’s and Domingo Chen’s life, both fatherless protagonists, but who, nonetheless, exist because Chen Pan eventually does have children.

constructing Chen Pan as a champion for the nationalist project. On the eleventh day of mourning, Chen Pan purchases machetes and sets out to deliver them to Commander Sian. Although the Ten Year's War (1868-1878) took place a few decades before Cuban independence, it illustrates Chen Pan's inclusion (along with the larger Chinese community) in an emerging national discourse impacting identity construction. Chen Pan is delivering weapons to a Chinese commander fighting a Cuban cause. Kathleen López asserts that "...the Chinese had become part of a discourse of [Cuban] national identity beginning with the founding of the nation. Official ideology...praised them for their role in the wars of independence. The incorporation of the Chinese in forming cross-racial alliances, paved the way for their actual integration into Cuban society" (118). While López states the Chinese involvement within the political arena as part and parcel of their identity construction, her final statement underlining "cross-racial alliances" is sentimentally depicted in the novel through Chen Pan and Lucrecia's romantic relationship. As soon as Chen Pan purchases Lucrecia, he symbolically sets her free from the tyrannical master and slave relationship; however, it is a year after she starts working for Chen Pan that she insists she pay him the seven hundred pesos for her freedom. Feeling there is no other way for her to love him, he accepts, and this final economic exchange between the pair marks their newly negotiated relationship: "He knew she couldn't have loved him otherwise. But instead of leaving, Lucrecia told Chen Pan that if it pleased him, she preferred to stay. It was a Sunday in May when they first made love" (García 131). When Lucrecia purchases her freedom, she discovers an active disposition that sets her present subjectivity apart from her existence as a slave and her life with Don Joaquín; this agential moment conclusively revises her role within the narrative and

legally locates her as a free woman as well as Chen Pan's partner within their intimate and sacred space.

A Destined Alliance: The Politics of Cross-Cultural Intimacy

Chen Pan and Lucrecia's union embeds them within the Cuban social landscape differently as their gender and sexual identities shape their level of political engagement. Yolanda P. Martinez describes Lucrecia as "a figure who serves as an image of the reproducer of the nation when, after losing her first child, she engages in her progenerative capacity with Chen Pan giving birth to a whole generation of 'brown children with Chinese eyes...'" (86). Martinez argues that in order to promulgate the burgeoning Cuban nation Lucrecia is called to the "service of womanhood." Martinez continues, "Lucrecia and Chen Fang's positions as wives and mothers indicate how gender roles are controlled by national myths, but moreover, they emphasize how women, ironically, aid in the construction of the particular mythology and images of the nation according to male and female performances within the national culture" (86). While Lucrecia's identity is indeed wrapped up in her role as mother and hence the progenitor of a racially mixed nation, Martinez simplifies Lucrecia's role to align her with Chen Fang, ignoring Lucrecia's successful breaks with convention. Lucrecia's ambiguous social position within a staunch Catholic colonial Cuba grants her a sense of autonomy within her heteronormative, maternal life, something Chen Fang never experiences.

García fictionalizes colonial Cuba as a restrictive religious space. Although nineteenth century Cuba is considered officially Catholic, other Christian denominations appear competing for potential converts. It is in fact a Protestant missionary who approaches Lucrecia about her relationship with Chen Pan. García states, "They told her

that she was living in sin, that she had to marry Chen Pan to sit right in the eyes of God. One sermon after another. Lucrecia knew that what they said had nothing to do with her” (128). Rather, Lucrecia believes “it was better to mix a little of this and that,” dismissing the established Christian faiths as too rigid (García 129). The spiritual *ajiaco stew* Lucrecia promotes in the lines above reflects the transcultural and sacral experience Lucrecia and Chen Pan create for themselves and their family in their home above the Lucky Find. This intimate space becomes their counterpublic space for positive and productive “nepantlism.” Gloria Anzaldúa introduces the notion of “nepantla” as both an experience and a physical space (235). This notion is intimately linked to *conocimiento* (the process or the instance of knowing and awareness) all the while signaling a space one can turn and return to as it is the space produced between two or more cultures. The Lucky Find depicts such a space of cultural accommodations for spiritual growth. Another significant departure from Chen Fang’s experience as mother is the politics of pleasure available between Chen Pan and Lucrecia. Lucrecia experiences physical pleasure and emotional fulfillment with Chen Pan and, through him and their sacral space, she engenders a sense of rootedness within Chinese myth and within Havana’s bustling *barrio chino*.

The union between Chen Pan and Lucrecia gives material dimension to Fernando Ortiz’s notion of transculturation. Ortiz defines transculturation as the

different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture...but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition, the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation. (102)

In syncretizing facets of their culture, Chen Pan and Lucrecia learn from each other and

together they not only create a “new race,”¹⁷ which is what Martínez attributes to Lucrecia, but more importantly, practice between themselves transculturation.¹⁸ Unlike Ortiz’s theory where the subaltern seems to be the only one affected, as two minority subjects within the Cuban political framework, Lucrecia and Chen Pan enact a dialectical and performative transculturation on equal footing. Their home above the Lucky Find, which connotes a destined alliance, becomes a shared and sacral interior space that allows for fluidity in cultural practice. It is a simple yet serene space, comfortably accommodating both Buddha’s altar with incense as well as a statue of Yemayá with offerings of food (Campilongo 120). Not only does Chen Pan enact Cubanness, Lucrecia appropriates a Chinese identity, both practicing what Kamau Brathwaite labels as “intercultural.”¹⁹ Further, the notion of the “new race” is significant only because it demands a new engagement with cultural and ethnic authenticity and authority. While Martínez mentions this solely to discuss Lucrecia’s call to motherhood, their child, Lorenzo Chen, is an industrious Cuban citizen and a direct product of the ‘uncontainability’ of hybridity Caminero-Santangelo suggests is not available in the text.²⁰

¹⁷ Bénéitez-Rojo mentions the emergence of a new race stating that “In Cuba, for example, the contract laborers came from the south of China, and they eventually made up 3 percent of the population by the second half of the nineteenth century... Very quickly, Havana had a notable Chinese quarter, with its theaters, restaurants, and traditional shops, and its cultural influence was quickly seen in cooking, pharmacology, music, local language, and a gambling scheme called *la charade china* that competed with the official lottery. But, above all, an unforeseen racial type began to grow up in Cuba: *el mulato chino*” (200).

¹⁸ Here I am suggesting that while race is a marker of difference inextricably connected and defined by Cuba’s colonial history – apparent in the scenes between Chen Pan and Cabeza de Piña on the plantation – identity formation, on the other hand, becomes a manner in which García can blur the lines of race relations. By sharing cultural practices, Chen Pan and Lucrecia do ultimately alter racial constructs. As Ortiz alluding to Malinowski maintains, “. . . the result of every union of culture is similar to that of the reproductive process between individuals: the offspring always has something of both parents but is always different from each of them” (103).

¹⁹ Brathwaite defines the notion of interculturalism as a “more reciprocal activity, a process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each” (11).

In order to appreciate Lucrecia's cultural and social transformation beyond the maternal, it is pertinent to mention that at the moment of her integration and inter-subjective belonging, the narrator divulges Lucrecia's dark past. Up to this point in the novel, García does not delve into Lucrecia's origins as the reader only knows that her father is the same creole who repeatedly rapes her. His prior victim was her mother. Considering herself fortunate for her life with Chen Pan, she considers that "her mother hadn't been as fortunate. She'd died from yellow fever-black vomit for days, a stench Lucrecia could still smell" (García 133). This moment of compassion and love for her mother mixed with revulsion grants Lucrecia the space to recollect her own abuses at the hand of Don Joaquín. Noticing one day her striking physical similarities to Don Joaquín, Lucrecia once "dared to call him Papá, Don Joaquín choked her so hard she stopped breathing... 'Say that again and I'll grind up your bones and sell you as pig feed' ... From then on, the master made her keep her eyes open when he did it, made her watch his beastly face" (García 134). This scene incites competing emotional reactions for Lucrecia's past and present selves. It first indicates the foreclosure of any sort of familial connection Lucrecia may have after her mother passes. Her father, who within the same passage is then decidedly referred to as "master," physically and sexually, tarnishes her first domestic space as well as their biological connection. This scene also marks the profound difference in her previous existence as chattel from her present state of agency and individuality.

²⁰ Caminero-Santangelo states, "It is notable that, in the novel, it is the cities that are the primary sites for the production as well as the containment of hybridity. (The 'deceptive capital' is deceptive not only in that ethnic 'others' seem to do relatively well there – as in Casal's account – but also in that the appearance of complete tolerance for hybridity is frequently illusory.)" (105).

The disturbing recollections indirectly lead to Lucrecia's cultural Chinese identity, as it is her refusal of her phenotypical characteristics that prompts her integration into Chinese culture. Despite Lucrecia's violent and abusive past, she is now most certain of her cultural transformation: "Sometimes Lucrecia questioned the origin of her birth, but she didn't question who she'd become. Her name was Lucrecia Chen.²¹ She was thirty-six years old and the wife of Chen Pan, mother of his children. She was Chinese in her liver, Chinese in her heart" (García 138). Lucrecia creates her own myth archive by becoming Chinese through specific bodily organs: her liver and her heart, two organs responsible for the purification and transformation of blood and other bodily fluids which maintain good health. Moreover, they are also two organs that distance her from her physical similarities to Don Joaquín; therefore, she is Chinese in her heart and liver because she rejects her physical likeness to her creole father. This physical rejection empowers her in relation to both her African ancestry and now her Chinese cultural identity. This new syncretic identity allows Lucrecia to rid herself of the creole toxins abounding when she lived with Don Joaquín.

This affirmation does not lessen her performative and biological connection to her African cultural ancestry. Even though Lucrecia adopts Chineseness as her cultural identity, she nevertheless incorporates the African and Afro-Cuban practices her mother instilled in her. She teaches her children with Chen Pan some Abakuá.²² She also passes

²¹ Lucrecia's affirmation of self is in her self-naming, she is renouncing her prior identity of an abused slave. Her life with Don Joaquín is violently marked by her body: "[Chen Pan] He took notice of the girl's feet, wide with calluses an inch thick... She was long-legged and wide-hipped and had a star-shaped scar on her temple" (García 67). She was all but stripped of her femininity, except for the assurance that she could breed and 'populate a plantation.' In this section where she is naming her self Chinese, she calls attention to bodily parts that were not appreciated or even recognized by Don Joaquín.

²² The Cuban Abakuá society was founded in the 1830s and derives from the Cross River region of southeastern Nigeria and southwestern Cameroon. Contemporary Afro-Cuban scholars like Ivor Miller and Teresa Maria Velez have focused on tracing and translating Abakuá chants as a way to potentially

down her enduring praise and devotion to Yemayá. The statue of Yemayá is one of the cultural and sacral fixtures of Chen Pan and Lucrecia's home above the Lucky Find. Her devotion is deep rooted as the narrator explains how, when Lucrecia was younger, her mother would dress her in blue and white and "they'd take offerings to the beach on Sundays, coconut balls or fried pork rinds when she could make them," historicizing her devotion to Yemayá and her intimate connection to Afro-Cuban practices (García 127).²³

Chen Pan and Lucrecia possess opportunities for constructing a voluntary identity because of their sacred space. These two protagonists attain enough access within social and political circles to live their lives and perform their identities with peaceful integrity. By positioning these protagonists as actively managing their senses of selves, their successes gesture towards a revision of Cuban history. From this point on, Chen Pan and his family become representative of a Cuban ethos which at times is savored and at other times painfully absent. In aligning Víctor Manuel's death with the Ten Year's War, and then granting Lucrecia a rite of passage into a Chinese cultural identity, positive aspects of nationalist and transnationalist discourse are utilized in order to privilege the Chinese marginal identity in defining an emerging independent Cuban identity.

While I will link Agamben's argument on the unrealized but nonetheless available potential to Domingo Chen and Chen Fang, this notion can also be applied to the role of

"reevaluate the extent to which African identity and culture were transmitted during the trans-Atlantic diaspora" (Miller 23). Since García's project is constructing space for the Cuban-Chinese, the incorporation of Abakuá is evidence to her awareness of and sensibility to the African presence within Cuban history and popular culture. Further, Lucrecia is the conduit through which this legacy is passed to the Chinese-Cuban subjects of the novel.

²³ Lucrecia's appropriation of her Chinese cultural identity should not be read as her turning away from her African ancestry; however, it is pertinent to note that it is through her relationship with Chen Pan and her adoption of a Chinese cultural identity that she forges an independent self. In "'A Whole New Race': Chinese Cubans and Hybrid Identities in Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*" Alfonso-Forero argues that Lucrecia's "marriage to Chen Pan allows her access to another culture, and her adoption of the Cuban-Chinese way of life provides for healing through self-definition. Her active construction of identity provides an opportunity to assert her agency" (par. 4).

the Lucky Find within socio-political Cuban circles. The optimism available within the Lucky Find reflects a counterpublic that allows Chen Pan and Lucrecia space to form their identities despite the intolerant creole voice that, while almost silent, does interject with disapproving comments. Warner discusses the availability of identity formation within counterpublics, stating, “The subordinate status of a counterpublic does not simply reflect identities formed elsewhere; participation in such a public is one way by which its members’ identities are formed and transformed. A hierarchy or stigma is the assumed background of practice” (121). Their cross-cultural spiritual refuge also resembles Édouard Glissant’s notion of the Caribbean identity as a constantly shifting, ever-evolving, “limitless *métissage*” (34). Glissant categorizes identity as a continuous process where individual acceptance can precede collective recognition, stating that “identity will be achieved when communities attempt to legitimate their right to possession of a territory through myth or the revealed word. Such an assertion can predate its actual accomplishment by quite some time” (13). I consider the Lucky Find a sacred, microcosmic space where identity processes and inter-subjective belonging precedes social and political cohesion. García does indeed introduce this political (public) and private (counterpublic) discrepancy when focusing on Chen Pan’s mode of conduct “as something of a spectacle [to the larger Cuban society], like a talking monkey or a sheep in evening dress” (García 65). Nevertheless, ignoring the at times malevolent creole population is critical to maneuvering around these tensions in order to arrive at a larger principle of coexistence that allows Chen Pan and Lucrecia to eventually claim a sense of self outside their multiple oppressions.

With Domingo Chen and Chen Fang, the notion of sacred citizenship as an opportunity for self-making identity demands revision. While Chen Pan and Lucrecia enact sacred citizenship that facilitates reading national and transnational networks as coalitional, Domingo Chen and Chen Fang cannot coalesce their multiple private and public selves in a productive fashion. Chen Pan's scenes as a *cimarrón* and his relationship to Lucrecia and their home prompt multiple cultural and sacral border crossings for them that cast national and global boundaries as always fluid but nonetheless available for direct engagement. It is only when Chen Pan and Lucrecia prompt these engagements themselves that they occur. For instance, Lucrecia claiming a Chinese identity is due to her gradually embracing her husband's cultural beliefs and then her proclaiming it for her self. Both Lucrecia and Chen Pan are emblematic of the *ajiaco*-like take a little of this and of that stance in order to produce something different but unique for their alliance. Domingo Chen and Chen Fang require a revision to notions of sacred belonging since these protagonists do not represent the realized peace and sense of self Chen Pan and Lucrecia depict. Domingo Chen and Chen Fang are bombarded with discriminatory boundaries but cannot return to the personal to negotiate their self. The sacred elements that surround them prove insufficient for self-making awareness, yet their potentiality remains. Their bodies are, thus, the ultimate source for sacred citizenship, and it is through their corporeality that they practice, albeit ephemeral, sacred belonging.

Chen Pan and Lucrecia's rootedness and symbiotic union prompts a fulfilling relationship with each other as well as with the social Cuban landscape; their great-great-grandson, Domingo Chen, on the other hand, is a wandering soul whose perpetual

physical and psychic movements foreclose his access to practicing a successful sense of self. While Chen Pan and Lucrecia assume a fluid engagement with nationalist and transnationalist discourses, Domingo Chen's unwavering essentialist quest for identity sets him up for a life of aimless travels. But his tragedy is not just feeling perpetually othered, it is also not realizing his sacral connection to othered bodies in order to practice inter-subjective possession. Antonio Bénitez-Rojo claims that the fruitless search for origins is a common condition for the Caribbean body:²⁴

Every Caribbean person, after an attempt has been made to reach his culture's origins, will find himself on a deserted beach, naked and alone, coming out of the water as though shivering and shipwrecked... without any identification papers other than the uncertain and turbulent memorandum inscribed in his scars, tattoos, and skin color. Finally, every person of the Caribbean is in exile from his own myth and his own history, and also from his own culture and his own Being, now and always, in the world. (217)

Throughout the text, Domingo is in perpetual exile – he is exiled from his mother in Cuba,²⁵ his culture, his homeland, and at times his self. Domingo represents Bénitez-Rojo's concept of claiming the Caribbean space as an exilic region altogether, which interestingly enough is opposite of the golden exile logic purported in Miami Cuban discourse; while Bénitez-Rojo is describing bodies physically inhabiting the Caribbean, I would extend this concept to exiled and nostalgic persons like Domingo Chen. His body

²⁴ While Lucrecia and Chen Pan actively engage with and confront their origins, Domingo Chen never overcomes the life-changes that destabilize his sense of self, leading him to blame his origins for his destitution.

²⁵ Domingo Chen's mother becomes a passionate and loyal revolutionary. She even testifies against her husband when he is charged with "anti-revolutionary activities" (García 112). The family unit is shattered and mother is pit against father and son. This scene is similar to Chen Pan's *cimarrón* episode as mother and homeland is once again juxtaposed. Domingo not only leaves his mother behind, he aligns himself with his father and simultaneously abandons his home space. Moreover, I believe his emotional and psychological exile is further compounded by his father's untimely death. His father's suicide occurs about a year before his deployment to Vietnam (1969).

may be outside Cuba, but his personal and historical myths seem to be locked within an unattainable Cuba which resides perpetually elsewhere from his immediate surroundings.

There is an interesting connection between Domingo Chen and his great-great-grandfather, Chen Pan, as they both negotiate their identities in relation to a procession of ghosts. However, Chen Pan's moratorium period as a Chinese *cimarrón* allows him physical and spiritual time to excise the cultural ghosts that would not follow him to Cuba (or rather would not follow him beyond the Cuban plantation and into Cuban society).²⁶ The novel does not afford Domingo Chen this time and, he is constantly haunted by a roll call of past and even future ghosts. Rather, his engagement with the sacred is not a self-enriching experience but a haunting. Instead of spirits inspiring Domingo Chen's migrations, he feels fragmented and loses himself. In his interview with Cristina García, Scott Shibuya Brown asks whether Domingo should be characterized as a "lost soul." García claims an in-between space for Domingo not much dissimilar from that of Chen Pan's. She states, "Domingo is a twenty-first-century man in the twentieth century...compounded identities such as his were still uncommon. His confusion is further complicated by his moving from Cuba to New York and then to Vietnam in a few short years. He really doesn't know who he is or where he belongs" (263). Sacred citizenship, which prioritizes an active sense of constructing belonging through transpersonal and cross-cultural connections across temporal and physical divides, does not grant Domingo Chen the sense of self he is searching. His detriment is that throughout his travels he continues to ask others who *they* think he is or tries to answer

²⁶ While Chen Pan is in fact physically in Cuba, his indentureship echoes the social death endured by slaves, which is the labor force he is there to replace. The lack of connection or even participation in 'society' alludes to Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* (1982) where he defines "social death" as a non-existent identity where emotional and psychological indoctrination alienates the slaves from the society at large.

himself by compartmentalizing his self. Domingo constantly shifts identity; he is Cuban to a girl at a New York bar, but just a few years later he is an American fighting in Vietnam. His sense of cultural erasure and identity fragmentation are not solely his fault. The expectations of who he is and how he should perform identity throughout his travels exacerbate his seemingly unconquerable circumstances. When discussing citizenship as a collective act through the notion of the transindividual, Balibar captures this tension of claiming self while others read and categorize you stating, "...each of us is confronted with the same problem: how to proceed in order to orient oneself – to 'find oneself' – among one's multiple personalities, with the help of others (who can be *abstract or ideal others*: memories, stories, symbols of institutional emblems, 'maps' in the most general sense of the term)" (26). Since more often than not, Domingo Chen externalizes the *who he is* question, he cripples his opportunities for coalitional belonging. He is not actively seeking to answer the identity question through internal psychic negotiations; rather, he asks multiple individuals, usually strangers, who they think he is or should be, granting the external world agency to make and re-make his identity. However, bringing together the politics of potentiality with sacred citizenship allows for a deferred sense of optimism. While Domingo Chen is not able to find a stable sacred space like the Lucky Find for Chen Pan and Lucrecia, he nonetheless possesses moments of sacral connections with others that depict his unrealized potential for intimate and social belonging and acknowledgement.

Domingo Chen's inability to articulate an identity is magnified when fighting in Vietnam, yet his sacred sensibilities are also highlighted as he is positioned within intellectual and spiritual crossings of being and understanding. His time as an 'American'

soldier in Vietnam is quite compelling as he locates the Other (the enemy) within the self. García writes, “His biggest fear was that in the heat of a firefight, his fellow soldiers would mistake him for a Viet Cong and shoot him dead. Enough of them were suspicious of him to begin with. With his heavy accent and brown skin, how could he be American?” (107). Physical attributes are a great source of anxiety for Domingo Chen. His features serve as markers of difference for his fellow Americans; thus, not only does Domingo Chen endure an internal otherness, he is also socially othered due to the other soldiers’ prejudice. His appropriation of the other within the self evokes and simultaneously revises Glissant’s argument regarding the interdependence between the manner in which the subject reads oneself and then how that subject reads other bodies. Glissant states,

The duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner) has repercussions on one’s idea of the Other (one is visitor or visited; one goes or stays; one conquers or is conquered). Thought of the Other cannot escape its own dualism until the time when differences become acknowledged. From that point on thought of the Other ‘comprehends’ multiplicity, but mechanically and still taking the subtle hierarchies of a generalizing universal as its basis. (17)

Glissant first problematizes the duality between self and other by calling attention to the constant of difference between and among subjects. Embedded in this argument is one of the enduring points of *Poetics of Relation*, where multiple representations of difference and otherness exist in relation and not in isolation. Glissant thus admonishes social hierarchies, calling attention to their detrimental socio-political influence established during the colonial contest and persisting into our contemporary moment. Glissant maintains that *acknowledging difference* is not enough to do away with the dualism present in the politics of otherness, as one can read an other’s difference and still not

accept their otherness or believe their difference continues to be “harmful” to them (Glissant 17). This ideological standstill is where the reader finds Domingo Chen.

Domingo Chen is othered among the American soldiers, whereby they acknowledge his difference but do not accept it. He is, on the other hand, tenuously a political subject to the othered Vietnamese he encounters and is fighting. Therefore, Domingo Chen is trapped in an interstitial and dynamic space Glissant does not necessarily account for. Domingo Chen does, however, have the potential to perform the controlled act of empathy Glissant points to, as Glissant claims that if one takes “up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself” (18).

Domingo practices an empathetic sensibility with the Vietnamese as a product of his own otherness. At one point, Domingo considers the enemy and pretends he could communicate with them: “Domingo...imagined them [the enemy] speaking to him in Spanish, fast and with a Cuban accent, hardly an ‘s’ every hundred words” (García 116). Through these conversations Domingo Chen learns of the costs and residue of warfare explaining that “They would tell him things – like how the wildflowers in Vietnam had changed colors from one spring to the next or how the river fish were bloating pink with chemicals, the hills wearied to nothing by napalm” (García 116). Domingo’s psychic connection reflects a sense of political nuance regarding the other Glissant speaks to; however, it does not necessarily afford Domingo with an understanding of self he is seeking.

Domingo’s capacity for regarding the other without fully processing the self presents the sacred sensibility Alexander advocates as well as its opportunity for assessing one’s position within personal, communal, and global spaces. Glissant’s poetics

of understanding limit my argument here as he unequivocally argues that a “dialectic of totality,” the construction of wholeness, is impossible to practice. Alexander, however, utilizes sacred citizenship as a means to practice wholeness through multiple alliances nurtured by accepting and engaging in inter-subjective belonging. Therefore, I share Alexander’s argument whereby successful sacral belonging is practiced through maintaining the contradictory point of practicing wholeness by sharing psychic, emotional, and sacral spaces. Due to Domingo’s otherness, he enters into an imaginary emotional and psychological shared space with the Vietnamese, combating the damaging isolationism related in forging and observing social, political, and ideological boundaries which are dominant during warfare. Alexander states,

How many enemies can we internalize and still expect to remain whole? And while dispossession and betrayal provide powerful grounds from which to stage political mobilizations, they are not sufficiently expansive to the task of becoming more fully human. I do not mean here the sort of partial, contingent humanism...but rather one that dares to cultivate a moral imagination that encompasses the full, unromanticized dimensions of human experience. (17)

Domingo’s non-verbal communication with the Vietnamese enables him to practice an emotional and psychological connection exposing the unutterable experience within a war zone as well as its “secret history.”²⁷ In communicating with the Vietnamese not only about personal experience but the macro effects of warfare, Domingo Chen taps into a “moral imagination” that grants him the insight to adjust his conception of otherness from *the* other to *an* other. This moment of refocus allows me to stage an interesting

²⁷Michael Herr’s *Dispatches* (1977) is a painstakingly vivid and candid portrayal of the Vietnam War. Herr’s account is compelling precisely because it resists adhering to a coherent narrative; it also refuses to adhere to any one strand of history. Gordon O. Taylor remarks on Herr’s portrayal of a “secret history” – a term Herr uses in his text in order to delineate between immediate experiences and prepackaged versions of experience. Through this definition, Herr opens up the manners of historical reception; Taylor states, “...secret history is also to be researched through self-encounters enforced, in landscape of the mind, by the environments of war” (126). Herr prioritizes the “landscape of the mind” by engaging a language through dreams and creating meaning from the senseless and the horrific, that which ruptures meaning.

intertextual moment between Glissant and Alexander. Alexander begins the statement above by proposing a politically weighted question: “How many enemies can we internalize and still expect to remain whole?” Implicit in my understanding of this rhetorical question is the conflation of other and enemies especially within the rhetoric of warfare, which is the discourse Domingo Chen is currently operating under. By borrowing Glissant’s process of deconstructing the dualistic nature of otherness, Domingo Chen can view his otherness and others as coexisting on an unthreatening spectrum of difference. Thus, this sensibility is reflective of the politics of sacred citizenship because it is not aligned with any one body politic or political society; an organized political community that tells him or anyone who the enemy/ies is/are.

Domingo’s insight is problematized in the section “Traveling through the Flesh,” where Domingo has the opportunity to rebuild his relationship among mind, body, and spirit as he engages in an erotic and loving relationship with Tham Thanh Lan, a prostitute in Vietnam: “Domingo burrowed his face deep between Tham Thanh Lan’s legs, breathed in her sorrows, longed for forgiveness himself” (García 162). After their intimate moment he exalts his body as an archive of self-knowledge: “The body, he suspected, stored everything in its flesh. The sun-warmed spots of his childhood bed. The palms along Parque Martí postponing dusk. His Tío Eutemio had told him once that every person carried the scars of each year in his body like a thick-trunked tree” (García 162). After this revelation he takes charge and while Tham Thanh Lan slumbers, he recognizes their union and claims she will not be “returning to work.” Tham Thanh Lan’s sudden and almost mythical pregnancy, however, becomes all too realistic for Domingo who sees no other option but to run away and desert Tham Thanh Lan and his unborn

child. Just before his departure, Domingo loses his body as he “watched himself watching Tham Thanh Lan from a distance, like a ghost on the other side of a riverbank” (García 218). Domingo Chen leaves Tham Thanh Lan filled with sex and no longer a prominent prostitute but a penniless mother to be. Domingo exits the stage as a void – a bodiless entity, a wandering soul.²⁸

It is in an incompatible and dichotomous fashion that Domingo Chen is able to transform an anonymously violent scene during combat and populate it with intimacy and compassion while simultaneously rejecting his romantic partner in such a delicate state. In abandoning her, Domingo Chen manifests a selfish mode of survival which I concede can call into question his empathetic and personal affect while at war;²⁹ however, by refusing to conflate these competing temperaments one can view his actions while in combat as a moment of sacral connection while his potential for the same with Tham Thanh Lan is frustrated by self-serving pursuits. The latter reaction forecloses his opportunities for constructing an inter-subjective sense of reciprocity with Tham Thanh Lan, that which Chen Pan and Lucrecia successfully establish for themselves generations

²⁸ In Jamaican author, Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), there is a protagonist named Bobby who after fighting in Vietnam suffers an injury on his ankle that despite his best efforts does not heal. His physical and psychological wounds are marked on his body similar to how Domingo Chen’s perpetual otherness continues to haunt him. What is most striking is that like Domingo, Bobby very suddenly disappears altogether as if he evaporated in thin air.

²⁹ Domingo further problematizes his perpetual “in-between” when he discursively summons his great-great-grandfather. As he questions Chen Pan’s decisions, Domingo Chen harps on Chen Pan’s legacy, foregrounding his own self-conscious anxieties. García states, “Domingo wondered about these migrations, these cross-cultural lusts. Were people meant to travel such distances? Mix with others so different from themselves? His great-great-grandfather had left China more than a hundred years ago, penniless and alone. Then he’d fallen in love with a slave girl and created a whole new race – brown children with Chinese eyes who speak Spanish and a smattering of Abakuá. His first family never saw him again” (209). Domingo Chen prioritizes Chen Pan’s decisions that directly affect him. For instance, the “cross-cultural lusts” is an emotion he has already succumbed to, and he too is about to desert his “first family.” This textual moment conflates Domingo Chen’s behavior with Chen Pan’s history; however, the manner of reportage is neither blaming nor excusing either protagonist. The current tragedy in Domingo Chen’s scenes lies in the consumption and irrevocable exploitation of Tham Thanh Lan’s body as well as his inability to acknowledge his accountability within the present moment.

back. The detail of him losing his body concretizes his self-sabotaging actions as it was through the body that Domingo Chen's belonging was possible.

Despite the tragedy surrounding Domingo Chen's inability to create self and selfhood, he decides his life course and chooses to abandon Tham Thanh Lan and his unborn child. Tham Thanh Lan, on the other hand, functions as a one-dimensional character that is more a representation of the social conditions and dilemmas facing oppressed third world women than a concrete multi-dimensional protagonist. Therefore, unlike Lucrecia, Tham Thanh Lan is too minor of a character to allot any time for narrative reflection; however, politically her predicament represents the underlying sexual exploitation available within uneven transnational contact zones like warfare. Her consumption and exploitation should, nevertheless, be read differently than that of Lucrecia's, as Lucrecia, once free from the shackles of slavery, assumes an agential position and is granted voice within the narrative. Tham Thanh Lan does, on the other hand, serve to rebuke Domingo Chen's self proclaimed victimhood. Although Domingo possesses a sensibility for the anonymous victimized other, he is blind to the harm he causes Tham Thanh Lan, an embodied other. Domingo, thus, never practices belonging and sustained intimacy because he is painstakingly unaware of his impact on *(an)other*. His narrative trajectory sheds light on the notions of practicing accountability and one's necessary awareness of the ethical footprints etched regardless of one's position within local and global circles. Domingo laments his disadvantaged position throughout his life but this never impedes him from harming and exploiting Tham Thanh Lan.

The Unhomeliness of Body

Contrary to Tham Thanh Lan, who García portrays as an extension of Domingo Chen and does not provide her with any reflective introspection, Chen Fang, Chen Pan's granddaughter, is the only protagonist to communicate in first person. Despite Chen Fang's relentless efforts to practice belonging and claim self, political forces beyond her control keep Chen Fang perpetually subordinated. Chen Fang does, however, practice ephemeral flashes of belonging and erotic autonomy. Yet, as the most central female protagonist that is constructed through the language of sex and gender above racial and cultural concerns, her narrative arc is concentrated on her navigating oppressive social regimes that eventually lead to her total erasure from her social and political landscape in China.

While Lucrecia and Chen Pan create a sacred space and, through their family, build a familial legacy, Chen Fang is an alienated and isolated individual even though she bears a son. Her alienation is somewhat different from Domingo Chen because he chooses his travels and decides to desert his new family. Chen Fang, on the other hand, is forced out of multiple intimate, familial collectives, like when she is asked to abandon her son or when her lover, Dauphine leaves suddenly. Chen Fang's first person claim to the narrative is a critical part to her attaining a sacred self and practicing sacred citizenship. Her monologues on her fantasy of living in Cuba and meeting family, her teaching Modern Languages at a Chinese Institution pre-Cultural Revolution, and her reading and re-reading her father's letters on Cuba all position language as her vehicle through which she affirms and extends her self. These modes of language as confirmation of self allow her to exist beyond her physical confinement in a Chinese prison, where she

is put for dissident behavior against the Cultural Revolution. Language of herself and words as traces of others allow her a claim to larger familial and social networks.

Although her Cuban family does not know her predicament, she is confident she can belong with them; Cuba then becomes her idealized elsewhere. It is the potentiality of that elsewhere, of who she could be within that elsewhere, that keeps her spirit intact. Agamben's notion of potentiality here functions as a deferred, unrealized experience, which Chen Fang revises through her perpetual imaginaries. She manifests potentiality with every dream of Cuba as an available space for her. On the surface, Chen Fang is undoubtedly a tragic figure; however, her ephemeral moments of erotic autonomy along with her first person narrative and active memory of a past and future she reconstructs casts her as a vulnerable but nonetheless sacred individual actively seeking belonging.

Chen Fang's life begins in Shanghai in 1924, and as the third daughter, Chen Fang's birth means, according to her mother, bad luck. Her mother therefore raises Chen Fang as a boy in order to secure her father's remittances from Cuba. Since Chen Fang practices coerced childhood transvestism, she never really negotiates an autonomous gendered subjectivity. Hence, García's use of first person during Chen Fang's childhood is a tenuous and vulnerable performance as every time Chen Fang uses the personal "I," the reader cannot be sure who or what she is claiming. Moreover, she is first placed within the male cultural domain, but then is stripped of that culturally privileged category and expected to not only be a woman but a wife and mother. Her rank and role within the constitutive constraints governing her social experience is a devolutionary process whereby she is first granted subjectivity but subsequently marginalized until ultimately cast by the Chinese Cultural Revolution as an unintelligible abject body.

Chen Fang's public displacement from her sex and assumed gender performance is at first a liberating experience for her: "Mother dressed me as a boy, treated me as a boy...She did not bind my feet...I did not help in the kitchen. I did not learn how to sew" (García 90). And when her father, Lorenzo Chen, pledges to pay for ten more years of schooling, Chen Fang is prepared to perform ten more years of masculinity. García states, "[At the boarding school,] It was not easy to disguise my sex. I kept my hair cropped short and affected a gruff manner, but my hands and neck were too delicate for a boy. My size helped. I was a head taller than most of the other students and I was not afraid to fight" (92). In this moment, Chen Fang articulates the markers of gender, or rather the characteristics and features she must monitor in order to continue to pass as male. The time lapse along with the series of voluntary and involuntary actions alluded to in this scene echoes Butler's definition of gender when she argues that gender is "...the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (45). Butler utilizes this definition to explain the public and cultural practice of gender within heteronormative spaces. Chen Fang's repeated performances support Butler's secondary comment regarding how easily this model is disrupted. Chen Fang's series of performances both within her village as well as at the academy really polish her public gender persona. Her transvestism distances sex from gender, positioning gender as a politics of performance. She does, however, disrupt this neat prescription due to her repeating her maleness but not progressively identifying with the gender publically assigned; hence, Chen Fang's passing³⁰ allows her short term benefits, but negates the

³⁰ The term "passing" is a weighted and complex term as it not only upholds but also subverts gender construction. Elaine Ginsberg states, "passing is about identities: their creation or imposition, their adoption

possibility of a personal identity. Socially she is successful, but personally her repetition does not grant her the feeling of naturalness the model normatively offers. Her long-standing performance forecloses any sense of belonging because she is performing for others and not ever reflecting on her needs. This stage in Chen Fang's life echoes Domingo Chen's quest for an essentialist identity where he would externalize his self and ask others to define him rather than personally coming to terms with his identity to then perform a public self. Chen Fang's childhood transvestism does not yet allow her to engage in sacred citizenship as she performs her personal identity solely for and within the public sphere. During this time, Chen Fang never returns to the intimate and the personal to reflect on who she is within and beyond her sartorial construct.

Further, in her discussion of cross-dressing, Butler addresses this incongruous relationship between a gender practiced and a personal identity stating that "The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance" (187). Once Chen Fang leaves the village, she exits the space of mutual silence and acceptance, and her cross-dressing, and thus passing as male, is subsequently tested and hence in a *Butleresque* manner is potentially subversive. Yet García doesn't really delve into Chan Fang's experiences outside her village, but rather focuses on Chen Fang's inability to congeal her anatomical sex and gender performance with a gender identity.

or rejection...Passing is also about the boundaries established between identity categories and about the individual and cultural anxieties produced by boundary crossing. Finally, passing is about specularly: the visible and the invisible..." (qtd. in Walker 8).

The “three dimensions” Butler points to, along with Chen Fang’s external persona, are irrevocably destabilized with Chen Fang’s visit to a brothel in Canton. During her time at the boy’s academy, Professor Hou takes twelve students to Canton “to see the opera and visit historical sites” (García 93). Yet, it is a physical education the boys experience when they frequent a brothel: “One by one, my classmates were escorted into the same squalid room. It was big enough for a bedroll and a tray of steaming tea. No one remained inside longer than a few minutes. Each boy pretended to be more pleased than confused when he came out” (García 93). It is interesting to note that Chen Fang describes the inside of the room prior to entering herself, threatening the first person perspective which foreshadows her disruption of “gender uniformity.” Once she enters the room, she immediately claims a female identity. The prostitute asks her who she is and she answers: “‘A girl,’ ... ‘Please tell no one’” (García 94). She explains her ruse and claims it is the only way she can go to school. The prostitute, who is a young girl herself, then tells her to stay a while in order for her fellow classmates to think that she has shed her boyhood and become a man.

The understanding between Chen Fang and the prostitute is based on commonality rather than difference. Chen Fang is astounded when she realizes the prostitute is no older than she is: “When it was my turn, I was astonished to see the bare, slender back of a girl no older than me... Her eyes were smeared black, her lips smudged the color of sunset. Even in the distorting shadows of the room, I found her beautiful” (García 93). The prostitute is wearing excessive makeup as if performing a role herself. They seem to understand each other as well as each other’s circumstances and sacrifices in order to keep up appearances. Moreover, Chen Fang’s physical excitement when

touching the prostitute's breasts is a manner of self-discovery. Through the body, she is able to locate pleasure for the first time. In a candid and jubilant scene García describes how the young girl "took my [Chen Fang's] hand and rubbed it against her breasts. I felt a jolt go through me. Then she touched me between my thighs" (94). This scene marks her experience with the spiritual and emotional terrains of the sacred as Chen Fang not only finds common ground with the prostitute, the persona which at first glance is least like her, she also touches upon the living materiality of her body. Her arousal when the prostitute touches her skin reinvests her body with renewed possibilities for physical, psychic, and emotional relations. This experience becomes a symbolic stripping away of all the guises she has until now hidden behind. She is returning to the personal through her body as she begins to practice an unadulterated self where her body becomes her sacred space.

Chen Fang's initial experience of primordial passion is nevertheless laden with uneven gender implications that seem to reinscribe the masculinist hierarchy present throughout the novel; however, closer analysis suggests that both Chen Fang and the young girl are subjects, mere pawns, within a social order that casts both bodies as marginal and therefore subjected to second class status. At a cursory glance, I concede that Chen Fang enters this male-dominated space through the veils of masculinity. Yet, she immediately denounces such sartorial constructs and proclaims to be "a girl." Chen Fang further establishes her *being* a girl when she aligns herself with the prostitute describing her surprise to be in the presence of "a girl no older than me" (García 93). Therefore, they perform their sensual experience on a more equitable level than that which Chen Fang's masculine garb connotes. Having said this, the profound difference

lies in Chen Fang's anxious and expectant classmates just outside the door. After their personal moment which was consensual and I would argue intimate, the nameless girl returns to being sexually exploited. This scene marks a frustrated cross-cultural space where otherness remains. While both Chen Fang and the prostitute engage in a physical and psychical connection, their public lives frustrate this moment of mutual recognition between two othered subjects.

Immediately after this experience, Chen Fang's circumstances drastically alter when her mother writes that her father is no longer able to send money due to a "war in the West" (García 95). This becomes the first blatant indication of political forces beyond her control that most profoundly affect her life. Chen Fang's family now expects her to quit school and marry. Therefore, the boy that became man will now have to become woman, wife, and mother. Chen Fang confesses to the reader that being a woman is a difficult task. García toys with the terms "being" and "pretending" when she writes: "This I must say directly. There is no harder work than being a woman. I know this because I pretended to be a boy for so long. This is what men do: pretend to be men, hide their weaknesses at all costs. A man would sooner kill or die himself than suffer embarrassment. For women, there are no such blustering, only work" (García 96). Through Chen Fang, García sheds light on standards of gender performance across gender identities. Even men are pretending to be men, locating the impossibility of gender as anything but a performance for both heteronormative and non-heteronormative identities.

Chen Fang's life as a conventional woman with a husband and child does not last long. Her whole life encompasses about three chapters; however, García sums up her

experiences as a wife and mother in about three pages. Due to a prophecy by a local fortune-teller, Chen Fang's mother-in-law pays Chen Fang to abandon her home and her family. Her moments as a wife and mother seem to last as long as her pregnancy; after she leaves her son behind, she takes a job teaching Chinese classics and modern languages at a school in Shanghai. García states, "In Shanghai, I was fortunate. I did not hide my gender and still the foreigners hired me, thanks to Professor Hou's kind words" (101). The reader never knows for certain if Professor Hou knew of Chen Fang's former cross-dressing. Either way, her profession becomes a conduit for her new life. It is interesting to note that she teaches of all subjects, Chinese classics and modern languages. The subject as one entity is representative of bridging two horizons, one of tradition and the other of change and polyphonic, comparative knowledge. As a protagonist, she practices this nepantla position. It is through her negotiations of existence within language, one being her educational position, others being her father's letters and her first person voice, that Chen Fang is communication and language determined in order to write or rather speak her existence.

Further, Chen Fang's brief encounter with the prostitute in Canton is precursor to the passionate, erotic crossing she begins to nurture with Dauphine de Moët, the mother of three students at her school. Dauphine, who is married to a French consul general, has lived in Havana and is able to resituate Cuba as a space Chen Fang yearns for. However, her inability to transcend mythic or internal notions of nation and national identity limit Chan Fang to a brief yet painful erotic awakening. García states,

Dauphine had many photographs of Havana, including one of an old Chinese man in a doorway smoking an opium pipe. I [Chen Fang] liked to imagine that this man might have known my father or grandfather. She played Cuban records on her phonograph, too...Dauphine showed me how

to dance like the Cubans, clasping me tightly and making me swing my hips. There was a club in Old Havana, Dauphine told me, where women wore men's evening clothing and kissed each other on the lips. (García 142)

Dauphine prompts Chen Fang's sensual and sexual awakening. Through their clandestine relationship, Chen Fang is as close to Cuba as she will ever get. She can see and hear Cuba; Dauphine even teaches her how to move "like the Cubans." It is interesting to note that Dauphine has a photograph of a Chinese man in Cuba that Chen Fang clings to, wishing the anonymous man knew of her father or grandfather. Cuba as an imagined nation is yet again depicted through a Chinese-Cuban subject. Both Domingo Chen and Chen Fang are, according to Caminero-Santangelo, "pawns of much larger economic and political forces, their geographic – as well as, in this novel, their erotic – movements are largely dictated by the ebb and flow of such forces" (114). This critique is most pertinent to Chen Fang's multiple predicaments, because while political events outside his control affect Domingo Chen, in most cases, he is choosing his course of action. He chooses to immigrate to New York with his father, and after his father's suicide, he also chooses to enlist in the U.S. army, taking him to Vietnam. Chen Fang never has these choices. Rather her life is a series of reactions instead of actions and subsequent repercussions. Caminero-Santangelo argues that Western imperialist interests are the political forces prompting Chen Fang's opportunity for intimacy but they eventually provide her with subsequent disappointment and physical and psychological abuse. Therefore these larger economic and political movements construct the opportunities for protagonists like Chen Fang, who has never left China, and Dauphine, a worldly traveler, to meet and nurture a relationship. However, the women share a promising sense of erotic and cultural exchange. Chen Fang and Dauphine's mutual love sheds light on the possibilities the

Caribbean space offers Chen Fang even if it is illusionary. But most importantly, their time together is housed within an inclusive space where their gendered and sexual identities are freely fashioned. In addition to erotic and intimate awareness, the construction of Cuba within their intimate space allows for hybrid cultural identities to initiate but Chen Fang's tragedy lies in their ephemerality. Despite her tragic end, Jennifer Ann Ho reads Chen Fang's final scenes as her integration into a larger Chinese-American diaspora. She states,

García's portrait of her [Chen Fang] as a woman influenced by forces outside of China, in terms both global (Mao's communist revolution) as well as intimate (her foreign lover) suggests that even a Chinese woman in China has an identity impacted beyond the borders of her nation-state. The last image of Chen Fang that García leaves us with has her imagining a trip she will make to Cuba to find her father and to smoke a Cuban cigar on the balcony of Havana's Chinatown. This portrait of Chen Fang is one of would be sojourner, whose own life has been intimately tethered to a larger Chinese-American diaspora. (212)

While political and economic forces, like the ascendancy of the Nationalist Party in China (the People's Republic of China), do indeed rip the women apart and leave Chen Fang once again reacting to a situation out of her control, Ho's argument regarding these very global and intimate forces allows the reader to see Chen Fang as a protagonist in a larger network of cultural belonging. Either way, Dauphine leaves Shanghai suddenly and deserts a heartbroken and very isolated Chen Fang: "I felt raw with the knowledge of pleasure, charred by it. I understood finally the truth of the Tao Te Ching: *The reason that we have great affliction is that we have bodies./ Had we not bodies, what affliction would we have?*" (García 144). Her physical and emotional barrenness lasts ten years. Chen Fang's dreams of Dauphine haunt her as she indulges in certain visions only to be painfully reminded of her current state. As this section concludes, Chen Fang's emptiness

mirrors the difficulties occurring in the Chinese nation-space, as she has not been paid in months and has a tough time buying food.

Chen Fang never finds Cuba. The instances of sacral, erotic belonging she experiences with Dauphine are brief. Her final chapter under the section “Last Rites” locates Chen Fang in prison in the midst of the Cultural Revolution in China.³¹ She is now seventy-two years old and badly abused: “My hands are stiff, reddened with arthritis from months of wearing handcuffs. My gums are black and bleed continuously. To eat, I must first press the blood from them” (García 224). Having utilized her body to experience pleasure and self-awareness, she now painfully exists within her body: “Here in my cell, I live in my body more familiarly than before. Once my body existed outside me, like a musty dress in the closet. Now each new discomfort brings it recognition and sympathy” (231). Alienated from society, Chen Fang is learning to live from within. Although her final chapter is under the “Last Rites” section, it catalogues all that has been stripped away along with all she will never be able to attain. She knows of her son, but only through articles. As a confidant of Mao’s wife, he is an active participant in the political upheaval destroying the country. His loyalties to the Cultural Revolution preclude her from finding any part of her in him (García 230). Abandoning her son and losing Dauphine, two events still fresh in her memory, she compartmentalizes her grief and ends by willing herself in Cuba: “If I survive, I will search for my family in Cuba...And I must teach myself Spanish!...When I arrive, I will find a balcony overlooking the sea and watch the boats pour through the city at dusk (my father

³¹ Joseph W. Esherick, Paul G. Pickowicz, and Andrew G. Walder argue that “The first and most dramatic phase of the Cultural Revolution was the explosive red guard movement of 1966-68. In a manner unprecedented in communist-ruled states, young middle school and university school students were unleashed to attack cultural symbols of the old society, academic representatives of ‘bourgeois’ scholarship, and party leaders allegedly infected with revisionist ideas” (19).

mentioned this in one of his letters). I will smoke a Cuban cigar (these are famous even in China)...” (García 233). Chen Fang’s preconceived notions of Cuba are limited to Dauphine’s photographs and music as well as commodities,³² like the Cuban cigar, that travel between these two national spaces. Chen Fang’s physical and textual stagnation compounds with the description of how easily the Cuban cigar travels. As the novel ends, the reader leaves Chen Fang behind dreaming of *have nots* and yearning for *never wills*. Her engagement with multiple forms of language symbolically wills her within Cuban and Chinese-diasporic spaces. Her father’s letters and her experiences with Dauphine shape Cuba into her ideal space for being. Although she lives painfully within her body, it is language that extends and maintains her sense of futurity no matter how futile or impossible it may seem. Her erotic and trans-cultural connections lend material dimensions to her desire of getting to Cuba. And now that she is left in prison and alone, it is the language she re-produces that keeps her actively willing a realized sense of belonging.

At the conclusion of the final chapter for each main protagonist – Chen Pan, Domingo Chen, and Chen Fang – there is a sense of mortality and obscurity that plagues the page. Ironically the final chapter, “Immortality, Havana (1917),” is given to an aging and fragile eighty-year-old, Chen Pan, who is sipping wine and contemplating his ephemeral prominence in Havana’s *barrio chino*. It was the beginning of the novel when a young and hungry Chen Pan was lured into the back room of a tavern in Amoy and offered “warmed red wine” and opium before agreeing to his contract in Cuba. The wine

³² Laurence J.C. Ma and Carolyn Cartier define “spatial interaction” as “...commonly manifested in terms of connectivity, exchange, and spread of people, goods, ideas, and information across networked space and among a number of places with varying degrees of intensity and directionality, and as such, diasporas are also *spatial networks*, with selected places serving as anchoring points” (8).

and opium “had him searching the clouds for immortals” (García 4). Now this section, which is entitled “Immortality,” presents Chen Pan as contemplating the inverse. García states, “He knew he was no longer so important in Chinatown. Younger, stronger men had surpassed him, achieving what was unthinkable when he’d first arrived in Cuba sixty years ago. Now Chinese owned hotels and restaurants in several cities, laundries and chains of bakeries stretching from one end of the island to the other” (García 236).

Although Chen Pan expresses a dejected attitude, his experiences in this final chapter are not solely his own. He speaks about all the unforeseen and amazing social and economic advances the Chinese-Cubans accomplished in the first half of the twentieth-century. He also speaks about the new migration wave of Chinese entering Cuba as President Aurelio Mario García Menocal (1913-1921) authorizes a new immigration law in order to repopulate the cane fields throughout Cuba’s involvement in World War I.³³ While this is the assumed end of Chen Pan’s lustrous life, it is a Cuba bustling with Chinese influences across all socio-economic levels. Concluding the novel here resists conventional, linear mourning for the loss of the Chinese-Cuban population and sheds light on García’s efforts of redirecting the meaning and practice of *Cubanidad*.

García’s notion of *Cubanidad* would not be completely taken in without assessing how the reader leaves Lucrecia. It is pertinent to note her seemingly resounding absence from the final chapter. In fact, in this chapter, Chen Pan recalls her memory, as he has been a widow for twelve years. Chen Pan claims not taking another wife as recommended by his friends is a nod to his undying love and loyalty to Lucrecia. Her final months are, indeed, recorded in a previous chapter, “Peonies, Havana (1899).” At

³³ It is interesting to note that Cuba officially declares war against Germany on April 7th, 1917, a day after the United States.

just forty-eight, Lucrecia dies from a condition in her “female parts [as] her womb withered to nothing. [And] Overnight her hair had turned white” (García 165). The symbolic resonances of such fatal bodily symptoms support the notion that women in the novel are always at the receiving end of perpetual anguish and abuse. Even Lucrecia, who answers the call of womanhood and is responsible for cultural continuity and growth, is marred with past physical abuse and a mysterious medical illness. It is interesting to note that once her reproductive organs *wither to nothing*, she instantaneously ages as her hair turns white. One could even suggest that she is excised once her body shuts down, and she lacks the abilities to procreate and mother the burgeoning nation. Despite such negative connotations, Lucrecia does indeed productively contribute as an Afro-Cuban, culturally Chinese woman. Knowing of her imminent demise, she performs two culturally symbolic acts: she first requests to go to the mountains and she second chooses her final resting place in the Chinese cemetery. Lucrecia states, “‘Before I die, I want to go to the mountains. You said yourself it’s where the powers of heaven and earth meet.’ ‘That’s only true for China,’ Chen Pan said. ‘I don’t see why this can’t be true for Cuba, too’” (García 168). The narrator then divulges Lucrecia’s history prior to her existence with Don Joaquín granting her a familial legacy that is both tainted with family betrayal but is also, the reader can assume, a space within memory that Lucrecia has been able to access during her time with Don Joaquín:

Lucrecia’s family was from the Sierra Maestra, and from the Congo before that. Her grandparents had been runaway slaves, *cimarrones*, like Chen Pan. For year’s they’d lived in a cluster of *bohíos* in the mountains outside Guantánamo and had grown okra, corn, pumpkins, and sweet potatoes. Lucrecia had told him that her uncle had gotten so hungry once that he’d boiled his mother’s cat for soup. This was the same uncle who’d later sold his sister to that bastard Don Joaquín in Havana. (García 168)

This passage links Lucrecia to Chen Pan with her family's history of marronage, but also grants her a past that she actively recalls and in her efforts to re-member her self, she retrieves as a final example of her practicing a sacred connection to her multicultural identity. In addition to this entry into her past, Lucrecia is active in how her family will preserve her memory. Chen Pan and Lucrecia visit the Chinese cemetery, and she chooses a plot under the pomegranate tree; she even decides on the flowers she would like planted around her grave. While Chen Pan feels depressed and almost already mourning her loss, she comforts him stating, "More than half my life has been happy," she said softly. "how many people can say that?" (García 180). Despite her hardship, she is able to grasp a sense of self through her relationship to a tolerant, syncretic space as well as her relationship with Chen Pan. Emma Garcia indirectly addresses the comprehensive nature reflected in sacred citizenship as she argues that while Lucrecia's death may be untranslatable within Christian doctrine, Lucrecia's access to make her life intelligible through Santería, Buddhism, and cross-cultural alliances grant her an active sense of control and peace. Although Christian based religions could regard her bout with cancer and subsequent short life as punishment for never marrying and living out of wedlock, Lucrecia's "adopted Buddhist beliefs while living with Chen Pan" allow her to cast her short life as not "a punishment or an end. On the contrary, her death signifies a new beginning" (170). This new beginning is entirely due to her variegated spiritual experiences throughout her life. Her home with Chen Pan becomes a space that accommodates the spiritual dimensions of the three prominent cultures in her life – Chinese, Spanish, and Yoruba.

In fact, all the protagonists I discuss within the context of sacred citizenship and belongingness – Chen Pan, Lucrecia, Domingo Chen, Tham Thanh Lan (tangentially), and finally Chen Fang – attempt to assert their sense of selves while simultaneously shedding light on the sociopolitical forces that serve to advance and frustrate their pursuits. With such varying degrees of success in negotiating and maintaining unadulterated identities, as not all are as complex and successful as Lucrecia, the novel ultimately presents sacred belonging as a utopic yet problematic construction when read for racial and cultural inclusivity. Social markers that trip up this quest such as the profound inequities of sex and gender make it difficult to realize completely the progressive and liberal agenda García promises in *Monkey Hunting*. Having said this, I believe García does succeed in reinserting the Chinese-Cuban presence within the often times binarized Cuban historiography. Acknowledging the pitfalls of her project does not necessarily cancel the work García does; it just complicates the multivocality she seeks to represent. I believe *Monkey Hunting*'s structure of feeling gestures towards a progressive *Cubanidad* that seeks to renegotiate history, memory, and identities. Through elements of sacred citizenship like cross-racial, cross-cultural alliances, safe spaces for the self to be, and memory constitution prompt a sense of belonging for the protagonists and for the Chinese and Chinese-Cuban subject at large that is outside top-down socio-political structures. Although Domingo Chen and Chen Fang are tragic figures, it is their equitable prominence within the narrative that exalts their stories, producing an alternative archive for silenced and marginalized bodies that are not represented in history and granting the opportunity for polyphonic contestations to such erasure.

Chapter Two: *Accessor("I")zing Gender and Sexing Desire in Shani Mootoo's Cereus Blooms at Night and Patricia Powell's The Pagoda*

In this chapter, I read sacred citizenship through the evocation of sacred rituals within physical spaces as well as the erotic as emancipatory and self-enriching. When physical spaces are not available, protagonists engage with the politics of the erotic to create mutual recognition and belonging. Unlike my reading for cultural and racial inclusivity in García's *Monkey Hunting*, this chapter highlights non-heteronormative gender and sexual identities as producing opportunities for "oppositional knowledges." "Oppositional knowledges" re-imagine epistemic frameworks of categorization by employing an emphatic "moral agency" (Alexander 5). Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996) and Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* (1998) present queer protagonists within private and public circles as they problematize heteropatriarchy and the sex and gender binary, all the while constructing sacred, culturally specific spaces that bring about alternative modes of intimacy.

In *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *The Pagoda*, I argue that sacred performances and rituals are available through critical engagement. The novels do not directly depict moments of worship or practice. While in *Cereus Blooms*, Mala and Otoh evoke the Hindu marriage ritual of the Matikor, they are not in an actual Matikor event. Rather, my argument centers around their gendered and intimate performance through dance as an opportunity to imagine this "counterpublic" experience through a sacral lens. This scene is thus imagined as a queer summation of the various negotiations with temporality, desires, intimacies, and intelligibility. Their garden dance depicts an embodied history that serves as the prelude to the final scene. The final scene introduces a queer romance that achieves Warner's notion of transformation within counterpublics, reflecting a pre-

emergent recognition of queer desires and intimacies. In *The Pagoda*, the cultural and inclusive promise of the pagoda suggests a futurity for undervalued ethnic and gender minorities within post-emancipation Jamaica. As a structure, it loosely represents the sacred as promise since pagodas are spaces for cultural continuity and spiritual renewal. However, since this physical space remains unavailable within the scope of the novel, the erotic maintains the promise of belonging sacred citizenship offers. The erotic then becomes a manner of producing non-rational, self-enriching moments of connection, introducing the body as a sacral site for transformation. Further, in both novels the protagonists offer up their bodies as indeterminate sites for queer identification. Otoh and Tyler in *Cereus Blooms* and Mr. Lowe in *The Pagoda* use transvestism as a gender performance that layers each physical and psychical crossing with the need to acknowledge multiple sexual and gender identities and re-conceptualize their relationship.

Another facet of sacred citizenship available in both novels is how immediate memory and collective, generational remembrances present bodies as transpersonal. The garden dance described above touches upon memory as a shared psychic space. Through Mala's garden dance and Mr. Lowe's construction of a pagoda, one can argue that the protagonists are tapping into generational and cultural repositories of knowledge that re-imagine belonging outside conventional notions of citizenry. While in *Cereus Blooms at Night* Mala's garden functions as a queer sacral space offering an alternative economy of being, *The Pagoda* presents Mr. Lowe as tirelessly constructing the Chinese pagoda. The pagoda possesses symbolic value as it can possibly become a space of belonging for individuals who look, act, speak, and commune like Mr. Lowe. Since he never steps into

the Chinese pagoda himself, he painfully endures his sacrificial positioning but his legacy creates the opportunity for others to practice belonging.

In both novels there is a profound resistance to reductive essentialism. By not mentioning the terms “gay” and “lesbian,” Mootoo and Powell resist the Western compulsion of fixing sexual identities. According to Gayatri Gopinath, “[Mootoo and Powell present] a *queer* feminist reading... identify[ing] the ways in which those bodies, desires, and subjects deemed impossible... intervene into the public culture...” (164). Both writers introduce queer protagonists that exist as subjects belonging to the Caribbean space outside the heteronormative framework of Carnival. And through sacred citizenship, these protagonists attempt to craft space and place for their marginalized identities that are otherwise unintelligible within their socio-political spaces.³⁴

The transvestic and transgendered protagonists in both novels add a dimension to syncretic alliances that is beyond the coalitional space of Chen Pan and Lucrecia’s Lucky Find. These transvestic and transgendered performances produce a connectivity embodied by the present gender performance. However, the *mélange* of transvestic performances contextualizes what I consider the indeterminacy of body and identifications as a scaffolding of gender and sexual performances across experiences. Otoh, in *Cereus Blooms*, most convincingly captures this notion with his multiple transvestic performances. In seeking a specific audience, the anatomically female

³⁴ *Cereus Blooms* and *The Pagoda* are set in a time when gender stratification and the notion of femininity were being negotiated within and across racial and ethnic lines. Despite their pronounced racial and ethnic differences, both colonial Trinidad and Jamaica perpetuated a modern feminine discourse where women were solely perceived as bearers of colonial legacy and thus bound to patriarchal norms. Therefore texts that introduce F to M transvestism, especially within this socio-historical space, should depart from Carnival criticism (although a carnival lens would still be productive as a vernacularizing of gender play and queer performativity). However, in creating this theoretical difference one destabilizes the Lacanian framework of desire always pertaining to the phallus. All queer and transvestic protagonists in these texts trouble this very paradigm.

protagonist who lives as a man for most his life just as easily transitions from a dress and red thong sandals to his father's suit. The lynchpin to reading not only Otoh's subjectivity, but also identities in general, is valuing the performances equitably and not proclaiming that one identification is more true to self than another. Unlike Chen Fang in *Monkey Hunting*, who cross-dresses as a boy but proclaims herself to be a woman when she is not socially policed, Tyler and Otoh in *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Mr. Lowe in *The Pagoda* never proclaim a definitive gender and sexual identity, nurturing self through the movement in signification embedded in the "Trans-" prefix.³⁵

"Generational" Transvestism and Non-Homespaces³⁶

Through the specific plot structure, Mootoo constructs an antirealist narrative which suggests Mala's private story is a public allegory on colonial excess as well as on contemporary gender and sexual inequities. Mootoo's text explores the sinister contours of colonialism in order to revisit and remap the excesses and consequences of such a socio-political experience. By placing a woman, Mala Ramchandin, at the center of multiple narratives of belonging, Mootoo prioritizes a feminist sensibility; the feminist in turn allows for a mapping of transgendered subjectivities that not only attempts to heal colonial and heteronormative violence but also seeks to read these queer bodies as

³⁵ In her welcome speech at the 2010 "Trans Global, Global Trans" conference held at the University of Miami, Professor Brenna Munro presented the theoretical term "Trans-" as a flexible prefix that connotes *transgression, transition, and transgender*. I think her insistence on the importance of the physical and theoretical movement embedded in the term highlights my argument on the multiple crossings at work in both Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Powell's *The Pagoda*.

³⁶ Both Michele Aaron and Michael use the term, "generational" once in their books. While Aaron does not define the term, Berry provides context which explains his use of the word. Berry describes the 1993 film, *The Wedding Banquet*, as depicting the "generational and gender-ational gaps between a gay Taiwanese American man and the parents he tries to please..." (326). Berry's use relies more on the temporal properties of the term indicating the distance and therefore lack of understanding between the parents and son. I, on the other hand, am using the term to blur the temporal nuances Berry maintains. Otoh's "generational" transvestism highlights a moment where he is both cross-dressing and therefore queering gender identity while simultaneously blurring temporality as he is not only dressing as male but dressing as his father. This gender performance allows Otoh to try and rectify his father's wrongs.

racially and sexually specific identities. It is pertinent to note that even though Mala is the nexus of multiple narratives of belonging, she herself is cast as a sacrificial subject in order for Tyler, Mala's cross-dressing nurse at the alms house, and Otoh, the son of Mala's childhood friend, to come into their own. With Mala's assistance, both Tyler and Otoh practice their gender nonconformity but are socially dissimilarly valued. Whereas Otoh's seemingly fluid gender transformation is buttressed by a familial and collective forgetting, Tyler's queer identity is the target of condescension and criticism. His position as narrator, nonetheless, grants him vocal supremacy while Otoh seems to lack the psychological and emotional depth available to Tyler.

Cereus Blooms at Night sets up stage in Lantanacalara, a fictional Caribbean island which is a colonized space subservient to the Shivering Northern Wetlands. By refusing to name a real island, Mootoo privileges space and place over nation and heteronormative history. Sissy Helff discusses the implications of introducing a fictional space as well as the name's deeply symbolic position constructing the text's loyalty to movement: "The island symbolizes migrancy and transformation. The lantana bush and its ability to adapt to most soil types can be found almost everywhere in the world today. Its beautiful pink flowers, however, should not distract the viewers' attention from the bush's dangerous, thorny undergrowth" (284). By naming Lantanacalara as a conventionally utopic, no-man's landscape, the social hierarchies critiqued could possibly proliferate in multiple spaces. Therefore, the subversive potentiality of Mala's garden as well as the abuses practiced in Lantanacalara are all available to be enacted in other spaces as well, granting an open-ended valuation of Lantanacalara as a controlled yet flexible space. Paula Morgan argues that Mootoo's fictional setting, while "an island

apart,” is somewhat reminiscent of post-indentureship Trinidad (6). While the competing social anxieties surrounding the creolization of the East Indian population and the animosity between ethnic lines is absent from the text, Mootoo prioritizes processes of identity and “the intergroup social and historical relations [between] the Presbyterian missionaries and the Hindus” (Morgan 6). Despite the reduced racial interaction which does not encapsulate Trinidad’s ethnic and cultural complexities, the White missionaries and the Hindu subjects nonetheless introduce opportunities where racial, gendered, and sexual identities and discourses intersect with one another. Therefore, Mootoo links Mala’s ostracism, her father, Chandin’s emasculation, and Tyler’s effeminacy to their practicing gender identities which are entrenched within a larger field of identity politics that is always in flux.³⁷

This racialized gendered construction is introduced through Mala’s father, Chandin Ramchandin’s failed colonial mimicry. Heteropatriarchy is revealed as permanently hinged to a raced discourse that inhibits Chandin from ever practicing ‘proper masculinity.’ As Grace K. Hong notes, “...no one who is racialized has access to ‘proper’ masculinity, no matter how assiduously he mimics the Wetlandish gentleman. Indeed, as important as it is for a racialized subject to aspire to colonial masculinity, the threat of miscegenation demands that such an aspiration is equally impossible to attain” (95). Hong points to racially gendered tensions through Chandin’s thwarted attempts to woo his adoptive white sister, Lavinia Thoroughly. Although the Thoroughly’s state their union an impossibility due to ‘incest,’ Hong’s point is clear when Lavinia marries her

³⁷ I position this chapter after my reading of García’s *Monkey Hunting* because I believe Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms* captures the nuances present in critically reading racialized gender and sexuality that is not always available necessarily in *Monkey Hunting*. For instance, Chandin’s coming into his masculinity is sharply defined against Reverend Thoroughly; however, since the creole voice is all but eradicated in *Monkey Hunting*, Chen Pan never faces such impossible and racist obstacles.

white cousin. Chandin eventually sets up house with Lavinia's East Indian friend, Sarah, establishing a prototypical heteronormative space. Nevertheless, colonial inadequacy seeps in and his home under patriarchal law cannot sustain itself, producing not only a violent backlash but also queer effects.³⁸

The Ramchandin household is first and foremost a violent heteropatriarchal space that centers on Chandin as a failed colonial experiment.³⁹ The indentured servant/colonial non-citizen could not be saved either through Western religion or 'civil' upbringing; therefore, his home symbolizes the oppressive patriarchal and colonial arm which the women in his life – Sarah, Lavinia, and Mala – all escape through varying degrees of queer identification. Chandin's reaction to his wife's homoerotic relationship and subsequent desertion,⁴⁰ for instance, is a combination of defeated worthlessness, misplaced anger, and rage. Subsequently imploding the family dynamic altogether, he eventually utilizes the home as his domain for abusive power, where he forces a longstanding incestuous relationship with Mala.⁴¹ Through the incest, Mala's body

³⁸ Gopinath positions the inner, homespace within the novel as both heteronormative and queer stating, "...by portraying the inner sphere not simply as a space of gender conformity but also of gender play and fantasy, the story refigures the gendered specialization of the nation by revealing how non-heteronormative embodiments, desires, and pleasures surface within even the most heteronormative of spaces" (170). Gopinath's argument not only blurs the lines between heteronormative and non-heteronormative identifications, she also opens up the "queer" marker for all protagonists that desire to escape heteronormative spaces.

³⁹ My discussion on the insidious consumption of female bodies within a heteropatriarchal, colonialist space in García's *Monkey Hunting* presents a tension female protagonists like Lucrecia, Tham Thanh Lan, and Chen Fang struggle against; however, in Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms*, there is no room for this patriarchal ambivalence as both heteronormative, patriarchal spaces represented are unequivocally asphyxiating and abusive.

⁴⁰ Bridget Brereton describes the Indo-Trinidadian man's social worth as intimately linked to his acquiring and 'keeping' a wife: "...in a situation where women were scarce, the possession of a wife was an important symbol of status and masculinity on the plantation, or crucial element in the husband's self-esteem, which he could ill afford to lose... The man whose wife had been unfaithful suffered a disastrous loss of self-esteem..." (183).

⁴¹ For a more detailed reading on incest in the text, Mala's abuse and her coping mechanisms through the Mala/ Pohpoh split look at Brinda Mehta's *Diasporic (Dis)locations: Indo-Caribbean Women Writers Negotiate the Kala Pani* (2004), Vivian M. May's "Trauma in Paradise: Willful and Strategic Ignorance in

becomes a scene of indeterminacy. This is most forcefully understood when Chandin, defending what's his, attributes three mutually exclusive names to her. When Chandin finds a young Mala kissing her first love, Ambrose Mohanty, he states, "A man tiefing *my baby*? He brave to even try. I ent go let nobody tief *my woman* again. No man, no woman, no damn body go tief *my property* again" (220, *my emphasis*). With each iteration, Chandin is speaking about Mala but differentiating her social marker. Even though she is "my baby" first, then "my woman" and "my property" next, her shifting social values all serve his benefit. Her bodily signification becomes indeterminate and multiple, as her first epithet is not cleanly eradicated before she is attributed the second name and so on. Furthermore, it is in moments like these that the reader is privy to Chandin's complete devaluation. Chandin here is not only speaking about Mala but about himself, his condition, and his losses. Written on Mala's body is Chandin's compounding shame due to Sarah and Lavinia's departure, his emasculation, and his utter worthlessness.⁴² While Sarah and Lavinia's homoerotic relationship sheds light on dual vulnerabilities – a man's reputation as Man (through Chandin) and the instability of heterosexuality – Mala's restructuring of the home once Chandin passes away illustrates her decisive evacuation of any traces of social normativity.

For most of the text, Mala resides in two non-homespaces – the garden of her home and the community's alms house. In Linda Bosniak's terms, these spaces challenge her two working definitions of citizenship: "in-ward-looking" and "boundary-conscious" belonging. While the former rests on the quality of belonging and is quite theoretically

Cereus Blooms at Night" (2006), and Patricia Donatien-Yssa's "Resurgence and Creative Resistance in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*" (Autumn 2008).

⁴² According to Rebecca Ashworth "...Lavinia usurps his [Chandin's] position as husband, and Sarah usurps his position as lover: he is neither white nor Indian enough, male nor female enough to win/keep either woman" (41). Mala, thus, becomes the site for his vengeful reconstitution of self.

optimistic, the latter focuses on the exclusivity of membership producing multiple borders even within the nation-state (Bosniak 2). Mala's reconstruction of her diasporic spaces resides within both these theories since the garden and the alms house are indeed marginalized physical spaces within Lantanacamara; no one enters Mala's garden until Otoh and the alms house is tucked away and cannot be seen from the main road. These nonsocial spaces are effects of a boundary-conscious community. Yet the possibilities that abound within these spaces speak to the universalism of inward-looking citizenship that promises inclusion. Within these two spaces, queer subjects like Mala, Tyler, and Otoh practice sacred citizenship, all the while exposing the weaknesses of the boundary-conscious institutions of power that otherwise govern the home and their lives. Mala's garden is constructed as a private sanctuary, creating the psychological and physical distance Mala needs because of how unhomey and abusive the actual home has been. The alms house, however, is positioned as a public space bounded by Mala's arrival and its aftermath, as well as a counterpublic where Tyler, Otoh, and Mala are afforded the space for identity formation despite dominant ideology.

As the main female protagonist, Mala functions as a sacrificial device that prompts the reader to think through the psychology of living in a space where one is different and othered. She also engages with Tyler and Otoh in order to make each other intelligible within the social landscape. And through their intimate collective,⁴³ Mala, Tyler, and Otoh, grant one another an audience in order to practice intimate and personal

⁴³ As part of multiple triangles of desire these identities participate in an intimate collective in which they thrive. It is important to note that giving prominence to an intimate collective is not necessarily casting aside the larger society structure that for many reasons has read their bodies and cast them as a non-citizen in, for instance, Mala's case, but it is crucial to recognize that the enveloping structure of the larger community does not give these individuals the presence that their multiple triangles of desire gives them. While Otoh is 'accepted' as part of the larger whole, it is his success in passing as male that is accepted, not his gender fluidity necessarily, or he would not have been as anxious as he was to step out in a woman's dress.

belonging. Mala first interacts with Otoh, which indirectly lands her in the alms house. Once there, she starts to have a rapport with Tyler, which then leads to Otoh and Tyler sparking a romantic relationship. For Tyler and Otoh, Mala becomes the organic mirror where they can see themselves and be seen without a dehumanizing gaze. Mala's body is the site through which they all settle their anxieties over what it means for ostracized and alienated bodies to be. Through non-descript and seemingly un-agentive practices like choosing to live out in the verandah, rearranging the alms house furniture, and handing Tyler a female nurse uniform, Mala transfigures her self and her positioning within her two non-homespaces to create a space for herself as well as bring Tyler and Otoh's queer identities into relief.

Both Tyler and Otoh initially nurture their relationship with Mala through the language of secrets. For instance, on Tyler's first encounter with Mala, he feels drawn to her, supposing an unspoken alliance between Mala and himself: "...for I [Tyler] did fancy that she and I shared a common reception from the rest of the world" (Mootoo 20). Their shared experience as social outcasts grants Tyler an empathetic perspective of Mala that few at the alms house or in Lantanacamara as a whole would afford either protagonist. Once this connection is forged, Mala is the social conduit Tyler (and Otoh for that matter) utilize to negotiate their identities. In the process, they breathe life back into Mala. Mala then becomes the desired audience as Tyler and Otoh experiment with gender identity through layered transvestism. Whether residing in the alms house or in her restructured home post Chandin, her social ostracism provides the privacy needed for these two protagonists to come to terms with their selfhood.

As the new nurse at the alms house, Tyler is very much aware of the condescending stares he receives from fellow nurses. Yet his position in the text is both precarious and privileged; as the narrator, he simultaneously allows readings of himself as well as performs readings of others, granting him status as the gatekeeper of information. This position allows him to zero in on a tapestry of experiences and details that may, through a heteronormative perspective, be ignored or suppressed. As the narrative's queer mediator, Tyler points to the “need for a different kind of remembering’ ...an ontology based on multiplicity rather than autonomy or singularity” (May 107). This reading supports my argument precisely because it narrows in on the availability of a non-normative yet intimate narrative of remembrance, celebrating collectivity and a structure of feeling that redeploys notions of experience, the body, and even accountability. This notion sets the stage for sacred citizenship in a way that positions Tyler's personal accounts and reportage as polyphonic histories that otherwise are left unsaid and unrecorded.

As Mala's private nurse, Tyler is first responsible for telling the intergenerational story of the Ramchandins; he begins and ends by pleading with Asha, Mala's sister, to respond if she ever reads this account. However, as an aside to Mala's story, he divulges that his peculiarity was the reason he migrated to the Northern Wetlands: “After much reflection I have come to discern that my desire to leave the shores of Lantanacamara had much to do with wanting to study abroad, but far more with wanting to be somewhere where my ‘perversion’ ...might be either invisible or of no consequence to people to whom my foreignness was what would be strange” (Mootoo 48). Tyler assumes his racial difference in the Northern Wetlands would serve as the primary marker for his exoticism.

Yet, this comment speaks more about the overall marginalization of the queer Caribbean community than it does Tyler, as his use of the term “perversion” illustrates his participation in the colloquial discourse circulating in his home community.⁴⁴ Since he is able to travel, Tyler is not only sexualizing race but also insinuating his class and social positioning at home. In addition, Tyler’s lack of information simply affords the reader a shell of the experience because, even though he is castigated for his queerness, he is privileged enough to freely move between spaces of un-belonging; his mobility indirectly calls attention to other silenced queer individuals who do not have the same luxury.

Nevertheless, the discrimination against Tyler is palpable and this type of condescension is exactly what is absent from his interactions, albeit nonverbal, with Mala. Their engagement regarding gender identity begins with her stealing a female nurse’s uniform for him to wear. With a series of gestures, Mala conveys her wishes that Tyler put on the dress and stockings. Tyler assumes Mala had overheard a conversation he had with Mr. Hector, the alms house gardener.⁴⁵ Mala’s act of kindness deeply touches Tyler – not only her attaining the dress, but also her accepting his gender identity: “But she had stolen a dress for me. No one had ever done anything like that before. She knows what I am, was all I could think. She knows my nature. I reached for the dress. My body felt as if it were metamorphosing. It was as though I had suddenly become plump and less rigid...I hugged the dress” (Mootoo 76). Tyler first feels “silly”

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note to that in García’s *Monkey Hunting*, Chen Fang dreams of travelling to the Caribbean and attending the queer night club in Cuba where Dauphine de Moët tells her women cross-dress and kiss each other. Tyler, on the other hand, experiences the Caribbean space as inhospitable to his queer sensibilities much more in line with the social discrimination and violence endured by queer individuals in the Caribbean. This dichotomous positioning of the Caribbean not only presents the enduring exoticification of the Caribbean space, but also sheds light on the multiple spaces of un-belonging experienced by the marginalized protagonists explored in this project.

⁴⁵ Mr. Hector and Tyler share an interesting relationship as Tyler represents Mr. Hector’s long lost queer brother. At one point in the text, he even asks Tyler and Otoh if they know the whereabouts of his brother, Randolph.

when donning the dress. He describes his penis as a mocking, formidable enemy, but proceeds to chronicle his internal transformation through his external preoccupations: “My man’s member mocked me yet was a delight to do battle with when pulling the stockings up against my thighs...there was something delicious about my confinement” (Mootoo 77). Although Tyler is at first embarrassed by the disruption of illusion, he ultimately embraces the disruption, reflecting on his present euphoria and its resounding absence prior to wearing the dress.

Evoking Tyler’s seminal statement in this scene, “Not a man and not ever able to be a woman, suspended nameless in the limbo state between existence and nonexistence,” Tyler engages in a constrictive mode of existence (Mootoo 77). Reflecting on the quote briefly, it is interesting to note the semantic alignment of “man” with “existence” and “woman” with “nonexistence.” While anatomically male, his gender identity and sexual orientation clash with social expectations and thus are personified through his cross-dressing. It seems Tyler does not wish to fit into either of these two historically weighted categories. Rather, like Mala, who has lost the utility of language, Tyler, too, brushes against linguistic and representational limitations. These limitations deny Tyler the ability to claim self-positioning. Tyler intensely suffers his otherness as he internalizes external oppressions due to this discursive shortcoming. However, despite his lack of such self-reflection, his position within the narrative nevertheless produces the opportunity to chart the tensions Marjorie Garber points to surrounding the repressive relationship between socially sanctioned categorization and understanding of the transvestite figure. In fact, Garber’s theoretical discussions shed light on cross-dressing as a productive site for not only challenging oppressive gender dimorphism, but also critiquing various disciplines’

overinvestment in binarism and categories in general: “One of the most important aspects of cross-dressing is the way in which it offers a challenge to easy notions of binarity, putting into question the categories of ‘female’ and ‘male’...the current popularity of cross-dressing as a theme in art and criticism represents...an undertheorized recognition of the necessary critique of binary thinking...” (11). Along with introducing cross-dressing as a “category crisis,” she argues that contemporary critics of transvestism tend “to look *through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser,” resolving the complexity by placing the figure in one of the “two traditional genders” (9). In attributing the transvestite a final gender, contemporary critics overinvest in the underestimation of their subject.

Critics’ insistence on conventional categorization is, problematically, what both Rosamond King and Kaisa Llomen practice as they read Tyler’s identity trajectory. According to King and Llomen, Tyler as well as other trans- protagonists trouble conventional identity politics and citizenry as they call attention to multiple constitutive categories. Llomen even evokes Garber and appropriates the “category crisis” term as a manner in which these bodies redefine the postcolonial space (230). While I agree with King’s and Llomen’s theoretical frameworks of racial and gender “border-crossing,” both of their close readings of Tyler gesture towards a suspicious normalizing, whereby Tyler is said to be beginning the process of becoming a “woman.” This argument completely contradicts Garber’s efforts to resist binarity. Both critics focus on the final scene where Tyler cross-dresses in public just as he is publicly announcing his amorous relationship with Otoh. Tyler narrates this public act claiming, “The time inevitably arrived. I decided to unabashedly declare my self, as it were” (Mootoo 247). Throughout this scene, Tyler never once names himself “woman” nor answers to it. While Tyler, as narrator, claims

this to be a more sincere performance of his gender identity, I disagree with the seemingly normalizing rhetoric that confines Tyler into one of the two categories he resists earlier in the narrative. Thus, reading this scene as Tyler becoming a woman is representative of a reductionist argument that seeks to process Tyler's otherness in order to produce an intelligible and manufactured identity.

Tyler's public cross-dressing performance affects multiple levels of sociality: "I could see the nurses had come to a halt and were watching us. I held my head high. The gossip mill began to rumble..." (Mootoo 248). Just as Judith Butler swaps performativity for citational practice,⁴⁶ I believe we should read Tyler's public cross-dressing scene as a multi-faceted private and public act of gender identification.⁴⁷ In order to read this scene effectively, one should utilize two lenses: the first attends to how the performance fits within the inner public milieu, which includes Mala, Otoh, Mr. Ambrose, and Mr. Hector; the second expands the public space to include the other nurses which represent a broader social collective. Within the former space, the performance is a success, as not only is Otoh affectionately reciprocating Tyler's advances, but Mr. Hector wishes his homosexual brother could see or know them. This utopic depiction is interrupted abruptly by Tyler's awareness of the outsiders' eyes. They do not seem as jubilant and open, echoing Butler's argument concerning the contentious relationship between one's gender practice and public spaces. The controlled public's reaction suggests that the larger

⁴⁶ In this book, Butler seeks to clarify the issues raised with performativity and drag in *Gender Trouble*. In the preface, she explains the nuances between performativity and citational practice claiming the latter better presents gender identity as an ever-policed, "constitutive construction" (x).

⁴⁷ It is prudent to take into account that this scene is enacted within one of the diasporic crevices of Lantanacamara. Although Lantanacamara is not considered a nation, but rather a controlled space, the alms house is one of a few spaces cast aside by social and political valuation. Therefore, like Mala's garden, the social codes governing this space are less constrictive than Lantanacamara's social codes within public spaces. Even within this diasporic crevice, however, the reader is still privy to the other nurses' prying, judgmental eyes watching and concocting their own commentary on the scene.

Lantanacamara society would not consider Tyler's gender nonconformity a successful transformation. He would, on the other hand, very possibly solidify his position within the abject outside as that which the heteronormative gender identities define themselves against.

While Tyler's cross-dressing seems to accentuate his gender transgressions and constrain his bodily signification, Otoh's gender fluidity is seamless as he has the capacity to traverse gender and temporal spaces. Otoh, the son of Mala Ramchandin's childhood friend, Ambrose Mohanty, epitomizes the difficulty of pinning down sexual and gender locations as with his every move, he encounters various erotic tensions that do not cancel his previous erotic encounter. As his name, an acronym for "on the one hand, on the other hand," personifies, Otoh resides in an indeterminate space. In the novel, Otoh possesses both masculine and feminine traits; he is, therefore, desired by both men and women. Since his multiple gendered traits are concentrated within one body, it produces an excess in meaning dissimilarly valued to that of Tyler's representational constraint.⁴⁸ It is crucial to note, however, that it is Otoh's successful passing as male and not his gender fluidity that society tacitly accepts because it is only with Mala that he performs multiple gender identities.⁴⁹

Due to a collective forgetting, principally by Otoh's parents, Otoh, an anatomically female individual, has been successfully living as a male since he was five-years-old:

⁴⁸ Mootoo states, "Unlike other men in the village, and much to their envy, he had long been the object of desire of almost every Lantanacamaran woman, regardless of her age. (It is also noteworthy that a number of men were shocked and annoyed by their own naggingly lascivious thoughts of him.)" (135).

⁴⁹ On Otoh's controlled acceptance, Allison Donnell writes, "Otoh can identify as a man because although he is not a man, man is a stable socially assigned identity offering an apparently essential guarantee of the natural through which he can be accommodated. In fact, Otoh needs to identify as a man (he has to hide his obvious flaw of his transformation) because he cannot be, because there is no name, no tolerance and no place for them..." (239).

By the time Ambrosia was five, her parents were embroiled in their marital problems to the exclusion of all else, including their child. They hardly noticed that their daughter was transforming herself into a son...Elsie, hungry for a male in the house, went along with his (her) strong belief that he (she) was really and truly meant to be a boy...The transformation was flawless. Hours of mind-dulling exercise streamlined Ambrosia into an angular, hard-bodied creature and tampered with the flow of whatever hormonal juices defined him. (Mootoo 110)

In the quotation above, the pronoun use enacts the gender metamorphosis as the “she” is relegated to parentheses, and hence, already marginalized to the silenced, understood, and almost non-existent space. Further, on the same page, Mootoo textually manifests this change, as within the same sentence she calls Otoh Ambrosia, but uses the male pronoun, stating “Ambrosia’s obviously vivid imagination gave *him* both the ability to imagine many sides of a dilemma (and if it weren’t already a dilemma, of turning it into one) and the vexing inability to make up *his* mind” (110, *my emphasis*). Ambrosia, who now answers to Otoh, performs his gender identity complicit with his social collective.

Mootoo prioritizes the collective forgetting not as a complete disregard of Otoh, but rather as an enabling behavior that follows suit with the magical realism available in his family dynamic. Mootoo describes Otoh’s father, Ambrose, as almost absent. He sleeps all month and only wakes to prepare a foods package for Mala. Due to Ambrose’s utter inactivity, Otoh is able to assume the more masculine role within the household.⁵⁰ Ambrose’s induced state of nonexistence is interesting when thinking about Otoh’s birth given name. Similar to the paternalistic tradition of a father giving his name to his first-born son, Ambrose lends his name to his daughter, Ambrosia. But rather than solidifying

⁵⁰ It is interesting to note the thematic invitation to hold Chandin’s proclivity to regard his daughter, Mala, as a body that shifts signifiers first from daughter, to lover (or more precise incest victim) who assumes wifely duties with Elsie’s need for a male in the house and Otoh’s gender and bodily transformation. While they are entirely different with respects to abuse, incest, and the immeasurable physical, psychological, and emotional pain and neglect, I think Mootoo creates yet another instance where Alexander’s critique on the flattening out of multiple ‘deviances’ can be discussed.

his patriarchal position, this act of naming effeminizes Ambrose and masculinizes Ambrosia, textually positioning the anatomically male as subordinate to his anatomically female daughter.⁵¹

Prior to Otoh's "generational" cross-dressing as he dresses in his father's suit to drop off Mala's package, he positions Mala – much like Tyler – as an organic mirror through which he can practice his gender identity. For Otoh's first visual encounter with Mala, he dresses like a woman; Otoh first feels awkward but yearns to share this "secret" with Mala (Mootoo 121). Otoh, who is layering his gender identification as an anatomically female body who lives as a man and dresses like a woman, completely implodes the cultural constraints that police the relationship between sex and gender. It is interesting to note Mootoo's description of Otoh's awkwardness in the dress alongside his simultaneous valor in going out in public, which may threaten his tenuous position within masculinity. Undeterred, Otoh approaches Mala's verandah in the dress, but is not ready for her to see him. When Otoh realizes Mala sees him, he runs away. Yet his desire to get close to Mala again heightens, and it is his persistent desire to see her and have her see him that drives him to don his father's clothes and subsequently his identity. By dressing as his father, Otoh seeks to not only perform his fluid gender identity, he strives also to use the opportunity to right his father's wrongs. Dressing in his father's clothing, Otoh recaptures a time and memory for both Ambrose and Mala. Yet, in a critical turn, Mootoo mentions that in all the excitement Otoh forgets to change shoes and performs this transvestic performance wearing his red rubber thongs, which expose "the pink edges of his soles" (141). This slip not only queers the current encounter, but also preserves the

⁵¹ In the narrative, Ambrose has a history of inactivity. As Mala's long-time friend, he runs away from bullies at the park; and most cruel and cowardly, he runs away from Mala when he finds out that Chandin has taken her as his female partner perpetually raping and abusing her.

traces of his previous transvestic performance of wearing a dress. Ultimately, though, this scene as a crossing of multiple gender and corporeal knowledge(s) is particularly interesting when read alongside the pre-wedding Hindu ritual – the Matikor.

The Matikor Dance and ‘A Cereus in Bloom’

The Matikor is a grassroots women-centered Hindu ritual that usually occurs the Friday prior to a Hindu wedding. The female-only ceremony provides the opportunity for social and spiritual engagement absent of patriarchal judgment. During the plantation and post-plantation era, the festival offered an occasion for Indo-Caribbean women to don their most lavish clothing and their most extravagant jewelry, usually brought from India. For one night, the women indulged in the luxuries denied to them in their daily lives. According to Rosanne Kanhai, the “Matikor was a place of healing where women could act out their resistance against the degradation and depersonalization imposed upon them by the ruling class” (xi). Within this space, Indo-Caribbean women performed against multiple modes of cultural and racial oppressions. By placing the Matikor first as a historical practice initiated in the Caribbean during the plantation and post-plantation era, the ritual not only calls into question the gendered social order but also sheds light on the multiple colonial patriarchies at work within a multi-racial and socially hierarchal space. In assuming a contemporary feminist perspective, I ultimately read against the Hindu practice by extending the kernels of possibility seemingly available in the Matikor discourse.

While Kanhai focuses on its historical prominence and the political potential of the ritual, Brinda Mehta foregrounds the Matikor as a physical and sexually charged practice. She explains, “During this celebration of female sexuality, which initiates the

bride-to-be into the politics of the female erotic, rural women repossess their bodies through sexual parody, openly satirizing the sanctity of patriarchal codes of social and sexual conduct of women..." (97). Both Kanhai and Mehta locate the Matikor as a lived experience as well as a discursive and creative space for patriarchal resistance. In offering up this sacred ritual as a feminist political space, Kanhai and Mehta reconsider this practice as a rite of passage for the women involved as well as a lens through which heteropatriarchy can be denaturalized. While Mehta focuses on the historical implications, Kanhai goes a step further, reading the Matikor as not only a historical and potentially subversive ceremony, but also a feminist paradigm. She positions the Matikor as a political practice and discursive framework that reinvigorates cultural specificity for Indo-Caribbean feminism.

Rather than defend whether the Matikor is appropriate here or attempt to argue that Mala must be Hindu because Chandin's family were practicing Hindus, I want to engage this discursive and cultural connection because of the practice's creation of intimate spaces where one can perform both an openly erotic and politically subversive self. Critics like Vivian May have no qualms positioning Mala's garden within Christian religious language stating, "Mala's garden links imperial compulsions to know, possess, and control with Christian origin stories of Eden and original sin. In Mala's Paradise garden, original sin is no longer located in knowledge of embodiment, desire, and binary heterosexual corporeality" (106). While this reading is definitely generative in revising Edenic myth to explain the space as possessing a self-enclosed, non-hierarchical logic, it subsumes a specifically minority space within the grand Christian narrative, eradicating any possibility for cultural and ethnic nuances. Mootoo's attention to processes of

identity and the gendered and sexual richness present is flattened within this reading.

Throughout the novel Mala's garden has staged various moments for exploring multiple sexual and gendered identities. This reading all but erases these encounters, and, while productive, inadvertently renders Indo-Caribbean female gender and sexuality invisible or uniform.

The Matikor read as a feminist theoretical space possesses all the raw materials for sacred citizenship. Mala and Otoh's physical dance prompts an awareness of erotic continuity, a re-constitution of memory and legacy, and a blurring of corporeal boundaries that facilitates reading this scene through the Matikor. The Matikor as a ritual holds in its contradictory tensions eroticism, sex, sexual agency, patriarchy, generational memory and knowledge, and spirituality. These tensions are catapulted into recognition through the presence of a witness which Mala and Otoh afford each other. While, for the most part presence, intelligibility, and sexual awakening are performed among Mala, Tyler, and Otoh – both Tyler and Otoh coming into being through their relationship with Mala – in this particular scene, it is Mala solely who is granted the space to be. It now becomes Mala, Otoh, and an absent Ambrose (or, rather, Ambrose's memory) who are dancing into presence. While Mala is seeing Ambrose, Otoh is actively practicing in a multi-directional act of remembrance countering the passivity of acceptance that his life has been thus far. He not only sees and acknowledges Mala, but he also sees her as the townspeople would and recognizes the limitations of such a gaze: "He was actually in her yard, holding her hand. They were whirling about. Unaware that her own voice had long been a stranger even to her, he was still awed that he should be privy to its sound, and a

witness to her past...Mala slowed and pulled Otoh close to her chest and whispered, this time pleadingly, ‘Ambrose?’” (Mootoo 161).

In this moment Mootoo queers temporality because Mala’s subjective disassociation with her immediate reality brings together multiple temporal moments. When Mala dances with transgendered Otoh, she believes it is Otoh’s father and her former love, Ambrose, with whom she is dancing. This scene captures Mala’s past self as she speaks for the first time in a long time and Mala and Ambrose’s past relationship; it also allows Otoh to assume a new present gender identity in his father’s suit. The queer temporal qualities evoke a sacred ritual and produce an atemporal space where multiple realities come into contact. However, it is not reflective of Game’s sacred time concept because, while blurring temporal divides, this scene still observes sequential time. This scene brings together experiences from the past and the present, but bringing them together does not grant the scene the eternal qualities available in *Monkey Hunting* when Chen Pan survives as a maroon.

After their dance but still during this suspended moment in time, Mala is compelled to show Ambrose that they are free to live as they wish, guiding Otoh inside the house. The tour of this abandoned domestic space culminates with Mala showing Otoh Chandin Ramchandin’s decaying body. Their moment ends when Otoh, very much living in the present, leaves Mala, and Mala becomes distraught “to see him running off and leaving her again” (Mootoo 164). This traumatic event indirectly causes Mala to be committed to the Paradise alms house uniting the reader with Tyler and the narrative present.

Mehta's analysis evokes the Matikor space as a constructive moment for staging sexual agency, but she does not directly make the connection to the garden scene between Mala and Otoh (220). It is interesting to make this link because this scene has the opportunity to be a revisionist performance contesting cultural, sexual, and gendered politics of being. First, this specific performance between Mala and Otoh is meant to call forth Mala's dances with Ambrose and their budding relationship, which to an extent began to heal her of her abusive reality with Chandin. Knowing how Mala and Ambrose's relationship abruptly ends, and also knowing of Mala's continued sexual oppression post-Ambrose, this scene no longer only serves to summon the former. In fact, when Mala and Otoh engage in this performance, there is a rectification of sorts, which attempts to recodify cultural and gendered expectations. As Mehta argues, Indo-Caribbean female sexuality has historically been caught within discourses of "elitist Brahmanic prescriptions for Hindu femininity elaborated in India as well as the colonizing effects of British colonialism and the impact of the Canadian Presbyterian Missions in Trinidad" (192). Layering this discourse with the vow of silence and shame Mala was subjected to concerning sexual abuses, this dance and by extension this dance read alongside the Matikor, offers multiple avenues for personal resistance.

The garden dance becomes a sacred encounter as it blurs corporeal identities and constructs the garden as an atemporal space which both protagonists use to make each other intelligible. Even though this free-floating space is ephemerally available, it is necessary to mention that the performativity of the ritual is complicated with the ever-present specter of heteronormativity, as most dancing and suggestive gyrations during a Matikor are in reverence to heterosexuality. Mala and Otoh's dance does indeed present a

façade of heteronormativity as it is a woman and a ‘man’ performing the ritual; however, if we consider their sensual and erotic dance in this Matikor space as sex in progress, then Mala and Otoh queer gendered and temporal crossings. The Matikor, then, not only becomes the lens through which to read this scene but this scene queers the Matikor ritual (117). The Matikor as a queer space subsequently denaturalizes sex and gender, sexuality and gender, sex and sexuality, and sexuality and object choice – the list becomes endless. Therefore, once the ritual is deconstructed then it is no longer just women donning phallic props in order to assume a binarized gender performance. The absence of a physical penis that can be logically attributed the phallic symbol queers Mala’s garden, creating a space for subversive gender play as well as sensual and erotic recuperation. However, while I do believe this particular dance in Mala’s garden can symbolically queer the Matikor ritual, it also re-codifies the Matikor’s limitations to effect concrete social change. Since the Matikor is a pre-wedding ritual, it never definitively contests patriarchal norms.

Fundamentally, the garden scene serves as a prelude to the complete implosion of heteronormativity with Tyler and Otoh’s romantic union. Paula Morgan and Alison Donnell offer different readings of this final scene where Otoh and Tyler publically (within the alms house) unite. Morgan argues that Mootoo is in effect attempting to naturalize homosexuality by denaturalizing heterosexuality; she claims that the “conclusion is a neat inversion of a traditional narrative and heterosexual ideology” (18). While Morgan does concede that Mootoo is in “favour of a disjuncture between surface and interior configuration in relation to gender identity,” this is seemingly not digressive or oppositional enough, as Morgan argues that Mootoo may be revising “but certainly not

overturning the traditional romance plot” (18). This begs the question of what Morgan prioritizes concerning the romance trope, suggesting that the end result, heterosexual couplings, undercuts the novel’s subversive efforts. Claiming this scene is a “neat inversion” leads me to believe that Morgan does not see enough here to completely queer the heteropatriarchal categories in play. Morgan’s stagnant perspective loses the fluidity and performative qualities of the trans- prefix (transformations, transgendered identities, trans-migrations) at work. On the other hand, Donnell anticipates this critical stance explaining, “The question of whether Tyler and Otoh’s relationship is a structure which brings difference back to sameness, the transgressive into the normative, is vexing but significant to the debate about Caribbean sexuality” (240). However, Donnell departs from this position and argues that the scene represents a much more radical construction of alliances and valuation of experience. Positing sexual identities as always multiple, she argues that Tyler and Otoh’s union

‘suggest[s] a sexual continuum’ that not only destabilizes the homo/ hetero binary, but that it is their union as an anatomically normative couple with reproductive capabilities that is the most radical “because it represents a sexuality that is neither criminalized nor legalised, a sexuality which the state does not have the will to condone nor the legal power to punish...[bringing] desire and sexual relations outside the state... (241)

Donnell captures a slippage in the relationship between sexual relations and the state that marks a vulnerability within the state’s influence on defining categories, creating a space for alternative intimacies and belonging. Concerning sacred citizenship, Otoh and Tyler’s relationship embodies the symbolic purpose of Mala’s garden and to a certain extent the alms house. These physical spaces within the spatial cartography of the novel operate beyond the state’s reach and now Tyler and Otoh’s hetero-queer relationship embodies the potential freedoms associated with this counterpublic space. Their union produces a

baffling intelligibility where their sex as materiality abides social codes of normativity but their gender performativity opens up the sex and gender binary for themselves and others. Their reproductive capabilities do not eliminate the myriad of sex, sensual relations, and fantasies they can generate which casts intimate relations as dynamic and evolving.⁵² I believe this utopic and progressive vision of sexual and gendered identities works because of its potentiality. Tyler and Otoh's sex life is never described and therefore is deferred to the space of multiplicity.⁵³

Gender, Desire and the Desired Gender in Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda*

Like Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda* sheds light on the social gaps of adequately reading othered bodies. Donette Francis points to *The Pagoda* as a text that critiques the constrictive machine of history that keeps these identities absent and unknowable. She states, "In writing this historical drama, Powell evokes other accounts of intimacy, conjugality, and subjectivity not readily intelligible to census takers, the law, and, in many ways, the larger society..." (26). Francis argues that marginalized identities like nineteenth century Chinese women can be afforded space

⁵² Eve Sedgwick discusses the multiple sexual acts that individuals with "identical gender, race, nationality, class and 'sexual orientation'" may engage in. This logic supports my arguments on Tyler and Otoh's sexual potential as Sedgwick's list of *differences* potentially disrupts the ways in which we think of even the most conventional, heteronormative sexual interactions (25).

⁵³ I believe this scene also symbolically represents the excess Otoh's body exudes. Unlike Tyler's multiple constraints with his queer otherness, because Otoh transgresses his normative category of male within specific and safe diasporic crevices, he is granted a proliferation of signification that evades social intelligibility but simultaneously does not immediately require a name and therefore he is able to go beyond an oppressive compromise with identity. It is, thus, his relationship with Tyler that publicly queers Otoh's masculinity. Although Otoh has successfully passed as a man, it is a tenuous performance that should be translated through multiple social markers. Even though his transgendered performance is successful, it is always through a racially-confined gender discourse; therefore, similar to Chandin's inadequate colonial masculinity, once Tyler and Otoh get together, Otoh's masculinity is exponentially queered and thus, does not sustain the gender binary for both and constructs if anything the demand to recognize the hetero/ homo binary as resoundingly insufficient.

within historical documentation by *recasting how we expect them to appear*.⁵⁴ Revising Francis' argument that Powell's novel not only admonishes the tools of empire that misread othered bodies, but also reclaims a space for nineteenth century Chinese women, I argue that *The Pagoda* recasts transgendered identity within discourses of belonging, despite racial, gendered, and sexual abjectness. Unlike *Cereus Blooms*, *The Pagoda* does not provide sacral spaces for transgendered identity; rather, erotic encounters posit queer and dynamic processes of identity for these bodies in order to claim ephemeral belonging. These sexual experiences ultimately support Francis' argument about *The Pagoda* as including alternative modes of "intimacy, conjugality, and subjectivity" and thus alternative means of representation.

Positioning Powell's *The Pagoda* as a foil for Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* continues my discussion on learning how to read unacknowledged, unintelligible, queer bodies and thus their histories. Read together, *Cereus Blooms at Night* and *The Pagoda* provide literary challenges to the heteropatriarchal and dehumanizing processes of historical documentation that keep othered bodies from practicing intelligibility. In so doing, both novels present processes of identity as ever-evolving constructions. In body, representation, and object choice, the transgendered protagonists – Otoh and Lowe – queer notions of intimacy, desire, gender, and even transvestism. Liddy Detar argues that Lowe struggles against a barrage of racial, sexual, and gendered gazes but survives by "articulating a subjectivity that detaches gender from desire and ethnicity from one's sense of 'home...'" (218). Building on her arguments of disjuncting gender from desire, I

⁵⁴ Powell maps out the fissures of historical documentation that not only render certain bodies historically and socially invisible, but constructs the present trend of writing Caribbean queer subjectivities as moving "from the edges" and rendering these bodies as indispensable to depicting Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic imaginings (228).

focus on gender in a dynamic space where one needs to acknowledge the intentions of the desire along with one's gender identity and the individual's object choice. I also apply the same principle of transvestism to the text, dislodging this practice from sexuality. By creating a theoretical space between transvestism and sexuality, both become transient experiences and performative practices unattached to a body's sense of self. *The Pagoda* specifically extends the gender and desire conversation initiated through *Cereus Blooms* as Lowe practices a gendered and sexual identity at the interstices of Mala, Tyler, and Otoh. He evokes Mala due to his violent and traumatic past, Tyler in that he feels constricted by his identity, and Otoh because just as Lowe recedes into one identity, he extends self and body by employing layered transvestic performances. Through Lowe's bodily erotics, along with his unrelenting aspirations of building a pagoda, he creates a space for othered bodies to be at the cost of his own presence. And finally, in dancing between constriction and extension, Lowe's body proliferates in significance dispelling essentialist constructions of race, gender, sexuality, and power.

The Pagoda places queer protagonist, Mr. Lowe, within certain intimate spaces that *Cereus Blooms* indefinitely defers. These spaces and experiences of intimacy that, for instance, Tyler and Otoh do not share at the conclusion of *Cereus Blooms*, can be explored through Lowe's tapestry of erotic encounters. Lowe indulges in a few caring and self-making couplings (with Omar and Joyce) but most experiences are abusive and uneven (with Cecil and Sylvie). And because the narrative is constructed in a postmodern, anti-linear format, the body, in the midst of these multiple sexual experiences, should be read as an indeterminate, queer, and multi-gendered scene

figuring transvestism, gender, and desire as not only layers of identity but performative strategies for survival.

Transvestism as trope remains important throughout Lowe's quest for belonging. As a *Garberesque* crisis, transvestism becomes a productive way through which to read Mr. Lowe's sartorial performances, as these scenes are not always solely his own and at times are used against him. Lowe's cross-dressing initially allows him movement, for instance, granting him access onto the ship, the *Augustina*. It also limits his identity as in this instance he is physically safe until Cecil exposes his sex. When Cecil finds Lowe as a stowaway, he dresses him in male Western clothing and cuts off his queue. In this scene, Cecil is committing "cultural castration" by stripping Lowe of his culturally charged clothing (Francis 25). It is important to note that this violence against culture and ethnicity is enacted on a body that has throughout his young life been performing a male gendered identity or, if that is too narrow a definition, a multi-gendered persona. Prior to his stowaway experience on the *Augustina*, which brought Lowe from China to Jamaica, Lowe dressed in masculine garb. While Lowe never attended school like his brothers; prior to puberty, the narrator describes Lowe as his father's work companion (Powell 25). However, once Lowe turns thirteen and his female traits are too apparent for his father to ignore, he casts Lowe aside and Lowe's masculine antics no longer serve as a means through which to nurture a relationship with his father. This back story not only establishes Lowe's non-normative relationship to gender and identity, but also positions his body as the site for others to construct their fantasies of Lowe. Lowe's self-making erotic moments counter such intimate and embodied violence enacted on his person.

When Lowe's life no longer includes Cecil and Miss Sylvie, he begins another sartorial experiment, donning Sylvie's dresses and jewelry. Rather than arguing a return to a "true" and therefore essentialist sexual and normative gendered identity, Lowe's performances can be read through the trope of transvestism in order to actively and dynamically engage with an evolving self. It is important to note that I first choose to refer to Lowe and Lau A-yin (his female name in China) as two separate entities. Although their experiences are through the same body, their development within the novel seems detached and therefore their gender identities connect only through Lowe's memories of Lau A-yin's "early tomboyism."⁵⁵ These recollections ultimately inform my arguments of Lowe as a transgendered being. While the choice of referring to Lowe as "he" is something I continue to grapple with, I am theoretically most comfortable with this semantic choice due to his persistent masculine construction. This pronoun choice also provides an instability to the gender and sexual categories explored here, preserving the novel's complex temporality that is indispensable to Lowe's characterization. Referring to Lowe as "she" or even interchangeably with Lau A-yin would contaminate the temporal nuances Powell constructs to tell both Lowe's and Lau A-yin's stories.

For *Cereus Blooms at Night* I argue that Mala's garden is reconstituting, reimagining sacred citizenship through the depiction of a sexual and gendered space that is temporarily outside the heteropatriarchal gaze. By reading Mala's garden against the Matikor backdrop, I examine how the scene and by extension the sacral belonging

⁵⁵ Judith "Jack" Halberstam constructs a definition of "tomboyism" that adheres to early performances of female masculinity stating that tomboyism is accepted as long as the child is prepubescent. Further, similar to Chen Fang in *Monkey Hunting*, Lau A-Yin's performs her tomboyism as "a 'natural' desire for the greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys. Very often it is read as a sign of independence and self-motivation, and tomboyism may even be encouraged to the extent that it remains comfortably linked to a stable sense of a girl identity" (Halberstam 6).

speaks back to a cultural framework available in the text. In *The Pagoda*, Powell names nineteenth century Jamaica as place, and through Lowe's wishes to build a pagoda, provides the promise of a culturally specific but traditionally heteronormative space. For Lowe, the pagoda becomes more than the promise of cultural and linguistic continuity, it becomes a space of one's own outside the guise of assimilation. Yet since Lowe never directly accesses the space throughout the novel, the question of how it would be represented as a queer-friendly space is left unanswered and Lowe's belonging is deferred.

Lacking a *Pagoda* of One's Own: Isolation and Race Relations

Powell commences the novel with Lowe documenting the narrative present in order to speak of his shadowed past. On April 1, 1893, Mr. Lowe wakes after having a disturbing nightmare. He leaves his wife, Miss Sylvie, sleeping soundly in bed and starts writing a letter to his estranged daughter, Elizabeth. At this moment, the reader learns that he has been married to Sylvie, an octoroon woman who passes for white for thirty years now. He has also been out of touch with Elizabeth for twenty years. For about the same length of time, Mr. Lowe has tended a small shop, which Cecil owns. Lowe has lived in Manchester, Jamaica since he arrived in 1860. The third person narrator then describes Lowe's and Sylvie's physicalities claiming he has a bony face and Sylvie is "mannish" (Powell 6). The narrator juxtaposes these details with a description of their home which has portraits of Queen Victoria and the last Manchu Emperor. As the novel continues and the reader learns of the many skeletons rattling in their house, their physical descriptions and the historical portraits function to mock the façade Lowe and Sylvie construct within private and public spaces.

In Lowe's letter to Elizabeth, which he finishes at the conclusion of the novel, he stages his proclamation of existence stating, "I am not your father like you think. It is a long story, full of a lot of deception, a lot of disguises, but try to understand this was all so I could live... There isn't a record of any of this. Of what I am in truth" (Powell 8). Practicing a sense of self within multiple marginalities, first as a Chinese in Jamaica, then as a female, and then as a queer body, Lowe represents a vulnerable subject. Historically, Lowe is racially cast in British ship logs through the empire's gaze, but his queer gender identity is altogether absent. Lowe's letter writing project is a reinsertion in an already marginalized body of history that negates his very existence. Since the letter represents a fragile personal piece of writing versus an authoritative colonial archive, it symbolically embodies the haunting social and political void throughout the novel for both Lowe's queer body as well as the larger Chinese migrant collective.

In the opening scene Lowe is disrupted from writing his letter to Elizabeth with finding out that his store has been burned down. The narrator also notes that Cecil who was sleeping inside the store perishes as well. Finding himself lost once again, Lowe has the opportunity to refashion his identity. The novel first presents Lowe's state of abjection solely through a racial discourse. Detar argues that once Lowe loses everything – his shop and puppet master, Cecil – his identity and mere survival is linked to his remembrance of the thousands of Chinese and South Asian indentured laborers that have migrated to the Caribbean: "In sorting through his past, Lowe is no longer able to separate his own experiences from the larger dilemmas of the community of displaced Chinese who arrived as part of the indentured labor system and who have no immediate hope of returning to China" (222). Detar suggests that Lowe is not only part of the

history but the vessel through which this particular history will be recorded and remembered.

Through Lowe, Detar argues that *The Pagoda* points to a pronounced lack of historical records chronicling the colonial Chinese presence in the Anglophone Caribbean. Although information is scant, the Caribbean scholar Walton Look Lai breaks ground in creating historical visibility for this marginalized ethnic minority. According to Look Lai, of the roughly 18,000 Chinese indentured laborers that migrated to the British West Indies between 1854 and 1881, 6% (a little over 1,000) arrived in Jamaica. Patrick Lee argues that on July 30, 1854, one group of 267 Chinese laborers arrived in Jamaica from Hong Kong traveling on *Epsom*. According to a report by Emigration Agent J. White on the Departure of the *Epsom* from Hong Kong, “The emigrants are all able-bodied men...” (Lee 76). Lee notes that of this first wave most of the thirty or so Chinese migrants that remained on the island started small grocery shops. Between 1864 and 1870, about four years after Lowe is said to arrive in Jamaica, another 200 Chinese laborers arrive in Jamaica, but it is not until the *S.S. Prinz Alexander*’s ship logs on July 12, 1884, that of the 696 migrants, 109 were documented as women (Lee 81). These socio-historical collections cast a cultural and ethnic footprint long ignored for the region; however, for the most part this information, alongside Powell’s *The Pagoda*, presents the nineteenth century Chinese woman as well as the queer Chinese and Chinese-Jamaican body as an undocumented rarity.

Lowe definitely occupies this void space within the larger multi-racial community in the novel, as the narrator initially presents him as a stranger. Even though Lowe claims he knows everyone’s business in the community because of what he hears in the

shop, he is not a part of their lives, blaming a vague and all-encompassing “them” for burning down his shop. Lowe states, “Yes, he’d come to catch his hand, to make something of his life. But he was no poor-show-great. He didn’t see himself better than them. Above them. But now they had burned it down. Flat. Flat. He was there only sufferance. Himself and the other five thousand Chinese on the island” (Powell 13). The animosity Lowe experiences from the black population stems from tensions of having multiple othered racial and ethnic groups in the same space. The Chinese historically enter the dichotomously white/black space and serve different social purposes. Lisa Lowe frames this ‘experiment’ as an economic and socio-political exercise, stating:

The British introduced the Chinese into the community of white colonials and black slaves as a contiguous ‘other’...Neither free European nor white European’s ‘other’ (the black slave), neither lord nor bonded, the Chinese were represented as a paradoxical figure, at once both an addition that would stabilize the colonial order and the supplement whose addition might likewise threaten the attainment of any such stability. The Chinese woman figured as a colonial fantasy of the Chinese capacity for bourgeois family and ‘freedom.’ (197)

Lowe’s last statement regarding the Chinese woman as a colonial fantasy is interesting to consider especially since she is constructed at this time purely as the absence Francis, Detar, and Look Lai point to. Within this discourse, the Chinese woman’s allure relies on her not being physically in the colonies along with the Orientalizing language surrounding her chaste yet exotic capacity. Most pertinent to the present discussion, however, is the West Indian Governor’s office insistence on Chinese women as integral to creating Chinese families which would serve as a “racial ‘barrier’ between the colonial whites and the enslaved blacks” (Lowe 198). Lowe’s rape, pregnancy, and subsequent fatherhood queers the family structure presented above. Although later in the novel the narrator introduces a traditional Chinese family with the Heysongs, Lowe, Miss Sylvie,

and Cecil initially frustrate the pursuit of the Chinese family structure. In exploring the sinister contours of Lowe, Cecil, and Sylvie's oppressive relationships, Powell considers the social and intimate repercussions of Chinese integration within Jamaica.

As soon as the reader learns that the shop burned down, the text shifts between the narrator and Mr. Lowe, capturing the mutterings of the predominantly black townspeople gathering around the site: "You hear that blasted idiot moaning like is her shop burn down? She don't see how the Chinaman take advantage of we. How the backra put them between we. All the hell we set at they tail, now they bringing in Coolie and Chinee" (Powell 15). The commentary captures the black population's angst regarding the Chinese and South Asian migrants, casting them as a threat whose presence could possibly undo their social and economic progress. According to Lisa Lowe, the white plantocracy is not only looking to repopulate their fields, but is also looking to the Chinese as a more 'civilized' group that could possibly instate bourgeois-like decorum within the laboring class.⁵⁶ Mr. Lowe, however, takes a more fluid and collective approach to family and is inconsolable, not only because he sees his family's future in cinders, but also because he had positioned his shop as a space for Chinese advancement on the island. He states, "The shop had been for...the Chinese who had escaped the sugar estates...the shop was there so if they wanted they could come and apprentice with him, till they'd pay off their contracts and with a small loan open up a little shop..." (Powell 15). Lowe's desolate reflections here re-produce the opportunities the Chinese had on the

⁵⁶ Later in the novel, Elizabeth's husband finally tells Lowe to his face, we (a collective black voice) think you are a threat and therefore will remain other within this community echoing the malcontent and inter-racial tensions pervasive throughout the novel. He states, "At first is farming and such. Then next thing shop, and before you know, a little shop in every blasted corner you turn. Now is school and property. Soon you have my people working for you on the estates cleaning for you in the big house. Calling you massa and such..." (Powell 73).

island that seem entirely foreclosed to the black population. Although Lowe's intentions may be honorable, it is necessary to acknowledge that Lowe's controlled position of power is backed by an industry that continues to kidnap Chinese and South Asian bodies for forced labor in the Caribbean. Significantly, it is not until he loses everything that he is able to productively engage with black protagonists like Jake and Omar, as Lowe's initial reality kept them at bay.

Lau A-yin: The Matter of Her Sexed Body, Mr. Lowe: His Gendered Body Matters

Even though Lowe's difference is initially his racial minority, his racialized gender identity is one of multiple evolutions. The introduction of his multi-gendered identities marks a point of re-evaluation not only for the scene that introduces his gender nonconformity, but for the novel as a whole. Sitting with Kywing, a fellow Chinese shopkeeper, Lowe dwells on his dejected position. Although Kywing suggests he open another shop quickly, Lowe introduces the idea of the pagoda (Powell 38). Even though Kywing argues against it, saying that their existence in Jamaica is about survival, not turning out learners, Lowe recedes into self-exploration, rummaging through his present state and unearthing a past palpably felt. From this current abyss of nothingness, the narrator unveils Lowe's layers of identity along with the circumstances of duress that spark such identity processes. It is from recollections of the physical and sexual struggle with Cecil that Lowe and "woman's flesh" textually become one:

The man lit a match. The light wavered. Leaving a white curl of smoke. The man lit another and another and another. Finally a blue flame, burning. Lowe tried not to bawl out, as the pads of fingers travelled the puffy contours of his bloody face, as the insides of his head drummed with the boom-boom of blood. Then the clumsy fingers were busy at the humid throat, ripping open the padded jacket...only to wade into a banded chest, a banded chest and beneath that a ruffle of smooth lambskin and the dense weighty mounds of woman's flesh. Woman's flesh! (Powell 49)

There are a couple of narrative techniques at work here. First, it is important to note that the narrator juxtaposes Lowe's discussion with Kywing regarding the pagoda with Lowe's mental descent into his present state of "dispossession"⁵⁷ and his traumatic memories of rape and abuse. This textual device positions the pagoda as an antidote to the traumatic events of his past. Second, in order to unpack the revelation of "woman's flesh" and its revisionist capacity to restructure the narrative, it is necessary to assess the prose as semantically preserving Lowe's layered identities. If considered a conventional "analepsis," or flashback, the "women's flesh" would be directly attached to the person having the flashback (Currie 29). It is a narrative technique used to reveal a hidden facet of the protagonist's psyche or possible motivation for present decisions. However, Lowe is never clearly mentioned in the scene. The reader is certain it is Cecil attacking Lowe and yet the narrator calls Cecil "the man." The narrator leaves the reader questioning how "woman's flesh" alters Lowe's identity. At this time, Lowe is not called by his former name and identity, Lau A-yin. By obscuring Cecil's identity and insisting that Mr. Lowe has "woman's flesh," Lowe and Lau A-yin are regarded as two distinct personas in one, *alone together*. Through this critical perspective, I believe these two personas resist the essentialist language of a return to an initial feminine disposition. Rather this scene represents Lowe as all of these markers and none of them simultaneously because he is read through another's eyes. To his father, Lowe was an androgynous child who he can dream of sailing the world with until Lowe's physical development betrays their

⁵⁷ Gerard Aching defines dispossession through his reading of Earl Lovelace's (1979), novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance*. He states, "Rising out of the [dispossession] landscape is a spirit of rebellion against poverty. Paradoxically, it is not manifested as an outright rejection of disenfranchisement but as an ideology of nonpossession through which the Hill's inhabitants transcend material impoverishment by holding to it as they would a prized possession" (53). The possession/ nonpossession binary is exemplified in *The Pagoda* through Mr. Lowe's loss of economic and social standing. The loss of Lowe's shop creates the opportunity for Lowe to be viewed by the extended community as an equal and gives way to him collaborating with Jake on the planning and building of the pagoda.

relationship. To Cecil, Lowe becomes a queer desirous pawn he can sexually access, secretly abuse and then re-dress as a man and shop owner when in Jamaica. In both instances, the narrator depicts Lowe's gender identity as someone else's construction and Lowe is left to suffer the damning repercussions.

The novel's non-linear temporality keeps Lowe and Lau A-yin as two distinct personas. If this timeline is untangled, the novel loses its queer subversiveness. The reader's surprise when learning about "woman's flesh" forces a re-assessment of Lowe as a protagonist. However, the reader should not discard his masculine construction but rather layer Lowe's identity with the new information. Until now, Lowe's gender identity has been textually produced through what Butler calls "the repetitive stylizations of the body" and Lowe's "woman's flesh" should not unravel its successful façade, but rather expose gender identity as a construction (*Gender Trouble* 45). Lisa Yun argues that even though "Lowe's [gendered] 'passing' is constructed as a strategic method of survival, it is also an act of queering and transgendering Lowe's diasporic history such that it is not easily commodified or homogenized" (277). In this quotation, Yun captures the anti-linear function which preserves the multiplicity of identity and naming within the text. If the reader insists on calling Lowe Lau A-yin, then Lowe's socio-historical, diasporic, and gendered identities are processed as familiar, manageable, and once again absent.

Although the insistence of calling Lowe a "he" even after his body is sexed as female does not dictate how we read his body, it definitely complicates the position of his queer body within the field of erotics mapped out in the novel. The erotic cartography of the novel allows Lowe to speak back and re-enter the belonging discourse outside racial, ethnic, and social barriers initially cast in the novel. According to Sheri-Marie Harrison,

Lowe as a cross-dressed woman and consistently referred to in the text as masculine (he, him), experiences positive homosexual and heterosexual intimacy with Joyce and Omar respectively, and negative homosexual and heterosexual intimacy with Sylvie and Cecil respectively. The determining factor of positive or negative, natural or un-natural here is not the partner's gender or sexual preference (Lowe's androgyny implicitly complicates this), but rather the partner's approach to his/her desire for Lowe's body, and the partner's racial designation. (par. 20)

I read the multiple manifestations of desires present when Lowe engages in intimate encounters with both sexes as his opportunity for a sense of sacred belonging. However, as Harrison notes, not all couplings are positive. Lowe is cast as a sacrificial identity not only because the pagoda as his physical space is permanently deferred, but also because he uses the body as his vehicle for practicing ephemeral belonging even after his abusive sexual encounters. The abusive couplings return to an oppressive racial discourse that fixes an Orientalizing gaze onto Lowe's body. According to Detar, this act fixes Lowe's racial identity but allows his gender identity to fluctuate (266). Despite Lowe's fluctuating gender identity, he cannot access freedom; rather, Cecil and Miss Sylvie perpetuate a selfish fantasy of racial specificity and subordinate power. While Cecil forces himself onto Lowe while Lowe is dressed as a man,⁵⁸ Miss Sylvie confesses that she saw Lowe before they even met. Although on a personal level these encounters do not serve to advance Lowe's self-making queer identity, they do shed light on the multiplicity of queer desires available between both heteronormative and non-heteronormative couplings. The novel also depicts erotic scenes where the physicality of the moment is secondary to Cecil and Miss Sylvie's mental narrative of the event. Both parties do not care about Lowe's participation beyond the role they assign for him. In

⁵⁸ On Cecil and Lowe's sordid relationship in the cabin, Powell states, "The relationship that develops in the cabin between Lowe and Cecil is an intriguing one that raises important questions about desire, for Cecil's desire for Lowe has everything to do with her cross-dressed status, a fantastical construction that has little to do with who she really is" ("Dynamic" 191).

both cases, this creates a very isolating physical experience for Lowe. In “The Dynamics of Power and Desire in *The Pagoda*” Powell states, “Though they are the only two in the room, neither Lowe nor Miss Sylvie sees the other. She begins her velvet words of seduction by telling him of her dreams haunted by an Oriental man who was to be her lover. Therefore her desires for Lowe precede Lowe and are informed by her fantasy of dreams, not by who or what Lowe is” (193). Further, Lowe’s sexual encounters with whiteness allegorize his unintelligible position within Jamaican society. Cecil and Miss Sylvie consume his sexuality without any negative repercussions, yet with every encounter he is left without agency, abused, and forgotten.

The narrator describes Lowe’s first sexual encounter with Miss Sylvie as tinged with pain, agony, and trauma. The intermittent exclamation points signify Lowe’s utter shock that Sylvie knew of his sex. The carnal knowledge does not lead to understanding as the narrator describes the scene similarly to Lowe’s violent encounters with Cecil: “There were only teeth and hard bites and spread legs and splayed fingers and breathlessness ...” (Powell 113). In fact this scene is marred with interjections of Lowe’s past with Cecil. While these erotic and violent moments conflate, they are indications that Lowe desired Miss Sylvie despite her oppressive behavior towards him. The narrator explains, “Secretly and in his heart he yearned for her embrace, and often he wished he could simply small himself up into her lap and sleep there. But always she wanted more” (Powell 114). The insatiability of consuming his body and the fantasy she constructs of him leave them isolated in their experiences. Their erotic encounters do not bridge an intimate space for acknowledging the other and creating a safe space for one another to be. Rather, with each present encounter, a barrage of past violent episodes floods the

scene crowding their physical moments together. Despite Lowe's desire to create intimacy with Sylvie, they cannot get beyond the narratives of power at play.

Along with eventually desiring Miss Sylvie, Lowe physically responds to Cecil's sexual advances, complicating the discourse of oppression. Cecil corporealizes all the systemic oppression Mr. Lowe endures. Cecil haunts all the spaces of confinement that Lowe resides in; whether the ship – the initial point of contact and violence – or the shop – a space of subservient power, to finally the home – where both Cecil's forced conjugal visits and Sylvie's *not quite white* façade trumps Lowe's opportunities to ever identify personhood outside their asphyxiating control. Yet there is a scene when Lowe, amidst his spewing hatred for Cecil, physically desires his sex. When Lowe confronts Cecil about not considering what he wanted, asking, “Did you once ask me what I wanted, when you bring me here? Did you know anything at all bout me when you throw me the bag of money and the shop key and left? Left me with the baby so weak and sick?” Lowe's stomach hardened, redolent with memories, even though down there, down there, he was moist” (Powell 97). Even though Detar reads this scene as “an unresolvable contradiction,” I believe it is an indication of the oppressive manner in which Lowe has, until now, experienced sex (286).⁵⁹ Between Lowe and Cecil, physically responding against his will seems a part of the psychological violation he has endured.

Lowe's erotic experiences with Omar and Joyce recast sex and sensuality as a means through which “instructive lovemaking” is experienced (Francis 39). For Lowe, these experiences are his opportunities for erotic crossings that prompt a sense of belonging. While in *Cereus Blooms* the love and intimacy between Otoh and Tyler is

⁵⁹ What I find most interesting in this scene, that Detar does not mention, is the queering and re-signification of erotic bodily reactions as the narrator correlates the male pronoun, “he” with feminine moistness.

deferred until the next bloom and hence beyond the scope of the page, the narrator of *The Pagoda* grants the reader entry into multiple positive scenes of seduction, sex, and even intimacy. Once it is only Lowe and Omar alone in the house, Lowe claims to start falling in love with Miss Sylvie. He dresses in her clothes, puts on nail polish, and even lets his hair grow down his back. He recognizes that Sylvie only loved the idea of him, stating, ““And how you to love some other person when the body you inhabit not even yours? When the body you inhabit has more to do with somebody else’s fantasy. The fantasy of somebody you love. But who it turns out don’t even see the real you, really”” (Powell 221). In proclaiming his unrequited love for Miss Sylvie, who only possessed an Orientalizing lust for his body, Mr. Lowe begins to open up to Omar and physically lets him in, symbolizing a culmination of queer desires. Omar is currently living with and working for Lowe, and their coupling can be read as queer because of Omar’s insistence on still calling him Mr. Lowe. Their living together also sparks rumors throughout town.

The narrator describes their erotic encounter as different from that of Lowe and Sylvie, or Lowe and Cecil. They come to be together on an even erotic plane. Their equity, though, comes only after a physical altercation that grants Lowe a sense of solidarity with Omar. When Lowe learns that it is Omar who burned down the shop, Lowe physically accosts Omar. The narrator states, “Lowe sat on his chest with the glittering knife plumb at his throat. ‘Move and see what happen this morning.’ His voice was sharp and gray. ‘Move and see whose blood run this morning.’ ...Omar said nothing at all, and the whites of his eyes rolled in the darkened kitchen and his breath was just tumbling from him, the face shining, the fear breaking him” (161). Although the scene marks a violent encounter, it is nonetheless an enlightening moment for Lowe. Realizing

Omar's hand in the shop's demise, he more importantly comes to understand Cecil's manipulation of Lowe, Omar, and even Miss Sylvie. In this moment, Lowe realizes his equally subjected position along with Omar as the narrator explains: "Here he was fighting Omar for land and for property that didn't even belong to them, that was still damp from prior bloodshed... Yet here they were like hungry dogs, setting upon each other and biting over the one little dry bone Cecil had flung them" (Powell 162). I read this realization as the moment where the pagoda's symbolic significance is born. At this time, Cecil and the racialized patriarchal oppression he represents is once and for all marginalized. This outward affront to Cecil's power gives way to the pagoda project, a culturally inclusive and tolerant space. Building the pagoda will directly cancel the cultural castration Lowe endured when Cecil cut off his queue and made him change into Western style male clothing.

Coupling Lowe and Omar's violent scene with their first erotic moment reorganizes the possibilities of the flesh between the two protagonists. Representative of the two parties who seem so irrevocably divided in the opening scenes – Omar, the frustrated and upstaged black townsperson and Lowe, the vague Chinese merchant – are now intimately close. While the scene above presents Lowe on top of Omar threatening his life, it is a complete inversion of the self-making promise explored when they join sexually. Unlike Lowe's moments with Miss Sylvie where he interrupts the scene with thoughts of flight, Omar and Lowe's intimacy is a very relaxed experience.⁶⁰ In fact after

⁶⁰ They are two active players in the scene: "They basked in the red glow of the heavy curtains and the smoky heat. The groping hands moved wildly, feverishly, on flesh no longer firm, on muscles no longer tight, on buttocks no longer round, on a waist no longer small, on a stomach no longer flat" (Powell 225). Their coupling is a physically relaxed scene. Like Otoh and Tyler, Lowe and Omar are another example of a queer yet anatomically normative coupling; Omar calls out to him three times, "Mr. Lowe" and Lowe responds all three times with, "Shh" (Powell 226).

physical intimacy, Lowe shares with Omar his inner most traumas and Omar consoles him, claiming that Cecil made a “whore” out of everyone.⁶¹ Although during this scene the major players of pleasure are Lowe and Omar, Cecil haunts the experience. However, he is now framed through a sexual and gendered discourse equally linked to power (as he made everyone his “whore”). This revelation unites Omar and Lowe on a continuum of oppression rather than difference. It is their intimate moment together that seems to allow them the psychological wherewithal to cast Cecil out of their lives. This scene also depicts the erotic as political in that it brings two marginalized racial identities together. Lowe and Omar become mutually aware of their social predicaments and their opportunities for cooperative re-building. Their intimate experience marks a definitive departure from the conversations had by the black townspeople in front of Lowe’s burned shop where both groups were represented as hopelessly divided. Very soon thereafter, Omar and Lowe’s new union offers concrete progress to Lowe’s dreams of his pagoda.

Lowe’s positive erotic experiences do not stop there, as the next day he goes to visit Joyce, the wife of Mr. Fine, a policeman. Their clandestine kiss in the shop in the past was a prelude of what they could be together, especially for Lowe. There is no seduction with Joyce. The narrator describes, “She brought him to her room, locked the door behind her, and pulled the blinds. She unbuttoned his clothes. She did not have to remove the merino or the offending swaddling band. His chest was bare and his breasts leapt out at her” (Powell 229). She calls him beautiful and asks him to “make love to [her] me” (Powell 229). This is the first time a sexual partner asks Lowe repeatedly to be present in the moment. She asks him to look at her and touch her and be available,

⁶¹ In this exchange, Omar responds, ““He [Cecil] turn everybody into whore, sir, man or woman. Young or old. He blackmail everybody, sir. So he operate”” (Powell 227).

“otherwise I [she] could be anyone here with you” (Powell 230). Their love-making is self-making for Lowe. She turns all his body parts into flowers, re-signifying all his physicalities that had once been markers of pain, violence, and abuse to things of beauty. His fists “become her flowering hibiscus, his elbows her marigolds, his breasts her star apples, his nipples her guineps, his knees her frangipani, his calves her turtleberry bush, his navel her iris, and down there, down there, how to call it, her tulip?” (Powell 230). Although their coupling is brief, Lowe remembers their time together and the two details above as what last between them:

Years later he would always remember how she kept his eyes open with her mouth full of orchids and how the iron drums rolled slowly and steadily off his chest...She unsheathed the organ inside his mouth. He nibbled on it. He pressed back against it as if they were wrestlers...She laid them [his hands] across her broad and stolid back. She laid them across her fleshy bosom, across the margins of her buttocks, she used them to strum the sides of her belly. ‘Plus you need to relax,’ she said. ‘Am not your enemy.’ (Powell 230)

In this sensually charged scene, the reader sees Lowe as more than a body haunted by past physical and psychological traumas. With Joyce at the helm, Lowe accepts how she transfigures his body into natural objects of beauty. This acceptance is self-making because he is not absorbed into the background, and, as Donna Haraway puts it, must be just a body (575). Joyce is constantly asking Lowe to look at her, to be present in the moment. From Joyce’s bed, he regains energy and proceeds with plans to build the pagoda. He revisits the scene of the fire and sees this space with new eyes, no longer as a space of loss but as the future lot for his pagoda. While he does not pursue further contact with Joyce, he finds solace in planning how he will paint the walls of the pagoda a specific scarlet color, and that he will choose commanding columns for the entranceway.

The Pagoda concludes with an array of unexpected encounters, vague plans and inconclusive beginnings. Although Lowe seems to be resolute, he undergoes a number of physical, gendered, and racial crossings that present him as psychologically shaky and ultimately sacrificial. Leaving Joyce's home, he visits with Mrs. Heysong, the first documented Chinese woman on the island. And while he feels a connection to her, their experiences are much too dissimilar to say that historical records have it wrong and that Lowe is actually the first woman on the island. Even their memories of home are different as Lowe claims that the China she speaks about "sounded distant and far away to him. Another country altogether" (Powell 232). Their pasts and presents do not coincide; however, narratively Powell's insertion of Mrs. Heysong indicates a changing socio-political landscape where Chinese women are beginning to fit within the Jamaican space. According to Lisa Lowe in "The Intimacies of Four Continents," "...Chinese women could only be imagined as virtuous to the extent that 'Chinese culture' would not permit them to migrate" (199). The fact that Powell casts the first Chinese woman as married and therefore respectable and 'productively' participating in society manifests Lowe's argument of the Chinese woman "as a figure that promised social order" (199).

Mr. Lowe, on the other hand, is presented in the end as anything but stable. Lowe's erotic encounters prove positive but ephemeral. He continues to dress in Sylvie's clothing in order to re-dress his living with her ghost. He becomes comfortable living in this ungendered (or multigendered),⁶² unraced (or multiraced) space in order to will her

⁶² Like Tyler's comment, *not a man, not ever able to be a woman*, the processes involved in labeling a body's gender identity seems to always be limiting. I argue that Lowe is residing within an ungendered or multigendered space because he performs multiple gender markers which should not cancel each other out and should open the space of reading gender and gendered bodies. It is interesting to note that while we have a similar trajectory mapped out in García's *Monkey Hunting* with Chen Fang's multiple gendered locations, as soon as she is expected to return to a female/ womanly disposition, she does so with no reservations. And again, unlike Lowe, she is always referred to with a feminine pronoun.

closer to him. While he is dressing in women's clothing – and critics like Donette Francis and Winifred Woodhull argue these scenes to be a return to a feminine self and identity – I argue that this is the ultimate sartorial experiment, because it belies the question of whose femininity he is performing.⁶³ This scene captures the epitome of transvestism in the novel as it opens up a space for multiple crossings to take place. In his self-reclusive state, Mr. Lowe experiments with Miss Sylvie's femininity putting “Miss Sylvie's dresses on my back, with her colors on my nails, with her rouge on my cheeks, her jewelry on my fingers and throat” (Powell 240). Sylvie's racially gendered persona, an octoroon woman passing for white, can never be a return to femininity for Lowe as there is no space for his femininity to thrive within these threads which were utilized to conceal racial ‘impurity’ and carry out a white-centered privilege. Lowe's feminine performance, if it is what he wishes to practice, would have to eradicate these markers of unbridled domination.

What is most pertinent to my argument is that throughout this performance, Lowe is acknowledged as “Yes, Ma'am, Mr. Lowe.” As one of the most quoted lines of the novel, the phrase summarizes Lowe's body's inconclusive state. Lowe's multiple “masquerades” have throughout the novel been about survival and struggle, but his erotic experiences have upheld sexuality as transient, suggesting his final moment of self-

⁶³ Francis states, “Earlier scenes show A-yin exploring femaleness through various types of sexual desire, but at the novel's close A-yin experiments with whether *becoming* a female necessitates a series of feminine performative acts: she lets her hair grow, and wears dresses, nail polish, makeup, and jewelry in the house. During this sartorial experiment, she does not, however, go out in public for fear that the community would think her mad: ‘The people would put me in an asylum. *Though am only just being me for the first time in my whole entire life*’” (39). While Woodhull in “Margin to Margin, China to Jamaica: Sexuality, Ethnicity, and Black Culture in Global Contexts” argues that “the narrative in *The Pagoda* posits the existence of a core gender identity and follows a trajectory leading to the discovery of the protagonist's ‘true self’” (122). I believe this argument a bit essentialist with regards to gender identity, but also missing the irony that Lowe says he is “being me for the first time” while inhabiting the clothes and persona of someone else.

construction as also transient. These final scenes do not return Lowe to a feminine self as his memories of Lau A-yin's childhood were in masculine garb and of performing masculine tasks with his father. There is no before, but there is a present in each of these gender constructions and a potential relationship among these gender performances that echoes Butler's arguments of gender transformation found in the possibility of connecting subversive moments of signification.⁶⁴ Claiming that Lowe possesses a feminine gender core would be to perpetuate the identitarian dislocation of self that plagues Lowe's social existence.

The multiple crossings, in effect, while interesting in denaturalizing the sex and gender binary, do not prove emancipatory for Lowe. This final sartorial experiment depicts an embodied act of mourning, as Lowe is mourning multiple losses. Through this performance, he is confronting losing contact with his daughter. The letter is a desperate attempt to reconnect with her. He is also mourning his lack of identity. While he proclaims that he is performing his self, his truth for the first time, he is in a constant state of present. He lacks the ability to channel a past that supports and recognizes who he wants and is trying to be. Lowe discloses, "I don't know which is worst, those years wanting so badly to forget the past so I could fit in, or now, forgetting so completely and still not fitting in" (Powell 241). Lowe assumes the ungendered (or multigendered) space where the flexible prefix "Trans-" resides. Yet living in this trans-between, Lowe is emblematically damaged because he practices an identity that is marred with silences and absences. The most problematic loss he mourns is that of Miss Sylvie. Practicing her

⁶⁴ In "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," Butler temporally and relationally places the practice of gender identity as "the stylized repetition of acts through time..." Hence Butler argues that since gender identity is a construction lacking an essence, "then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style" (520).

femininity, he channels her but also evokes who he was with her. Throughout the text, Lowe acknowledges Miss Sylvie's erasure of his identity and concedes that she constructed an identity for him that suited her fantasies. Lowe's confirmed devotion to her despite Miss Sylvie's reductive recognition of Mr. Lowe casts him as yearning to be within a fantasy constructed for him that is nonetheless a narrative of belonging. With that identity unavailable to him, he is restricted to personal recognition but social meaninglessness. The multi-gendered space he resides in does not grant him freedom, but rather encloses him within a house full of familial and personal ghosts; who he has been, to whom, and at what price.

In lacking the constructed queer sacred space that *Cereus Blooms* makes available, Lowe's queer body never finds a space to be. His private home with Omar is haunted with his former identities Sylvie and Cecil constructed. While he actively hides, society's lack of comprehension seeps in with Jake, who is working for Lowe on the pagoda. When he comes for his weekly pay he cannot help but to try and read Lowe's body and its signification: "I see him pretending not to peer into my chest, not to look at my behind" (Powell 241). Jake quickly looks down at his feet and says, "Yes, ma'am, Mr. Lowe."

Space for Belonging Deferred

Lowe's pagoda becomes the imaginative space of creation that, while its plans and construction sustain his spirit to continue, never grants him the sacred space afforded to Tyler and Otoh in *Cereus Blooms*. At the end of the novel, Lowe can only create an imaginative connection to the space that may very well be for others. The novel ends with Lowe's letter to his daughter, where he states that the "center is there" hoping that his daughter and his grandchildren will frequent the space in the future (Powell 240).

At the end of the novel he practices a proliferation of gendered experiments that leave him abject and simultaneously meaningless to those around him; for instance, Jake does not know what to make of him. It is building the pagoda that brings him to a coalitional sense of affinity with Omar, who, reciprocating the connection, picks up the everyday responsibilities of overseeing the project when Lowe becomes increasingly reclusive. Although he does not find belonging himself, the pagoda is nonetheless a future space of promise for other and othered bodies to construct a coalitional sense of citizenship.

Lowe's pagoda is expected to become an institutionalized space that will bring into the public realm the Chinese cultural practices usually held in Kywing's private home. In bringing these rituals outside Kywing's private space and into Jamaican society, the pagoda epitomizes Renato Rosaldo's argument on cultural citizenship as accessing a personal sense of social value and acknowledgement: "The notion of cultural citizenship concentrates on the viewpoint of ethnic minorities and asks how they conceive of first-class citizenship – that is, how they conceive of being treated with what they define as respect" (14). Since this particular pagoda is being built by laboring hands across racial lines, the space represents a collaborative effort to cast the Chinese identity as integral to Jamaican culture. On a familial level, Frydman argues that the pagoda is a public space that can ultimately queer "the gendered distribution of family roles" removing the responsibility away from women as bearers of culture in society (105). He continues, "The Pagoda... would compensate Lowe's failure to fulfill a role that his traumatic sexual history has made impossible. Institutionalizing, rather than gendering, the function of transmitting the Chinese heritage allows Lowe to remain in the 'place of uncertainty' that

haunts him but also propels his intimate circulation through the many spheres of colonial Jamaican society” (Frydman 105). This distinction seems at first to cast Lowe as the mother he was never able to be, which simplifies his ever-evolving gender identities; however, by refocusing the pagoda’s role as a future Jamaican institution of culture, the novel preserves Lowe’s proliferating identity just as the pagoda’s promise for collective practice and healing is prioritized. This argument is most effective, however, because the novel closes with the pagoda in mid-construction. The manner in which this cultural space will be socially coded is left unanswered; therefore, while its institutional promise can potentially reorganize belonging for marginalized identities, it is a leap to assume that it will be a safe space for queer Chinese-Jamaicans.

Ultimately, both Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Powell’s *The Pagoda* are narratives that create space for queer voices that, amidst their traumatic history, are not defeated by the heteronormative historical tools that oppress their existence. These novels also avoid promoting a homonormativity that absconds their protagonists’ past. Both texts invest queer identities with integrity and emotional complexity, re-signifying their presence within the Caribbean space and re-inserting these bodies within the very fabric of identity-producing discourse. Mala, Tyler, Otoh, and Lowe, to varying degrees, all engage with a politics of identity by distancing from essentialist explorations like *where do I come from* and aligning themselves with *how did I come to be*.

**Chapter Three: Bodies Scared Sacred at the Crossroads: Vodou and Sacral
Intelligibility in Mayra Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* and Ana-Maurine Lara's
*Erzulie's Skirt***

This project thus far has positioned othered bodies as constructing sites of belonging within the Caribbean space despite their invisibility in the grand narrative of history. The first two chapters position these literary efforts amidst nineteenth century global flows, tangentially shedding light on the socio-political effects of introducing Chinese and South Asian groups to Caribbean colonies. Therefore, the novels I have thus far examined have allowed readers to evaluate spaces pregnant with transnational networks that produce opportunities for belonging. This chapter provides a similar literary stage but examines texts that look at the present, focusing on the politics of immobility and its relationship to sacral and sexual experiences. Édouard Glissant argues that “immobility and alienation are the necessary consequences and the facilitating circumstances of exploitation” (xliii). Mayra Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* (2001) and Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* (2006) depict contemporary socio-political abuses within spaces of confinement. Through representations of Vodou worship, Montero and Lara both pose the sustained critique that globalization encompasses processes that preserve physical, social, and political mobility for some while fixing immobility for others who perpetually face inequitable and utterly defeating terms. Mimi Sheller positions immobility as “co-constitutive” to those bodies whose mobility is an understood privilege. One example she details is the mid-twentieth century's “colonial/ industrial system of ‘free labour’ and capitalist plantation commodity consumption in which workers began to migrate in search of wages and metropolitan dwellers began to travel in search of exotic pleasures...” (Sheller 22). Both novels focus on the routes

available and unavailable to the marginalized women protagonists Zulé, Miriam and Micaela, and how amidst these political worldings they access their sacral and sexual personas as critical registers for identity construction.

This chapter examines protagonists directly engaging with traditional forms of sacred practices through Vodou worship. Both *The Red of His Shadow* and *Erzulie's Skirt* depict protagonists whose affiliation with loa (Vodou goddess), Erzulie, guide their physical and otherworldly realities. In *The Red of His Shadow*, the sacred is tapped into as the main protagonist, Zulé, is mounted by her loa and relives Erzulie's perpetual tragedy. Miriam and Micaela, in *Erzulie's Skirt*, maintain a more distanced relationship with Erzulie. The temporal qualities of *The Red of His Shadow* and *Erzulie's Skirt* also distinguish them from previous novels discussed. *The Red of His Shadow* extends the sacred time concept discussed for *Monkey Hunting's* Chen Pan. When mounted by their loas, Zulé and her retinue relive their mythic tale. The mythic past and the protagonists' banal reality coalesce within a pocket outside sequential time. Within this sacral contest, the protagonists are drudging up a cultural and intimate past available to them through worship. Although the scene evolves as an allegory of Erzulie's tragic love story, it also somatically depicts Game's discussion of involuntary memory as archetypal, mythic moments. She states, "Involuntary memories have the same extra-temporality as mythic-archetypal experiences; they also have a mythic quality, they involve an archetypal calling up...Involuntary memory is inhabited by and calls up spirits; it lives in-between... We come to life, our past comes to life, when our particular memories mix with the immemorial" (230).

Similarly to Powell's *The Pagoda*, Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* revises the analepsis technique, introducing a mythic dimension that anoints the scenes with an otherworldly, collective quality. *Erzulie's Skirt* redeploys analepsis by revising the narrative past and future, thus constructing a plural present. For instance, when Miriam and Micaela cross the Mona Strait, the scene recaptures the bodies lost through the Middle Passage. While the Middle Passage is never directly a memory from the women's personal past, therefore not a depiction of analepsis in its conventional state, it nevertheless becomes available to the women. In the scene, the Middle Passage becomes not only the women's past but the reader's as well. This doubling scene where temporality is scrambled has mythic qualities, but unlike in *The Red of His Shadow* it keeps sacral presences and interventions at bay. The loa, Erzulie, is guiding the women but does so at a distance.

Zulé in *The Red of His Shadow* and Miriam and Micaela in *Erzulie's Skirt* inhabit sacral and sexual identities as a counter to multiple experiences of physical and/or social immobility. Within worldly and otherworldly exchanges, the body becomes a social tool for physical labor, gendered control, and sacral discipline. In casting the body as central to multiple physical and spiritual crossings, this chapter picks up the politics of the erotic present in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Patricia Powell's *The Pagoda*. However, rather than linking the politics of the erotic to a deconstructionist stance on gender identities, the erotic here focuses primarily on the relationship between women's sexual agency and citizenship. The relationship between sexual agency and citizenship in the novels critiques the heteropatriarchal notions of normative couplings as the nucleus and foundation for family and, by extension, social recognition and continuity for the nation. This conception becomes highly problematic when Zulé, Miriam and Micaela

choose to practice egalitarian sexual practices whereby they bed whomever they please without minding conformist politics within their social surroundings. These women protagonists assert a sexual freedom negating social expectations of normative sexual behavior. Directly linked to how the women's sexual agency troubles their citizenship is how they access belonging through immediate pleasure and benefit. Similarly to Mr. Lowe, the women practice belonging through a giving of the physical self for immediate gains and benefits. They revise citizenship from what one produces, and, as a woman, the cultural and economic continuity one's body promises the body politic, in order to access connection through physical pleasures and even mutual recognition of oppressions. For instance, Zulé finds an ephemeral sense of belonging through her high standing Vodou station as well as her sexual couplings with female partners. Yet she represents the space created between sacred and citizenship when, despite sacral grandeur, political transformation is absent. On the other hand, *Erzulie's Skirt* places Miriam and Micaela in unconquerable situations that prompt their transpersonal interdependence not only with each other, but also with other bodies from the past who have endured similar experiences.

In *The Red of His Shadow*, Vodou priestess (*manbo*) Zulé Revé is a powerful priestess who is nonetheless entrenched in a patriarchal system that polices her bodily and social movements. Zulé's narrative of belonging within her collective would have ideally encompassed her performing her gendered station first and taking a husband in order to secure her position of sacral power. She moves from her father's guardianship to her mentor and lover, Papa Coridón's control. However, when he passes away and she becomes leader of her own Gagá, male elders pressure Zulé to marry. In fact, Papa

Coridón's son, Jérémie Candé, desires to own her bed. It is in this moment of sacral ascendancy that she refuses to accept the marriage proposal and beds both male and female partners. She constantly dismisses the regulatory efforts of her male counterparts in order to live and tragically die as a woman beyond patriarchal narratives of discipline. I read these scenes through the Afro-Dominican concept of *Liborismo* as well as Hortense J. Spillers' discussions of the captive body as offering contradicting experiences of self-construction that shed light on the manner in which Zulé ultimately mirrors her loa, Erzulie.

Although Zulé embodies a physical captivity while inhabiting sacral grandeur, Haitian Miriam and Dominican Micaela in *Erzulie's Skirt*, travel the Caribbean creating routes that are unavailable to Zulé. However, mobility for Miriam and Micaela does not guarantee freedom and safety. The women survive passage through the Mona Strait, face forced prostitution, and then social persecution when finally laying roots in the Dominican Republic. Despite their hardship, the women anatomize the spiritual dimension of the *metaphysics of interdependence* as they find strength and compassion in their physical and psychological union.

While blessed by the gods, when they settle down and open a *colmado* (a small goods store) in the Dominican Republic, the locals refer to them as "brujas" (witches) and "putas" (whores) (Lara 203). Both categories use the sacred, sexual agency, and citizenship as a means to marginalize them and their practices. Their initial vilified status separates them from the señoras, the respectable women of the town. The society, however, does not know who the women are, what they do, and how they have acquired the monies to open a store. The irony is that the women have, indeed, willingly and by

force performed and reconstituted both names, “brujas” and “putas.” They practice Dominican Vodou; as a Vodou practitioner, Miriam is in fact Changó’s horse or mortal vessel. Both women are also forced into prostitution when they arrive in Puerto Rico, and it is the U.S. dollars they find as they are escaping that makes the colmado a possibility. However, it is not that they have engaged in the conventional notions of what these names entail, but that they have reconstituted their significance by successfully practicing a sacral and erotic self and union despite their traumatic past. They actively practice their sexual agency, and, with their apprentice, Yealidad, Miriam and Micaela construct an alternative family structure not through procreation, but through passing down their sacral legacy and knowledge.

As cultural representations, *The Red of His Shadow* and *Erzulie’s Skirt* attempt to counter the onslaught of socio-political critique of Vodou, resignifying it as a meaningful and complex religion. It is, therefore, pertinent to contextualize twentieth century Vodou as a sacred practice and scholarly discipline. Although Vodou has been continuously deployed and misused for various political and identitarian purposes, there are a number of sources that regard Vodou as a rich and multi-faceted tradition and religion.⁶⁵

Margarite Fernández-Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert cast Vodou as “The oldest, least understood and perhaps most maligned of all Afro-Caribbean belief systems” (4).

Vodou originates in the Dahomedan, Congolese, and Nigerian regions of West Africa and “it was filtered through Roman Catholic symbolism and liturgical traditions” (Fernández-

⁶⁵ Vodou has historically suffered a tension-ridden relationship with Haitian and global political discourse shedding light on the intricate connection between sacral practices and political identities. Brief background on the relationship between Vodou scholarship and politics tracks its multiple restructuring whether it has been aligned with Catholicism, a Pan-Africanist agenda, or most indelibly Dictator Francois Duvalier’s use of Vodou myth to incite fear and maintain control. For more information on its multiple iterations see Jean Price-Mars’ *So Spoke the Uncle* (1928), Alfred Métraux’s *Voodoo in Haiti* (1959) and Joan Dayan’s “Vodoun, or the Voice of the Gods” in *Sacred Possessions* (1997).

Olmos and Paravisini-Gebert 4). Its gods and goddesses, the loas, are in the hundreds and, unlike any other religion, Vodou practitioners possess an ever-evolving attitude to the construction and manifestation of new loas.

Vodou is an extremely corporeal religion where communing with the Divine is practiced through the body. The act of mounting, the event through which a loa inhabits the body of their *houngan* or *manbo*, male or female Vodou priest(ess) is a moment of symbiosis between mortal and god:

The ‘horse’ [mortal] is said to be mounted and ridden by the god. The event is not a matter of domination, but a kind of double movement of attenuation and expansion... This experience of election, its shock of communion, is not evidence of psychic disruption, or proof of pathology, but rather a result of the most intense discipline and study. Not everyone can be possessed, for not everyone can know how to respond to the demands and expectations of her god. (Dayan19)

This experience personifies the term transpersonal (which is thread throughout the chapter) and imagines this notion of a shared space of being within sacred spaces of the Vodou practice. The encounter between loa and Vodou practitioner, or “horse,” gestures to the indeterminacy of the individual not only during the exchange but also in their everyday lives. Further, spiritual embodiment through a loa possession is an auspicious opportunity for the loa to transfer knowledge to his or her practitioner. A mounting is an act few can experience, but within a spiritual ritual, it is usually the collective, who witnesses the act, that learns and changes. The “manifesting of spirit” or possession is also called *monte chwal la*, “which involves the *lwes* who ‘mount’ their human ‘horses.’” The *loas* often give instructions to their horses, the human vessels that are not aware of the *loa*’s presence during the ‘ride,’ and additionally to the community, with the phrase,

‘tell my horse...’” (Daniel 9).⁶⁶ According to Yvonne Daniel, s/he “needs to be told later about the advice and commentary that have taken place, since s/he is usually unaware of what transpires while s/he is mounted” (9).

As the female loa that both Montero’s *The Red of His Shadow* and Lara’s *Erzulie’s Skirt* pay tribute to, Erzulie is a paragon of virginity and promiscuity, making her the most contradictory of the loas. Most widely known as “Maîtresse Erzulie,”⁶⁷ Maya Deren acknowledges her position within the pantheon as the figure through which creation, myth, dream, and desire are fashioned:

Voudoun has given woman, in the figure of Erzulie, exclusive title to that which distinguishes humans from all other life forms: their capacity to conceive beyond reality, to desire beyond adequacy, to create beyond need. In Erzulie, Voudoun salutes woman as the divinity of the dream, the Goddess of Love, the muse of beauty. It has denied her emphasis as mother of life and of men in order to regard her (like Mary, with whom Erzulie is identified) as mother of man’s myth of life--its meaning. In a sense, she is that very principle by which man conceives and creates divinity. (138)

As the “Lady of Luxury,” however, her domain – love, dreams, creation, the overall appreciation of aesthetics – are all excess desires and not essential facets of existence and practice. Mistress Erzulie’s excesses are painfully punished as she is cast as the sacral entity that is eternally sacrificed in order for a sacral connection between Vodou practitioner and loa to subsist. Deren states, “The wound of Erzulie is perpetual: she is

⁶⁶ *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* is aptly the title of Zora Neale Hurston’s book on Haiti. While this ethnographic travelogue includes sections on Jamaica, it mainly focuses on her experience in Haiti during the U.S. occupation. The book was poorly received as critics claimed it was too sensationalistic. Her continual alliance with non-Caribbean individuals is pervasive throughout the text. For more critical information on this text refer to Leigh Anne Duck’s “‘Rebirth of a Nation’: Hurston in Haiti” (2004).

⁶⁷ According to Thelma B. Jiménez Anglada in “Rito y otros cuerpos (in)disciplinados en tres textos de Mayra Montero” Maîtresse Erzulie has multiple names including but not limited to, “*Erzulie-Fréda, La Balianne, Ti-Quitta, Gran Erzulie, Erzulie-Ge-Rouge, Marinette-Bras-Chêche, Brigitte, Erzulie Mansour, Mai-Louise, Marinette-Congo, Erzulie Lemba, Marinette- Pied-Chêche, Erzulie Mappione y La Sirène*, son sólo algunas de las diversas expresiones de la divinidad...” (128).

the dream impaled eternally upon the cosmic cross-roads where the world of men and the world of divinity meet, and it is through her pierced heart that ‘man ascends and the gods descend’” (145). This background on both the shared process of possession and Mistress Erzulie’s characteristics and perpetual destiny are pertinent in order to engage productively with the sacral and mythological script both novels follow.

I argue that the relationship between Zulé and then Miriam and Micaela with Erzulie introduces a sacral feminist politics. In *The Red of His Shadow*, Zulé and Erzulie share sacral subjectivity since the end of the novel and thus the end of this spiritual mounting is predicated on the loa occupying the space of the living. While Erzulie is destined to relive her tragic love story, Zulé experiences godly splendor but loses her life in the process. Zulé, thus, lacks the safe haven that sacred citizenship affords Miriam and Micaela. Miriam and Micaela’s relationship with Erzulie is less messy since the loa serves as a guiding presence, and not a deterministic force. Lara distances the world of the living and the godly plane, only conjoining them in uncanny moments of familiarity. For the most part in the novel, Erzulie serves as the goddess of the ocean and beauty and her multiple incarnations guide Miriam and Micaela. It is the two women in the text that practice a blurred corporeal and imagined identity providing literary representation to transpersonal subjectivity.

Mayra Montero(’s) Haiti and *The Red of His Shadow*

Mayra Montero was born in Havana, Cuba in 1952. Montero emigrated from Cuba to Puerto Rico at an early age and was brought up with an aura of Santería and Caribbean mysticism infiltrating her everyday life. These personal experiences coupled with her studying journalism in Mexico and then working for the Puerto Rican

newspaper, *El Nuevo Día*, gave Montero an appreciation of the interconnections and interdependence of the Caribbean space. Unlike prevalent arguments on the Caribbean as impossibly divided due to social, economic, linguistic and/or cultural disparities, Montero's personal experiences both in Cuba and Puerto Rico and then professionally in Dominican Republic and Haiti, grant her a holistic view of the Caribbean. It is due to this comprehensive understanding that she claims complete comfort concerning the Haitian politics and Vodou practices represented in her work.

According to Paravisini-Gebert, Mayra Montero, while not a Vodou practitioner herself, perceives the embodiment of the sacred through Vodou as an absorbing and significant practice. She argues that Vodou, especially “in the lives of the Haitian laborers who harvest cane in slavery like conditions” is “a compelling approach to understanding history and culture. These practices, she has explained, are ‘at the origin of an important aspect, perhaps the most beautiful and sublime aspect, of our *mestization*’” (146).⁶⁸ Aside from interpreting sacred practices as a conduit for vernacularizing *mestizaje*, Montero emphasizes the sacred as a space for existence outside unlivable conditions. She has revisited this vulnerable space of representation three times now. *The Red of His Shadow* is the second of three novels Montero has written on Haitian identity and the socio-politics of Vodou during and after the Duvalier regimes. The first novel, *The Braid of the Beautiful Moon* (1987, *La trenza de la hermosa luna*) focuses on Jean

⁶⁸ Alicia Arrizón defines *mestizaje* as a practice that “helps to imagine the racialized body and the elements of cultural/ colonial difference. It ‘performs’ a link to local and translocal identities through contradictions, cultural negotiations, and resistance” (4). While the term is heavily invested with Hispanophone connotations, it is interesting to note Montero's use of the term to describe Haitian Vodou and culture and then how she links herself within the conversation as Vodou being “the most beautiful and sublime aspect, of *our* *mestization*.” In addition, Vodou as a religion is itself a syncretic practice produced by multiple negotiations and unwavering resistance. In this context of Vodou's role within marginalized sociopolitical realities, the term captures the dichotomous and tension-ridden relationship between the economic and political confinement of contemporary Haitian cane cutters and the liberating, empowering dimension of their Vodou worship.

Leroy, a Haitian man who returns to Haiti to assist a friend with some personal matters, which action, unfortunately for Leroy, leads to his demise. The novel is set during the Duvalier dictatorship and weaves Leroy's personal journey with the nation's political and social instability. *In the Palm of Darkness* (1995, *Tú, la oscuridad*), written a few years after *The Red of His Shadow* is also set during the Duvalier regime. This novel centers on the relationship between two men, a herpetologist, Victor Grigg and his Haitian guide and translator, Thierry Adrien. While searching for the mythical "grenouille du sang," a nearly extinct amphibian, their relationship delves deeply into untouched nature as well as the corrupt proceedings of the Haitian government. In *The Red of His Shadow*, Montero shifts the interactions with politics and enters the discarded and forgotten space of sugarcane plantations where there is seldom a voice from the outside. The only political arm which overtly threatens their space is a former Tonton Macoute, dictator Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier's secret police, who incites a bloody war in this space when his drug trafficking plans are thwarted. Further, *The Red of His Shadow* is the only one of Montero's novels where the main protagonist is a young woman, and, since it is set in a contemporary batey, a sugarcane plantation in Yerba Buena, La Romana, Dominican Republic, it is also the only novel dealing with Haiti that is not set on Haitian soil. Despite the physical dislocation from Haiti, the novel presents haggard Haitian bodies that perform back-breaking work in dire conditions. Although this is work that no Dominican national would ever be caught doing, the Dominican state perpetually accosts the thousands of Haitians that work in these bateys near the border.

The Red of His Shadow opens with an ominous preface positioning the incidents recounted within the context of violence against and among these marginalized identities. Montero states,

Each year on the island of Hispaniola, tens of thousands of Haitians cross into the Dominican Republic to work as cane cutters. These Haitians, ‘Congos,’ as they are called on the other side of the border, bring their wives and children with them, and what awaits them all, without exception, is a life of untold privation and misery in working conditions patterned after the cruelest slave regimes. (xiii)⁶⁹

In this “Author’s Note,” Montero both expands the collective discussed and particularizes the sequence of events, creating a space within the novel to represent subjectivities usually silenced in historical records.⁷⁰ Their perpetual struggle, according to Montero, draws them to traditions of the spirit that allow for the possibility of sacral connections and metaphysical recognition not of this world. Montero then casts this pernicious side of globalization within the politics of love, hatred, death, and Vodou, stating, “This novel narrates real events...involving a ‘houngan,’ or Vodoun priest, and a ‘mambo,’ or Vodoun priestess...The names of the people and some places have been changed to

⁶⁹ I think it is prudent to note that Samuel Martínez argues that while these working conditions are dire and inhumane they should not be blanketed as modern day slavery: “...most sociologists and ethnologists who have done research on the Dominican sugar estates agree that the condition of 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. And, in the sugarcane fields of the Dominican Republic, the primary means of maintaining labor discipline is not the threat of physical punishment or legal penalty but wage incentives” (xiii).

⁷⁰ In 1991, there was a U.S. Congressional Hearing to provide a stage on which to discuss the purported abuses of Haitian cane cutters in the Dominican Republic. According to April Shemak in “Textual Trespassing: Tracking the Native Informant in Literatures of the Americas,” “the ‘witnesses’ who testify[ed] are not themselves subalterns. Instead they are ‘expert witnesses,’ including...the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Robert Torricelli, U.S. Representative-New Jersey; Robert Lagomarsino, U.S. Representative-California; Joseph Becilia, 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...(263). Two major discrepancies occur, first while the Dominican government was represented, the Haitian government was not. And then, the most pronounced lack is the voices of actual Haitian cane cutters. Although discussing their “condition,” they remained absent throughout the entire proceedings.

protect certain informants. Behind a case closed by the Dominican police as a simple ‘crime of passion’ pulse the magic spells of a war that is still being waged” (Montero xiv). The open-endedness of the phrase, “a war that is still being waged,” may allude to a multitude of conditions including, but not limited to: the inter-ethnic animosity between Dominicans and Haitians, the violent drug traffic ring that claims so many lives each year, the caricatured, cheapened, but simultaneously feared Vodou practice as well as the inhumane treatment of Haitian cane cutters particularly and “peripheral migrants” in general throughout the world. Samuel Martínez describes “peripheral migrants” as belonging

to a ‘second tier’ or lesser privileged migrants internationally, whose standards of living are inferior to those of most Third World migrants with whom social researchers are familiar... Commonly, peripheral migrants stand at the very bottom of regional and international divisions of labor. They go to the least desirable destinations and take the most arduous, worst paid, and least secure jobs available in the host area. (27)

Zulé and her spiritual and socio-political community depict this debased and completely unvalued group of laboring bodies who endure this systemic political unbelonging.

The “Author’s Note” also depicts Montero’s transformation from journalist to novelist as she seeks to represent experiences otherwise silenced. However, for the purposes of my argument, the factual integrity of her work is less important than the articulation of the sacred experiences. Montero’s claim that these events are “real” is less interesting to my purposes than the novel’s presentation of social and emotional landscapes the state glosses over when using the phrase a “crime of passion.” Emphasizing that events like this one can be contained as a simple “crime of passion,”

ultimately critiques the inutterability of the sacred as well as the socially marginalized within legal and other socio-political institutions of recording.

The actual novel lacks the direct connections delivered in the “Author’s Note.” Mistress Zulé Revé and her Gagá, a spiritual and political collective based on Vodou worship, annually participate in a ceremonial pilgrimage during Holy Week. This pilgrimage constitutes the narrative present while the narrator interjects with recollections of the past. Since the protagonists perform these physical, spiritual, and narratological crossings within the bateys of the surrounding cane fields, this already marginalized space is constructed in the novel as an atemporal scene.⁷¹ Unlike Mala’s garden in *Cereus Blooms at Night*, where an un-policed space allowed for gender play and invention, the bateys serve as an atemporal construct due to the individuals’ marginalization, and yet the persons that exist within this space police and marginalize one another. Rather than simply glossing this othered space with utopic and non-violent characteristics, Montero does not shy away from delving into the insular problems present in such a space. This complex view of the inter-personal and sacral relationships within the bateys grants a complex and uneven representation true only to the availability of both great power and vast, multiple oppressions.

“Taking on Flesh” in a Metaphysical World

Twentieth century Dominican and Haitian-American literature periodically represents the cane fields and surrounding areas as a space outside time where mythic retrieval is possible but also where great pain and bloodshed is located. For instance, in

⁷¹ In the preface Montero alerts the reader to the possibility of numerous outcomes experienced during these journeys, stating, “Sometimes the Gagá travels great distances, through much of the countryside, and frequently crosses paths with another Gagá. The encounter can be absolutely cordial or extremely bloody, depending on the unpredictable mood of the ‘gods’” (xiv).

Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), the Dominican police take the main protagonist to the cane fields and beat him after he continues to pursue a woman who is involved with a fellow police officer (296). This scene somewhat parallels a torturous moment for Oscar's mother, Beli Cabral, who, thirty years prior, has an ill-fated love affair with "the Gangster," who turns out to be married to "La Fea," President Rafael Trujillo's sister. "La Fea" and two men kidnap her, beat her and leave her for dead in the cane fields (Díaz 157). While near death, she hallucinates a Mongoose guide who tells her that she lost the baby she was carrying but that there was peace and life for her future. And it is this mythical connection beyond her present state that saves her. This is also the place where, in 1960, three of the four infamous Mirabal sisters (strong dissidents of the Trujillo dictatorship) find their death. Julia Alvarez portrays the violent scene in her historical novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994). Further, Haitian-American Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) depicts the 1937 massacre of about 17,000 to 22,000 Haitian men, women, and children; the title of the novel itself is the colloquial phrase referencing the cruel nature of cane labor. The workers regard the harvesting of cane as "farming the bones" because of its decimating harshness.

Similarly to the novels noted above, Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* endows the sugarcane plantations with both mythic and violent qualities. It threads the present and past, carnal and spiritual worlds in an effortless braid of events, capitalizing on moments of crisis and granting flashes of understanding through the materiality of the body. The phrase, *taking on flesh*, speaks to the protagonists' multiple selves. They are laboring bodies exploited for unethical profits that never reach them who, in turn, negotiate grand sacral identities in private. In the novel the protagonists inadvertently

institute their own inequitable gendered milieu. At the very beginning of the novel, the narrator introduces the phrase *taking on flesh*, when Zulé first hears about her archrival and former Tonton Macoute, Similá's plan of attack. The narrator states, "Zulé closes her eyes and seems to see the villain's face. How many goats, she wonders, and how many guinea hens had their heads cut off so that the bokor's huge body could be submerged in the tide of blood? Similá knows all too well that only in this way will his vow take on flesh" (2). Similá's vow to break Zulé *takes on flesh* through a Vodou ritual of bathing in the blood of sacrificed sacred animals. It is only when he literally dons animal flesh that Similá garners the spiritual powers needed to take on Zulé and her Gagá. The term "flesh" is also taken up when discussing physical labor: "She [Anacaona] knew what burned cane meant: more work and less pay, because the piles of cane lost weight. She had already suffered through it in the flesh of her dead husband, who would come with singed clothes and labored breathing" (Montero 28). The narrator utilizes the term here within a paradoxical semantic construction as Jean-Claude is dead and hence his flesh is decaying and decomposing. Soon after Jean-Claude's death, Anacaona marries Luc, Zulé's father, which leads to the second usage of flesh on the same page. The narrator explains how Anacaona rewards Luc with an abundance of food during lunch due to their "difficult contest of the flesh," which is how he wins her over the previous night (28). Jean-Claude's rotting flesh as well as his singed flesh when alive and working the fields is juxtaposed with the vitality of flesh used in sport. This is a critical moment in locating the symbolic importance of the community's batey and their Gagá as a social safe haven since the narrator portrays the male protagonists like zombies with burned flesh mechanically working the fields. However, when secluded within their intimate

collective, they perform machinations of the body that grant pleasure unlocatable in their laboring selves.⁷²

Zulé's flesh and body, however, is the most contested with regards to how she performs self amidst the heteropatriarchal constructs of her social reality. She occupies a dichotomous position of ultimate sacral power as well as a restrained and marginal second-class status. While the former is due to her proven Vodou crossings, the latter is forced upon her through the re-gendering of her body and society's expectation of her compliance with heteronormativity. Introducing Hortense J. Spillers' argument of the flesh as *a priori* for the body facilitates my argument of Zulé's dueling identity. In "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," Spillers links the flesh stripped of all social markers with the captive body stating, "...before the 'body' there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse, or the reflexes of iconography...If we think of the 'flesh' as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-aparntness, riveted to the ship's hole, fallen, or 'escaped' overboard" (67). Spillers utilizes a sustained image of the violence enacted on bodies held captive as a primary and uncensored form of communication. The marks and scars on flesh demand their own form of language beyond meaning production that distances the experience from its much needed immediacy. Spillers then connects this construct with the racial and gendered particularities of the black captive (female) body where, since she was assessed against

⁷² In addition, these dissected descriptions of flesh propose the indeterminacy of body as intimately related to one's private and public exchanges. These moments in the text echo Sarah Ahmed's take on the ethics of touch where she sheds light on "the different ways in which bodies 'touch' other bodies, and those differences are ways of forming the bodies of others" (113). Differentiating between the shake, the beating, the embrace, Ahmed's construction of touch encompasses a wide spectrum of how bodies come to interact and affect one another; all exchanges deeply rooted in the manner in which we regard self as subject and construct others along a social hierarchy. These specific configurations shape our perceptions of one another and subsequently rationalize our interactions whether caring or violent.

an authoritative model of value – the male slave – the captive female body “locates precisely a moment of converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange” (Spillers 75). While primarily discussing the theoretical underpinnings of gender and captivity, Spillers brings the argument into the present when attributing these symbolic histories of signification and value to how the contemporary black female body is repeatedly commodified. The black female subject is, thus, always within a discourse of bondage. The conflation of time and “historical order” theoretically shrinks the space of experience between the captive bodies during the Middle Passage and the contemporary black female subject who is always already perceived through an excess of signification still being funneled through the very construct of captivity. Thus, it is the violent gendering of Zulé’s sexual and sacral crossings that cast Zulé within both godly grandeur and social captivity.

While Mistress Zulé is in a constant battle for selfhood amidst an ambush of sexist social structures, it is pertinent to acknowledge Zulé’s position within the Gagá as the absolute priestess. This position of great political and metaphysical power within the Gagá affords her a sense of authority above all others, male and female. Her leadership role echoes infamous Vodou prophet, Olivorio (Liborio) Mateo, who, in the early twentieth century, initiates Liborismo, a defiant and counter-cultural practice of modernity. Capturing the attention of Haitian and Afro-Dominicans along the border, Liborio and his followers challenged the Dominican elites’ capitalistic labor and land privatization within the sugar industry. Liborio

established...Cuidad Santa (Holy City), based on shared volunteer labor (*convite*), equitable distribution of resources, subsistence agriculture, communal lands, self-sufficiency, spiritual law, and the celebration of

Afro-Dominican culture. He also refused to charge for his services: 'Curaba pero no cobraba' [He cured but did not charge]. (Adam 65)

The direct correlations between Zulé and Liborio begin with their metaphysical prowess and extend to their stance against economic and political abuses within their respective communes.⁷³ The novel depicts Zulé aiding a number of physically and spiritually ill individuals along her voyage, but it is Similá, the triple-balled, yellow-eyed bokor from Paredon, who challenges Zulé on all fronts. Her relationship with Similá sheds light on her reciprocal social and economic relations within her Gagá which parallel the 'Holy City' Liborio historically established. Their exchanges also reveal Zulé's unwavering stance on preserving her Gagá's integrity as their godly battle starts from her refusing that the former Tonton Macoute's drug ring pass through her batey. Counter to all of their batey's labor and social regulations, Similá's drug trafficking is based on privatization, unchecked capitalism, and greed.

While Zulé and Similá's relationship depicts her spiritual and political powers, it is also the very personal exchange that simultaneously brings Zulé back into Spillers' captive body model. Spillers creates four distinct components to the construction of the captive (female) body that dissects the power relations embedded in notions of intimacy and then the intimacy entrenched in the idea of captivity. She states,

1) the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality; 2) at the same time – in stunning contradiction – the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor; 3) in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and

⁷³ According to Robert L. Adam Jr., "Olivorio (Liborio) Mateo was a fifty-year-old Afro-Dominican campesino from the valley who, long before his elevation into a Vodú prophet, had developed a reputation as a credible clairvoyant. . . Popular history maintains that Liborio unexpectedly disappeared during a tremendous storm in 1908. Relatives and friends presumed that he had died during the storm. On the ninth and final day of the memorial services being held in his honor, he reappeared and recounted the story of his disappearance to those present: he had traveled far away, he told them, carried to heaven by an angel on a white horse. While in the spiritual realm, God recruited Liborio to be his servant to spread His word, cure illness, and save the world" (64).

biological expression of ‘otherness’; 4) as a category of ‘otherness,’ the captive body translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general ‘powerlessness,’ resonating through various centers of human and social meaning. (Spillers 67)

Spillers’ trajectory from physical captivity to sexualizing processes of control mimic Zulé’s experiences with her multiple heterosexual and same-sex couplings. Similar to the manner in which proximity to whiteness and colonial powers influenced whether *The Pagoda*’s Mr. Lowe’s couplings were oppressive or nurturing, Zulé follows the four parts above with the men in her life. During heterosexual encounters, Zulé becomes powerless and abused while her same-sex couplings assist her in garnering the strength she so desperately yearns for in her everyday existence.

Despite her Liboristic following, once Zulé’s mentor and first sexual partner, Papa Coridón, foresees his own death, she is almost immediately re-gendered female, heterosexual, and an agent for procreation. I bracket the prefix, re-, because it is not until she is perceived as a single Vodou priestess that she is re-branded as a woman first and a Vodou practitioner second. Coridón quickly urges Zulé to marry his son, Jérémie Candé, because he foresees that once he dies she needs to worry about the next man she will meet. She ignores his advice and, fulfilling the prophecy, Similá Bolosse suddenly appears seeking Zulé’s medical and spiritual assistance. Similá is a man near death when he reaches Zulé: “Anacaona...shook her gently by the shoulders and told her that a bokor, almost naked and with raw, bleeding feet, had come to Colonia Engracia begging them for the love of god to help him” (Montero 70). When Similá meets Zulé they are instantly attracted to each other. While Zulé desires him and seeks to cure him of his injuries, his immediate desire is to capture her and her powers, slipping Zulé into the first

category of captivity. At first, Similá flatters Zulé, telling her of the reputation that precedes her: ““The people who go back and forth buying the dead. They tell me about the untamed daughter of a luckless houngan who lived on the slopes of Mayombe; they told me about the dead Coridón’s widow, as tough as a man; they told me about the long courtship of a black Chinaman who isn’t mute but never opens his mouth. All three times it was you”” (Montero 72). Each iteration Similá speaks refers to Zulé in different phases in her life but nevertheless always in direct relation to a male figure. According to Vilma Manzotti, “La idea que no hay un solo ‘yo’ sino una multitud de ellos, que se apropian de los actos de un cuerpo según sus deseos y necesidades, es la realidad que Zulé sostiene como ‘verdad.’ Ella es según ‘quien se la monte.’ Luce Irigaray conceptualiza este procedimiento como la evidencia de nunca ser simplemente ‘uno’ (31)” (364).⁷⁴

Summoning French Feminist Luce Irigaray, Manzotti attributes the multiple names which she argues indicate Zulé’s sexual multiplicity as both her resistance and the manner in which Similá *sees her* and reads her body.

I believe there is a two-fold argument present here that Manzotti glosses over. Initially, there is a sexually subversive multiplicity available to Zulé’s body which is contingent on the indeterminacy of how she deploys her corporeal and sacred self. This is especially seen in her same-sex coupling with Christianá Dubois discussed later. For Manzotti, Zulé’s subversive multiplicity is first all the sexual and spiritual mountings that she experiences, which I disagree with because it is only through her same-sex experiences, those that do not position her in the service of womanhood, that she is able

⁷⁴ My translation is as follows: *The idea that there is no single “I” but rather a multitude of selves which all appropriate bodily acts based on one’s desires and needs is Zulé’s reality and what she regards as truth. She is who mounts her. Luce Irigaray argues that this process is evidence of a woman never being one.*

to practice a self-making identity. Manzotti, however, claims that not only do all sexual mountings contribute to her multiplicity but also that this is the same discourse Similá utilizes to call upon her. My reading diverges here as well, since what I believe is most pertinent to her sexual identity is not at all these names which link her to men, but her sexual and spiritual mountings that are for pure physical and spiritual pleasure. These experiences do not submit her body to heteronormative practices that require her total complicity with procreation and cultural continuity. Manzotti makes a leap that is not carefully considered as the multiplicity of naming does not necessarily correlate to the multiplicity of sex for Zulé's body. On the contrary, the names cast her as a daughter, then as a wife and lover of another. And nevertheless, whom she evolves into when in proximity to Similá is the woman who uses her tongue to cure him, sexualizing her powers but ultimately leaving her powerless. This uneven sexualization of her self sheds light on Spillers' second and third category of captivity.

Sex with both Similá Bolosse and Jérémie Candé concretizes her gender and sexual otherness within her socially constructed space. The narrator describes Zulé and Similá's coupling through the language of violence. A scene capturing their moments together describes her flesh as nourishment and Similá, an insatiable parasite: "Then the bokor of Paredón stopped speaking, coiled around the nourishing flesh of the mistress, and buried his fury in a deep digesting sleep from which he did not waken even when Zulé slipped out of bed to open the door" (Montero 142). In this instance, Zulé's sexually captured body is depicted as a host on which Similá feasts. Her use-value exchange is, therefore, reduced to a sexually consumable *being for the captor* (Similá). Despite her reviving him and regardless of their spiritual connection, their sexual encounters prove to

be nothing more than a prelude to the war for control that is brewing over her batey. Prior to the overwhelming and catastrophic sexual coupling between Zulé and Similá, Zulé and Jérémie also sleep together in another example of phallocentric sex that for Jérémie would have ideally ended up in their union (Montero 46).⁷⁵ Here Zulé knows immediately that she is pregnant but, unlike her experience with Similá where she aborts the fetus, she sees the pregnancy to term despite fearing the child would be Chinese like its paternal grandmother. They name the baby Florvil Coridón, but the baby dies soon thereafter and the narrator never really attributes the baby a physical description (Montero 47). Both these couplings prove detrimental to Zulé as within these relationships she can never escape the men's projections of her as a use-value commodity. This very brief stint into the domestic life she is expected to lead catches Zulé by surprise, and it is her turning away from these processes of domesticity altogether that allow her to practice an unfettered albeit ephemeral sense of self.⁷⁶

Zulé's same sex erotic moments prove empowering and produce a spiritual trance through which Zulé garners great powers. On the eve of the major battle between Zulé's Gagá and Similá, Zulé beds the war queen, Christianá Dubois: "Christianá Dubois, still stupefied by her recent pleasure, opens first one eye and then the other, then closes them

⁷⁵ As one of her spiritual councilmen and self-proclaimed bodyguard, Jérémie is the closest in proximity to Zulé; however, due to his racial otherness he assumes a stagnant state of difference as everyone is so quick to attribute his callousness and shrewd behavior to his Chineseness, racializing his erratic behavior and creating an aura of uneasiness that permanently surrounds Jérémie.

⁷⁶ This defiance is inevitably met with the masculinization of her identity as it is used to both praise and critique her independence. For instance, Similá's praise when addressing her spiritual talents and leadership qualities claiming she is as "tough as a man" (Montero 72). Another example of this tendency is when Jérémie sees her contemplating their plagued circumstances and describes her as possessing "mannish obstinacy" (Montero 4). The challenge in addressing these markers of categorization lies in the particularity of the black female subject as always possessing the specter of slavery and bondage labor written on her body. Therefore, Zulé's "mannish" persona is not atypical within the specter of slavery where black women worked alongside their male counterparts in the fields; however, in the novel the women are never sent to the canefields to perform physical labor which, I believe, reinstates how the men in her life admire and simultaneous feel disgusted by her power.

both and stretches, her body marinated in the nocturnal saliva of the woman who licked most” (129). This moment thrusts Zulé into a trance that leads to her untimely demise; however, it is not the trance that causes her death. Jérémie sees Zulé’s sacral crossing as his perfect opportunity to accuse her of her sensational antics with Similá, ultimately divulging his obsession with Zulé and with controlling her sexual body:

‘You covered over the cracks, Mistress but I heard you. Even in Papa Luc’s house I could hear you howling, you and the dog Similá, when you were fucking,’ Christianá tells him to shut up, Papa Luc’s daughter is suffering a great mounting, you only have to look at her eyes or hold her hands, ten fingers that are no longer Zulé’s fingers but those of the angry mystery who rides her. (Montero 131)

Just as Zulé is controlling her trance, Jérémie becomes ruthlessly mounted by Carfú and lunges at Zulé. This scene highlights the nature of Zulé relationships with those she beds. While Jérémie attacks Zulé and seeks to violently contain her, Christianá “convinced that Papa Luc’s daughter is in danger, heroically covers her body with her own body” (Montero 133).

Zulé and Christianá’s love for each other inside and outside the bedroom is indicative of their mutual instinct to protect their individual and collective selves. Unlike Similá, who is only present in the final battle scene for personal interest, and Jérémie, whose trance is proving destructive, Zulé and Christianá perform mutual interdependence. Zulé’s final sexual coupling and trance defies sexual and gender marginalization by not categorizing difference. In “Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas,” Alexander presents the incestuous connection between state-sanctioned identities and the sexualization of specific bodies. She argues that sexually aberrant bodies are problematic to the state precisely because of their rejection of procreation,

‘stealing,’ as it were, possible economic profit from the state. Alexander explains, “some bodies have been marked by the state as non-procreative, in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non-productive of babies and of no economic gain. Having refused the heterosexual imperative of citizenship, these bodies, according to the state, pose a profound threat to the very survival of the nation” (7). Zulé’s multiple couplings productively threaten the relationship between identity and sexual practice as she first resists such categorization as well as presents her sexual experiences as pertaining to a continuum of desire seemingly foreclosed in the aforementioned quote. Within her sexual exchanges, Zulé feels at home with both men and women; it is rather her object choice’s intentions that cast her same-sex couplings with Christianá as nurturing and self-making. While she ultimately rejects the heteronormative compulsion of procreation and marriage, she does birth a child that dies. Zulé, thus, moves in and out of the state-sanctioned model citizen role as well as her pleasure-seeking experiences resisting categorization. In her final scenes where she rejects Similá and Jérémie altogether, Zulé’s body assumes the marginalization linked to her sexual subversiveness and re-figures it as she finds strength and metaphysical greatness through prioritizing self-making pleasure. Zulé’s fluidity within the domain of signification along with her Liborista attitudes against capitalistic abuses like Similá’s drug cartel reconfigures citizenry, wresting it from the network of performances and behaviors that serve the preservation and continuity of the state, and instead lending citizenship a dynamic quality by practicing belonging through a giving of the self for personal, immediate, and qualitative gains. Legitimation is no longer what you produce for the future and invisible body politic, but

rather what your loving and mutual labors produce for the self and one's intimate community in the very present.

Dissecting Race, Love, and Death on a Godly Plane

Zulé's final trance (as Erzulie Freda) ends tragically when she finds her death, not at the hands of her adversary Similá Bolosse (Toro Belecou), but her trusted confidant, Jérémie Candé (Jérémie Carfú), the patron of sorcery. Within this godly state, Zulé and Similá discuss a worldly contest of wills, as all Similá is interested in is whether Zulé will accept his alliance and let his cargo pass through her "shitty batey" (Montero 150). The disconnect between the baseness of the content discussed and the grand and sacral stage evoked seems at first ironic and cheap. The richness of the text, however, lies in presenting such worldly, mortal issues as problems pertaining to the gods. Vodou tradition, especially a spiritual mounting, is about gods intervening, transmitting messages, and intermingling within human affairs. Erzulie, Bull Belecou, and Carfú each play a vital role in what seems to be negotiations of land, social, racial, and gendered scripts. And it is at the moment where all these negotiations intersect that Erzulie and Zulé fully share a space of being. Montero states,

...her knife in the air and her hair loose, [Zulé] looks more than ever like the Metressa Erzulie Freda, a hot whore with a deep heart, a lover of perfumes and white food, of everything made with flour and everything that smells of milk. The saints say that the Metressa Freda insisted on trying the seed of Bull Belecou. But Bull Belecou humiliated her, he mistreated her at night and obliged her to drink white urine passed in those days by black snakes... (Montero 150)

This passage brings to the fore all themes previously discussed concerning Zulé's relationships with others. Aligned with Erzulie, Zulé is named a whore, and a sad, humiliated lover which encompasses her wedged status between Similá and Jérémie. On

the other hand, the narrator also describes her as armed, holding a knife and prepared to defend and fight for her retinue. A dichotomous description, Zulé perpetually resides within this space of troubled signification. As a woman of great social, political and otherworldly powers, the Gagá respects and loves her, but they also regard her as crass, inappropriate, and transgressive. This collective mounting creates the space to dispute socio-political issues but also introduces the loas' histories as destined to be relived. This event problematically inscribes Zulé within Erzulie's sacral tragedy that is perpetually performed with no room for worldly or otherworldly revision.

Since Zulé and Similá's personal relationship parallels the legend of Erzulie and Toro Belecou, it is difficult to argue whether Zulé is being sacrificed as or for Erzulie's mistakes. Despite the end outcome, Zulé's agentive awareness amidst the mounting is unusual for a sacral transaction. According to Lidia Verson, this act of shared awareness seems to be an uneven relationship for the loas: "Mientras Zulé, sin anular su identidad, se convierte en Erzulie y vive sus mismos amores contrariados, la diosa sólo puede materializarse y revivir su propia historia, a través de la posesión del cuerpo de Zulé, lo cual logra mediante el trance"⁷⁷ Zulé's final trance finally establishes her body as an indeterminate scene, as she is provided the opportunity to experience both her identity as well as that of Erzulie's, ultimately queering notions of control and resistance. Further, Zulé's possession temporally shatters the constrictive notions of patriarchal feminine control plaguing her thus far and produces an alternative to conventional beauty and power by displaying an undisciplined female body. A figure adored by both young

⁷⁷ My translation is as follows: *While Zulé, who does not forfeit her own identity, transforms into Erzulie and lives her contentious love story, Erzulie can only relive her tragic history through mounting Zulé's body which she accomplishes through this trance.*

virgins, spinsters, and prostitutes, through Zulé, Erzulie reinvests the unrestrained female body with control, vengeance, and agency.

Nevertheless, her perpetual tragedy, echoing Maya Deren, is that Erzulie is “impaled eternally upon the cosmic cross-roads where the world of men and the world of divinity meet, and it is through her pierced heart that ‘man ascends and the gods descend’” (145). Just as Zulé is reaching a compromise with Similá and saving her Gagá from excess bloodshed, “The machete comes down, brushing her cheek, plunging into her neck, and in passing cutting off the tip of her nipple. She raises an arm to protect her face, and it is the second blow of the machete that slices off at the root those fingers that twitch on the ground like living worms” (Montero 152). Jérémie Carfú literally impales Zulé/Erzulie with the machete, an act everyone is shocked to witness. Zulé is killed by the man, who, through proposing marriage or even procreation, was never able to restrict her within the domestic confines which would have relegated her body to the service of her community beyond her spiritual contributions.

From the outset, Jérémie is dubbed the resident other, and the final scene cements his otherness predominantly articulated through a racial and ethnic discourse. Throughout the novel he is responsible for the ethically questionable work within the Gagá. When a snake bites María Caracoles, Papa Coridón’s first wife, for instance, it is Jérémie who takes it upon himself to kill her. Even though they were in agreement that her death was the only option, Papa Coridón emphatically claims, ““Those are things Chinamen do,”” almost evacuating the supposed kindness of the act and binding Jérémie to his outsider status (Montero 45). For Jérémie, residing in this space of perpetual otherness evokes Ahmed’s concept of *other others*. Ahmed suggests that

each time we are faced by an other whom we cannot recognize, we seek to find other ways of recognition, not only by re-reading the body of *this* other who is faced, but by telling the difference between this other, and other others. The encounters...surprise the subject, but they also *reopen the prior histories of encounter that violate and fix others in regimes of difference*. (109)

The other protagonists see Jérémie as different from them and different from those that occupy the other category for them, be it Dominican nationals, plantation owners, etc., and they categorize his otherness by assuming that there exists an essentialist distinction due to his Chineseness even though he has known no other home. The novel never allows him to be and he is never given a moment to claim selfhood beyond this construction. The reader also never hears from Jérémie on how he internalizes such abjection. Rather, he is almost a shadow of an individual throughout the entire novel as the only thing the reader knows is his all-consuming obsession with Zulé that culminates into the dooms day showdown. Since Jérémie is produced within a contained space of otherness with no opportunities for redemption, during his Carfú spiritual mounting, he successfully carries out the dreaded “Chinaman” betrayal.

Following the allegorical story, it is no surprise that Erzulie finds her death at this spiritual and physical crossroads. In life, Zulé is unapologetic about her eroticism, her intellectual and spiritual powers, and although she is relentlessly policed, she never loses the ability to transmit a feminist history usually silenced. Whether she is embodying Erzulie’s sacred history, using her body to practice ‘obscene’ and ‘crude’ behaviors, loving both male and female partners, or tending to her domestic chores bare-breasted, her materiality creates an affront to her intimate patriarchal surroundings along with Western codes of conduct. Sacred citizenship proves difficult for Zulé; however, her sacral subjectivity that she’s been constructing throughout her personal journey from a

shy and awkward young girl to an absolute priestess should not be diminished because she perishes. Her existence as a spiritual leader is entirely accessible due to her ability to create and re-create her feminist self despite heavy-handed oppression.

In addition, Zulé's tragic death positions her body as still producing signification beyond death.⁷⁸ Her haunting dismemberment is brought right back to the materiality of her corporeal self as her stepmother, Anacaona, takes on the responsibility of caring for Zulé's body (Montero 153). Anacaona pieces Zulé's body together, covering where her nipple would have gone and generously applying perfume and talcum powder. While in life Zulé is resistant to observing the rules of *appropriate* femininity, in death Anacaona dresses her with the frills of a life never had, a life loved by her loa, Mistress Erzulie. This act should not be read as somewhat weakening her resistance to patriarchal power. In fact, it is through caring for Zulé's corpse that the reader hears about not only the war scene, but also the moment in which the socio-political realities of their daily laboring lives are thrust back into the forefront. From the moment Jérémie inflicts Zulé with a mortal wound, the narrator never mentions him again. He fades from the page once the narrator states that, as a response to his act someone, left unnamed, clobbers him across his knees and, writhing in pain, he crawls away. The narrator never recounts the war between Zulé's Gagá and Similá, but rather, the narrator repeats Similá's initial ritual where he bathed in the blood of one hundred goats. The participants in Zulé's wake all agree that his opening ritual really benefitted him "as the war with Similá was bad"

⁷⁸ According to Thelma B. Jiménez Anglada, Zulé's body in life and then more forcefully in death represents the fragmentation of the female body: "El cuerpo de Zulé es ahora mujeres todas uniéndose y fragmentándose perennemente como parte de la estrategia de resistir al poder, a las disciplinas, a los silencios y a las sujeciones que el otro les impone. Su muerte representa el desmembramiento forzado por el otro del cuerpo femenino" (73). My translation is as follows: *Zulé's body is now all women coming together while perpetually fragmented as a strategy to resist oppressive power and discipline, against the silences and subjugation the other forces. Her death represents the dismemberment forced upon the feminine body by the other.*

(Montero 156). “Bad” is otherwise never quantified, and the wake is immediately disrupted by the dawn of a Monday morning where the cane cutters (no longer gods and spiritual majesty) “are waiting for the overseer’s bell to set out slowly for the fields” (Montero 155). It is interesting to note that life after a seemingly catastrophic encounter is back to normal come the beginning of the work week. Where once the physical and spiritual worlds were interchangeable, now the baseness of reality reigns supreme.

The Red of His Shadow is a powerful tale that according to Margarite Fernández-Olmos “interconnects such postmodern tools as feminism, ethnography, mysticism, and an analysis of otherness with localized circumstances to enhance our understanding of Afro-Caribbean spirituality and culture” (280). It reconfigures corrupt socio-political events like the drug cartel and back-breaking labor regimes through myth and mysticism, creating new perspectives on the intimate relationship between Vodou’s socio-cultural facets and the political ramifications of abuse in marginalized spaces. The body is constructed as a material yet sacral vessel where all rituals from sex to spirit possession are translated and understood through the flesh. And with seldom to no internal monologue, the story redeploys the mind/body dichotomy as the mind and the spirit are only accessed through giving prominence to the body. The novel sets up the mind, spirit, action, and body as all possessing equal premium; “taking on flesh” is then granted multiple meanings as words, physical labor, love-making, and even *amarres* and *resguardos* can all take on flesh and acquire a sense of body and thus exist as an extension beyond the boundaries of one’s own body. Through the allegorical overlaps between Zulé and Mistress Erzulie, Vodou is ultimately cast as available through a collective cultural memory directly connecting these individuals to their loas not only in

worship but also in lineage. The political significance of such connections presents ideological and spiritual tensions within the island of Hispaniola and the Caribbean at large as integral to understanding the socio-political selves that belong to these spaces. Thus, the state's "crime of passion" packaging fails to capture the intricacies depicted in the novel.

Physical Travels and Sacred Trances: In the Folds of *Erzulie's Skirt*

Similar to Montero's *The Red of His Shadow*, Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* positions the body as the scene where the sacred and the political are negotiated as a means to combat marginalization. In this novel, the sacred intervenes during moments of great physical and psychological danger. The protagonists, Miriam and Micaela, construct metaphysical spaces through their Vodou worship that allows for spiritual elements to protect them from imminent peril. The metaphysical connections evoked extend the notion of memory as a collective and ancestral structure that guides and empowers. When, for instance, the protagonists are forced into prostitution in Puerto Rico, a vision creates a door through which they find their freedom. This spiritual crossing informs the women of what they should do next in their lives, but most importantly, casts their political circumstances as ephemeral and surmountable. The relationship between political realities and spiritual recognition is precisely what strikes *Philadelphia City Paper's* Jessica Loughery about *Erzulie's Skirt*. In her review, Loughery quotes Lara claiming prominence of the sacred in everyday practices, but also pointing to the political story she yearns to tell. Lara states, "People speak and move with an awareness of the spiritual...I worked from a desire to honor the characters...but also to inform the world that these lives are worth hearing about."

In *Erzulie's Skirt*, Lara tells the story of two women that would otherwise escape the pages of history and the mythic representations of Vodou loas like Erzulie and one of her husbands, Agwe, who guide and at times protect their believers.⁷⁹ Except for the sections in italics that foreground the happenings among the loas, the chapters are for the most part entitled indistinct temporal labels like “Then” and “Now.” There are also stock protagonist names and vague locations playing into the flexibility of the story’s timeline. Nevertheless, the trials and tribulations faced are specific and simultaneously representative of the cultural and political moments of living on a sugarcane plantation (a batey) for the marginalized Haitians and darker skinned Dominicans within the social circles of twentieth century Dominican Republic.

Exponentially more expansive than Zulé’s physical travels, Miriam and Micaela create experiences and construct identity through movement. Miriam and Micaela forge a life together and construct a united, transpersonal subjectivity through their shifting identities within multiple physical and metaphysical spaces. They practice sacred citizenship through a shared sense of identity and recognition. They see, acknowledge, and value each other in all facets of their collective life. Echoing Gloria Anzaldúa’s *New Mestiza*, these women move through multiple spaces of oppression and cultivate self anew. Anzaldúan theory constructs the body as a medium for honoring feminist and queer politics in order to achieve self-actualization. In a provocative and intimate move, Anzaldúa utilizes her own body as a geopolitical space for theoretical exploration. She uses her body to map out oppression and to situate voice within and emitting from the

⁷⁹ Just like *The Red of His Shadow*, it is unclear exactly when *Erzulie's Skirt* is set; however, it is some time after Trujillo’s dictatorship. And so somewhere between the bloody 1937 massacre of thousands of Haitian in the Dominican Republic and present-day Dominican Republic, the painful and enduring love story between Miriam and Micaela is depicted.

U.S. – Mexico border, a historically bruised and exploited vessel: “1,950 mile-long open wound/ dividing a *pueblo*, a culture,/ running down the length of my body,/ staking fence rods in my flesh,/ splits me splits me/ *me raja me raja*” (Anzaldúa 24). Anzaldúa theoretically journeys from the politics of oppression to the politics of the body as a physical, racial, and sexual site of contestation to then the body as a scene for the New Mestiza. The New Mestiza successfully resides within a borderland space because she produces flexibility in practicing *facultad* (understanding through knowledge) and assimilates contradictions. Miriam and Micaela mirror this transformation as they productively reside in multiple border spaces. Their uniting on a psychological and spiritual borderland prompts a concrete space of belonging that, I argue, is represented by their final endeavor of opening a colmado together, once back in the Dominican Republic. Their journey is anything but easy, and it is Erzulie’s guidance and, at times, myth, that produces the possibilities for these fateful lovers to engender spaces of intimacy despite physical and sexual abuses. Unlike Zulé, who never translates her sacral possession to an alternative space of being within her reality, Miriam and Micaela produce sexual, psychical, and spiritual belonging by turning to their space of intimacy.

The novel begins with Erzulie “the great goddess of the sweet waters and the ocean’s waves” and her husband, the old Agwe, having a conversation on their responsibilities of keeping the souls that have passed in the depths of the ocean (Lara xiii). Agwe claims he is bored and asks Erzulie to tell him a story. She begins by telling him of Miriam and Micaela (Lara xv). The first chapter, “Now,” starts at the end of the women’s journey with Micaela’s death and the first introduction of Erzulie as messenger. Unlike the voracious and sexually-potent Erzulie in *The Red of His Shadow*, the narrator

describes Erzulie as a gentle and aged woman with silver tears: “Through her tears she saw the woman was now a grandmother, dressed in old rags and skirts, her head covered with a red cloth as she picked up cowries from the floor and shook them...” (Lara 7). In a dream-like scene, there appears a wall of water that has come to guide Micaela in her final journey and at that moment Miriam notices the old woman’s face “was filled with the sorrow of ten million stories” (Lara 7). Unlike *The Red of His Shadow*, where Erzulie was solely connected to Zulé, in *Erzulie’s Skirt*, the loa is both representative of Miriam and Micaela’s particular story but also of all stories she comes in contact with. This seems to be a more liberating and mythic position for Erzulie, who was destined to relive her personal tragedies through Zulé in *The Red of His Shadow*. In this novel, she guides all the women at one point or another, granting her an omnipotence across temporalities. Grief-stricken by her partner’s passing, Miriam asks Erzulie to be taken with Micaela; however, the request is left unaddressed as the subsequent chapter, “Before Now,” starts with their back story. Both protagonists each have a “Before Now” chapter which constructs their initial abjected realities. While Miriam is a Haitian orphan who loses her parents in a cart accident while she is mounted by Changó, Micaela, is banished from her Dominican home when her two-year-old brother, Fernandito, drowns while in her care (Lara 91).

Naming, Loving, and Teaching the Sacred Self

Once the women meet and engender a relationship, the spiritual dimension of the novel serves to advance their mutual belongingness. Rather than simply recounting their story, Erzulie becomes an active agent in the worldly happenings, all the while maintaining a pristine distance from the women’s experiences. For instance, the multiple

spiritual mountings Miriam experiences are with Changó and not Erzulie. Unlike *The Red of His Shadow*, the sensual, sexual, and psychological connections of the loa mirror the experiences between Miriam and Micaela but they do not coalesce. This distance does not inhibit Miriam and Micaela's subsequent relationship with the sacred. On the contrary, the parallel experiences allow for queering effects which blur the boundaries of the physical and spiritual bodies represented.

When Micaela meets Miriam, she summons Erzulie Freda's myth, exalting their love and their imminent union:

‘You know Miriam, one day we will all return to Guinée. Erzulie will guide us home through her waters, and we will rest. Until then, we must dance like Erzulie Freda.’ Micaela's eyes flickered, a spark shining in them as she spoke. She felt their bodies stir, getting hotter at the mention of Erzulie Freda's infamous character. Freda the sensual full-bodied woman, Freda the woman adorned with jewels and perfume. Freda the queen of lovers and the metressa of female flirtations. Miriam smiled and whispered back. (Lara 120)

In this passage Erzulie possesses a vitality that does not necessarily align with the dignified woman who accompanies Micaela in death. At this juncture in the novel, Erzulie is a coquettish loa who prepares the women for the godly experience when joining in bed. In the subsequent scene, Changó mounts Miriam for the second time. Unlike the first time where Changó exclaimed her body was not yet ready,⁸⁰ this time Miriam withstands Changó and he invites Micaela to join in the sacral and erotic experience: “Changó took her [Micaela] by the waist, dancing against her as he led her around the center pole. She danced with him, excited by the feel of Miriam's breasts pressed up against hers and the rum that laced her breath like halos. She felt Miriam get excited, and Changó had

⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that when mounted by Changó the first time, Miriam is no longer referred to on the page but rather her body is called Changó. Therefore, Changó and not Miriam eats glass, strips his clothing, and walks on fire (Lara 34).

breathed into her ear, ‘Later, Cherie, later’” (Lara 121). In a subversive manner, the novel converges sacral history and erotic energies while queering desire and experience.

Changó invites Micaela to join him in dance and they participate in a tapestry of sensual movements where, despite being mounted by a male deity, Miriam’s female attributes are sexualized and perceived as pleasurable. Rather than have Changó mimic a masculine sexual movement, Lara makes him aware of the horse he is mounting and plays to their attraction and desire. When Micaela presses up against Changó’s/Miriam’s breast, the women are aroused, yet Changó defers their sexual moment for when he no longer resides in Miriam’s body. Lara writes, “Out of the trance, Miriam fell back, exhausted, into the bed of arms awaiting her return. Micaela took her away from the light and music...and laid Miriam down on the mat. She slowly undressed her, running her palm between the wet fabric and Miriam’s moist skin” (122).

It is not until Changó releases Miriam that Miriam and Micaela join sexually. And it is at this very time where Changó beds, according to Lara, the “Dominican voodoo spirit/goddess of love,” Anaísa: “Anaísa and Changó loved each other...Anaísa a mirror of Changó’s thunderous sound, the brilliant white paths of lightning like the veins of sweet water in the forests. Anaísa fed Changó’s thirsty skin with water...” (Lara 122). It is interesting to note that the narrator relegates Changó and Anaísa’s sex to the world of metaphors. Changó as deity of thunder, his most common epithet across Afro-Caribbean religions, and, Anaísa, defined in Lara’s glossary as a “spirit,” is materialized as the fresh water quenching Changó’s insatiable thirst. This is particularly crucial because while the sacral dimensions in the novel are indispensable to identity construction, when the deities are interacting between each other and not with Miriam and Micaela, it is always

secondary to the present exchange between the women. Therefore, Changó and Anaísa's scene is contextualized and given prominence because just after they conclude, the physical and sacral worlds converge again as "Oyá, Changó's dearest lover, blew in through the loose boards surrounding them. Micaela and Miriam trembled" (Lara 122). It is unclear who exactly comprises the "them" that Oyá comes in on but the reader is led to believe that Miriam and Micaela's bodies experience pleasure alongside, at the same time, and within the same space as that of the gods.

As a textured scene where multiple physical and sacral embodiments are coming into focus, the queering aspects are two-fold. By replacing Miriam's name with that of Changó altogether, her body becomes the scene of racial and gendered deconstruction. Changó is an essential fixture of Cuban Santería, but nevertheless the "Yoruban deity of thunder and lightning, used among a few Dominican voodoo practitioners," Changó is a complex and rich figure (Lara 250). According to James J. Pancrazio, "Changó/St. Barbara is African/American, Yoruban/Catholic, black/white, and male/female"⁸¹ (55). As a fundamentally creole and queer deity, Changó's identity and role within Yoruban-based faiths is one of strength and power. However, his multi-faceted identity as he is both black/white, male/female is troubled when mounting a body that blurs these very social distinctions – black/white, male/female. When Changó mounts Miriam, it is a male deity who, in the Santería tradition, is also translated as Santa Barbara, a white female and Catholic saint. This scene epitomizes the indeterminacy of the sacral body such that in sharing Miriam's corporeal space with the gods, the reader is privy to a body that

⁸¹ It is interesting to note that in order to position Changó within queer conversations of transvestism, Pancrazio tells one of the most common and well-known *appataki* (legend) of Changó entitled "Changó y Oyá." Pancrazio states, "...Changó is corralled by his enemies and uses cross-dressing as a means to save his life" (55).

during the mounting is beyond racial and gendered categorization. Within their social realities, these women are marginalized and will continue to be abused due to their otherness; however, when mounted by gods who those very agents of discrimination worship and pray to, the assumed power dynamic is inverted. These women perform sacred citizenship they construct spaces to be for themselves, and they also experience a sense of magnificent grandeur that prompts a critical engagement with the very structures of representation that marginalize them.

Similarly to Montero's complex depictions of the power relations embedded within physical pleasure, Lara does not remain within this utopic space of pleasure and physical and sacral intimacy. In fact the narrator contrasts these loving caresses with dire living conditions and a barrage of police brutality. Lara describes Miriam and Micaela's shed made out of a tin roof atop dirt floors as increasingly intolerable due to a series of violent police raids where cops drag out Haitian individuals living in their *barrio*. Fed up with the fear of losing one another, Micaela recalls the luxuries her aunt, Angelica, boasted of New York and they instantly plan to immigrate to the United States. However, when Miriam and her son, Antonio, cannot apply for a visa because they look Haitian (even if they were born in the Dominican Republic), they resort to *La Gata*, a woman who for six-hundred U.S. dollars, has someone take them aboard a *yola*, a small fishing-boat sized craft, to cross the Mona Strait to Puerto Rico. Once in Puerto Rico they would meet someone else to arrange a flight to Miami or New York (Lara 151).

Their passage across the Mona Strait, where the Caribbean and Atlantic waters meet, is a nightmarish reality. Lara writes the scene similar to a slave narrative as the women somatically experience extremely rough waters and overcrowding, and witness

the loads of lives lost during the voyage.⁸² The scene becomes chaotic as Lara describes the “heavy loud wails that echoed against the wooden boards of the *yola* [as well as visual and audio pollution produced from]...the sharks [that] mangled the others, blood tingeing the water a crimson gold” (Lara 165). In a contradictory fashion, not only is La Mar (Erzulie) guiding Miriam and Micaela, but also she is claiming bodies currently dying. With death and utter darkness surrounding them, the women are exhausted but slightly comforted when Erzulie appears. In all this chaos, however, Miriam suffers a great loss when her son Antonio falls overboard. Yet since they are physically and emotionally drained by all the commotion, Miriam and Micaela do not process the loss and immediately collapse.

According to Omise’eke Natasha Tinsley, “For Lara these hellish conditions constitute a contemporary Middle Passage whose stories are drowned out, and her novel’s inspiration arises from this. ‘My own connection to this story—it’s deep and personal...Slavery and the trafficking of people...are still very real circumstances for many Dominicans today’” (200). This scene marks a collectivity previously unavailable in the novel. Lara expands from narrating Miriam and Micaela’s lives to textually recuperating the thousands of lives lost and histories forgotten within these waters. Through Micaela’s conversation with La Mar (Erzulie) once aboard the *yola*, Lara constructs this collective representation by casting history as a place and not an abstract concept imprisoned in the mind and bound by linear time: “La Mar told her of a place

⁸² Tinsley describes the contemporary phenomenon stating, “Dominican maritime migration to Puerto Rico fosters ever-growing informal businesses, headed by organizers and captains who overcrowd fishing boat-sized crafts with hundreds of people desperate for economic opportunities in the global northern territory across the strait. Ten thousand Dominicans arrive in Puerto Rico by *yola* each year; many others die in the process. Because of the earthquake-rocked roughness of the waters and the tight packing of boats, migrants routinely perish when *yolas* capsize, passengers are thrown out to lighten loads, or unexpectedly long trips lead to dehydration or starvation” (199).

where two people lay with irons on their ankles... Micaela watched as She appeared, beautiful and decorated, to reclaim her tortured children, to soothe their skin torn and mangled by the irons of slavery” (Lara 160). I read this deployment of history as critiquing the structural blockages present within social and political spheres of remembrances. Lara’s construction of history as a place gives materiality to remembering and lends literary representation to the notion of embodied history.⁸³ Thus far, the women have produced sacral and physical experiences as securing a sense of alternative belonging where despite their sociopolitical reality, their shared intimacy grants them solace. And while this will continue to be available for Miriam and Micaela, and, in fact, is the premise of my argument in this section, this particular scene moves away from their intimacy and introduces a shared space of experience in which one can be changed by experiences that one does not necessarily endure. Lara produces history as accessible and ever-present. The metaphysical dimensions of the novel allow Warner’s notion of a public bound by an event to capture a doubling moment which creates a plural present. This public consists of the narrative present where the women are crossing the Mona Strait along with Erzulie and the lives lost during the Middle Passage. The scene, and by

⁸³ There is a moving multi-media project by the University of Albany that visually plots the physical and spiritual journey Miriam and Micaela experience in Lara’s *Erzulie’s Skirt*. The two project authors, Danielle Charlestin and Nina Fei Yang, titled the page “Sexual Migrations from Haiti and the Dominican Republic in Ana-Maurine Lara’s *Erzulie’s Skirt*,” which belongs to a larger internet project entitled, *Middle Passages, Gendered Diasporas*. The page features a map of Miriam and Micaela’s journey through the Mona Strait, a video clip of Lara reading a scene from the book, and Viv Logan’s acrylic on canvas work, “Waves in the Ocean” (2004) which like Lam’s “The Jungle” in the first chapter eerily captures the multiple deployments of the physical and sacred body constructing a blanket of protection for the too many forgotten female bodies that have perished through a watery grave. Further, echoing Alexander’s argument on the “postmemory” experiences that we do not physically endure but that can nonetheless shape our lives and perceptions, Charlestin and Yang describe their project as examining “the histories of the Middle Passage and its influences on present-day situation of women of African descent.”
 <http://www.albany.edu/faculty/jhobson/middle_passages/caribbean/project.html>

extension the novel, becomes a collective repository for memories and silenced histories brought to be through Micaela and Miriam's personal suffering.⁸⁴

This scene not only productively suggests non-linear historicism as redemptive, but also is particularly interesting when read through the politics of mobility and its insidious nature within marginalized spaces. Sheller argues,

...mobility is embedded in systematically asymmetrical power relations involving a politics of lived forms of mobility and immobility in which these two terms are always already implicated in each other (Ahmed *et al.* forthcoming)...The current political debates and vehement reactions generated by the movement of asylum seekers and refugees in Europe and the United States attest to the emotionally charged situations of immobility and boundary-fixing generated by border controls, visas, and the internment of 'aliens.' (29)

Once the state denies Miriam and Antonio visas, they lack practical and safe opportunities for travel. *La Gata*'s business of surreptitious travel requires U.S dollars and therefore hard-earned sacrifice; it also demands a sense of desperation where one is willing to take such perilous measures. The asymmetrical power relations Sheller mentions are available on dual registers: first, the abstract but ever-present state has denied Miriam and Antonio's legal mobility because they resemble a Haitianness that within socio-political Dominican circles is viewed as sub-class. This boundary-fixing act seems contradictory since this group is under-valued and marginalized within Dominican society. Therefore, why force them to remain within the state? These immigration measures are suspect because they gesture towards an international preoccupation of too

⁸⁴ In *Pedagogies* Alexander calls for physical and psychological engagements with history beyond restrictive access where there is available an "expansive memory refusing to be housed in any single place, bound by the limits of time, enclosed within the outlines of a map, encased in the physicality of the body, or imprisoned as exhibit in a museum" (288).

many ‘undesired’ bodies flooding first-world spaces.⁸⁵ Second, political restrictions such as this one birth the black market demand for trafficking bodies. While *La Gata* promises a successful voyage, there occurs unspeakable horror. Antonio dies and, while the women do end up in Puerto Rico, they are forced into prostitution and, therefore, entrenched in yet another socio-political reality that considers them exploitable. Their bodies and lives are hence re-instituted in yet another discourse of immobility.

Once in Puerto Rico, the transpersonal and collective connection between the bodies of the historical past and those who endured the contemporary ‘Middle Passage’ in the novel’s present comes to fruition through the short vignettes between chapters about a nameless woman, “She” and her journey as a captive slave. The vignette explains, “*She looked for Ifé. Ifé had pressed herbs and roots into her hand as they boarded the ship – rough white men pushing and pulling them up the thin boards...After handing over a small parcel of herbs, Ifé made as if to run back to the forest...*” (Lara 173). This chapter, “Micaela and Miriam: Puerto Rico” begins with the two women waking up locked in a room in Puerto Rico, although they have no recollection of where they are or how long they have been there. Dazed, “She [Micaela] looked in her hand for the herbs, only to find she clutched a bed’s edge. She looked toward Miriam, hoping to find Ifé in her eyes, finding only Miriam’s curled body and mangled hair, the dim light of defeat a halo around her” (Lara 174). Neither Ifé nor the herbs are available and the

⁸⁵ Sheller’s arguments on uni-directional access to mobility can also be experienced through the Dominican (-Americans) who travel very frequently to the Dominican Republic but live in the U.S. While leaving the Dominican Republic seems to be a daunting and politically skewed process, returning is usually represented with much more ease. Junot Díaz’s *The Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* captures this movement as the narrator states, “Every summer Santo Domingo slaps the Diaspora engine into reverse, yanks back as many of its expelled children as it can; airports choke with the overdressed; necks and luggage carousels groan under the accumulated weight of that year’s cadenzas and paquetes, and pilots fear for their planes – overburdened beyond belief...Like someone had sounded a general reverse evacuation order: Back home, everybody! Back home!” (ii)

sacral crossing that salvages the women from their circumstances is temporarily deferred. Taken in as sex workers, Miriam and Micaela now practice a life of survival. Not knowing if they ever made it to Miami or New York, their world shrinks to the four walls of their bedroom as a racist woman named Delia keeps them locked up and constantly prostituting themselves for her benefit. One day, a customer violently punches Miriam after refusing his advances. This encourages Micaela to “pray for a miracle” as they cannot sustain such an existence (Lara 186). Micaela summons her mother and father’s spiritual guides, Ogun and Damballah, and in the very next scene a snake appears coiling around Miriam and Micaela’s bodies and then slithering under the locked door of their room (Lara 187). Micaela realizes that the room is no longer locked. One of the walls then becomes an entrance into a forest labyrinth where Micaela enters and bathes in the mist: “She felt herself become transparent as she rose, her body blending into the sky...Uttering one final prayer, she turned from the forest and returned to her bed. Miriam lay with her eyes closed as she rested. Micaela held out the fruit in her hand. Its scent filled the room with sweetness” (Lara 188). Despite not clarifying whether the forest maze was a dream or not, the narrator points to the convergence of that moment of freedom with the women’s macabre reality. When she returns, Micaela brings a part of this feeling into the room as she shares with Miriam a fruit from the forest.⁸⁶ The narrator interrupts the scene with the information that at that very moment Ligia, Miriam’s mother, is dying in the Dominican Republic. In Ligia’s moment of crossing she learns that Miriam is in danger. At the same time, Miriam dreams of her mother and

⁸⁶ Although the narrator does not connect this forest with the forest Ifé runs off to, choosing marronage rather than slavery, I think there is an interesting foil here. It is Micaela, who after experiencing freedom amidst the foliage, can summon the strength to evoke the spirits for guidance. She is, then, able to convince Miriam to walk through the door with no doorknob, while Miriam, scared the entire time, thinks they shouldn’t because it may be a trap.

understands that they will leave the room soon: “A strange light filled the room...bright and silver through the opened door. Micaela lay absolutely still, staring at its shape as it entered the room, bold and unapologetic. The light was silent, and nobody walked in its wake...Micaela sat up and walked toward the door that had sealed them in the room for endless days and nights” (Lara 191). As they walk out, they start learning about where they were. Realizing that they are still in Puerto Rico, they learn that Delia had kept them locked away in a room overlooking a courtyard. Sprinkled on the floor were U.S. dollar bills, which Micaela starts picking up: “I’m charging for services. We’re going to go home. Forget this country, the gold is too expensive. Let’s go home, Miriam...Let’s go” (Lara 192). This scene epitomizes the layered mythical setting guiding Miriam and Micaela through their experiences of marginality. While Ifé is summoned with the forest Micaela walks through, Miriam experiences a connection with her mother as she crosses over, learning of their imminent salvation. The magically appearing door is problematic in its purpose of saving the women from their destitution as it is not an experience directly related to the protagonists’ relationship to the sacred; it just seems to appear magically. However, this scene is rich in magical elements but is not the women’s decisive, self-affirming moment. Rather, it is a conduit to their final constructions of self.⁸⁷

Overall, the particular circuit of transit Miriam and Micaela endure consistently shapes their subjectivities and, with each added experience, progressively constructs their relational, transpersonal connection. One of the most unflinching contentions in the novel is the relationship between their differing positionalities within local, national, and global

⁸⁷ A minor note is the completely uneven contrast between Miriam and Micaela’s journey to Puerto Rico and their passage back to the Dominican Republic. The latter is but a mere line on the page; Micaela calls out to Erzulie and begs for a “safe journey home” (Lara 193).

flows. While thus far the novel has placed Miriam and Micaela as second-class Dominicans, Mona Strait survivors, and sex workers, it is their final and most redemptive set of opportunities that allow them to reinvent self despite attributed social markers. Once back in the Dominican Republic, Miriam and Micaela reconstitute self by coalescing their long acquired sacred intelligibility with a space to call their own. Now with *dolares* (U.S. dollars) in their pockets, the two women set out to open a colmado in the batey. Initially they face social ostracism, as when they return to the batey with U.S. dollars, the community calls the two women *brujas* (witches) and *putas* (whores), social categories exclusive to marginalizing women that transgress accepted social codes. Miriam, however, thought it was a matter of time before “they stopped being brujas and became señoras” (Lara 209).

Despite their initial experience, their colmado becomes a sacred space of belonging for them and their intimate collective. It is in this space that they labor with dignity and love each other and their community. They also secure the optimism of futurity when Micaela takes in an apprentice. Through working at their colmado, Miriam and Micaela’s relationships with each other, with Yealidad, Micaela’s apprentice, and with the sacred take on spatial dimensions in the most concrete manifestation thus far. Talking to Yealidad about the value of their work and the intimacy through which these processes carry forth one’s body as well as one’s history, Micaela states,

‘Everything in this store is sacred. We do not cheat people...Everything in this store carries the breath of Dios and our ancestors’ hard work. Even the bread that comes here every afternoon has been formed by someone’s hand that has been helped by a force more powerful than us. I want you to remember that as you work, now that you can understand the force that I am speaking of’. (Lara 232)

The narrator describes Yealidad as a gifted child who possesses a halo around her head.⁸⁸ Micaela first teaches her about Elegba, since nothing begins or even ends without his evocation (Lara 229). And although Micaela is a child of Changó, Elegba is the border figure in the novel; the medium through which all physical and sacred crossings are conducted. As healer, lover, and a conjurer of opportunities and salvation, Micaela represents a body perpetually residing in the in-between. As her ultimate gift, she offers Changó to Yealidad. Once this transfer of sacred intelligibility is complete, Miriam and Micaela pass, and it is Yealidad who finds them on the bed (Lara 240). She promises to continue the colmado and, most importantly, to continue their practice: “Miriam and Micaela had shown her in their final moment, had shown her with every story that had graced her ear and every medicine that they had taught her. They had shown her how to walk, how to breathe and how to believe... Yealidad reached down to the ground for the keys, her body filled with a new sense of belonging” (Lara 242). The relationship nurtured among the three women redeploys the institution of family through a non-heteronormative formulation. Similar to the final scene in *Cereus Blooms* where Otoh, Tyler, Mala, and Mr. Ambrose recast a sense of unity, these women practice a queer family reality where a patriarchal presence is supplanted by the love and admiration they feel for one another and for their sacred selves. The intimate relationship between Miriam and Micaela’s family romance is ultimately practiced on dual registers. First, the women pass down the colmado, their autonomous economic and quantifiable market, and,

⁸⁸ Soon after meeting Yealidad, Micaela nurses her through a terrible fever (Lara 220). Her fever is said to have been tied to her starting menstruation, but it is nonetheless presented as a spiritual mounting as Lara states, “[The fever] had possessed her whole body and taunted her with rashes and a heavy pain that sat on her head... Micaela turned to study Yealidad’s pale figure lying still on the bed. She knew right away that her vigil would last for two nights. If all went well, Yealidad would be able to come back to the world of the living, leaving the spirits to wander back home” (219).

second, Miriam and Micaela leave Yealidad their sacred body of knowledge in order to continue their qualitative sacral work. The wealth of sacral understanding is definitely not lost as Yealidad is Changó's next horse. Both sets of families or intimate collectives reflect a similar critique of the heteronormative structures all the protagonists were once struggling against. Despite the sexual identities, both sets of collectives point to a reimagining of belonging outside the concept of procreation as the sole means through which culture and society secures continuity. Rather, these family members retain their spaces for practicing an uninhibited sense of self and position their intimate negotiations as independent from state-sanctioned discourses of belonging and respectability.

Once Miriam and Micaela open a colmado in the batey, they represent shades of what Gloria Wekker terms "mativork." Wekker's comprehensive ethnographic study on the economic, spiritual, and sexual relationships between Afro-Surinamese working-class women speaks to the multiple levels of interdependence between Miriam and Micaela. Tied to the Winti religion, which is primarily concerned with the manner in which one performs one's soul and spirit, women (and men) possess a multiplicity within the lexicon of describing and naming self. The soul and the self "in terms of one's Winti" is never considered an essential and unitary concept (Wekker 104). Wekker explains,

In Sranan Tongo...there is a plethora of terms to make statements about 'I,' pointing to the multiplicity and malleability of self...One of the striking features of this scheme is that it is possible, irrespective of one's gender, to make statements about self in one of three ways: first, in singular and/ or in plural terms; second, in male and/ or female terms. (103)

The negotiations between elements of the sacred (through the Winti religion) and the economic and sexual arrangements nurtured by these Surinamese women echo the efforts in both Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* and Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* where Zulé

and Miriam and Micaela strive to practice a sacred citizenship on one's own physical, sexual, and psychological terms. First, both novels present the main protagonists as initiating an alternative, against-the-grain socioeconomic construct of mutual interdependence within their social spaces. While Zulé refuses the possible economic benefits of 'selling' her batey and allowing Similá to pass with his drug cargo, Miriam and Micaela practice a capitalistic mode of subsistence through their colmado. Although Zulé and Miriam and Micaela cannot excise themselves from the larger economic networks of survival – Zulé's Gagá still cut cane for the Dominican elite and Miriam and Micaela's colmado sell to all customers that enter their intimate space – they continuously strive to practice mutual interdependence within their private spaces. Further, Wekker's study sheds light on not only alternative arrangements of labor but also sexuality, arrangements that problematize entrenched Western conceptions of the constrictive relationship between one's identity and one's sexual practices. Destabilizing the relationship between identity and sexuality, Wekker argues that matiwork prioritizes "...sexuality that insists on and foregrounds sexual fulfillment rather than giving weight to the sex of one's object of passion; sexuality as activity, not exclusive identity" (214). Zulé, with her brief yet elixir-like sexual encounter with Christianá Dubois, and Miriam and Micaela with their long-standing sexual and spiritual connection, practice same-sex couplings that do not eradicate Zulé's love and passion for her ill-fated lover, Similá, or Miriam's identity as mother to deceased Antonio. Thus, both novels investigate the realm of sexual and sacral subjectivity and it is through sexual practices and not Western conceptions of sexuality that these protagonists negotiate a sense of self within their social spaces of intimacy. Through Vodou and their physical and spiritual relationships,

Zulé and Miriam and Micaela attempt to create a more expansive set of markers that layer identity and do not restrict their sense of self. While they construct their spaces to be, it begs the question, whose citizenry, whose political belonging is most productive? In *The Red of His Shadow*, Zulé is never outside the bateys. Protagonists like Similá introduce international and politically-charged tensions, but all encounters are brought to Zulé. She is never beyond the confined space of the bateys, and the novel never veers outside its proverbial doors. Therefore, her sacral and social identity is possible only when casting her immediate surroundings as a microcosm nation space. While she never receives public and social acceptance when completely evacuating her self from the heteronormative expectations around her, Zulé is able to practice a feminist identity throughout the novel and beyond her physical death. On the other hand, Miriam and Micaela are always within public spaces represented as political hotbeds that consistently try their identity construction. Their experiences within oppressive spaces, like their forced prostitution in Puerto Rico, positions their final social and political space, as represented through the colmado, as a concrete depiction of their successful movement within the political field of signification. Similar to Chen Pan and Lucrecia's the Lucky Find and their home above it, Miriam and Micaela build a physical structure that signifies their self-constructed identities within and against public opinion and state-sanctioned prejudices. As Miriam prophesized when stating that one day the community would no longer consider them *brujas* and accept them as señoras, their colmado eventually becomes a space of cordial exchange between themselves and the very individuals that were marginalizing them. It seems to be a tentative victory here since it suggests their definite integration into society, proclaiming their attainment of citizenship and

belonging on their own terms; however, the relationship among age, gender, and sexuality may also be a factor. Once Miriam and Micaela become of matronly age, their sexual coupling no longer serves as an affront to the heteronormative backbone of society neutralizing their behavior. While this is a contention that may be left unresolved, their public success as business owners and their sacral continuity through Yealidad serves as representation of their practicing sacred citizenship within their private and public exchange.

Chapter Four: To Dream, To Be: *The Island of Eternal Love* and Mythical Postmemory

In the previous chapter, my readings of Mayra Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* and Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* focus on how gendered and racial difference can mark an inhospitable place even within an already marginalized milieu. This tension leads to constructing a theoretical space between the terms sacred and citizenship conceding that even though sacral practices, like Vodou worship, can be the center of one's life, the transformative elements of sociopolitical belonging associated with citizenry can remain evasive. Although Zulé in *The Red of His Shadow* and Miriam and Micaela in *Erzulie's Skirt* construct self through their engagement with multiple Vodou mountings and rituals, their social realities are always lynchpins in their constructions of selfhood. Zulé, especially, is never able to bring into relief her physical and social marginality through sacred positioning. This chapter examines notions of belonging and identity construction along similar lines of sacred engagement, but diverges on how generational time is considered and manipulated through sacral elements, reimagining the relationship between the sacred and one's sociopolitical reality.

Unlike the atemporal space depicted in *The Red of His Shadow*, the novels read in this chapter – Daína Chaviano's *The Island of Eternal Love* (2008) and with a lesser focus, Mayra Montero's *The Messenger* (1999) – read time through a cyclical and dynamic perspective. These novels bring together individuals and identities that may otherwise be worlds apart. Focusing on time and historical events as non-linear and dynamic prompts an opportunity to expand my discussion of Miriam and Micaela's voyage across the Mona Strait as presenting a literary representation of not only the

structural blockages present within socio-political spheres of remembrances, but also the need for acknowledging an embodied notion of history. In key scenes of *The Island of Eternal Love* and *The Messenger*, the events bodies undergo become emblematic of multiple historical scenes that reorganize how we understand citizenry when socio-political belonging extends beyond temporal and geographical boundaries. In particular, the scene in *Erzulie's Skirt* where the women cross the Mona Strait creates a doubling space for remembrance. The writers discussed bring together personal, intimate experiences with grand historical events, echoing what Marianne Hirsch terms “postmemory.” Hirsch defines “postmemory” as “distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated, not through recollection but through imaginative investment and creation...” (22). Through postmemory, events personally endured give way to re-imagining distant historical events evoked within the present experience. Therefore, Miriam and Micaela’s scene represents not only contemporary Mona Strait survivors but also, with as much intensity, the lives lost or forever altered during the Middle Passage.

Chaviano’s *The Island of Eternal Love* similarly presents doubling scenes but in an inverse fashion. While Miriam and Micaela’s scene revises the notion of analepsis, the flashback, *The Island of Eternal Love*, with Amalia and Pablo’s walk along Havana’s Malecón, offers the inverse narrative technique, prolepsis. According to Mark Currie, “Prolepsis...is a moment in a narrative in which the chronological order of story events is disturbed and the narrator narrates future events out of turn. The narrative takes an excursion into its own future to reveal later events before returning to the present of the

tale to proceed with the sequence... (29). When Amalia and Pablo declare their love for each other, they stroll along Havana's Malecón in pre-revolutionary Cuba and both envision bodies jumping into the waters. The scene directly alludes to the future *Balseros* crisis of the 1990's that would not occur for approximately another thirty-five years. This scene revises the concept of prolepsis and proposes the novel's past, present, and future as that of the Cuban and Cuban-American population. This collective sense of time and experience diminishes the importance of the protagonists directly experiencing these moments during their lived reality and imagines history as something to tap into by envisioning the present as a trace of the past and future we can affect. Further, the doubling act here brings together the narrative present with a future event that to the Cuban and Cuban-American reader is a central political event in the not so distant past. Unlike Miriam and Micaela's scene where their crossing couples with a distant and almost unrepresentable while simultaneously hyper-recalled moment in history, Amalia and Pablo's scene considers two historical moments that the aging Cuban-American population personally lived through. Therefore, there is a sense of possibility for the latter in a way that asks the reader to re-consider their participation in these events.

While this scene is unmatched in its collectivity, the final scene of *The Island of Eternal Love* completely implodes the temporal nuances available in the text. The scene marks the beginning of Miguel and Cecilia's relationship as they dance alongside Amalia and Pablo's ghosts. The apparitions are the much younger versions of Amalia and Pablo and thus disrupt any sort of sequential understanding. They did not pass at such a young age; they lived beyond their youth and yet they meet their grandchild and his partner on the dance floor as young adults. In this scene, chronological time is revised as the

narrative past between Cecilia and Amalia was getting to know each other at this very bar. However, it was Cecilia and the ghost of a much older Amalia who would meet.

While the emphasis of this chapter is Chaviano's *The Island of Eternal Love*, I also examine excerpts of Montero's *The Messenger* to produce a comparative reading of passages that utilize this doubling effect in order to represent the Chinese-Cuban subject; these scenes account for past occurrences in the present in order to revise history's valuation of marginalized subjects and events in Cuba as well as in the region at large. Both novels represent the Chinese indentured laborers' arrival to Cuba. In Montero's novel, however, the scene connects the Chinese indentured laborers with the African slaves, who, never seeing Chinese subjects shackled before, laugh in amazement. This scene mythologizes how Sanfancón, the Chinese-Cuban god of war comes into being. His introduction to Cuban society, which I briefly discussed in the first chapter when analyzing Chen Pan's marronage, is captured with greater detail in both Chaviano's and Montero's novels. Sanfancón's myth and integration into Cuban society as noted in the novels is depicted through postmemory. In *The Messenger*, the protagonists pass down the anecdotes generationally but are nonetheless intimately felt and experienced many years later. The embodied sense of these post-memories is re-created through their worship for Sanfancón. Most pertinent to my discussions on sacred citizenship is the manner in which Sanfancón reflects and represents first, a re-cognition of similar states of oppression between the African and Chinese populations in Cuba, and second, how within the texts, he mythically embodies the ethno-cultural negotiations between both Santería and Chinese mysticism. This spiritual license indicates an indigenous space for the Chinese within Cuban historiography.

In both novels, postmemory introduces a means of connecting the protagonist's histories with generations past and future. Postmemory, thus, lends theoretical language to connections not physically forged but performatively constructed. Extending sacred citizenship's sociopolitical and ethical possibility, postmemory allows the individual subject to learn of the interdependence available in knowing where the collective has been in order to manage where the collective that one is physically a part of should go. The sacred in these novels is specifically present in the ability of the protagonists to commune with spiritual, familial bodies as well as mythical deities, corporealizing the forgotten individual and pointing to historical amnesia. The excavation of familial and spiritual bones allows for the intimate collective (however one defines family) to thread self into a larger identity collective that counters historical erasure. Therefore, sacred rituals of connection with one's collective makes the past and future emotionally and politically available within the present. Similarly to previous chapters, the protagonists' connection to magical and mythical elements around them prompts alternative modes of being outside oppressive tools of representation (although Chaviano and Montero also depict the latter in their novels). Through myth and on multiple spiritual and mythical terrains, Chaviano (and with a lesser focus Montero) recuperate an occluded Chinese-Cuban history. And, like García, Chaviano and Montero celebrate this Cuban subject as integral to the Cuban identity fabric.

Eternal Love is critically productive in relation to García's *Monkey Hunting* because it grants a prominent role in the narrative to the Chinese and Chinese-Cuban figures. While the three families, each of different racial backgrounds (African, Spanish, and Chinese), receive equal representation, there seems to be an emotional ode offered to

the Chinese-Cuban subjects.⁸⁹ Therefore, my readings will focus on how postmemory and sacred belonging function among the Chinese and Chinese-Cuban protagonists, more specifically Pag Li, or Pablo (b. 1926 – Amalia’s husband), and his parents – Kui-fa, or Rosa (b. 1908) and Síu Mend, or Manuel (b. 1906). Further, sacred citizenship registers on a more literal level in this novel as it is through the sacral and mythological figures in the narrative that the protagonists negotiate Caribbean belonging. Chaviano’s dual focus in *Eternal Love* is first and foremost the transportability magical and mythical elements possess along with their value as guides for her protagonists who are themselves navigating multiple spaces. Unlike García’s project in *Monkey Hunting*, Chaviano casts Cuban identity politics on a more spiritual plane where one practices identity by connecting with apparitions, personal ghosts, and future generations. These spiritual bodies all reside in multiple geographic spaces and it is their personal connection to the Cuban physical and psychical terrain that brings them together. Chaviano’s inclusive spiritual pantheon involves the syncretization of Chinese Buddhist gods, Celtic and Greek deities, and Afro-Cuban orishas, which gestures to her ethnically diverse reading of Cuban identity. This perspective forms syncretic spiritual bridges across ethnic and cultural boundaries. Rather than portraying an almost exclusive Chinese-Cuban space like García, Chaviano and Montero *creolize* the narrative space and forge a politically charged and socially transformative rendition of cross-cultural alliances. Another specific departure from García’s *Monkey Hunting* is that, for both *Eternal Love* and *The*

⁸⁹ In fact, in the acknowledgements page at the end of the book, Chaviano gives thanks to the Chinese-Cuban Pong family, “especially Alfredo Pong Eng, who shared with me their personal anecdotes and memories of that gigantic migratory journey that was common to those Chinese who emigrated from Canton to Havana more than one hundred and fifty years ago. Without their help, I would not have been able to reproduce the family atmosphere that appears in these pages” (Chaviano 396). Along with her living sources of information, she also cites the history books: Napoleón Seuc’s *La colonia china de Cuba (1930-1960)*, José Baltar Rodríguez’s *Los chinos de Cuba: Apuntes etnográficos*, and Juan Jiménez Pastrana’s *Los chinos en la historia de Cuba (1847-1930)*.

Messenger, women occupy the historically agented position, narrating most events as well as experiencing most supernatural occurrences. Gender and memory construction intertwine in a manner that allows for history to become an anti-linear sensorial experience.⁹⁰ Daína Chaviano's ease with multiple (physical and spiritual) worlds depicts Cuban identity as constantly in flux, an identity that is nonetheless practiced by multiple races, in various temporal spaces, and within numerous realities. Split between her loyalties to Havana as well as to Miami and its diasporic Cuban community, Chaviano expresses in her writing a sensibility to multi-vocality as she forcefully represents a new crop of Cuban and Cuban-American writers. Critics like Yvette Fuentes, Michelle Herrera Mulligan, and Reinaldo Escobar all preface their discussions of Chaviano's prolific literary career with her early educational and professional success in Cuba. Soon after graduating from the University of Havana with a degree in English Language and Literature, she won a national science fiction competition with her short story collection, *Los mundos que amo* (*The Worlds I Love*). At around this time she also established the first science fiction literary workshop at the university. In the 1980's, Chaviano was considered the most celebrated and best-selling fantasy and science fiction writer in Cuba. On the international stage, Chaviano is currently considered one of the three most important fantasy and science fiction writers in the Spanish language. (She shares this honor with Angélica Gorodischer from Argentina and Elia Barceló from Spain.) Chaviano found domestic and international success in the late 1980's, with short stories published in countries like Czechoslovakia and Germany. According to Herrera

⁹⁰ Fuentes establishes the connection between gender and the sacred stating, "In Chaviano's novel, the capacity to heal and the ability to see and speak to the dead are transmitted down from woman to woman, from generation to generation. Women hold their family's history, and by extension the nation's, and through Amalia's narration of her family history, another woman, Cecilia, is able to carry on the story of Cuba's multiple transculturations" (par. 16).

Mulligan, once she settled in the United States, Chaviano endured a painful spiritual loss (par. 9). Seeking solace in her work, Chaviano departed from her more conventional yet renowned science fiction, in which she explores alien encounters, unicorns, and vampires,⁹¹ and revised her literary style, producing works similar to magical realism. Through this revised approach, Chaviano keeps the literary present in a world very similar to reality but allows for mythical connections to surface. In my interview with Chaviano she argues that the realist tradition is a limiting form of expression and claims that the magical and fantastical elements in her work are very much a part of her daily life. She states,

En primer lugar, lo que llaman realismo es una forma muy limitada de percibir o analizar el mundo que nos rodea. No somos sólo lo que vemos o escuchamos o tocamos, sino también nuestros sueños, lo que sentimos o presentimos, lo que pensamos, todas esas sensaciones que no pueden describirse con palabras o explicarse con lógica... Yo no podría decir en mis libros todo lo que necesito si no reflejara en ellos mi manera de percibir y experimentar la vida, donde existen experiencias y vivencias que caerían dentro de la clasificación ‘no realistas’ o ‘no lógicas.’ El mundo de mis novelas es el mundo que yo también percibo.⁹²

Her creative license allows her the space to move beyond what she terms realist Cuban fiction that often becomes political propaganda. The magical and fantastical in her work recuperates Havana’s mystic essence while representing a dynamic perception of the

⁹¹ Catherine Davies notes “Her [Chaviano’s] interest in nuclear physics and astronomy has led her to specialize in science fiction and fantasy. Her short stories *Los mundos que amo* [*The Worlds I Love*] (1980) present an optimistic view of the human encounter with alien life, space situations and inter-planetary mystery tours while the three novellas collectively entitled *Historias de hadas para adultos* [*Fairytales for Adults*] (1986), set in strange, dangerous landscapes, is dedicated to Steven Spielberg and *ET*. The poems and stories of *Amoroso planeta* [*Loving Planet*] (1983) are full of unicorns and vampires and *El abrevadero de los dinosaurios* [*The Dinosaurs’ Water Hole*] (1990) collates an ingenious collection of apocrypha – encyclopedia articles, diary entries, notes – on dinosaurs” (134).

⁹² My translation is as follows: *First of all, realism is a form much too limiting to perceive and describe the world around us. We are not only what we see, hear, or touch; we are also our dreams, what we feel and perceive, what we think, all the sensations that can’t be described with words or logically explained... In my novels, I could not write all I need to without them reflecting how I perceive and experiment life, where there are experiences that would fall within the ‘non-realist’ or the ‘non-logical.’ The world I create in my novels is the same world I live in.*

world. Rather than travelling galactic distances, in *Eternal Love*, she represents magic as exuding from her newly-distant natal city as well as her new home within the diaspora. Through this literary lens, she is able to re-imagine a Havana outside temporal, political, and social limitations. In this transformative state, she writes *La Habana Oculta* series (*The Occult Side of Havana*) which consists of four novels: *El hombre, la hembra, y el hambre* (*Man, Woman, and Hunger*, Planeta, 1998), *Casa de juegos* (*House of Games*, Planeta, 1999), *Gata encerrada* (*Cat in a Cage*, Críticas, 2001), and the latest installment being *La isla de los amores infinitos*, (*The Island of Eternal Love*, Riverhead Books, 2008).⁹³

In an interview with independent Cuban journalist, Reinaldo Escobar,⁹⁴ Chaviano mentions again the manner in which *Eternal Love* is diverting from propaganda like Cuban fiction, stating,

I tried to create a portrait of Cuban society in which the spiritual, magical, and paranormal elements would allow me to describe a reality I wanted to explore from another perspective. Much of Cuban literature has investigated our history following the same old pattern. The same themes are repeated, using the same codes. I wanted to break away from that orthodoxy. So I decided to use tools from other genres in order to draw a different portrait of my city and my country...[I was afraid] that many publishers would reject it because it didn't follow the conventional norms of classification that the market has established – something all publishers look for. Many of them have a predetermined notion of what a 'Cuban' novel should be like.

⁹³ While there are loose connections between the novels, for instance, the protagonist, Gaia, shows up in both *Casa de juegos* (*House of Games*) and *La isla de los amores infinitos* (*Eternal Love*), the most pertinent connection is the interweaving of magical elements with realistic social conditions.

⁹⁴ Reinaldo Escobar (Camagüey, b. 1947) is an independent journalist and staff member of the on-line Cuban magazine *Consenso*. He resides in Havana with his wife, acclaimed dissident Cuban blogger, Yoani Sanchez. Their blog is www.desdecuba.com (her specific address is <http://www.desdecuba.com/generaciony/>). In November 2009, he was the topic of international news as a youtube video surfaced capturing Cuban government supporters beating him as he sought to discuss his wife's previous attack. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2009/11/21/reinaldo-escobar-spouse-o_n_366369.html>

In an effort to strike against conventional Cuban and Cuban-American stories of imperialism and exile, Chaviano seeks distance from native tendencies of summing nationality and culture with political ideology. She also diverges from the conventional Cuban-American coming-of-age narrative where writers cast a protagonist's formative years in exile and usually within the bi-lateral discourse between the U.S. and Cuba. Because Chaviano's style does not fall into the latter convention, she is speaking towards a change in literary climate for Cuban-American fiction. With writers like Chaviano immigrating as adults to the U.S., the immigration/coming of age story cannot sustain their dichotomous and at times frustrated passions for both Havana (Cuba) and Miami (U.S.). With *Eternal Love*'s focus on tracking historical threads through a re-valuation of sacral elements, Chaviano's protagonists construct memory in the process of assembling a time/logic that is always just a bit out of tilt. Managing these two forces, Chaviano operates in an interregnum, a power vacuum which allows the occurrences in the novel to function in an in-between space of order. Since formative Cuban critical discourse like Gustavo Pérez Firmat's *1.5 generation* and Isabel Alvarez-Borland's (Cuban) *ethnic minority identity* assess the scattered yet powerful voices of post-Mariel as solely immigrant narratives, I am left speaking about Chaviano as affiliated with Spanish-language Science-Fiction writers and not yet part of a collective force for Cuban-American writings. Having said this, her work is most forceful precisely because it is divorced from ordinary rhythms common to Cuban-American conventions.

From Miguel's Notebook: "Go find a Chinaman to take you in"

Eternal Love chronicles four major storylines and three families, spanning five generations. The narrative present follows Cecilia, a young Cuban woman working as a

journalist in 1990's Miami, who is told about a phantom house that appeared in various Miami neighborhoods in the 1980's. While investigating the reappearance of the phantom house, Cecilia enters a Little Havana bar and meets Amalia, an older woman with a grave desire to tell her story. At this point in her life, Cecilia feels lost and disconnected since she misses Cuba, dislikes her life in Miami, and feels completely alienated. Her moments with Amalia transport her to a Havana she never knew and thus begins the novel's master narrative. Amalia recounts the histories of three families who in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century settle in Cuba. The first is a Chinese family running from the Chinese Revolution of 1911. The second is a Galician family who leave Spain because their modest plot of land can no longer sustain them as it is ruined by Martinico, a goblin who only the women of the family can see. And the third family is an African couple brought to Cuba as slaves, but manumitted with the October 7, 1886 abolition of slavery decree and eventually established as prominent importers.

Cecilia is at first awe-struck with Amalia's stories. Amalia's accounts are full of magical beings, destruction, and a diverse Havana that accommodates all these families from various corners of the world. Cecilia is enchanted with Amalia's story and, without really comprehending why, feels compelled to return again and again for not only are the stories magical but they are transformative for Cecilia:

It was a story of burning landscapes and creatures who spoke an incomprehensible dialect, of distinct superstitions and ethereal embarkations that set out for the unknown... Amalia's story was rather an enchantment. The wind blew with force through the tall cane of a far off country, loaded with beauty and violence. There were celebrations and deaths, marriages and killings. The scenes spread out from some crack in the universe as if someone had opened a well from which the memories of a forgotten world were escaping... The visions that rose up from the old woman's story and the evocation of a Havana overflowing with musical

deities had left her with an unusual feeling of bi-location. She felt like those saints who can be in two places at the same time. (Chaviano 26)

This beginning constructs a logic of movement for the reader. Communing with Amalia introduces the reader to the transportability of sacred elements; for instance, Cecilia feels that these deities can be in two places at once, and she imagines her own moveability within narratives of experience. Throughout the narrative, Cecilia is at times meant to remember things she has never or has not yet experienced herself. Her conversations with Amalia as well as her acceptance of the presence of the phantom house facilitate her spiritual, sacred self as she comes to terms with her active ability to construct a sense of self. As the novel progresses, Cecilia connects the at first erratic and fantastical stories to Amalia's own family legacy, as she is the product of the Galician and African union and later marries Chinese/Chinese-Cuban protagonist, Pag Li (Pablo). Their union produces Isabel (mother to Miguel), who is, like Chen Pan and Lucrecia's children, a native, racially mixed Cuban. Cecilia also comes to understand that the phantom house that appears throughout Miami on various patriotic Cuban holidays is her lost family legacy attempting to institute a connection with her. It is through these postmemory alliances that Cecilia and Miguel (Amalia's grandson) come to meet and fall in love. The phantom house along with Amalia, who Cecilia later learns is a ghost herself, serve as the conduits for sacral connections and crossings which ultimately bring Cecilia and Miguel together.

Prior to Cecilia embarking on her spiritual and familial journey, the narrator introduces the other family histories as independent from one another. The most pertinent for my discussion begins with protagonists, Kui-fa and Siu Mend, who are introduced to the reader in their childhood. It is their voyage to Cuba and their transnational markers,

which commands their identities in the narrative.⁹⁵ The narrator initially describes Kui-fa as a young and mild-mannered girl who is raised by her nanny, Mei Lei, after her mother, Lingao-fa, commits suicide. Soon thereafter, Weng, Kui-fa's uncle, arranges for her to marry Síu Mend. One month after Kui-fa gives birth to Pag Li, Síu Mend travels to Cuba assured by Weng that "Things have changed... They don't hire the Chinese as coolies anymore" (Chaviano 23).⁹⁶ Síu Mend returns to China five years later with "a relaxed air that surprised the whole family" (Chaviano 84); however, a couple days later, soldiers ambush their house and burn their sugarcane convincing Síu Mend to permanently relocate his young family to Cuba.

According to Yvette Fuentes, Chaviano presents an equitable distribution of value to the ethnically diverse sacral deities she represents in *Eternal Love*. For instance, Fuentes pays close attention to Chaviano's use of not only Kuan-yin and Ochún who "appear as protectors of the women who are devoted to them," but also the Christian or Catholic figures, along with the "Celtic Pagan beliefs and Greek mythology" the novel incorporates (Fuentes par. 16). This hodgepodge of belief systems all charged with their own set of hierarchical, socio-cultural, and historical threads come to reside within the same narrative space in order to present a Cuban ideal of heterogeneity, syncretism, and transportability. For instance, although worlds apart, Kui-fa brings her Buddhist customs and beliefs to Cuba as her devotion to Kuan Yin – the Chinese Buddhist Goddess of Compassion and her worship of the Three Origins (Heaven, Earth and Water) – never

⁹⁵ Fuentes states, "Although the novel intertwines Cuba's African, Spanish, and Chinese origins, there is no doubt that the novel places special emphasis on Chinese influence in Cuban society. As with Montero's novel, *La isla de los amores infinitos* explores Chinese spiritual and religious beliefs and the intermeshing of these with others on the island to create a distinct Cuban culture" (par. 13).

⁹⁶ In order to rationalize his move to Cuba, Síu Mend establishes a geographic, "trans-local" connection between Canton and Havana stating, "It wasn't a mere coincidence that the climate of both cities was similar: Canton and Havana were at exactly the same latitude. And that clean, straight voyage struck him a good omen" (Chaviano 24).

wanes. In Cuba, Kuan Yin becomes Goddess of Mercy; the same goddess that Pablo will later think he saw when he first sees Amalia donning a shimmering silver shawl. Both mother and son pray to Kuan Yin for dichotomous purposes. While Kui-fa wishes that Pablo would break things off with Amalia, Pablo prays for his relationship to surge. What I find most productive when the Three Origins are summoned in Cuba are their representation of the three originary ethnic groups – the African, the European, and the Chinese – that are coming together producing a socio-cultural product different than any of the original progenitors.⁹⁷ This moment of difference and accommodation alludes to Fernando Ortiz’s final stage in transculturation, neoculturation. The relationship between Kuan Yin and the Goddess of Mercy sheds light on how spiritual and cultural practices in the novel do not strip previous elements while simultaneously shedding light on new conceptions of cultural production, identities, and selfhood.⁹⁸

Kui-fa’s initial perceptions of Cuba, however, are anything but accepting of difference. She feels strange and makes a note of everyone’s facial expressions, including the other Chinese, as she feels like the center of attention. She feels a bit alienated from the familiar until she enters the *barrio chino* (the Chinese neighborhood); Kui-fa immediately is “at home:” “At last the family entered a neighborhood filled with their countrymen. The fragrance of incense and boiled vegetables floated in the air, more

⁹⁷ At various points in the novel, there are more subtle examples of the three originary ethnic groups joining. For instance, when at the bar with Amalia, Cecilia notices the Cuban musical artists on stage describing them as: “...a young man with the profile of Lord Byron playing drums as if possessed by the devil, standing next to an Asian-featured mulatto woman who was shaking her braids to the beat of the *claves*; and that prodigious-voiced black man, like an African king – a silver hoop in his ear – singing a range of cadences, from an operatic baritone to the nasality of the *son*” (8). She views them as a Cuban trio; each race belonging to Cuba and all the musical traits mentioned practiced by and belonging to Cuban cultural production.

⁹⁸ Ortiz defines transculturation as the “different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another because this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture...but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture, which could be defined as a deculturation. In addition, the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, which could be called neoculturation” (102). This definition is more closely read in the Cristina García chapter on *Monkey Hunting*.

consuming than the scent of the sea. ‘I feel like I’m home,’ sighed Kui-fa, who hadn’t opened her mouth during the entire walk” (Chaviano 149). Kui-fa and SÍu Mend symbolically remain all their lives in Havana’s Chinatown. Unlike their son who practices intimate relationships with individuals of other cultural and ethnic backgrounds, Kui-fa and SÍu Mend are insular in their social exchanges. Despite this insularity, however, their generational teachings impact Pag Li so that with his movement amidst inter-ethnic lines, their spiritual teachings reach across multiple boundaries.

Both Kui-fa and SÍu Mend do make changes to their personas especially with regards to their names and their modes of worship. As soon as Kui-fa arrives in Havana’s Chinatown, she meets the honorable Yuang, SÍu Mend’s grandfather, who is considered a Cuban patriot like the *mambís* Chen Pan takes weapons to during the Ten Year’s War. He suggests to both Kui-fa and SÍu Mend that they change their names “in order to deal with the Cubans” (Chaviano 150). Therefore, when in public they answer to Rosa and Manuel. Chaviano glosses over the potential cultural erasure produced by switching to Western names. She narrates the change through their son, Pag Li’s, experiences, claiming it is to be a very different life for him now, and that he would no longer be called Wong Pag Li, but Pablo Wong (Chaviano 151). I will continue, however, to refer to Kui-fa and SÍu Mend by their Chinese names as I believe this is indicative of their first generation immigrant status. They never realize a successful transition into Cuban society; they have difficulty learning the language and interacting with other non-Chinese Cubans. Yet, I will refer to Pag Li as Pag Li and Pablo interchangeably as he personifies Ortiz’s notion of transculturation where he straddles both cultures with much more ease, but nonetheless claims Cuba as home. The name change to Pablo is his first act of self-naming within the

Cuban space. In fact, outside the family home, he seems most comfortable being referred to as Pablo, while Kui-fa and Síu-Mend only answer to their Cuban names in public and at home call each other by their Chinese names.

Aside from the social changes Kui-fa and Síu Mend negotiate, they personally adopt divergent spiritual practices. While Kui-fa stays loyal to Kuan-Yin, the Chinese Buddhist Goddess of Compassion, Síu Mend adopts Sanfancón as his Chinese-Cuban protector. Kuan Yin is already an old world syncretic figure: “Kuan-yin (Perceiver of Sounds)...is the Chinese name for Avalokiteśvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, worshipped throughout the Buddhist world...[She is considered] a compassionate universal savior who responds to anyone’s cry for help regardless of class, gender, or even moral qualifications” (Yü 5). In the novel, Kuan Yin does not command her historical genealogy, but rather solely functions as the Goddess of Mercy that resonates in both China and Cuba.

As previously mentioned when discussing Chen Pan’s time amidst the ceiba trees in García’s *Monkey Hunting*, Sanfancón is a syncretic deity intricately linked with the sacral crossings and sacred energies produced by the arrival of Chinese indentured laborers to Cuba. While Sanfancón is indeed unique to Cuba, his historiography has a few versions within Cuban mythical genealogy. Chaviano’s *Eternal Love* and Montero’s *The Messenger* distinctly capture this mythological discrepancy.⁹⁹ In *Eternal Love*, Chaviano depicts Sanfancón’s entry when Kuan Kong (Sanfancón’s Chinese progenitor) appears to

⁹⁹ I find this point to be especially significant when thinking about how Chaviano’s work, and this novel in particular has been translated into Mandarin Chinese and released in Taiwan: “The novel [*Eternal Love*] has been translated into twenty-one languages...and with its publication in Taiwan, Chaviano becomes the first Cuban author published in that Asian nation” (Fuentes par. 13). This detail is important as it speaks to Chaviano’s international success; it is also ethnically engaging as it prompts a transnational, transcultural conversation among Chinese, Chinese-Cuban, and diasporic Cuban social and sacral identities.

a Chinese peasant in Cuba in order to reach his spiritual constituents. In *The Messenger*, Montero describes the mythical inception when a young Chinese boy travelling on the *Oquendo*, the first ship to arrive in Cuba with Chinese immigrants, gets off the ship with a picture of Kuan Kong. A comparative reading of these two scenes establishes a layered critique of the writers' abilities to syncretize Chinese elements into Cuban society.

In her work, Lisa Yun argues that Antonio Chuffat was the first to record the “transcultured practices of ‘Kuan Kong’ in Cuba” (207). There are some historical and literary overlap between Yun and Chaviano's accounts, especially when Yun explains Chuffat's notations on how Kuan Kong comes to be endowed with localized significance: “In Chuffat's recollection, the spirit of Guan Gong enters the body of one Chung Si and speaks counsel to the Chinese in Cuba...[highlighting] his views regarding race, as he declares that the Chinese have their gods, as do whites, blacks, Indians, and Malays, but the true God is not white, Chinese, black...but it is an omnipotent God” (Yun 207).

In Chaviano's version of this legendary scene, there is no such spiritual mounting; rather, the scene is a vision of the god highlighting the necessary spiritual accommodations of having multiple gods of war in one space. The scene is recounted through hearsay when an immigrant who lives in *the central area* confirms that Kuan Kong appeared to him to announce that he “would protect anyone who shared his food with his unfortunate brothers” (Chaviano 230). In this moment, breaking bread with the marginalized Chinese indentured laborers becomes a sacral ritual in and of itself. The mighty Kuan Kong aligns himself with his ‘unfortunate brothers’ but simultaneously offers protection to any who *shared his food* with the Chinese indentured laborers. Chaviano continues, “...in Cuba there already lived another holy warrior named Shangó,

who dressed in red and had arrived on ships coming from Africa. Soon the Chinese believed that Shangó must be an avatar of Kuan Kong...the saint became the dual figure Shangó-Kuan Kong. Later he turned into San-Fan-Kon, who protected everyone equally” (Chaviano 230). Where the former quotation establishes the deity as a medium for connecting the oppressed Chinese and African on the island, the latter quotation narrates a connection between the two groups. The act of joining through a shared sacral discourse projects a possible and optimistic interdependence also seen, for instance, in García’s *Monkey Hunting* through the labor interactions on the plantation. In both examples, there is an assumed empathy between the Chinese and the African communities; and in this scene specifically, the Chinese laborer’s assumption that Shangó must be an avatar of Kuan Kong exemplifies an ethos of tolerance and diversity. While a moment of compromise, it also marks a scene where the Chinese-Cuban subject comes to respect and thus validate Afro-Cuban customs. Further, the act of amalgamating deities positions both groups as active participants in their mode and manner of worship. Having established the positive ramifications of this syncretization, there are available moments of tension that complicate the argument. First, the manner of exchange narrated seems flat and impersonal. It is all conducted on a macro scale or through hearsay, lacking an intimate human connection.

On the other hand, Montero paints Sanfancón’s legendary entrance into the Cuban spiritual pantheon with much more human vitality. Montero’s *The Messenger* tells of the ill-fated love affair between the mulatto-Chinese Aída Petrirena Cheng and the popular historical Italian tenor Enrico Caruso. Through a painfully intimate portrayal of love, spirituality, and despair, the story revisits the mysterious bombing in a 1920 Havana

theater where the tenor along with other performers ran out onto the streets in costumes covered in soot. This historical scene begins Montero's novel, which fictionalizes Caruso's relationship with Aída, who, through Santería and Chinese spiritual rituals, redirects Caruso's and her own life course. The story is told by two narrators, Aída and her daughter, Enriqueta Cheng, who is born out of Aída's affair. Through the dual narratives – Aída's first person master narrative (circa 1920) and Enriqueta's first person present narrative (1980s and 1990s) – the novel sheds light on the multiple racial configurations and social positionings within Cuba's socio-political and spiritual worlds. The most relevant sections of this novel to my discussion here, however, are the moments when Montero evokes Sanfancón. According to Montero, Kuan Kong's arrival aligns with the ship, *Oquendo*, the first to bring Chinese indentured laborers to Cuba. On January 2, 1847, three-hundred Chinese left Canton for Cuba. Aboard the ship travelled an eight-year-old child, Yuan Pei Fu, "guardian of an image of Cuan Cong" (Montero 22). Yuan becomes guardian of the relic as soon as his father along with ninety-five other bodies is thrown overboard. Before Yuan's father dies, he makes Yuan promise to take care of the image and keep Kuan Kong's memory intact. In the novel, Aída's godfather, African José de Calazán tells the story. At the time of the event, he had not been yet born, but his father was a child then and saw the first Chinese, including Yuan, set foot on Cuban soil. Calazán adds that at first "the people laughed [because] it was the first time they had seen Chinese slaves chained up like blacks, but even more ragged and desperate, with sunken eyes and their feet swollen with seawater" (Montero 22); however, the take away of his story is that to "the people of the Lucumí nation," who witness this event, the child was assumed to be carrying the image of Shangó. Similarly to Chaviano's

representation, the myth begins through hearsay and postmemory; however, the difference is the personalized re-telling captured in Montero. Montero also establishes a contact scene for the Chinese and the African that allows for both groups to participate in the act of recognition, a moment of acknowledging a doubling of each other's oppression.

In an effort to provide an indigenous space for her protagonist to be in, Montero assumes spiritual license at this moment and offers a line of distinct Chinese elements within Santería. The novel infers the striking connection and syncretization that occurs on a religious level among the sword and thunder figures – Santa Bárbara, Shangó, and Kuan Kong (who later becomes Sanfancón). However, Montero is strategic in positioning Aída's ancestry as one that embodies the syncretization of both Afro-Cuban Santería and Chinese mysticism. The narrator later reveals that the repository of the Sanfancón relic, Yuan Pei Fu, is Aída's biological father, not her mother's husband, Noro Cheng. This, along with her African ancestry, which prompts her spiritual relationship with her *babalawo* godfather, Calazán, amalgamates the two religious practices as syncretic in nature but one in embodied spirit. Alicia E. Vadillo argues that through Aída's straddling of both the Chinese, Chinese-Cuban, and Afro-Cuban Santería practices, Montero presents “un breve camino chino dentro de la Santería cubana [*a small Chinese path into Cuban Santería*] ...” (191).¹⁰⁰ What is most striking is not necessarily that Montero argues that Sanfancón's myths have made a spiritual inroad within Santería, but rather, Montero's unrelenting comments that the gods are “blood brothers” regardless of spiritual or racial origin. This realization “makes it possible for Aída and her mother to realize that Calazán's Afro-Cuban magic will not be sufficient to protect her. They also

¹⁰⁰ There is a note on the statement that according to critic, José Baltar, there is no record proving the existence of a spiritual bridge represented by Sanfancón within Cuban Santería.

seek the protection of more powerful ‘Chinese *nganga*,’ and go to a Catholic church with offerings for the altar that holds relics of Santa Flora in hope of yet another level of protection” (Paravisini-Gebert 153).

Montero evokes multiple religious practices again at the end of *The Messenger* when Aída and Enrico fail to thwart their doomed destinies. Aída concedes that there is nothing she will be able to do to save Enrico’s life for the narrator states that he enters her life already dead (Montero 11). Soaked in despair, Aída reminds the reader that “On the ocean, in that quiet night, all the Chinese phantoms, all the ghosts from the steamship *Oquendo*; and the black phantoms, all the ones who came with my [Aída] grandmother Petrona of the Lucumí nation. There was a power, a great gathering, many *engungún* hovering around” (Montero 176). As one of the final intimate moments between Aída and Enrico, this scene accomplishes a dualistic, almost dichotomous, conclusion that precludes a neat resolution. First Aída embodies the syncretization of both Santería and Chinese mysticism while, simultaneously, the scene marks a doubling of experience. The dark cloud that hovers serves to indicate the inescapability of Aída and Enrico’s destiny as predicted by Orula, the master of divination. The ominous ode summons the lives lost during the Middle Passage and *La trata amarilla*. These forces come together to represent a sacral umbrella of protection for the Cuban nation.

Meddling Deities and Desired Destiny(ies) in *Eternal Love*

Montero’s use of Sanfancón on a religious level and Aída’s role on an ethno-cultural level produces instances where the sacred redirects the deployment of social boundaries and categories. The fact that within the novel the personal (Aída and Enrico’s relationship) is interrupted by sacred energies is not as critically important as the utopic

acclimation of multiple religious practices within such a politically charged, classist society as Cuba in the 1920s.¹⁰¹ Pablo and Amalia's relationship in *Eternal Love* imparts similar social possibility and critique. Unlike his parents, S'iu Mend and Kui-fa, Pag Li nurtures multiple cross-racial relationships that resonate on physical and sacral levels. He initiates his most triumphant and cherished relationship, however, as a child. He first meets Amalia when carrying out a delivery for his parents' laundromat. During a family party honoring famous Cuban singer Rita Montaner, Amalia dons a magical silver shawl that bathes her in light. As soon as she opens the door to Pablo, who mistakenly thinks Amalia's home is the delivery address, her shawl glows signaling that the two people who've met each other's gaze are destined for love. Astonished, Pag Li thinks he's seen the Goddess of Mercy, while Amalia is convinced "she had just met her prince" (Chaviano 215). According to Robin McAllister, this contact between Amalia and Pablo is a crossing of spiritual and physical worlds as a folding of generational time occurs due to their recounted histories within the narrative. He states,

Only if we have read Amalia's stories about previous generations of Pablo's and Amalia's families do we realize what events, loves, and destinies meet in the moment Pablo sees the Goddess of Mercy in Amalia's face. It is as if these lovers are living out lives whose destinies have already been prepared, laid out for them... This encounter—love at first sight—had already been prepared for, already preordained... (McAllister 4)

McAllister goes on to define this moment as a fulfillment of each other's destinies, and hence the destinies of multiple generations before them. What I find most striking about his perspective is his position on this scene as uniting sacral and carnal entities. This is,

¹⁰¹ According to Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, *The Messenger* is set during a period known as the "Dance of the Millions:" "a time of unprecedented and very short-lived prosperity ushered in by extremely high prices for cane sugar (of which Cuba was one of the world's leading producers) after the destruction of the European beet-sugar industry during World War I" (148).

he argues, “a moment of contact between goddesses, persons, legend and moment of history, world of spirit and living passion and blood. Most important, a connection across the discontinuities of generations” (McAllister 4). I agree with McAllister’s argument that this scene adjusts historical perspective in that it allows one to consider connections among disruptions in time, experience, and practice. In fact, I couple this scene with my reading of Montero’s final scene because there are clear similarities between the two. What Montero is addressing on a sacral level, promoting a sense of combined and syncretic religious space, Chaviano is purporting through her main love story within the narrative. Both are redressing the systemic alienation of marginalized subjects by envisioning history and experience as a plastic practice. This on a grand scale is a cornerstone argument of sacred citizenship, as it is through envisioning history as a non-linear, malleable entity that one can begin to construct connections and forge intimacies otherwise unavailable. Through Montero and Chaviano’s literature, the reader possesses literary representations of the types of connections that can be instituted. Thus, in joining generations outside linear temporality, Aída’s embodied connection to Chinese mysticism and Santería, Amalia’s face reminding Pablo of the Goddess of Mercy (and this same goddess being Kui-fa’s point of contact to spirituality), as well as the collaborative nature of sacred energies in both novels, create space outside historical time where protagonists, and sacred energies for that matter, commune through similarity of experience.

Despite the ordained quality of Pablo and Amalia’s union, not all is instantly perfect for their budding relationship as both sets of parents disapprove of their young love. Amalia’s parents argue that their social and racial class make them superior to the lowly Chinese worker; however, Amalia reminds her father of her lineage stating, ““No,

Papa,' the girl corrected, feeling the blood rushing to her face. 'You're white, but my mother is a mulatto, and you married her. That leaves me out of such refined categories. And if a white man can marry a mulatto woman, why can't a mulatto woman who passes for white marry the son of Chinese parents?'" (Chaviano 246). There is an interesting disjuncture performed in this scene as it is made clear that Amalia's white father was able, through hardship of his own, to marry 'below' his social class; however, despite his personal experiences, he denies his daughter, the product of such a relationship, the same opportunity. The performance of racialized gender available to the white male is thus precluded from the mulatto female as well as the Chinese male, producing a racialized gender hierarchy. The multiplicity of patriarchies always positions white masculinity at the pinnacle of access and mobility, foreclosing equal opportunities for other subjects of color despite gender. Furthermore, another interesting detail in this quotation is the description of the blood rushing to Amalia's face as she defends her choices and her racial make-up to her white father. The *extra facial coloring* functions on a visual level to gesture towards the performativity of race. She is a woman who passes for white but can at any time give herself away. Although a passing detail, this scene shares some symbolic connections to the role of race and racial identity in Montero's *The Red of His Shadow* where race is less one's racial composition and more about how one conducts oneself. Nevertheless, Amalia's discussion with her father reaches a wall when they address the families' differing social and economic levels. While both families are business owners, her family owns a recording studio and the Wong family owns a laundromat that they plan to sell in order to buy a restaurant. Despite the change in business, the Wong family remains within the service sector, unlike Amalia's family who

own a business that caters to the airs of cultural sophistication, aesthetics, musical production, and art. Therefore, while both families are business owners, the Wong family still serves, fixing their status as second-class within bourgeois circles of society.¹⁰²

Despite Amalia's family's objections, Pablo is convinced he has seen the Goddess of Mercy in Amalia, and they form an unbreakable bond irrespective of familial obstacles. While their love is concretized during their first kiss, "that whiff of the soul that could easily die if destiny were to take an unforeseen turn..." it is their stroll along the Malecón that exalts their union as one not hindered by the temporal limitations of this world: "Time acquired a different physical quality, and then – some people swore – it was possible to see certain ghostly shadows from both the past and the future strolling by the wall" (Chaviano 251). Just as the apparitions strolling alongside the couple seem to indicate love connecting them across temporal divides with other past and future lovers, the narrator constructs a political landscape stating, "[Martinico] stood motionless before the strange mirage that she [Amalia], too, could see, knowing that it was not a real, present image but rather something from another era: hundreds of people launched themselves into the sea on rafts and anything else that would float" (Chaviano 251). In this scene, Chaviano seems careful not to restrict the politics of love or sacred energies within the realm of the romantic or within a specific historical time period. Pablo and Amalia's elixir-like union grants Amalia the vision to see other acts of love from the ghosts of the pasts to events that have yet to occur. During their walk in pre-revolutionary

¹⁰² Further, Kui-fa and Siu Mend are equally discontent with this budding union. Amalia and the Wong family cross paths during the Havana Carnival just as the traditional Lion Dance is branching out of Chinatown and joining the mainstream festivities. When meeting Amalia for the first time, the cross-ethnic misinterpretations abound as she thinks she is watching a *Dragon Parade*, and Kui-fa corrects her on the fact that it is not a dragon but a lion and that the lion is not parading but dancing (Chaviano 226). The brief and uncomfortable meeting leads Kui-fa to purport that Cuban girls are not "raised properly" (Chaviano 226).

Cuba,¹⁰³ they envision the mass exodus of Cubans leaving the island during the *balseros* crisis of the 1990's. It is important to note that this historical event for the Cuban-American readership is a somewhat recent past experience still charged with political significance and bipartisan undertones.

This textual moment creates the symbolic fabric for a collective redeployment of postmemory available to the Cuban people. Regardless of the reader's political stance – whether one is with the bodies launching into the water or those remaining behind – this scene beckons a psychic and political transpersonal experience for the reader, dislodging the boundaries of the personal. The scene also supports McAllister's argument that Amalia and Pablo's union forges “a connection across the discontinuities of generations.” For politically driven identitarian boundaries, unbridgeable notions of difference usually keep these collectives apart; however, in presenting a scene where time, history, and experience are malleable, Chaviano assumes the most radical politics where it is not what side one is on but rather the participation within the experience that grants a transformative scene for recasting self in that political moment through intimacy.

Chaviano's scene brings the individuals exiled through the *balseros* crisis back to a cultural or trans-political sense of belonging with the Cuban state. Her scene is most effective because it blends time and experience. Amalia and Pablo's scene is set in pre-revolutionary Cuba, invoking a syncretic space to be with and for future bodies leaving the island keeping with them a sense of love and duty to notions of Cubanness that seems irreconcilable. This brings to the fore a sense of trans-political citizenship which looks to the distant and the not so distant past as a means to refigure cultural collective Cubanness

¹⁰³ It is not clear exactly what year this event takes place, but the couple is assisted by the afrocuban singer, Rita Montaner, who historically dies prior to the 26th of July movement which gives Fidel Castro control of the state after five years of rebellion. Rita Montaner passes away of cancer in April 1958.

for present and future individuals claiming this physical, psychical, and imaginative space.

Another Cuban-American novel depicting the *balseros* crisis along with a multi-generational exilic and Cuban experience is J. Joaquín Fraxedas' *The Lonely Crossing of Juan Cabrera* (1993). The story captures the *balseros* phenomenon which, according to Holly Ackerman and Juan Clark, was a steady cycle of Cuban immigrants arriving in the United States from 1989 until approximately 1994 (ii). The novel's publication in fact precedes the August 1994 spike where tens of thousands left monthly. Nevertheless, the *The Lonely Crossing* captures the desperation of three exiles, Juan Cabrera along with his friends, Andrés and Raúl, as they set out on a makeshift raft for the Florida Keys. Juan is the sole survivor and starts his life in Miami. Once in Miami, he meets and engages with Vivian and Alberto, who immigrated to the States during previous migration waves and embody the complexity of the forty-plus years of Cuban diasporic identities. According to Borland, "...Fraxedas wills an ideal community into existence...by imagining the different fragments of his community and bringing them together in his fiction..." (96). Both Chaviano and Fraxedas imagine a politically messy cultural Cuban identity that all the protagonists depicted can access despite when and how they left the island. However, by depicting this doubling scene within a pre-revolutionary Cuba, Chaviano is imaginatively creating the Cuban island suspended beyond historical time as the space for these encounters. In Chaviano's scene, the *balseros* become a group symbolically cast out because they do not fall in line with Cuba's Special Period's restructuring and Chaviano's scene brings them back into the cultural collective.

Further, allocating the vision as one experienced by protagonists still physically in Cuba allows for this reconciliation among Cubans to include the Cuban population still on the island. This is most intimately represented with Chaviano's evocation of the *jinetera* (defined as women and some men who exchange a range of favors, including sexual experiences, for money from tourists). Chaviano describes how, "Pablo also fell speechless at the sight of a young woman in a scandalously short dress, walking alongside the wall...the young woman whose natural rhythm bore the marks of a life of bought and sold love" (251).

With the fall of the Soviet Union, Cuba entered into the Special Period which roughly encompassed the entire decade of the 1990's. According to Ariana Hernandez-Reguant, "Across the board, its [the Special period's] invocation brings up memories of deprivation and hopelessness; of hunger and heat; of wheeling and dealing, of dreams of a life elsewhere. Raising pigs in bathtubs, making omelets without eggs and pizzas with melted condoms...and other epic tales of survival...form the lore of the time" (2). The Cuban state fell into bankruptcy and international tourism became a promising avenue for sustainability. With everything re-coded as for sale, the economy of the Cuban *peso* and the U.S. dollar, now commanded every exchange. This included access to the embodied and exotic otherness of Cuban citizens. *Jineterismo* became a global marketing venture as, according to Silvana Paternostro, the Cuban state contracted Playboy Magazine in 1990 to shoot "the country's revolutionary mulattas...and distributed posters of beaches with white sand and topless Cubanas to travel agencies worldwide. The government referred to the women as 'promoters of tourism'" (Paternostro par. 4).

This is a tragic commentary on the abuses enacted on women for capitalistic gain by a specious body politic. The *jineteras* were providing a service and preserving a quality of life unavailable to other Cubans like the *balseiros* who believed they had no other option for survival than to plunge into the ocean. However, they were clearly pawns in a larger international exchange enacted on and through their bodies. Through state-sanctioned *jineterismo*, the state was manipulating notions of embodiment and erotics that are antithetical to the empowerment available through the body within sacred citizenship. Foreign tourists were invited to consume the exotic other. This exchange was profitable by maintaining the *jineteras* as these cultural products of otherness. Chaviano's depiction not only of Amalia and Pablo, who the reader knows will migrate to the U.S. soon after the revolution, but also the *balseiros* and the *jinetera* thus presents a commentary on acts of desperation and survivability all connecting to one cultural Cubanness across time and space.

A foil to the collectivity of the public scene above occurs when the sacred intervenes in private matters, shedding light on the inter-generational tensions sacred elements try to circumvent. Soon after their evening at the Malecón, Amalia's family moves and forces her to cut all ties with Pablo. They, however, reunite at the university and Pablo believes "he had come within reach of Kuan Yin, the Goddess of Mercy, whose outline shines as brightly as the moon, in order to touch a face he had never stopped dreaming about" (Chaviano 261). Since this fateful meeting on the university steps, they begin a clandestine affair, and in a mythical ceremony, they consummate their love and Amalia returns home pregnant (Chaviano 272). Their pseudo wedding ceremony seems to be an inverse of the collectivity reached while ambling along the Malecón years

before. As they take another walk, this time, on a secluded “spiral path” – connoting a similar non-linear experience like the Malecón scene – Pablo and Amalia walk towards “The peak [that] stood awaiting the ceremony that would mark their souls. Such a ceremony had already taken place countless times, and so it would occur again and again as long as the world existed and the gods – forgotten or not – retained their power over humankind” (Chaviano 275). Their union is contingent on a pact Amalia’s grandmother, Angela, made decades prior with Pan, a forgotten god who retains powers. Since Angela is kind to him and gives him honey, he vows to bless a member of her family when needed. And, just as promised, his ceremony blesses the young couple producing “A light [that] descended – or perhaps emanated – from their [Pablo and Amalia’s] bodies. It surrounded them like gauze and adhered to the edges of their souls like a mark of love, visible only to their spirits, that would last for all ages” (Chaviano 275).

Similar to the Malecón scene, Amalia and Pablo’s private wedding and subsequent pregnancy casts the sacred energies as assisting human matters regardless of social difference.¹⁰⁴ Hence, the sacred that is tapped into does not necessarily respect generational or individual perspectives and desires. For example, it is interesting to note that Angela, whom Pan is inadvertently blessing by joining Amalia and Pablo, dies the night after Amalia’s family learns of her pregnancy (Chaviano 282). This sudden passing is associated indirectly with her grief upon discovering her granddaughter’s predicament. Therefore, the incongruence between the sacral crossing available and the mortal perspective interpreting such happenings becomes irrelevant. Another instance of friction

¹⁰⁴ Their eternal bond materializes with the birth of their daughter, Isabel. However, Amalia actually loses the baby girl from her first pregnancy (Chaviano 310). She does not mourn for too long as she finds out about her pregnancy with Isabel a few months later. And with Isabel’s birth, comes serene peace for a while between both sides of the family. Yet this stretch of happiness is halted by daunting and overwhelming political upheaval.

between sacred and human desires is when Kui-fa and Pablo (mother and son) both pray to Kuan Yin – the former to break Amalia and Pablo up while the latter prays to preserve his relationship with Amalia. Similarly to Montero’s *The Red of His Shadow* and Ana-Maurine Lara’s *Erzulie’s Skirt*, where the sacred is presented as intervening in mortal affairs, the sacred here never provides relief from petty qualms and often leaves certain protagonists’ wishes unanswered; however, the sacred in these novels often serves to imagine an existence that counters marginality, leaving those protagonists that advocate difference and exclusivity dissatisfied. Most importantly, though, Chaviano never presents the sacred as solely on the side of the marginalized. Rather, the marginalized subjects access the sacred to build spaces of belonging and meaning for themselves.

From this point on, socio-political circumstances flood the narrative and seem to all lead to the family’s fracture and destined relocation. With political instability looming, the sacred elements guiding the protagonists lose the dramatic irony present in the above readings and a shift occurs so that throughout the rest of the novel familial spiritual bodies conduct most sacral crossings. The spiritual becomes a focused exchange across generational and physical divides as familial ghosts align with their mortal charges to provide as much guidance and support as need be. There are, however, sacral figures still present that the protagonists do not pray to for protection, but serve only to externalize the anguish of certain protagonists. Martinico is a perfect example as he is the pest imp that all the women in Amalia’s family see and tolerate as soon as they fall in love. He no longer wishes to torment Amalia now that she is a mother. Their bond is cemented during Pablo’s upsetting arrest where he is subsequently imprisoned for twenty years by Castro’s regime for keeping propaganda materials in the music shop he owns with Amalia. In this

moment specifically, music enters the spiritual pantheon of worship and expression. The scene opens with Amalia watching a performance by the controversial and radical Cuban singer, La Lupe. Her tenacious antics on stage where she would remove her jewelry, hit her band mates with her heels, and rip off clothing, is first received by Amalia as a performance that is “too theatrical” and lacking the grace of a Rita Montaner, for instance. On the page, La Lupe’s descriptions as rendered through Amalia’s point of view are interrupted with lyrics from La Lupe’s songs expressing a sense of betrayal as she endures a love gone wrong: “*A play, with you it’s all a play: rehearsed lies, a perfect simulation...*” (Chaviano 349). Just as Amalia finds La Lupe’s raged-filled performance baffling, four men rush into her house and arrest Pablo. The narrator depicts Amalia’s physical and emotional reactions through La Lupe’s stage performance: “Amalia wanted to shout insults, scream, bite into her arms, and rend her clothing like La Lupe. She would have sung a duet with her if only she could spit in the face of the one who had deceived them, promising them the moon with that monkfish expression that doubtless concealed...the face of a red devil” (Chaviano 351).

The final statement above captures a political critique so far suggested in the narrative, but never so forcefully articulated. The narrative’s anti-totalitarian politics are directed at Castro’s suffocating government and the dissidence voice names the oppressor as the “red devil” possibly connoting communist ties but definitely depicting the disillusion felt by many who first supported Castro’s ambitions to power. Amalia, the once conventional mother and wife now aligns with La Lupe, a singer who defected to New York City in the late 1960s after being accused of being a toxin and a clear

representation of the American imperialism Cuba was trying to rid itself of.¹⁰⁵ Similar to the scene involving the spectral figures from the *balseros*, La Lupe is not only brought back into the Cuban cultural collective but gives Amalia the strength she needs to unleash her emotions. It is Amalia's connection to La Lupe that gives her the language of despair and rage that allows her to communicate her present state.

Throughout the novel, there is a soundtrack sustaining the protagonists' lives in one way or another, especially for Amalia and her families (first with her parents and then with Pablo). Thus far, the connection between music and the sacred has been a tongue in cheek bond; for instance, Amalia's family's recording studio is named "The Imp," a clear ode to Martinico while Amalia and Pablo's record store is called "Pan's Flute," the nearly forgotten deity who blesses their union during their mystical wedding ceremony. Throughout the novel, Chaviano brings in historical artists like Rita Montaner and Beny Moré. Montaner, for example, is embedded in the narrative in such an intimate manner that it is her silver shawl Amalia is wearing when Pablo first sees her. She also keeps their clandestine love a secret as she champions their young love. Furthermore, while music thus far has been consumed for the most part as a cultural product, this scene establishes music and artistic production as a coping mechanism to assist in combating oppressions endured. The novel opens with an ode to this very relationship: "It was so dark that Cecilia could hardly see her. Rather, she intuited her silhouette behind the small table next to the wall, beside the photos of the sacred dead: Beny Moré, the genius of the bolero; Rita Montaner, adored diva of Cuban composers; the night-black chansonnier

¹⁰⁵ For more on La Lupe's musical talent and political reputation, see Ela Troyano's documentary *La Lupe Queen of Latin Soul*. There was also a one night only production, Jim Monas' *La Lupe One Woman Show*, starring Lauren Velez at Colony Theater, Miami Beach, FL on April 15, 2009. Monas' production was an effort to raise funds in order to possibly make a motion picture depicting La Lupe's tumultuous life and celebrating her indelible contributions to Cuban and Cuban-American music.

Bola de Nieve, with his smile, white and sweet as sugar...” (Chaviano 5). Music’s transformative and otherworldly properties are indeed available in this scene as it is Amalia’s connection to La Lupe that incites her evolution. Positioning Amalia as akin to La Lupe reinvents Amalia’s role in the narrative from conventional female protagonist to, for better or worse, a woman outside patriarchal vigilance. And, after Pablo returns home from prison a changed man, she soon thereafter loses him altogether.

In his final days, similar to his mother, Kui-fa, Pablo seeks connectivity across physical and spiritual divides. He begins to commune with his ancestry and reconnects with his *Akún* (his great-grandfather) who is extending him comfort from the beyond and replenishing Pablo with happiness: “And little by little, embracing his great-grandfather’s shadow, he stopped feeling hungry” (Chaviano 384). Rather than visiting the cemetery, Amalia and Isabel choose to remember the dead (including the recently departed, Pablo) by visiting the Chinese Revolutionary monument which still stands on the corner of Línea and L Street in Havana. Yun describes the black marble monument as “a dark obelisk that is distinctive yet mysterious” (33). Etched on the monument are the Cuban patriot and secretary to José Martí’s Cuban Revolutionary Party, Gonzalo de Quesada’s “most enduring words about Chinese freedom fighters of Cuba” (Yun 33): *No hubo un chino cubano traidor; no hubo un chino cubano desertor*. [Chaviano’s translation: “There never was a Chinese Cuban deserter; there never was a Chinese Cuban traitor” (356).]¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Yun continues her statement about the anonymity of the Chinese indentured laborers and freedom fighters stating that “Little is known about the coolies’ ages, names, or the plantations they came from. The Chinese participation in the wars for liberation spanned a remarkably long period of thirty years: with their role in the fighting beginning with *la Guerra de los Diez Años* (the Ten Year’s War of 1868-1878) through *la Guerra Chiquita* (the Little War of 1878-1879), and to the end of *la Guerra de Independencia* (the War of Independence 1895-1898)” (33). Further, this monument is also remembered in Mary-Alice Waters’ edited collection, *Our History is Still Being Written: The Story of Three Chinese-Cuban Generals in the Cuban Revolution*. Mention of this monument is a point of pride in this book that celebrates three Chinese-Cubans still active within the Cuban military. This project aims at celebrating within an extremely leftist

At this historical site, Isabel professes that she will teach the phrase to “the children she would one day bear, when she would tell them about the deeds of her great-great-grandfather Yuang, the tenacity of her grandparents Síu Mend and Kui-fa, and the rebelliousness of her father, Pag Li” (Chaviano 356). Amalia and Isabel’s remembrance of family passed in front of the Chinese-Cuban monument rather than the cemetery (where they had gone countless times before to share food and drink with the dead), evoking a sense of comfort in the permanence of the structure before them. While this monument can be considered a conjured site for postmemory geared to evoke a specific sentimentality and loyalty, it nonetheless grants Amalia and Isabel a space to mourn their losses, all the while rejoicing in the thousands that have come before them. The historical weight behind this is bittersweet as readers would be inclined to assume that this record of Chinese contributions to Cuban society was and will continue despite Amalia and Isabel’s personal losses; however, as our representatives of the Chinese-Cuban presence, Pablo and Amalia relocate to Miami, joining yet another diasporic community. Although not of Chinese descent herself, since she marries and has children with Pablo, she serves to continue Chinese-Cuban culture.

Further, for most of the novel women function as transmitters of sacral and historical narratives. Amalia’s role within the narrative present and the stories she shares with Cecilia temporally align now and she practices her revised role no longer as a physical bearer of culture but as a voice for individuals who could not vocally and historically assert self. Similarly to La Lupe, Amalia utilizes her exiled position to speak back to systems of oppression. Her conversations with Cecilia become a representation of

and Socialist, pro-Castro slant the memory of the Chinese-Cubans while still acknowledging a few of the dying breed within Cuba (60).

the role women assume with regards to capturing historical experiences missed by the machine of history. She also functions as the most memorable example of the spiritual and physical crossing, since throughout the length of Amalia and Cecilia's conversations, Amalia is an apparition herself.

The Chinese-Cuban Identity: Translational Preservation

Once the narrative present aligns with Cecilia and her conversations with an elderly Amalia at a Miami bar, the reader has not only learned about the relationship between Amalia and Pablo but also is becoming aware that Amalia's ghostly intervention within the world of the living prompts the union of another budding love – that of Cecilia and Miguel. Miguel, Amalia's grandson, has just arrived from Cuba on a sociological mission to study and record Chinese contributions to Cuban culture (Chaviano 389);¹⁰⁷ he is instantly smitten with Cecilia. Like the rest of the novel, these closing scenes unfold with a futurity in mind that is optimistic without being overly naïve. Cecilia's connection with Miguel is a climax to a series of investigative efforts of self-reflection, familial discoveries, and cultural awareness. Although chapters on Cecilia are present throughout the narrative, she is most relevant as a bookend thread in that it is her unrelenting pursuit of learning about the phantom house that consistently returns her to connecting with Amalia: “Unlike this strange house that ambled around Miami, the story Amalia had begun telling had a beginning and certainly an end. She felt that those characters, lost in time and distance, were much more real than her own life or the elusive mansion that kept slipping through her fingers. Without a second thought, she turned her car around

¹⁰⁷ Noting the previous comments about the Chinese-Cuban representations of the novel entering another diasporic community, Miguel who is Amalia's grandson and therefore part Chinese-Cuban, travels to the U.S., crystallizing such a move. It is interesting to note as well that no one points to the irony of his studying Chinese contributions to Cuban society in Miami and not Cuba itself.

toward Little Havana” (79). Cecilia still insists on a separation between real and fiction, on a logical explanation regarding supernatural happenings in her life. Because at this moment she does not yet even imagine that Amalia is an apparition, Cecilia clings to her as a physical fixture that can possibly anchor meaning for and about her life. As Cecilia is learning of Cuba’s cultural and political legacies through Amalia’s intimate accounts – accounts not usually present in historical documents – she comes closer to learning and appreciating her interdependence with these stories and the phantom house. With each piece of evidence that surfaces regarding the phantom house, Cecilia grows more and more interested in her personal past and constructs the possibility of a much more optimistic future. Cecilia begins visiting her grandmother’s sister, Loló, who maintains a relationship with both her deceased and psychic sister, Delfina (at one point Amalia’s neighbor), and her male companion, Demetrio. All these details culminate when Cecilia looks at old pictures of her grandparents and parents, and realizes that the phantom house is occupied by their ghosts and appear not only on “bad” Cuban holidays,¹⁰⁸ but also on her familial days of celebration like February 14th, her parents wedding anniversary:

She trailed off when she saw the photos on top of the dresser. There was her grandmother Delfina, sporting one her of customary floral dresses and her usual smile, surrounded by roses in her garden. In another picture was a man Cecilia couldn’t identify except for the unmistakable parrot he carried in a cage. When she saw the third photo, she felt the floor shift beneath her feet. With a combination of tenderness and horror, she recognized her parents as bride and groom: she, with her hair pulled back and in a long gown; he, with his actor’s face and that tie with light-colored polka dots that Cecilia had long since forgotten. (309)

¹⁰⁸ Cecilia notices an ominous pattern among the dates when the phantom house appears politically aligning herself with anti-revolutionary Cubans, most of which reside in Miami: “Cecilia was about to copy the name of the first witness when she noticed the date: the dawn of January first, five months after the year of her arrival. The second one took place seven days later: January 8. Then another report, July 26... ‘They’re national holidays...or, rather, *bad* national holidays’” (162). At first she does not pay much attention to her connection to the dates she mentions like the first reappearance was a year after she arrived in Miami; she, instead, harps on the historical meaning of the dates for Cubans – January 1st, the triumph of the revolution, January 8th, when the rebels entered Havana, and July 26th, the rebels’ assault on the Moncada Barracks.

This moment connects with the multiple accounts Cecilia previously documented regarding the various eye witness anecdotes of actually seeing people inside the house. Cecilia's main source, Gaia, along with other accounts, all agreed that the woman wore a floral dress from the forties or fifties and that the man carried an empty bird cage. After some internal debate, Loló's pictures confirm for Cecilia that she is as much a part of the phantom house as the phantom house is a part of her. This revelation comes at the end of the penultimate section; the last section sets the stage for Cecilia to meet Manuel; thus, symbolically coming to terms with her past and present in order to construct a future in Miami as a "Cuban-bred American."¹⁰⁹

With this news, Cecilia returns to the bar where she usually meets Amalia in hopes of finding her there; instead, she meets Miguel, who at first she is cold to but is much friendlier to him after realizing her friends in Miami are old friends of his from Cuba. They begin talking and become engrossed with the boleros being sung live that evening. A woman "draped in a shawl" starts singing "*How could it be? I can't tell you how, I can't explain it, but I fell in love with you...*" as Miguel explains his connection to Amalia and that Amalia passed about a year prior (Chaviano 391). Throughout their encounter, Amalia's aura is indirectly available through the woman singing with a shawl; an ode to her destined meeting and instant connection to Pablo so many years prior. This is also the moment when Cecilia learns that she herself is a "visionary, someone who could talk to spirits" (Chaviano 392). Her powers as a visionary brought her to this scene of interdependence with the sacred, producing a wealth of concentrated inter-generational

¹⁰⁹ Gustavo Pérez-Firmat introduces this phrase when he distinguishes between the ABC, the American Born Cubans who are Cubans in name only like his children and the American-bred Cubans, who will acclimate to *Americanness* without losing their Cuban culture (29).

knowledge. Once Cecilia sees Martinico for herself, she realizes their union is blessed like Amalia's and so many before. Cecilia and Miguel's final scene marks the triumphant spark of a union destined through the sacred energies produced not only through their attraction and budding love but through the transpersonal connection forged between Cecilia and her spirit guide, Amalia. As Miguel and Cecilia dance, Cecilia feels a chill as "She turned her head a little and could barely recognize her: a young, adolescent Amalia was dancing with a boy who looked like Miguel, with slightly more Asian features" (Chaviano 394). This moment, which coalesces love(s), physical and spiritual knowledge, and experience among generations, introduces Cecilia to a new space for self-definition. Their physical dance is layered by the ghostly dance between a young Amalia and Pablo whose union is blessed across multiple lifetimes. The transpersonal experience here produces continuity and futurity for not only Cecilia and Miguel (and their love) but also for a lost community, the Chinese-Cubans. In our interview, Chaviano acknowledges that she set out to make the conclusion optimistic. With both sets of couples dancing alongside each other, in a space so different from their native country, Chaviano portrays an acknowledgement of past sacrifices for future promise. She states, "[Este] es un modo de reconocer que, gracias al pasado y a los sacrificios de quienes vinieron antes, puede ser posible la felicidad en este mundo, aunque para quienes vivieron ese pasado, el amor y la felicidad sólo puedan ser posible en la otra vida."¹¹⁰ Chaviano's comment here highlights the potentiality postmemory and sacred citizenship espouses. Despite Amalia and Pablo's tribulations, their love, their future continues through Miguel and Cecilia. Also, rather than being simply immortalized by a cold marble monument hundreds of

¹¹⁰ My translation is as follows: *[This] is a manner though which to recognize individuals from the past and their sacrifices in order to make happiness possible within today's world. Despite the fact the love and happiness of those that came before us can only be experienced in another lifetime.*

people may walk passed everyday but not notice, Miguel's academic work (and the novel itself) actively seeks collective remembrance and celebration.¹¹¹ Cecilia now possesses the intimate knowledge Amalia shares with her on multiple generations, regarding various races and ethnic groups. The knowledge on Cuban culture that she learns from Amalia is most pertinent because they are lessons that are localized, and simultaneously transportable, and translational.

¹¹¹ Although Miguel enters the narrative in the final scenes when he meets Cecilia, his journal entries, which seem to be traces of his sociological project in progress, have introduced each section of the novel. These snippets of information which are entitled "*From Miguel's Notebook*" cater to both Cuban and non-Cuban readers as they explain popular Cuban expressions. They encompass the profound Chinese influence within Cuban popular culture from the affectionate reference "Mi chino...mi china" used by Cubans regardless of racial lineage to "Not even the Chinese doctor can save him" giving homage to the "Chinese Galens who achieved astonishing and inexplicable cures in colonial Cuba" (Chaviano 203). In fact while explaining the saying, Chaviano references a specific doctor of the time stating, "*This expression is still used in Cuba for cases of incurable illness, and, by extension, for those who find themselves in very grave situations. It's assumed that the phrase alludes to one of the Chinese doctors who arrives on the island during the second half of the nineteenth century – according to some, Chan Bombia, who landed in 1858, while for other it was Kan Shi Kon, who died in 1885*" (203).

Conclusion: “Different Ones of Us: A (Re)Cognition of the Sacred”

In a talk conducted as part of the University of South Florida Women’s Studies Spring Lecture Series (2009), M. Jacqui Alexander mentions the phrase above, “different ones of us.” She deploys this phrase in an attempt to rectify deficits within critical frameworks for engaging the current political moment. She introduces the controversial yet potentially transformational notion that *we are all keepers of each other’s souls*. The phrase conjures a specific affect I believe threads throughout this project – that of coming up against difference through alternative means of acknowledgement and engendering plural truths that imagine multiple collectives through critical and intimate solidarity. With regards to this project specifically, collectivity is constructed through sacral crossings where socio-political (often regarded as secular) and spiritual moments coalesce to produce spaces beyond obvious and treacherous social intransigency.

Throughout this project, I have positioned the sacred as critiquing and at times countering some of the deleterious byproducts of modernity and globalization such as poverty, suffering, alienation, dislocation, and uneven access to mobility. I have focused on Caribbean and diasporic Caribbean women’s writings that represent these oppressive global forces as turning individual subjects into abstractions of liminality and even non-existence. García, Mootoo, Powell, Montero, Lara, and Chaviano all make efforts to counter these processes and re-invest marginalized subjects with dignity, complexity, and voice. Through the sacred’s qualitative forces, complex temporalities, and memory as a shared, transpersonal experience, these writers challenge readers to reconsider what counts as political history, and, as Donna Haraway encourages us, re-imagine the

locations and subjectivities from which history and cultural memory can, and should, be written.

Reading their works through a transnational feminist framework, I bring together critics like M. Jacqui Alexander, Audre Lorde, Donna Haraway, and Gloria Anzaldúa in order to engage in a conversation that offers spiritual and secular critical language through which to re-visit and transform intimate, local, and global spaces. These scholars collectively construct a critical frame for reading spirituality and the erotic as political, all the while critiquing knowledge production and consumption that is limited to a linear, sequential, and segmented narrative. They not only expose the domestic and international avatars of power, but also fight against the political trends that pull subordinate, vulnerable subjectivities and dissident perspectives into oblivion. This network of ideas shapes my readings of the novels to imagine sacred engagements and evocations as intrinsic to self-possession and belonging for protagonists who seem to have no other recourse for community. Through this critical framework, I offer a complementary reading of Anglophone and Hispanophone Caribbean writing along with Caribbean diasporic writings that deprioritize national identity or any other 'natural' claim to belonging. All the works examined here break through the narrow walls of exclusivity shedding light on: 1) which subjectivities are excluded from these constructed categories, and, 2) how these vulnerable bodies proceed to claim an identity along with a space to be. In each of the novels surveyed, ethnic and national conventions are indeed available; however, it is never sameness that unites or transforms.

In prioritizing sacred engagements for alternative forms of belonging, I consider each writer examined in this project as constructing a public and at times a counterpublic

space through their novels. According to Michael Warner a public, which is different than the public, is bounded by a single event or experience (66). The readership for these novels comprises such a public, one engaged in an ongoing socio-political conversation. I argue that through their treatment of unpopular and usually marginalized subjects, they are attempting to open public spaces to accommodate these kinds of conversations.

Monkey Hunting, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, *The Pagoda*, *The Red of His Shadow*, *Erzulie's Skirt*, and *The Island of Eternal Love* address the social anxieties of the racialized other, non-heteronormative intimacies, African based cosmology and worship, alongside global inequities, the politics of immobility and racial and homophobic preoccupations. Through the engagement between writer and reader, there is a mutual “witnessing and display” in which the writers and their readership begin a socio-political re-ordering of *the* public (Warner 13). They envision belonging for these marginalized identities that, for the present moment, is only able to assume and inhabit space within the counterpublics fashioned within the novels and witnessed by *a reading* public.

Through their fiction, these Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic women writers perform a civic duty. They shed light on not only specific sociopolitical disavowals in their respective societies but also bring into the fold matters of the spirit to offer up a politics of possibility. These writers then assume the role of cultural historians, constructing a doubling event whereby within the novels the protagonists are actively participating in their construction of belonging, while the writer and readership are also practicing imaginative constructions of belonging. Although nearly impossible to track the literature's effects on the reading public, the most utopic of scenarios is that the readers take these conversations of tolerance beyond the page and into their lived realities.

One noted example of the reiterative effects of the novel is captured in Wendy W. Walters' piece on Patricia Powell. Walters quotes Powell reflecting on her experience as a guest speaker for the Hakka Chinese diaspora conference held at York University in 2000. Powell states, "A man named [Keith] Lowe emailed me. His name was the same as my character. He said, 'Your Lowe didn't finish his pagoda, but I'm having a conference which is a bit like my own pagoda, and I'd like you to come'" (166). This exchange sheds light on the activities that continue beyond the page and the kinds of interconnections and possibilities brought forth through an engagement that understands the novel as a possible space for belonging and critical dialogue. Powell participated in Mr. Keith Lowe's conference pagoda and thus allowed her narrative about the Chinese in Jamaica to become a part of the Hakka collective. While outside Jamaica and thus the specific scope of the novel, Powell's participation at this conference nonetheless speaks to a sense of promise for citizenship building and belonging across spatial, temporal, and political divides.

Each writer examined in this project constructs the novel form as an intimate and collective space for recognition. One manner in which most of the writers begin to stage such a balance is with the addressee trope. Warner defines the addressee practice in public speech "...in two ways: as addressed to us and as addressed to strangers. The benefit in this practice is that it gives a general social relevance to private thought and life" (77). In the novels this dual work is deployed through several intertextual moments of engagement. In *Cereus Blooms at Night*, Tyler's primary goal as he narrates most of the text is to find Asha, Mala's sister in hopes they can reconcile. Powell's *The Pagoda* begins and ends with Lowe writing a letter to his estranged daughter, Elizabeth, as he

wishes to finally shed his layers and divulge his secrets. Another instance of intertextuality is the excerpts from Miguel's Notebook that begin each chapter in Chaviano's *The Island of Eternal Love*. Since most of the excerpts are common sayings regarding Chinese-Cubans, they extend a conversation on Chinese-Cuban cultural literacy. In each instance, the protagonists mimic the authorial powers of the written word in order to embark on their narratives of belonging. The novel as form is intimately engaged in the same processes in these narratives as the protagonists are in their personal writings.

Other slightly nuanced versions of this addressee practice are seen in the most restricted spaces of the novel's development. For instance, in García's *Monkey Hunting* Chen Fang is the only protagonist in the text to assume a first person point of view. As the most vulnerable body and the one least able to assume a space and place for belonging, it is her language and intimacy with the reader that allows her to extend beyond her personal and political confinements. In Montero's *The Red of His Shadow*, Montero herself begins with an "Author's Note" that suggests that the persons and events in the novel are real and that the names were changed to safeguard their identities: "This novel narrates real events...involving a 'houngan,' or Vodoun priest, and a 'mambo,' or Vodoun priestess...The names of the people and some places have been changed to protect certain informants" (Montero xiv). She continues by stating that the events were inadequately captured through a Dominican police investigation and then deemed a "crime of passion" and forgotten (xiv). Since Montero was a journalist prior to her literary career, she is assuming dual roles here as she suggests that the space of the novel will recapture moments misread and emotions evacuated from the current discourse

surrounding the events. It is in this “Author’s Note” that Montero exemplifies what all the writers in this project to varying degrees propose. The novel as form creates a space for these marginalized identities unavailable in other socio-political discursive practices. Warner argues that the addressee practice not only accomplishes the work of addressing a public on private matters, he extends its potential effects, stating that “The expansive nature of public addressee will seek to keep moving that frontier for a queer public, to seek more and more places to circulate where people will recognize themselves in its address...” (120). The assertion that the novel presents the continuous space of circulation and the ongoing potential of more and more readers joining their public is particularly promising, and it is this promise that I draw upon here in this project.

Using sacred citizenship as the critical frame for reading these literary works allows publics to imagine political pre-recognition, echoing Raymond Williams’ structure of feeling discussed throughout the project. Despite these subjects’ current socio-political limitations, the novels imagine a futurity different from what the contemporary reality affords. They also suggest that politics and change for these identities and societies at large are not only thought of and enacted, but also intimately felt. Sacred citizenship is primarily argued through the availability of physical spaces constructed within the novels through Anzaldúa’s notion of “nepantla.” While the universality of alternative citizenry seeks to overcome and shatter divides, nepantalism is an acknowledgement of creating space on the physical, psychical, and sacred border. By casting the sacred and the protagonists accessing sacral elements as in process, borders are then continuously crossed and imagined as flexible spaces that accommodate a multiplicity of cultural and sacral components. Unlike Bosniak’s notion of “boundary-conscious” citizenship, where

exclusion is the underbelly of community belonging, the physical and metaphysical crossings produced in these narratives grant the subjects in process an occasion to reside within the interstices of new discourse and understanding.

Concurrently, bodies as indeterminate and ever-evolving scenes as well as knowledge produced through the erotic become a form of sacral engagement. In *The Pagoda* and *Cereus Blooms at Night*, subaltern bodies re-signify sexual and gendered norms. The way these bodies perform intimacy further challenges existing notions of heteronormativity as stable and constant. *Cereus Bloom*'s Otoh (the anatomically female transgendered protagonist) performs transvestic identities that, I argue, position a sexed and gendered body that is always in the process of becoming. His multiple transvestic performances come up against established gender and sexual notions demanding new, more dynamic and flexible language to describe and layer identity without foreclosing difference. In this instance, Marjorie Garber's contention with contemporary criticism as looking "*through* rather than *at* the cross-dresser" to insist binarity has been most productive. Otoh's crossings and layered identity becomes emblematic of resisting this neat resolution and sitting with identity as a "category crisis." His identity is unraveled further when reading his identity alongside the body/person he loves. Otoh falls in love with Tyler, a cross-dressing nurse who proclaims to reside within the limiting semantic space, "not a man and not ever able to be a woman" (Mootoo 77). Together, they possess reproductive capabilities but their social and intimate identities provide a queer perspective to the multiplicity of and in desire. Otoh and Tyler's physical coupling is not captured in the novel and left as a queer possibility, while Mr. Lowe in *The Pagoda* constructs a recuperative identity through nurturing sexual couplings. Echoing Lorde's

argument, the (nurturing) erotic is expressed in the novel as unharnessed energy that envelops and allows unbridled passions with non-threatening recognition. While Mr. Lowe's physical space to be, the pagoda he builds, is deferred beyond the scope of the page, his self-making sexual experiences with both men and women are cast as countering previous abusive and violent sexual encounters. However, his perpetual state of self-reflection, especially at the end of the novel, supports my argument on the erotic as being part of sacred citizenship but far less stable than a physical space to which one can return.

While my goal of reading these novels as interlocutive texts has been to examine alternative belonging through sacral crossings, the literary trope of the Chinese-Caribbean and the queer subject continued to come into focus. These identities provide productive engagements with difference, challenging the (at times) political impasse linked to the two figures in Caribbean literary and cultural studies. While there are nonetheless differences between the Chinese-Caribbean and the queer subject, they become two modes of postcolonial subjectivities emerging into literary focus. Regarding Asian American masculinity, David L. Eng poses the question of whether "being Oriental: [is] the antithesis of manhood, of masculinity?" (1). Examining various literary, visual, and filmic representations, Eng argues against the persistent feminization of the male Asian-American subjectivity. Using this specific framework for a Caribbean context does not capture the nuances of the Chinese-Caribbean and their historical positioning. It does, however, shed light on the integral relationship between investigating the ethnic other and how sexuality and gender identities are immediately questioned.

As previously mentioned in the first chapter, the Chinese figure in Cuban literature has predominantly assumed the role of the perpetual other practicing flexible ethics unlike the ‘native’ Cubans. Examples are found in Miguel Barnet’s *Biografía de un cimarrón (Biography of Runaway Slave)* (1966), Alejandro García Maldonado’s *A la Medianoche en la Plaza del Panteón* (1979), and Severo Sarduy’s famous novel, *De donde son los cantantes (Where the Singers Came From)* (1970). Investigating the Chinese in West Indian Literature, Anne-Marie Lee-Loy argues that the male Chinese protagonist assumes not only the role of perpetual other, but is also positioned as a sexual threat. This is most clearly depicted in V.S. Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* (1959) and Elizabeth Nunez’s *Bruised Hibiscus* (2003) (Lee-Loy 48). In both examples the Chinese shopkeeper maintains an imbalance of power and sexual danger that vilifies their role in their respective narratives. While this shopkeeper persona is not in line with Mr. Lowe in Powell’s *The Pagoda*, we do have the sense that he is a stranger no matter how much he wants to fit in. His obstacles in practicing belonging stem from the way the predominantly black townspeople view him. They see him as someone who takes away from their businesses, as an economic oppressor. I believe it is Lowe’s queerness along with the abuses he endures that complicates his shopkeeper persona. Speaking about Powell’s *The Pagoda*, Lee-Loy writes,

...I do wonder if Powell was tapping into the long tradition of representing the Chinese as outsiders and aliens in the West to explore the questions that she wants to raise. In other words, Powell might have chosen to use a Chinese character because, if the Chinese are understood to be symbols of alienation, it would reinforce Lowe’s sense of estrangement and isolation as a transgendered individual in that community. Lowe’s outsider status in the community as a Chinese man parallels and reinforces his outsider status to conventional gender and sexual norms. (70)

Lee-Loy's comment is particularly productive when suggesting that Powell may be using one unknowable trope (the Chinese subject) to discuss another (non-normative sex and genders in the Caribbean). Unfortunately, Powell's Mr. Lowe does not reach a sense of self-definition that may challenge his otherness; however, through the sacred citizenship lens his efforts of building the pagoda and institutionalizing belonging for Chinese-Jamaicans is hopeful.

The other main protagonists in the novels analyzed, Chen Pan in *Monkey Hunting*, Pablo and his parents in *The Island of Eternal Love*, and Jérémie Candé in *The Red of His Shadow* are all constructed as heterosexual personas, but their queerness emerges in other ways. In the two Cuban-American novels, the Chinese subjects are actively negotiating against their traditional role as outsider and pursuing inroads into dominant society. Both García and Chaviano construct the Chinese-Cuban as integral to the Cuban social and historical landscape. The peculiar and troubling aspect of Montero's appropriation of Chinese ethnicity in *The Red of His Shadow* emerges when Jérémie's unethical actions are all attributed, according to the other protagonists, to his Chineseness. Unlike Chen Pan who nurtures cross-racial, cross-cultural relationships, Jérémie lives all his life in the Dominican bateys with Zulé and family, yet he is never completely assumed into the cultural fold.

Returning to the intimate, collective memory, the body as well as sacral episodes, these women writers imagine belonging beyond the national framework that has historically maintained the Chinese subject in the Caribbean as perpetual stranger. I believe this to be an interesting overlap with sexual and gender identities in the Caribbean as these women writers also explore belonging for queer subjects that disrupt the family

romance trope and hence do not serve the nation's continuity. Alexander, Jennifer Rahim, and Cecil Gutzmore have explored the popular culture and political discourse surrounding the exclusion of homosexuals in the region. In "Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas," Alexander argues that the nation state makes queer subjects "enemies of the state" (5). These women writers are constructing space for these marginalized subjects despite such narrowing exclusion. It is pertinent to note, though, that as Allison Donnell argues "[these] Caribbean writers representing queer subjects live outside the region and remain, it would seem, outside of national and literary histories" (208). While I concede that most writers in this project are writing outside the region and hence assume an outsider position themselves, it may be this peripheral status, with the rights and limitations that comes with this category, that facilitates their interventions. I disagree with Donnell that they are outside "national and literary histories" though; in fact, I argue that they are very much a part of Caribbean literary history and, through their works, shed light on contemporary political and social issues. Similarly to the Chinese-Caribbean, queer subjects in Caribbean literature are troubling essentialist markers of identity, sociality, intimacies, and desires. It is no longer enough to view these protagonists as unknowable. The Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic women's writing analyzed in this project demand a fluid and dynamic framework to see and never just "look through" these Caribbean subjects (Garber 9).

In all the novels there is a move towards publically articulating and negotiating normative and non-normative gender and sexual identities. While sex as an act is described as a private experience, the moments of recognition for queer identities like the

final scene at the alms house in *Cereus Blooms at Night* are enacted in front of a public. These moments suggest complexity and ambiguity in identity formation unavailable in government policy defining sexuality. Taking cue from Lorde, these writers participate in a feminist genealogy inviting readers to acknowledge that it is less important to consider what sex is and value how and what sex is used for. The erotic as emancipatory becomes integral to negotiations of respectability, citizenship, belonging, and social ordering.

While physical spaces to be and the politics of the erotics makes way for present and intimate belonging, the direct sacral invocations available in the novels consider memory as a place one can access in order to align with a community beyond temporal and historical divides. Through the transpersonal and metaphysical connections, these novels all explore flexible temporalities. Sacred citizenship, then, creates a critical space for how the novel as form is producing these moments of and for alternative belonging. According to Jose Esteban Muñoz, when challenging oppressive discourse, “The present is not enough...The present must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds” (27). By scrambling temporalities through palimpsestic and sacred times, the novels critique earlier discourses written on historical experiences and invest value in intimate acts. All these moments experienced during flexible temporalities allow the protagonists to imagine inter-subjective belonging and transpersonal coalition through physical, gendered and sexual crossings as well as cosmological and mystical practices. The transpersonal experiences depicted in the novels across time and space also symbolically evoke Balibar’s argument on the construction of citizenship and belonging as a plural experience. He states that “...*every identity as such is transindividual* (in psychoanalytic

terms one would say ‘transferential’)” (26). While Balibar critically captures the collective’s influence on a person’s identity and citizenry, the transpersonal in the novels depict this exercise in a particularly metaphysical and temporally malleable fashion. Those protagonists that share psychic and spiritual connections and blur their individual borders engage in a decisive melding and complementary identity construction with one other.

All the novels share a common investment in challenging linear and dominant histories that marginalize subjects. While engaging with matters of the sacred to different degrees and within various sociopolitical milieus, all the writers present revisionist accounts that introduce the notion of palimpsestic time scrambling “the ‘here and now’ and ‘then and there’ to a ‘here and there’ and ‘then and now...’” (Alexander 190). Examples of these complex temporalities are found in the doubling scenes evoked in Lara’s *Erzulie’s Skirt* and Chaviano’s *The Island of Eternal Love*. There are also moments that evoke sacred time where sequential time is not observed. In Alexander’s proposition and the examples noted above, the before and after, the past and present, are preserved to locate intersubjective coalition. However, with sacred time there are present moments that the protagonists engage in as they access the eternal now. Throughout these experiences, the protagonists tap into what Ann Game calls the “immemorial” (230). These sacral experiences un-measurable by linear time are depicted through Chen Pan’s maroon and Sanfancón episode as well as Zulé’s embattled yet grand sacral contest in Montero’s *The Red of His Shadow*. During these sacred moments representing the eternal now and the eternal always allow for the most direct experiences with the sacred. Yet,

despite which complex temporality is constructed within the novel, the goal of transpersonal connectivity and alternative belonging is always prioritized.

Regardless of how the sacred is accessed and/or produced, all the novels examined reach a coming to terms with the need for an active, different, and collective understanding of self and community that prompts the sacred self to reside within a critically intimate position to *other othered* bodies as well as their socio-economic realities. All the examples noted above depict the protagonists as productively moving away from their initial position of marginality and, through their multiple sacred engagements, producing a space that re-imagines socio-political belonging. With varying degrees of success, they all challenge the supposed borders and practice plurality at the crossroads.

In the spirit of sacred citizenship's allegiance to multiple and perpetual crossings, to close this specific critical enterprise and hopefully open up a new conversation, I call on Esu-Elegba, *loa* of the crossroads.¹¹² As sacred communicator, Elegba affects all exchanges within and between the human and spiritual planes. Elegba's prominent position at the crossroads is multi-valent. For instance, and this is in no means an exhaustive list, he is at the crossroads discursively because he facilitates communication between human and spiritual entities; because of his position as sacred communicator, he mans the gates of knowledge; he is also physically (at the gates between worlds), and metaphorically as not only a highly respected *loa*, but also an entity who has experienced all stages of human development. I leave this project in his hands: "Attibon Legba ouvri bayé pou'moin ago!/ Ou wè Attibon Legba ouvri bayè/ pou'moin ouvri bayè!/ M'apé

¹¹² There are multiple variations of Elegba's name including Papa Legba, Legba, Elegbara, Esu, and Eshu, I will consistently use Elegba.

rentré quand ma tourney/ Ma salut loa yo!” Translation: “Attibon Legba, open the gate for me, ago!/ You see, Attibon Legba, open the gate for me, / open the gate!/ I will enter when I return,/ I salute the loa!” (Daniel 69).

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