

5-2017

"The Caribbean Imaginary in Southern Women's Literature"

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The Caribbean Imaginary in Southern Women's Literature

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English

by

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May 2017
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Abstract

“The Caribbean Imaginary in Southern Women’s Literature” examines the U.S. South’s often contradictory approaches to viewing the Caribbean. While the image of the U.S. South has long been constructed by imagined fantasies, the southern authors in this project often thrust their own images onto the Caribbean imaginary. Throughout this project, I argue that over the past seventy years, the imperialist bent towards the Caribbean manifests in a variety of forms: media manipulation, patronage, fantasies, and nostalgia. At times, the Caribbean is seen as an imagined utopia full of potential, however this construction often erases the historical renderings of economic and political revolutions.

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Dedication

To Shane and Jeremy, who in their far too short lives taught me that there is more than one way to learn and to live fully.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Lisa Hinrichsen for advising and mentoring me throughout the duration of my time in graduate school and on this project. Her thorough and timely feedback was invaluable to me as well as her genuine concern and care for the wellbeing of so many graduate students. Dr. Yajaira Padilla, Dr. Benjamin Fagan, and Dr. Susan Marren have also provided guidance throughout this project for which I am grateful. I would also like to thank the University of Arkansas English department for their support throughout my entire graduate career.

This project is also deeply indebted to Whitney Martin and Paula Wingard White, who encouraged me throughout the project and had countless conversations about this project both personally and academically. I would also like to thank my writing group, Megan Vallowe and Eddie Ardeneaux IV, who read many drafts of each part of my work providing thoughtful criticism at every stage.

I would also like to thank the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami and the Stuart Rose collection at Emory University. I spent several weeks scouring archives and was thoroughly impressed with the constant help and attention provided by each staff member I encountered. These research trips were only made possible through my African and African American Studies Fellowship and my College of Arts and Sciences Dissertation Research Fellowship.

Finally, I want to thank my family for being my village as I completed this project. Specifically, I want to thank my mother who proofread many documents, and my sister who provided constant encouragement, in her own way. I also cannot fail to mention the support I

received from my therapist, whose guidance for three years shaped my ability to complete this project.

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Introduction

“Good Black Talk”: Rescripting the Narratives

Martin R. Delany’s *Blake, or the Huts of America* was originally written serially from 1859-1861 and charts the travels of a runaway slave, Henry Blake, trying to foment revolution throughout the U.S. South and Cuba by espousing a pan-African nationalist rhetoric. In 1970, Floyd J. Miller collected the entries and published the unfinished novel at a time when Black nationalism was on the rise.¹ The 1970s was a time of both black power and black feminist movements and the newly published *Blake* fed into the narrative of a possible black paradise—specifically located in the Caribbean.

Paul Gilroy’s seminal *Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* begins with a discussion of this novel, in which he defines blackness as “a matter of politics rather than a common cultural condition” (27). Gilroy defines blackness as a product of the black Atlantic world in order to avoid ethnic absolutism. He also explains how the routes of the nationalist author created this pan-African vision that Blake argues for throughout his novel. Gilroy principally uses *Blake* to critique what he claims is a false dichotomy—the nationalist perspective vs. the African diaspora. Instead, Gilroy employs a transnational approach, an approach that transcends the boundaries of the nation, is necessary for understanding *Blake* because Blake’s dream for a nation cannot be realized in the text and cannot even be spoken about; thus a nationalist lens fails to register the power of the African American community. The silences in the text represent Blake’s rejection of the national model of freedom and his unspoken revolutionary plan remains unrealized, although this incomplete revolution is possibly due to the incompleteness of the novel.

¹ Amanda J. Davis charts the rise of black women’s literature during the rise of the black nationalist movement in her article, “To Build a Nation.”

In addition to Blake's discourse, there's another language present in the text that undermines nationalist perspectives while also reinscribing a type of blackness that Gilroy doesn't mention. "Dat's what I calls good black talk!" shouts the character, Andy, in response to a clergyman claiming that the legal rules of matrimony only applied to "the whites and the free" (156). In this moment of celebration for two runaway slaves marrying each other, the clergyman quickly circumvents the rules claiming that they did not apply to the "panting runaway slave" (156). This casual explanation for rewriting the rules of the church and the state becomes the phrase used to mark the resistance to the U.S.'s political ideology. Their ability to rescript the narrative of legality and personhood is defined as "good black talk," which also simultaneously allows them to comment upon the tradition through the use of metacommentary. Thus, when Andy claims that this is "good black talk," he's providing the meta-commentary necessary to explain the language of liberation. Through his talk, he is revising and interpreting the unspoken rules, and the revising of this tradition becomes the "good black talk."

Analyzing *Blake* through the lens of transnationalism as well as the meta-commentary of the text allows us to see that because his language fails to register on a nationalist perspective, Blake never seeks to set up a parallel nation because he refuses to follow the model of the United States. His refusal to voice a plan is essentially the "good black talk" that will not reinscribe a national ideology that began with slavery. Slavery was always inherently embedded in the U.S. national model, and Blake rejects this idea for liberation, particularly through his use of language. Ultimately, this text acts as a useful paradigm for reconsidering the use of language to shape identity outside of a national context and to create revolutionary imaginaries. I argue that throughout *Blake*, this "good black talk" transcends the national boundaries and ultimately creates a discourse decentered from a nationalist perspective. "Good black talk" resists oppression by

creating a language that is outside of the law of the white characters. This ability to resist nation-state boundaries through the tactical use of language is also significant because “good black talk” is part of this unspoken narrative of revolution: rewriting the religious and political laws of the nation-state by reinterpreting the rules and space of the revolution.

Blake’s “good black talk” is central to this project for two reasons. First, *Blake* is a defining southern, Caribbean black text. Second, “good black talk” is integral to this project as many texts from the U.S. South are participating in this “good black talk” by imagining an alternate world of equality. Much like the preacher’s ability to redefine the politics of the moment, these authors redefine their roles through an imagined Caribbean. This phrase of “good black talk” is also reminiscent of Hurston’s “inaudible voice of it all” (15) when Janie experiences orgasm in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through an observation of nature. John W. Lowe equates this moment to the “tropical sublime” (15). According to Lowe, the tropical sublime “refers to literary attempts to convey the usually inexpressible sensations of awe, beauty, and danger evolved by tropical jungles and waterways, which simultaneously attract and repel” (“Not So Still Waters” 1). “Good black talk” is similar to the “tropical sublime” in that it refers to the sensations from the tropics and is an unspoken revision of language. Missing from Lowe’s discussion is the connection of female embodiment and sexual pleasure within the tropical sublime. Janie’s inexpressible experience is manifested in her physical body’s reaction. Her body’s reaction is a way of knowing that resists straightforward categorization much like “good black talk.” “Good black talk” refers to the inaudible way that Blake describes political revolution throughout the U.S. South and Cuba as well as the preacher’s ability to rescript narratives to allow for more power. In my project, “good black talk” signifies the meta-fictional

strategies used to define the liberating aspects of the Caribbean imaginary, which is also deeply connected to female embodiment.

The Caribbean Imaginary

In this project, these authors, primarily women, redefine their role in the space of the Caribbean imaginary. The Caribbean imaginary is a term most widely used in relation to the French Caribbean Imaginary and was coined by J. Michael Dash. Dash succinctly expresses the overarching dichotomy of how the space of the Caribbean is defined through the imagination: “one that totalizes by homogenizing difference in the name of an ahistorical wholeness; and the other, dynamic concept of space that stresses displacement and diaspora” (20). In order to break out of these binaries—between the one homogenizing Caribbean vs. solely focusing on the diaspora—Dash posits that a better framework for understanding Caribbean writing is “the confined and displaced African figure” (20). Dash discusses the common trickster figure seen in many folklore projects and explains, “Trickster-Zulu is not an African retention but a circum-Atlantic reinvention” (24). Much like the grounding trope of Gilroy’s black Atlantic—the ship as a chronotope—Dash investigates the many figures of Caribbean writing that circumnavigate the U.S. South and the Caribbean. In my project, Henry Blake and his “good black talk” figure into this narrative of the trickster, as Blake clandestinely stirs up revolution. Blake also mirrors Keith Cartwright’s recent discussion of the importance of investigating the trickster figure of the tortoise throughout the circum-Atlantic. The tortoise is a trickster figure repeatedly evading capture often through the use of “good black talk.” Blake’s attempt to foment revolution through an unspeakable revolutionary plan in Cuba while evading capture reflects how the Caribbean imaginary often figures into conceptions of the U.S. South as a potential utopian space.

Avoiding defining the Caribbean Imaginary as either diasporic or homogenous, Joseph Roach investigates how other circum-Atlantic reinventions manifest in performances imbued with tragic memories. Roach explains that while the memories of the tragic narrative of slave violence are often glossed over through history, the memory of slavery and the Middle Passage can never be wholly erased,

While a great deal of the unspeakable violence instrumental to this creation may have been officially forgotten, circum-Atlantic memory retains its consequences, one of which is that the unspeakable cannot be rendered forever inexpressible, the most persistent mode of forgetting is memory imperfectly deferred. (4)

For Roach, these memories are consistently played out in a form of surrogation and performance which reflect the cultural inheritance from the Caribbean. Roach defines New Orleans using Antonio Benítez-Rojo's definition of a "repeating island." He explains that New Orleans is continually re-inventing itself through the repeated traditions of the Caribbean. One of the most repeated claims of Benítez-Rojo's text defining the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago is that the Caribbean exists "in a certain kind of way" (20). In his study, he continually explains that the islands are not repeating one particular island but instead co-exist and are repetitions of the Caribbean as a whole, at least, in "a certain kind of way":

The case here is that we are speaking about traditional culture and its impact on Caribbean beings, not about technological knowledge or capitalist consuming practice, and in cultural terms to do something "in a certain kind of way" is always an important matter, since it is an attempt to sublimate violence. Further, it seems that it will keep on being important independently of the power relations of a political, economic, and even cultural nature that exist between the Caribbean and the West. (20)

Benítez-Rojo recognizes how "a certain kind of way" attempts to sublimate violence, and Roach comments "the concept of a circum-Atlantic world (as opposed to a transatlantic one) insists on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas" (4).

In part, the turn towards the Caribbean is to reclaim the diasporic voices in the U.S. South so often sublimated by ideas of southern exceptionalism.

Southern exceptionalism often figures within the literature as an insular region untouched by global politics. However, Carson McCullers' *A Member of the Wedding* elides this description and furthermore, mimics the "certain kind of way" in which the protagonist dismisses all of Cuba and Mexico to a simple image of pictures as "a certain kind of Cuban expression" (131). I mention this here to emphasize not only the ubiquity of the qualifying nature of the language in the Caribbean akin to the "good black talk" of Delany, but also to demonstrate how this unspoken expression stands in for this imagined Caribbean space. In Roach's description of circum-Atlantic performances he explains how "the voices of the dead may speak freely now only through the bodies of the living" (Roach xiii). That which was once silenced is now evidenced in the bodies of the circum-Atlantic. Like Hurston's inaudible voice, I extend the idea of the "good black talk" of the Caribbean to the circum-Atlantic bodies. The women in the texts not only create imagined spaces through their discussions and depictions of the Caribbean imaginary, but also their ideologies of the Caribbean are made manifest in their physical bodies.

The Caribbean imaginary is especially relevant in southern studies as the U.S. South has also figured in its own imaginary, and southern studies has recently emphasized the Caribbean connections that shaped and continue to shape the U.S. South. The continuing development of an increasingly globalized world challenges scholars to view not only the current interactions, but also to look back and reevaluate the ways in which shifting economies and changing demographics shaped the idea of the South. As we move away from an understanding of the U.S. South as defined by a white/black binary, we need to develop frameworks for understanding the multi-cultural south. In Jessica Adams' introduction to *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in*

the Caribbean and U.S. South (2007), she emphasizes “the long and indeed well-documented, as well as ongoing, history of interactions between Caribbean islands and southern states” (3). I build on recent research that examines the South in connection with the Caribbean islands as both a site of potential imperialist control as well as a site of possible freedom from existing gender and racial constructs. My approach utilizes both the real, documented interaction that Adams mentions as well as the focus on the imagined space of the Caribbean throughout the southern region.

The southern region of the U.S. has also occupied this imagined space. Deborah Barker and Kathryn McKee define, in their exploration of southern cinema, the southern imaginary as “an amorphous and sometimes conflicting collection of images, ideas, attitudes, practices, linguistic accents, histories, and fantasies about a shifting geographic region and time” (5). These fantasies of the South often operate as an alternation to the United States as a whole. Tara McPherson notes in her examination of popular southern culture in *Reconstructing Dixie*, “in an era of increasing globalization the region circulates as an alternative to the nation-state, shifting in meaning and content” (78). Particularly, this alternative conscripted the South as the scapegoat of the nation, which allowed the other issues of racial oppression to go unnoticed. For example, as Leigh Anne Duck notes in her work, often the South was cast as the site of regional racial oppression even though it was present throughout the nation. Duck’s explanation of how the South was viewed as “backward” in time helps us understand how the image of the Caribbean was “depoliticized” as the islands in the Caribbean exist in a liminal space, often characterized as a timeless, erotic paradise. To separate the revolutionary nature and political unrest from these islands, the Caribbean imaginary became an escapist space for those looking to belong. The “uncanny regional backwardness” of the South allows the southern imaginary to at once be the negative scapegoat as well as an imagined space separate from the political machinations of the nation-state (82). Jennifer

Rae Greenson defines this imagined space of the U.S. South as essentially an “internal other for the nation,” effectively making the South a placeholder for the nation’s ills in order to maintain the myth of American exceptionalism. Sylvia Shin Huey Chong explains that “Although this negative vision of southern exceptionalism allows American exceptionalism to export as it were, its unwanted characteristics to its outcast region, a critique of both exceptionalisms must start with the fact that these ‘exceptions’ were wholly unexceptional” (309). Hong explicates the imperialism of the U.S. was not necessarily different than other empires, but rather the understanding of American exceptionalism was predicated on this refusal to acknowledge U.S. imperialism. Hong explains how the ideology of American exceptionalism offers “a different logic of exception than the South—by outright exclusion rather than internal quarantine” for other territories of the U.S., such as Puerto Rico (311). The U.S. territories in the Caribbean do not fall under the realm of imperialism due to this outright exclusion. However, these imperialist desires are certainly manifested in the ideological understandings of the Caribbean.

The U.S. South’s connection to the Caribbean represents an ideological space for both black, white and Latinx writers to imagine alternate possibilities of living. Communities of women, regardless of race, imagined the Caribbean offered an alternate opportunity for sexual behavior and mores, gender roles, and economic opportunities as well as a site of fantasized history. While other studies have explored the relationship between the U.S. South and the Caribbean, I build on this scholarly scaffolding by addressing the ideological space that the Caribbean occupied primarily for women during this time. As a result, my project explores how communities of women in the South viewed the Caribbean and vice versa. Scholars have sufficiently made the connection of southern imperialist views of the Caribbean in the nineteenth century, but those views persisted within this literature. In the works I have chosen, the Caribbean becomes more than merely

interrelated to the religious and political landscape of the South throughout the twentieth century: it becomes the imagined landscape of racial and sexual equality.

Imperialist Concerns

These projected ideals of racial and sexual equality onto the space of the Caribbean can at times simply be another representation of imperialism, which is why it is necessary to also investigate the alterations that occurred during the crossing of the Atlantic. As Keith Cartwright recently pointed out, the “Atlantic turn in southern studies has been more of a Gulf & Caribbean turn than a transatlantic turn” (79). This project's focus on the South looking out as well as the reciprocity of the Caribbean is necessary as we become more globally connected. Although the commandeering of the Caribbean as a space of freedom specifically for southern women can potentially be oppressive, and in fact, my use of almost exclusively southern texts can be seen as imperialistic, I attempt to mitigate this concern by utilizing primary sources, such as newspapers and archives from the Caribbean. However, as Marlene Manoff has recently discussed in her theorization of the archives, that regardless, archives are always, already a reconstruction:

Whatever the archive contains is already a reconstruction—a recording of history from a particular perspective; it thus cannot provide transparent access to the events themselves. But regardless of what historians may have once believed, there is currently a widespread sense that even government records that appear to be mere collections of numbers are, in fact, already reconstructions and interpretations. Someone decided what was worth counting and how to count it. Many researchers also have made the case that archives are not neutral or innocent. (15)

Acknowledging the bias of the archives inherently leads to a broader critique of western scientific research and traditional ways of knowing. Throughout this project, female bodies become the site of receiving and manifesting knowledge. For instance, both Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber challenge the role of the objective, anthropological outsider through body possession and

inhabitation. Similarly, Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor complicate notions of linear time and rational, expressible language by transporting female bodies through imaginary islands. The fictional islands stand in as a reconstruction of the Caribbean imaginary.

The Caribbean Imaginary as a Response to Global Concerns

This project examines these Caribbean influences in southern women's literature in the latter half of the twentieth century. I argue that authors in the U.S. South define the Caribbean imaginary as a depoliticized space of escapism and timelessness. While these depictions are often not historically accurate, the authors in this project use the image of the Caribbean in their work to create imaginative spaces of freedom which brings visibility to often overlooked women's groups and challenges hegemonic historical narratives.

The start of my study looks at the mid-twentieth century when a turn towards the transnational creates a natural connection to literature of the Caribbean, which is inherently connected to literature of the U.S. South. Scholars have long recognized the role of the southern imaginary in the shaping of the nation's ideology as well as the shaping of the U.S. South itself. However, a key facet of the southern imaginary is the Caribbean imaginary. In order to understand the U.S. South in global terms, the Caribbean needs to be examined as well, and in Harilaos Stecopoulos' *Reconstructing the World: Southern Fictions and U.S. Imperialisms, 1898-1976*, he notes that the U.S. South as a failed site of reconstruction is inherently connected to other failed imperialist adventures of the United States, and the U.S. South acts as "a portal to an anti-imperial world" (80). Similarly, Robert Brinkmeyer in *The Fourth Ghost (2009)* focuses on how the fear of Fascism shaped many southern novels. This transnational approach to understanding southern literature recognizes the imperialist control that the United States

exercised over the Caribbean and how that imperialism was reflected in the ideology of southerners. Through this attention to the connections of texts within and across the Atlantic, I also note Carson McCullers' particular connection to Cuba. Brinkmeyer argues that McCullers was trying to avoid the label of Fascist. I argue her turn to Cuba in *The Member of the Wedding* suggests a political alignment with a utopian ideal, which is problematic in that it erases the revolutionary potential of Cuba to be merely associated with Batista. Building on this transnational turn allows us to investigate how constructions of blackness, southernness, and gender are being formulated through these imperialist desires.

American exceptionalism and southern exceptionalism are inextricably linked much like they are linked to the fear of the Cold War: "The Cold War heightened the ideological stakes of the American exceptionalist argument" (Chong 309). In the 1940s, U.S. involvement in World War II highlighted the global nature of the world. The literature at that time has often been looked at in connection with imperialist worldviews present in the United States. However, in my project, I reground the focus of southern studies during this time to examine the imperialist desires directed at the Caribbean which are present in southern literature at the time.

Following a discussion of Carson McCullers and Zora Neale Hurston in the 1940s, I turn to the 1980s as a time of Reagan-era imperialist views which resulted in similar imperialist themes present in the literature of the period. The neoliberal policies enacted by Reagan following the economic crisis of the 1970s affected the countries of the Caribbean both in a tangible sense financially and metaphorically as the economic concerns of the United States led to a nostalgic longing for an imagined free space of the Caribbean. This neoliberal turn in politics led to conservatives arguing for a stronger imperialist presence for the U.S. throughout the rest of the world, and Patricia Stuelke argues that these views aligned with the black feminist literature of the

time. For instance, her recent article in *American Literature* notes the connections between imperialism and communities of women:

Through an examination of the relationship of black feminist literature to Reagan's neoliberal nostalgia for a lost free Caribbean, I suggest that US black feminism's matriarchal myths of reclaiming the Caribbean participated in the transition to neoliberal capitalism, creating a compelling vision of the Caribbean as a timeless, eroticized paradise that effaced the Caribbean revolutionary present in favor of a free-market future and precluded US black feminists from constructing solidarity with revolutionary Grenadian women. (Stuelke 118-119)

Complicating Stuelke's analysis, the fiction during the 1980s, is at times a discrete and compelling rejection of imperialism as well as capitalism despite the fact that both the imaginary and the nostalgia associated with the circum-Caribbean often "efface the Caribbean revolutionary present" (119). The narratives of these women's revolutionary activities are often dismissed or lost. For example, Ashley D. Farmer charts the radical political gains made by women in the Pan-African movement, which have largely been ignored. In particular, Erna Brodber bases part of her novel *Louisiana* on the forgotten Queen Mother Moore, which will be discussed in chapter two. Throughout this project, each instance of archival evidence works to uncover forgotten narratives of the Caribbean, from the progressive women of the Universal Negro Improvement Association to the idealized women of Cuba's Lawn and Lyceum Club.

In chapter one, "'A Kind of Cuban Expression': Carson McCullers, Fulgencio Batista, and U.S. Imperialism" I investigate the influence of Cuba on Carson McCullers' work, *The Member of the Wedding*. Frankie imagines Cuba as a space of sexual and racial equality, and her ideas are confirmed by her contemporary magazines and news sources. The Caribbean, specifically Cuba, represents a space of sexual and racial freedom for both black and white characters in *The Member of the Wedding*. Frankie also creates a fantasy of what Cuba was like in the 1940s and tells Honey Brown, a black, potentially queer man to move there in order to belong. Frankie's obsession with

displacing Honey Brown to Cuba represents a desire to move bodies outside of the boundaries of the South in order to displace the discomfort with queer bodies of color. When Frankie tells Honey Brown to leave so that he can be happy and succeed somewhere else, in a sense, Frankie wants to protect Honey from his future dissatisfaction and ultimate incarceration. Similar to her own desire to escape, Frankie wants Honey to leave the confining South. Frankie wants to leave the South in order to belong within the family of her brother, much like she wants Honey to get out of the South in order to become Cuban with his “Cuban expression.” This paradox of belonging by leaving becomes the dominant ideology of the South in the text through Frankie's eyes. This desire for finding a sense of belonging through leaving is repeated throughout the text as a potential solution for not belonging in the South. For herself and Honey Brown, Frankie sees leaving and becoming either a member of the wedding or “becoming Cuban” as a solution for being a misfit.

Becoming Cuban for Frankie has been shaped by the dominant political milieu of the time. In *Life Magazine* as well as other newspapers, Batista is sexualized and presented as the image of democracy. The images of Batista parallel the image that Frankie has constructed for Honey Brown. The three spreads present three interesting ideologies of Cuba. First, the explicit references to his attractiveness and the sexual position of Batista focus on the sexuality of the Cuban. Second, Batista is presented as a partner to the United States but also as a pawn. Finally, the racial politics of Cuba are described as near equality. Frankie's reference to Honey Brown becoming Cuban mirrors these basic ideals—Cuba's nationality can be usurped by the United States, sexual explicitness is allowed in Cuba, and racial politics are better in Cuba.

In my second chapter, “Crossing the Bar: Reframing Patronage in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the Suwannee* and Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana*,” I first examine the influence of the Caribbean in Hurston’s often-overlooked novel, *Seraph on the Suwannee*. Through this

hierarchical structure, Hurston subtly indicates that white women occupy the same space in southern society as black men. This reconfiguring of relationships emphasizes the ways in which a white, patriarchal society delegitimizes the agency of all that is other through a seemingly benevolent infantilization. The only space to reclaim power becomes the ship in the Gulf of the Caribbean. The renegotiation of patronage is also in Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* which reinvents the researcher/subject hierarchy through the imagined, reclaimed histories of the Caribbean manifested in the body of Ella, the researcher. Ella's research also uncovers the role of women in Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, but ultimately ends in failure.

In my third chapter, "Beyond Language: Mythical Islands as a Resistance to Capitalism and Modernity in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*," I examine the island in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* as a fictional Caribbean isle that initially appears to be a space of equality for the main female character, Jadine. However, I examine how the failure of language within the text demonstrates the inability of the Caribbean to sustain Jadine and her attempted liberation and independence. Through each repeated crossing of the Caribbean, the idealized space of equality and safety is rescripted until there is no more language to discuss the flawed faux-utopian space. Like Morrison, Gloria Naylor's stories also revise the narrative of the black Atlantic. The ship, according to Gilroy, becomes the place of revolution, but I argue the ship also becomes a space of forgetfulness. The black Atlantic becomes a site of trauma, resistance, forgetfulness and idealized bliss. This emphasis on crossing and in-betweenness appears in Gloria Naylor's liminal places in *Bailey's Café*, *The Women of Brewster Place*, and *Mama Day*, which all function as safe havens from the trauma of modernity and patriarchy. Thus, this in-between space becomes read as blissful safety, even though the relative safety of these spaces is often in question. The imagined islands at first appear as a safe space, but ultimately are unsustainable

which complicates the neoliberal image of the Caribbean—a created, imagined, utopian space devoid of true memory. Through tracing the representation of the Caribbean through these novels, the Caribbean hovers in the imagination as a site of both potential promise and failure.

In chapter four, “Peeling Away the Layers of Mythic Heritage in *Holy Radishes!*,” I examine how Cuban-American novelist, Roberto Fernández, in his 1995 text *Holy Radishes!* reinvents historical memories in order to critique capitalist principles. Throughout *Holy Radishes!* each character defines his/her identity in connection with his/her status in a former country and usually in an imagined past. Through subverting the historical records of oppression Fernández demonstrates the fallacy of a culture that is based on capitalism. By creating a tale of imagined pasts for the characters, Fernández reveals the slippery nature of historical records particularly those based on late capitalism. A past disconnected from capitalism is the only way to truly be connected.

As I show throughout the entirety of this project, the connection between U.S. southern literature and the Caribbean is defined by their respective imaginaries. The imagined Caribbean as well as the very real passage from the Caribbean to the South has left an indelible impression on the work of southern authors. Uncovering these stories within literature of the circum-Caribbean depicts a South that is connected to the global landscape as well as a southern identity that is far more culturally diverse than originally discussed. My conclusion turns to contemporary popular culture discussions of the Caribbean particularly of Afro-Caribbean voices to demonstrate the changing nature of the southern landscape.

Chapter One

“A Kind of Cuban Expression”: Carson McCullers, Fulgencio Batista, and U.S.

Imperialism

In 1955, Carson McCullers made her first and only trip to Havana, Cuba, with fellow author Tennessee Williams. In the seminal biography of McCullers, Virginia Spencer Carr details McCullers' excitement about the trip as she originally hoped to rendezvous with Ernest Hemingway, though, on their trip they were unable to meet with him. Carr claims that Williams believed this “slight” was due to Hemingway's overprotective wife. This slight upset the travelers, and, overall, the trip to Cuba was not what McCullers had envisioned; Carr writes that “the visitors from Key West were offended and found little about the island that pleased them except Havana's atmospheric bars. The trip to Cuba was brief and disappointing. With Tennessee Williams, as with Carson, the anticipation had been more pleasurable than the real thing” (Carr 444). This anticipation and imagined fantasy of the island becomes striking when paired with McCullers' earlier novel *The Member of the Wedding*. Ten years before her own jaunt to Cuba, McCullers published a novella which features a young protagonist, Frankie Adams, who also anticipates that Cuba would not only be a pleasurable destination but also an imagined place of belonging and acceptance. Frankie recommends to another character, Honey Brown that he should leave for Cuba because he has a “kind of Cuban expression” (131). Frankie's seemingly nonchalant description of Honey Brown's “Cuban expression” reflects a broader cultural understanding of Cuba in the 1940s, a cultural understanding demonstrated by McCullers own trip to Cuba.

McCullers' depiction of Frankie's understanding of Cuba matches the representations of Fulgencio Batista in the U.S. media during his pre-Castro reign. These representations

demonstrate the changing attitudes of the U.S. towards Batista, revealing how the U.S. used his image to emphasize his race and his sexuality in order to express its imperialist desires to control Cuba. Through an examination of Batista's representations in the United States and Honey Brown's association with Cuba, I argue that Cuba haunts the text as an imagined space of potential racial equality and sexual fluidity. McCullers' reference to Cuba reveals her own critique of imperialism, specifically her critique of a controlling legislation over hybrid or queer bodies. Throughout *The Member of the Wedding*, three hybrid misfits, Berenice, John Brown, and Frankie spend one summer sitting around the kitchen table often discussing their utopian visions of the world. By the end of the summer, their band of misfits has dissolved, as John Henry dies, Berenice leaves the family to get married, and Frankie gives up on her dream to join her brother's marriage and finds a suitable playmate. These three characters' imaginings speak to their worldviews and their focus outside of their own southern enclave.

Furthermore, the connection between Honey Brown and Batista suggests that southern literature is not insularly focused, but rather it suggests that McCullers was deeply interested in exploring the imperialist policies of the United States, particularly in relation to its effects on both black and white constituents. Other scholars, such as Robert Brinkmeyer have examined McCullers' impulse in reference to World War II, but no one has paid attention to Frankie's comments about Cuba. Frankie's comments about Cuba represent how the U.S. viewed Cuba as a vacation spot connected to the U.S. South. More significantly, Frankie's references to Cuba towards Honey Brown demonstrate that she saw Cuba as a space of racial equality because of the images of Batista. The images of Batista demonstrate how the U.S. has manipulated discussions of race in the media both to control Cuba and to minimize connections between the African

diaspora. Finally, Honey Brown's own relatively light-skin and queer sexuality also suggest that Frankie viewed Cuba as a space of queer possibility.

While McCullers' scholarship has noted her worldview following the turn in southern studies away from an insular focus, it has largely overlooked specific references to the Caribbean despite recent scholarship on the U.S. South and the Caribbean.² The global concerns in the text have often been viewed by scholars as a growing recognition of southern cosmopolitanism and simultaneously a growing concern of Fascism during World War II. In Noah Mass' description of southern cosmopolitanism, he examines Frankie's relationship with the South which incorporates her desire to expand the isolationist U.S. southern view; however, he claims that McCullers "offers no critique of the postwar United States and its enabling of neo-Imperialism as the Cold War took shape" (243). However, Frankie's command to Honey Brown, who is eventually incarcerated, to "change into a Cuban" ultimately results in a critique of imperialism through its failed promise. Similarly, in contrast to Mass, Robert Brinkmeyer suggests that McCullers' critique was embedded in her construction of the south: "McCullers's South was a version of the Fascist systems that America was fighting against, a powerful cultural system that brutally enforced its demands for conformity and allegiance" (229). According to Brinkmeyer, *Member* made a direct connection between European totalitarianism and U.S. southern oppression. As an outspoken anti-Fascist, McCullers critiques the brutal systems of law in the U.S. South demonstrated through Frankie's inability to escape their reach and power. Brinkmeyer touches on how Frankie and Berenice critique these systems by imagining alternative spaces. Despite the mention of Frankie's creations, Brinkmeyer does not discuss

² For example, recent scholarship such as *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies* (2004) and *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and U.S. South* (2007).

Honey Brown or McCullers' Caribbean concerns. Acknowledging the inherent critique of Fascism within *Member* lends the reader to further question the other systems that simultaneously fail or constrict Frankie.

Cuba becomes the site of possibility in the text to reimagine relationships outside of strict racial systems. Often scholars have examined the growing adolescence of Frankie in connection with the growing United States as Harilaos Stecopoulus notes "If *Member* is a classic rite-of-passage novel, it takes as its subject the growing pangs of both a white southern girl and a rising nation" (103). Stecopoulus also claims that McCullers was "seek[ing] out alternatives to the Jim Crow South" by idealizing initially the army bases nearby (103). However, the army bases did not necessarily find her images of them flattering. In her incomplete autobiography, McCullers notes that her story "Reflections in a Golden Eye" "made quite a stir in town and especially at Ft. Benning, the Army Post nearby" (31). At the same time, she also comments "The Ku Klux Klan even called me and said, ['We] are the Klan and we don't like nigger lovers or fairies. Tonight will be your night" (31). In her biography, Carr also refers to this instance with more detail explaining,

An alleged Ku Klux Klansman called to say that he and his friends were going to get her that night. She had been a 'nigger lover' in her first book, he said, and now she had proven herself 'a queer' as well. Carson's indignant father waited all night on the front porch of their Starke Avenue home to greet the Klansmen with a loaded shotgun and was disappointed when no one attempted to carry out the threat. (137)

The Ku Klux Klan's distaste for McCullers speaks to her own advocacy against the Jim Crow South. While Stecopoulus focuses on how the army bases were idealized for racial equality, I argue that McCullers sought out Cuba as an alternative to the Jim Crow South as she idealized the racial equality while simultaneously critiquing the attempts to legislate bodies by simply moving them into other spaces in order to belong.

Haunted by her own loneliness and distinct role as outsider, McCullers chose to write about cultural outsiders. Her work was widely regarded as unflattering to southern towns especially for harboring racial resentment. It is widely established that McCullers felt herself an outsider, and thus always saw herself as an ally. In fact, “Richard Wright thought McCullers’s quality of despair in the novel was “unique and natural...more natural and authentic than that of Faulkner.’ Wright said he was impressed most by the ‘astonishing humanity’ that enabled a ‘white writer, for the first time in Southern fiction, to handle Negro characters with as much ease and justice as those of her own race” (Carr 33).

Frankie’s treatment of Honey Brown demonstrates this ‘astonishing humanity’ in that she consistently searches for space for him to belong. In Patricia Yaeger’s *Dirt and Desire* she makes two significant points about *The Member of the Wedding*: 1) Frankie’s search for an alternative space for Honey Brown is due to her recognition of his failure to succeed in the U.S. South, and 2) Frankie and her discussions about global solutions are representative of the politics in the kitchen. In Yaeger’s study, both of these contributions actually reinforce Frankie’s obsession with Cuba as a product of U.S. imperialism. Yaeger examines the hybrid bodies, such as Honey Brown, which she argues demonstrate the inability of the black/white binary to be broken down during the 1940s: “recovering the hybrid bodies in *The Member of the Wedding* as well as the figures of the southern gargantua as literary symptoms for a series of large-scale historical movements sweeping the modern South” (183). While she focuses on the historical movements sweeping the South, these hybrid bodies also reflect the massive migrations from the U.S. into Cuba during the 1940s. In response to Frankie’s discussion of Honey Brown’s movement to Cuba, she claims “For Honey’s wrongs and her private pain, Frankie’s answer is emigration” (174). Both Yaeger and Anna Young suggest that Frankie and Honey Brown are connected as

“fellow travelers” (84). While Yaeger accurately points out that Frankie looks outside of the U.S. for a place of acceptance for Honey Brown, the significance of picking Cuba as his destination has been overlooked in scholarship. In this chapter, I note the similarities between Frankie’s choice of Cuba and the context of her contemporary political climate.

Frankie’s global solutions are borne out of her discussions in the kitchen. While Frankie’s ideas may seem childish or immature or even lacking in geographical knowledge at times, Amy Kaplan encourages scholars to note the importance of the domestic home life in formulating nation building: “If domesticity plays a key role in imagining the nation as home, then women, positioned at the center of the home, play a major role in defining the contours of the nation and its shifting borders with the foreign” (582). Ultimately, Kaplan argues, “My point is that where the domestic novel appears most turned inward to the private sphere of female interiority, we often find subjectivity scripted by narratives of nation and empire” (601). The kitchen is often scripted as the site of “female interiority,” and, in fact, Frankie spends her days sitting around a kitchen table with John Henry and Berenice. Frankie and her kitchen compatriots discuss alternate images of the world as Frankie consistently states how something in her world is just not right. Each of the three of them formulate a different way to envision life. Berenice’s idea is described as a completely different world:

But the world of the Holy Lord God Berenice Sadie Brown was a different world, and it was round and just and reasonable. First, there would be no separate colored people in the world, but all human beings would be light brown color with blue eyes and black hair. (97)

From the domestic sphere of the kitchen, they are interested in nation and empire. They formulate worlds where they belong, worlds not constricted by color or borders. Berenice rescripts her own narrative much like Frankie rescripts southern boundaries. Berenice’s round world is akin to an island much like Cuba. Her claims that it would be just and reasonable echo

Frankie's utopic vision of Cuba as a space of justice for Honey Brown. However, Frankie disagrees with Berenice claiming, "She did not completely agree with Berenice about the war; and sometimes she said she would have one War Island in the world where those who wanted to could go, and fight or donate blood" (97). Instead, Frankie's War Island as opposed to Berenice's round, just island incorporates fighting, which further points to the imperialist views Frankie is surrounded by as she grapples with a world constantly at war and moving.

Frankie's inherent imperialism also causes her to see Cuba as an already colonized space of use to the Americans, specifically a space where she can command others to go and become Cuban. Cuba as an independent nation that might not want Americans to immigrate does not exist in Frankie's mind. Instead, Frankie tells Honey, "I think you ought to go to Cuba. You are so light-skinned and you even have a kind of Cuban expression. You could go there and change into a Cuban" (131). Frankie never specifies what a kind of Cuban expression is other than a vague reference to pictures of Cubans and Mexicans smiling. However, Frankie's claim that Honey Brown could change identity points to not only an erasure of Cuban nationality but also an erasure of fixed identity. Honey Brown, who is described as unfinished, can simply become whatever he wants based on his own performance, according to Frankie. This idea is central to Frankie's own fluid identity as she actively changes her name—Frances, Frankie, Francine—and tries on different personalities. However, while Frankie remains free to experiment with changing identities, ultimately this is not allowed for Honey Brown, who is eventually incarcerated, and even Frankie returns to a normative expression of girlhood by the end of the text. Honey Brown is not allowed the fluid identity of Frankie because much like depictions of Batista, his identity is constructed outside of himself. Frankie's view of Cuba as an already

colonized space shapes her understanding of the erasure of Cuban nationality, which further demonstrates her inculcated imperialist views.

Being a Cuban, having a “kind of Cuban expression” are just constructs to Frankie that are not rooted in an actual national identity. This notion of Frankie’s reflects broader cultural understandings of Cuba at the time because of the United States’ dominant exceptionalist ideology that suggests the U.S. was the deciding role in liberating Cuba from Spain; many believed that the Cuban identity was simply an offshoot of the United States. Essentially, Cuban identity was changeable simply because the United States took ownership of Cuba’s national identity, which demonstrates the problematic imperialism of Frankie and the U.S.

Crossing the Gulf: Material Connections between the U.S. South and Cuba

Frankie’s desire to move Honey Brown into Cuba also reflects the idea that Cuba was an extension of the United States. This idea stems from two important factors determining Cuba’s relationship to the United States. First, the proximity of Cuba to the United States resulted in a close connection between the two countries that ultimately shaped the ideology of Cuba. Second, in the American imagination, Cubans owed their freedom to the United States due to the Spanish-American war in 1898. In Louis A. Pérez’s text, *On Becoming Cuban*, he argues, “Due in part to historical circumstances and in part to geography, Cubans happened to have been among the first people outside the United States to come under the influence of North American material culture” (10). Thus, Cuba was closely connected to North American culture, and there was a striking similarity between the two cultures.

In addition to geographical proximity, Cuba also occupied a space in the American imagination of a rightful colony. Matthew Pratt Guterl explores the U.S. South as part of the

American Mediterranean in the early nineteenth century. He argues that, specifically for the U.S. South, “Cuba was, then, the next Texas, but with greater short-term promise... ‘a contemporary competitor and a future acquisition” (102). This belief that Cuba was essentially a colony was also influenced by the Platt Amendment that was signed in the aftermath of the Spanish American war specifying Cuba’s alliance to the U.S.

In addition to the belief that Cuba would be a future acquisition of the U.S. South, Cuba was also seen as a space for sexual encounters. Part of the image of this sexualized Caribbean stems from the depiction of Havana as a wild, gambling tourist location where any sexual desires could be fulfilled. In truth, Havana was a tourist destination heavily advertised with Cuban rum, however, part of this image is a further construction of overly sexual racialized others. Guterl argues that Cuba emphasizes the racial hybridity and “tropics” side of the South (103). He explains:

But where the South seemed “tropical,” it called into question the future of the region. Portraits of the South that emphasized its Caribbean flavor, or its “eroticism,” were, implicitly or explicitly, drawing conclusions about its location in relationship to the “tropics,” conclusions that could often emphasize the relationship between hot temperatures, immorality, violence, and sex [...] They would, in other words, have to forsake (or set aside) some of their heartfelt commitment to the nation-state and to Europe as the standard of “civilization” in order to be a part of the American Mediterranean. (104)

Guterl’s description of the potential formation of the American Mediterranean emphasizes the established beliefs of the Caribbean as exotic and tropical. A notion that the U.S. South not only ascribed to, but at times, took on as its own identity. For instance, in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s seminal novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she too equates the temperature of the tropics with the personalities and passions of its inhabitants, particularly in New Orleans. If the U.S. South acquired Cuba and became this American Mediterranean their identity shifted from the U.S. to a southern, tropical identity. This connection speaks to not only the geographical reality of the

connections between Cuba and the U.S. but their potentially shared identity as tropical regions. Frankie has held on to these conceptions of Cuba from the antebellum south: she still sees Cuba as partially belonging to the U.S. South.

Frankie's beliefs would not be considered uncommon in the American conception of Cuba at the turn of the twentieth century according to Pérez. While Pérez focuses on the early twentieth century, he also convincingly argues that the beliefs at the beginning of the century carried over throughout the first half of the 20th century. Namely, Pérez focuses on U.S. involvement in the Spanish American War. He argues that people in the United States saw themselves as responsible for freeing Cuba and, because of that gift, the people of Cuba essentially owed the United States. Thus, the U.S. felt they were therefore entitled to use Cuba as a tourist space: "Through much of the first half of the twentieth century, the Americans sustained a moral claim to power over Cuba based on the proposition that they had succeeded where Cubans had failed, that through the sacrifice of their lives and their treasure they had liberated Cuba from Spain" (226-227).

Pérez's understanding of the United States' dislodging the Cubans' idea of nationhood reiterates Frankie's ideas that one can just "change into a Cuban" (132). The story of the Spanish-American War resides solely in the narrative of the United States rather than in Cuba's own attempt for freedom:

At a critical point of their national formation, Cubans seemed to have been dislodged as subjects of their own history and displaced as agents of nationhood. The North American discourse lay in its capacity to implicate Cubans in a moral hierarchy derived from U.S. needs and inevitably to deny the Cubans' presence and participation in their own history. (211)

By displacing Cubans in their own history, the United States believe that Cuba existed only as a construct or a metaphor and,

the island and its people existed largely as representations that often bore no relationship to the place and population that it purported to depict. Cuba as a metaphorical construct developed as a matter of North American needs: imagined as vital to the well-being of the United States and populated with a people who were expected to accommodate North American interests as a condition of their national existence. (230)

While this image of Cuba was principally disseminated in the first half of the 20th century, prior to Batista's second reign, Pérez mentions that "The narrative of 1898 expanded into the most readily accessible sources of American knowledge of Cuba... It was the subtext of what many Americans were reading in their fiction, in such novels as...MacKinlay Kantor's *Cuba Libre* (1940) and Elswyth Thane's *Ever After* (1945)" (205). In addition to stories that the United States was reading about Cuba, there was also a widespread dissemination of travel brochures and pictures contributing to the idea that Cuba belonged to the United States.

Robert Chrisman charts the role of mass media in U.S. relationships with Cuba from 20th century to the 1980s providing two significant pieces of information—the belief in control over Cuba began with the narrative of 1898, and ultimately the media played a role in the closeness between these two countries. In Yeidy M. Rivero's examination of Havana in the 1940s, he argues that the capital city became a media haven due, in part, to the influence of the United States. The broadcasting companies of Havana in the 1940s and 1950s adapted the U.S. practices of disseminating information. This connection with the U.S. reflects the close working conditions between the two countries. Furthermore, Rivero examines carefully how the interests of the U.S. drove much of the corruption in the 1940s. The 1940s became a time of great prosperity and hope while corruption, drugs, and sex trafficking were also on the rise. This corruption and association with sex and drugs contributed to the idea in the American imagination that Cuba was a vacation spot for wild times.

However, during the setting of the novel, and the writing of the novel by McCullers, Cuba was experiencing unprecedented levels of political reform and liberalism. In Paul J. Dosal's brief history of Cuba, he explains that Batista was the son of poor "mulatto" parents, and he "represented a middle-class intrusion of color into the political system" (64). Batista's reforms emphasized the civil rights of all, and the 1940 constitution specified in Article 20, "All Cubans are equal before the law. The Republic does not recognize exemptions or privileges. Any discrimination by reason of sex, race, color, or class, and any other kind of discrimination destructive of human dignity, is declared illegal and punishable."³ Cuba's adoption of the Constitution at this time reinforces Frankie's ideas about race in Cuba. The liberal constitution from Batista emphasizes that all people of color could peacefully blend in without any discrimination. According to Batista, Frankie was right, no one would know that Honey Brown was "a colored boy," but rather he would be a part of the blended Cuban society (132).

Immediately prior to the 1940s, Cuba was experiencing a liberal revolution which sought to establish better race relations. In 1934, Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar staged a coup to become ruler of Cuba. Over the next ten years, Batista simultaneously enacted reforms while also using exceptional force to shut down any opposition. However, in 1940, he adopted a liberal Constitution which he followed, and he was elected fairly as President that same year. In 1944, he left office peacefully and a subsequent ruler, Ramón Grau took over. The next eight years were marked by corruption, and in 1952 Batista staged another coup in which he regained power and continued to rule for the next seven years. During his second tenure, he did not uphold the liberal constitution, and the years were extremely repressive (Dosal 66-67).

³ This article is a translation of the Constitution which is available online on latinamericanstudies.org. A copy of the Constitution is available in the Cuban Heritage Collection library of the University of Miami, but only parts of it are available digitally.

Batista Background:

The media representations of Batista varied widely in part due to his relatively unknown background and ethnicity. In Frank Argote-Freyre's *Fulgencio Batista: From Revolutionary to Strongman*, he explains that the only biographies that currently exist are either hero worship or completely vilifying. In volume one, Argote-Freyre works to establish the complexity of Batista's role as both dictator and man of the people in Cuba. Fulgencio Batista y Zaldívar rose from poverty to fame primarily through the military. However, his continued success was due to his ability to work with both conservatives and liberals in Cuba. Depending on the votes, Batista courted the Communist student groups, and at times was endorsed by the liberal media in the U.S. Batista's ability to maneuver his relationship with the press did not necessarily extend to the United States. Instead, the U.S. media often manipulated his image usually based on race depending on their approval. Argote-Freyre explains, "In the U.S. media, Batista was often described as a 'mulatto' or the 'brown dictator'" (4).⁴ However, the U.S. media revised descriptions of Batista. One telling example from Argote-Freyre is that "as Batista proved himself, Gimperling revised his racial and ethnic profile:

I am very inclined now to believe that Batista is either of Chilean-Indian extraction or of Chilean-Mexican extraction, and not as was first believed, half negro and one-quarter Chinese. I consider the importance of this to be that the Chilean-Mexican is apt to be more courageous, more sagacious and more crafty than the mixed negro-Chinese-Cuban. (4)

Furthermore, even his eldest son recognized the importance of Batista's race in connection with his role as leader: "In a sense, Batista's ethnicity and race were whatever his friends and foes wanted it to be. His friends called him *el indio* [the Indian], and his enemies called him *el negro*

⁴ These descriptions will be looked at in more detail in connection with images later.

[black man],’ (qtd. in Argote-Freyre 4). Batista’s changing racial identity mirrors his political capital, and this changing racial identity is reflected in the U.S. media’s depictions of him.

Cuba in Pictures

Pérez’s history book focuses primarily on the years directly after the War of 1898. However, his idea of Cuba as metaphor resonates still in the 1940s not only in the protagonist of *The Member* but also in the imagination of the pictures circulating around the United States. In one lengthy paragraph, Pérez glosses over the pictures that were prevalent in the 1940s:

Cuba in the first half of the twentieth century dwelled in the American imagination principally as a site of moral license. It was not a country to be taken seriously, hardly thought about before 1959 as anything more than a place of tropical promiscuity, illicit pleasures, and risqué amusements. Metaphorical depiction in this instance worked as innuendo and intimation. This was Cuba in the service of the North American libido: a place to flaunt conventions and fulfill fantasies; to indulge unabashedly in fun and frolic, in play and pleasure, in bars and brothels, at the racetrack and the gambling casinos; to do illegal drugs and have illicit sex. Cuba entered domains of the North American familiar as a place of promiscuity, as site of sexual encounter with the tropical Other. Metaphor provided meaning without the need for explanation: ‘one of the last of the world’s sinful cities,’ a fleshpot city,’ ‘one of the world’s fabled fleshpots,’ ‘the brothel of the new World,’ “the Red Light district of the Caribbean.” (235)

Pérez highlights the idea that the United States viewed Cuba as a place for “illegal drugs” and “illicit sex.” In order to build on Pérez’s ideas of Cuba, I look at three primary sources of visual texts that serve as the basis of the pictures Frankie might have seen. Pérez briefly mentions the *National Geographic* magazine’s references to Cuba, so I pause briefly to emphasize their connection to Frankie’s ideas. Second, *Life* magazine’s three instances of mentioning Fulgencio Batista solidifies the ideology that Cuba was racially ambiguous. Finally, I look at one Cuba

tourism spread in the 1940s⁵ which emphasizes the American belief in the “gaiety” of Cuba as a vacation spot.

National Geographic

Surrounding the time of Frankie’s adolescence are two significant spreads in *National Geographic*, which feature Cuba. In 1933, a thirty-five page spread describes Cuba as the “Isle of Romance.” This feature would have been before Frankie was even born, but it highlights the dominant ideology that Cuba was considered a place of “moral license” and “sexual exploits.” In this article, the narrator Enrique C. Canova emphasizes the places where one could vacation, paying special attention to Havana.

Then, in 1947, *National Geographic* featured a thirty page spread on “Cuba the American Sugar Bowl.” The section begins with the editor, Melville Bell Grosvenor describing his son shouting, “Cuba really is our American sugar bowl” when he discovers that Cuba imports over thirty pounds of sugar per person to the United States. Grosvenor’s son blithely shouting about Cuba as the American sugar bowl speaks to the ideology that Cuba was merely an object to be consumed by the U.S. More than simply an export, sugar signified the growing appetite of the U.S. to not only consume more processed goods, from outside the U.S. but the appetite of the U.S. for all things Cuban. 1947 was the height of U.S. tourists as well as ex-pats to relocate to the sweet life of Havana. In Sidney Mintz’s book *Sweetness and Power* he details how the explosion of the sugar trade was in part due to the significance that sugar gained as a luxury commodity so quickly in the eighteenth century. For the U.S. Cuba becomes intrinsically linked

⁵ The other significant area of visual texts that would be useful in constructing the Cuba of American imagination in the mid-Twentieth century are photographs and postcards. Due to the breadth of these findings, I focus on the most common scenes.

to not only this luxury good, but the greedy consumption of it. This short article in *National Geographic* ends with Grosvenor deciding to visit this American sugar bowl in order to see the lush vacation spot thus conflating once again the consumption of sugar with a site of leisure.

Throughout the next thirty pages, there are photographs showing fisherman, universities, women, and various aspects of Cuban life. However, two scenes are particularly striking in this issue. One, Grosvenor immediately describes visiting the “Remember Maine” monument which “grateful Cubans erected” (3). Thus, Grosvenor immediately sets up Cuba’s debt to the United States in the first page. Second, there is a small photograph of a black boy smiling, waving an American flag, and the title states “The Cuban flag, too, was born in a revolution” (3). Immediately, this issue of *National Geographic* emphasizes the Cuban connection to the United States. These two issues of *National Geographic* solidify the problematic idea that Cuba was considered indebted to the United States just as Frankie’s assertion that Honey Brown could change into a Cuban. Moreover, Frankie claims, “I’ve seen a whole lot of pictures of Cubans and Mexicans. They have a good time... This is what I’m trying to discuss. I don’t think you will ever be happy in this town. I think you ought to go to Cuba” (132). Frankie’s offhand comment about having seen lots of images of Cubans led me to an examination of contemporary images in 1940s homes. *Life*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*’s Cuban images are most often of Fulgencio Batista, the rising dictator of Cuba. These images reflect not only those that would have influenced Frankie’s view of Cuba, but also demonstrate the changing relationship between Batista and the U.S.

In 1936, *Life* magazine began its circulation and within four years it had gained one million subscribers. During the time of the novella, the *Life* magazine would have been a widely circulating source of pictures for someone like Frankie Adams. However, during the years, 1935-1945, there were very few instances of Cuban images in the magazine. Most of the references to

Cuba were merely advertisements primarily of Cuban rum or a tropical paradise, or a geographical reference in someone's military biography. However, there are three notable references to Fulgencio Batista.

Images of Batista

The first reference to Batista is a several page spread detailing his trip to Washington D.C in the November 21st 1938 issue. The article is titled "The U.S. gets a look at Fulgencio Batista Strong Man of Cuba" (20). Much like Guridy's analysis of Batista as a "race man" within *Life Magazine*, he was also established as "a self-made strongman" and during his visit "a brilliant success" (22). The three page spread on Batista features the opening photograph with him playing tennis with his Chief of the Army Press Bureau, Captain Antonio de Torres.

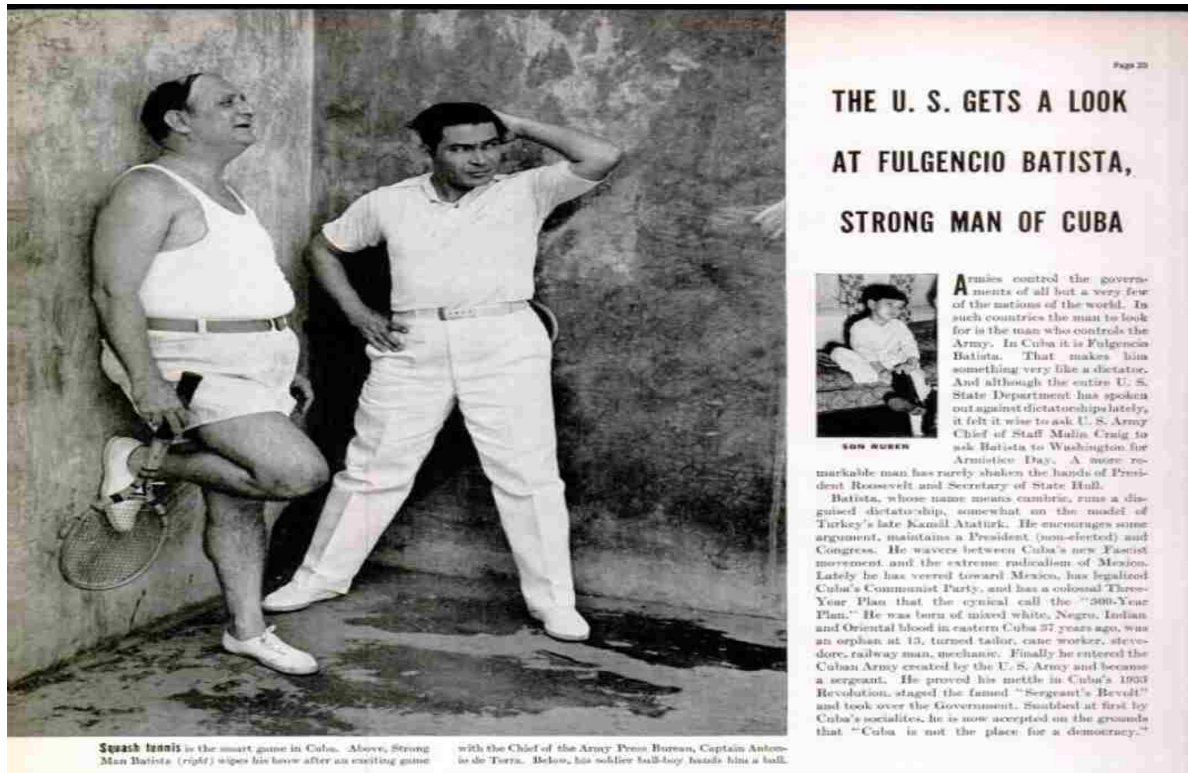


Fig. 1. Batista playing Tennis

In this photograph, which is beside the title calling him the strong man, he stands with his legs apart and his left arm resting on his hip in a classic power pose. His right hand rests behind his head, and he looks off into the distance. Beside him, the portly figure of Torres reclines with his mouth open, looking winded, and his leg resting against the wall with his tennis racket held languidly beside him. This photograph encapsulates the American vision of Batista at the time: the strong man is in no danger of the army taking over. Furthermore, throughout the article Batista is praised for being “a smart politician” who promises to have elections. The article mentions that the U.S. is concerned that Batista may swing right or left, but insists that “he got a fine reception.”

Within the spread, aside from the pictures of Batista, there were multiple photographs of Cuba’s army. Most notably one of the small corner photographs inscription states “Notice: Negro boys. Cuba has probably nearest thing to perfect equality between whites and blacks in the world today” (21). With Batista’s pictures and the pictures of the “Negro boys,” this issue clearly indicates that the United States was heavily invested in connecting with Batista and portraying him in the best light at the time of the novel. Moreover, the ideas of racial equality in Cuba were widespread, which strengthens Frankie’s claims to Honey about his ability to blend in regardless of color.



istic Negro boys. Cuba has probably nearest thing to perfect equality between whites and blacks in the world today.



White, black and mestizo boys of the Civic-Military School are being taught setting-up exercises by Army sergeants. The

school is a part of the Three-Year Plan for social betterment which Batista gives by turns a Fascist or a Communist tinge.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Fig. 2: Race equality in Cuba

Second, in the February 7th 1941 issue, there is a picture of Fulgencio Batista with the caption “But *El Jefe* got wind of it and shipped the three of them off to Miami before things got out of hand: ‘within 48 hours Batista had restored the constitutional guarantees, received the congratulations of the United States Ambassador, been kissed by his friends, became a father for the third time and proudly announced: ‘Democracy has been saved’” (355). This caption refers to Batista as the chief and also makes him sound extremely authoritative and also exceptionally congratulatory. In this issue, the small corner inset photo shows a smiling Batista “being kissed by a friend” (24). Above the photograph is the caption “Democracy Saved.” The story is in between two stories about World War II, but the article is hopeful and aggrandizing of how Batista gave all “Latin American dictators a lesson in how to deal with threatened revolt” (24). This brief story demonstrates that *Life Magazine* was invested in emphasizing the success of democracy, even if it acknowledges that Batista was using the army to control the country.

The third and final notable mention of Batista was in the May 8th 1944 magazine, which is a two page spread detailing the wedding of Batista’s daughter, Mirtha. The first page has three photographs, two of which are Mirtha with her husband, but the first one the eye sees, in the top

left-hand corner is Mirtha with Fulgencio Batista. Part of the description reads “Father Fulgencio Batista, once a field hand, has become in ten years best-dressed man at the wedding” (30).



Fig. 3. The Wedding of Batista’s daughter

The bottom photograph of Mirtha and groom begins, “The dimple, the beautiful teeth and the alert gaze, all inherited from her father, are shown to advantage in this charming picture” (30).

Interestingly, the charming advantages are all from Batista. In a photograph on the next page,

“Mother Batista” is featured with the groom’s family, and part of the inscription reads “Both families are short and heavy” (31). Moreover in the description of the wedding Batista is

described as having won over the Cuban socialites by having “charm” and being “tough and smart” (31). The overt praise of Batista emphasizes the role that he played in the American

imagination. He is the attractive, charming democratic leader of a Cuban nation of equality, despite the widespread corruption at the time and his future dictatorship. Interestingly, the

critique of the heavy mothers’ family in comparison to Batista’s charming qualities is surprising

in comparison to *Time* magazine’s earlier spread in which Batista is described as "husky, brown Fulgencio Batista y Zaldivar" (22). Like discussions of Batista’s race, his size is also described in

varying degrees to demonstrate the United States’ relationship with him.

The July 29, 1940 image in *Newsweek* features Fulgencio Batista on cover: smiling, arms crossed, and the caption claims “host to 21 republics.” This benign view of a happy Batista welcoming other republic governments is a dramatic shift from just a few years earlier. In 1937, *Time* magazine had a spread labeled "Cuba's Boss Batista--Paternalism begins at home." In this article about Batista, two themes emerge. First, the article focuses on Batista’s humble beginnings and his rise to fame as a boss: "For the first time since he was born in a farmer's hut in Oriente Province 36 years ago, full-blooded Fulgencio Batista was without a boss to chafe him." The article pits Batista and the U.S. ambassador at odds with each other as Franklin D. Roosevelt was instituting his Good Neighbor Policy. The Good Neighbor Policy was enacted from 1933-1945 and led, in part, to the economic frustrations of the U.S. Cubans (Gellman 236). At this time, no intervention was made into Cuban military affairs, but the economic reigns of Cuba were held tightly by the U.S. Significantly, the contrast between Batista and Sumner Welles highlights Batista’s beginnings: "Between him and his absolutely opposite number, the earthy, self-made Cuban farm boy Batista, now began a historic tug of war for Cuba." Batista’s description as earthy farm boy and the sophisticated ambassador elides Batista’s own progress and power. Even as Batista grows in power, he is described by his color; he is a "a hard brown obstacle" in the way of the ambassador, particularly U.S. power.

In addition to Batista’s background, the other key term highlighted in this article is paternalism. Interestingly as noted in Frankie’s patronizing descriptions of Cuba as well as well-documented historical interaction, the U.S. was actively exhibiting a paternalistic, imperialistic view of Cuba. Batista rescripts this narrative by making himself the father, patron of his country. The article mentions Batista’s military interactions in a potentially disingenuous phrasing: "And

it is not as a killer but as a father that Boss Batista sees himself using his martial power." Batista squarely critiques the U.S. in this article:

The U.S., says Batista, has always been very kind and fatherly toward Cuba, and a profitable thing that attitude has been from the U.S. Now, says he, let paternalism begin at home, and let the profits stay there, too. Batista, and not the U.S. State Department, will be the father of his country. (21)

These descriptors- "full-blooded," "earthy," "brown" -all work to position Batista as either a "self-made" hero or a "killer" depending on his relationship with the U.S. at the time.

In addition to exerting control over Cuba, the depictions of Batista also represent the growing concern that the U.S. had about race relations in Cuba. In Gerald Horne's recent book, *Race to Revolution: The United States and Cuba during Slavery and Jim Crow*, he emphasizes the connections between African American press and Cuba, particularly the better race relations that occurred in Cuba during this time. Batista also represents a close link between Cubans and African Americans during the early 1940s. Frank A. Guridy argues that the United States and Cuba were closely connected through the African diaspora as well. By looking at a group of "intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and political activists," Guridy contends that Cubans and African Americans were connected through the black press, specifically the Associated Negro Press which even profiled Batista in 1938. He was hailed as a "race man" and "while most of the white Cuban elite never accepted the mulatto from Oriente, African American observers of Cuban affairs claimed him as one of their own" (35). While there are no instances in the *Member of* Cuban connections to the African American community, Guridy also recounts Batista's visit to the United States in 1942 where he famously declared that "there were no racial differences in Cuba" (36). Moreover, the connection between Cuba and the United States was so strong that Guridy argues, "The power of these information circuits led the U.S. government to attempt to manipulate the circulation of racial understandings between the two countries in an effort to

neutralize Afro-Cuban activism” (20). The United States embraced Batista, at times, as almost white, which was not the case for him in Cuba. Despite the differences in racial understandings between Cuba and the U.S., Batista was still barred from elite places for being “too dark.” The manipulation of racial understanding by the U.S. government is most clearly seen in depictions of Batista, particularly in regards to race and even sexuality. Similarly, Batista’s depictions readily change in Cuban newspapers as well depending on current favor or current fear of Batista at the time. Batista was often accused of threatening the media, but what is interesting here, is again the shaping of the narrative of the rags-to-riches. However, there was less of a focus on his indigeneity or racial background. In fact, Batista often claimed that there was no racism in Cuba at this time. A sampling of Cuban newspapers in his biography demonstrates how he was described in Cuba vs. the United States (Argote-Freyre 279).

Connections to Honey Brown

The U.S. media’s manipulation of Batista is akin to Frankie’s belief that Honey Brown could “change into a Cuban” (132). Despite Frankie’s suggestion that Honey leave the South, Frankie is not trying to get rid of the threat of this body that does not fit in, because she actually is obsessed with Honey Brown. She considers when she is running away that she wishes she could go away with him: “If only she could hunt down Honey Brown and they could go away together! But Honey had gone to Forks Falls and would not be back until tomorrow” (153). Moreover, Frankie's first interactions with Honey suggest that Frankie looks up to him as a mentor and an ideal. When Frankie first goes to see a fortune teller, she hears Big Mama tell Honey Brown, who was behind her, to quit putting his feet up on the desk. Frankie is astounded by Big Mama's knowledge. But later, Honey Brown explains that she had a mirror to see him.

Immediately, Frankie recants and says she too does not believe in that fortune telling nonsense. The use of the mirror not only demonstrates Frankie's desire to agree and pretend she too, like Honey, doesn't believe in this nonsense, but also the mirror gives the readers another framing of Honey Brown. The third time we see Honey he is again standing: "on the threshold between the kitchen and the parlor" (128). Similarly, the first actual glimpse of Honey Brown is in a doorway: "Honey...standing in the doorway. Honey, though he was her foster brother, did not resemble Berenice—and it was almost as though he came from some foreign country, like Cuba or Mexico" (38). When Frankie discusses Honey at this point she says that she knew "what Big Mama had said about Honey Brown. She said he was a boy God had not finished. The Creator had withdrawn His hand from him too soon. God had not finished him, and so he had to go around doing one thing and then another to finish himself up." He was "eternally unsatisfied" (128). In addition to his placement in the text, Honey Brown's descriptive name also immediately positions him in a space of in-betweenness. His light skinned appearance and description as "a boy not quite grown up" presents him as body in motion, unfixed, and as fluid as honey itself. Honey's position of liminality also connects him to Cuba, since Cuba was considered both a part of the United States but also a separate vacation spot.

When Frankie tells Honey Brown to leave so that he can be happy and succeed somewhere else, in a sense, Frankie wants to protect Honey from his future dissatisfaction and ultimate incarceration. Similar to her own desire to leave, Frankie wants Honey to leave as well. Frankie wants to leave the South in order to belong within the family of her brother, much like she wants Honey to leave in order to become Cuban with his Cuban expression. Other scholars have commented on this idea of eliminating the differences, the people that don't fit by the end of

the text, but what is interesting is that Frankie wants Honey to leave for the benefit of Honey because she sees Cuba as an alternative to the segregated, racist U.S. South.

Frankie's potentially androgynous body has become the locus of much scholarship and points to the importance of looking at the queer body within the text. Elizabeth Freeman argues that Frankie's obsession with the wedding acts as a queer model: "It figures Frankie's insertion of herself into the wedding scene as a mode not merely of rewiring affiliation, but of reimagining reproduction on a queer model—though we might note that the relationship between girls and women offers her no such possibility" (12). Similarly, Rachel Adams contends, "Rereading McCullers's work from this perspective does not provide a coherent plan of action but rather a place to begin thinking about what it would be like to inhabit a community rooted in heterogeneity rather than sameness, desire rather than prescription, where each member can find in herself "a mixture of delicious and freak" (576). Melissa Free engages both Adams and Freeman, and ultimately argues that Frankie is not just advocating for a mixture or a heterogeneous situation, but ultimately, we can understand *The Member* as a lesbian coming of age tale (441). These three scholars point to the lack of examination of the other queer figure in the text, Honey Brown. Most often in scholarship he is simply characterized for his connection to Frankie rather than his role as advocating against imperialist desires.

Frankie is similarly a misfit in the South as well. Her feelings of loneliness cause her to latch on to discussions of her brother's wedding and decide that she must also become a part of their family. She envisions herself as, a member of the wedding; however, in Frankie's mind, the wedding entails not just the ceremony but the marriage itself. Her brother is in the army and will then travel around with his new bride. According to Freeman, Frankie's obsession with the wedding stands in for her own queer desires which are dissolved by the end of the text. In fact,

by the end of the text, the threats of disrupting the heteronormative, white small town society have been completely eliminated. Frankie's African American housekeeper, Berenice, leaves Frankie, who moves to the suburbs, and John Henry, the strange child, dies a horrifying death. Freeman writes about how the novel removes the threat of the misfits through John Henry's death and through Honey Brown's incarceration. Freeman argues, "She wants, as she points out, to "keep moving," to blur the distinctions between territory, country, and continent even as she traverses their boundaries" (21). Despite Frankie's transnational desires, at the end of the text, she remains garnered in normative girlhood.

Similarly, Patricia Yeager describes the simultaneous removals of John Henry and Honey Brown as demonstrating the importance of the white body over the black body: "What these twin "deaths" reveal is a system of linkages invisible to the eye but utterly powerful, in which the lives of blacks and whites, women and men are so intertwined that any disturbance within one quadrant sets up a reaction in another" (180). Furthermore, this "twinning" emphasizes the use of the grotesque bodies to disrupt the strict white black binaries that occur at the end of the text. Yaeger claims "This is a cultural space where only half the bodies are allowed to come in, but already the other half are hovering around" (184). Other scholars claim that by the end of the text Frankie has given up her desire to be a misfit, and her only companion is a similarly aged suburban white girl. However, before this change, Frankie already envisioned the South as not a safe space for everyone. Rather than eliminating the hybrid bodies, Frankie provides an alternative—co-opting the space of Cuba.

Frankie understands Cuba as a place to move to in order to belong, but also a place that erases differences: as Batista said, there are no racial differences. Yaeger sees the removal of the threats as demonstrations of the lack of interest in the black bodies in the text, and Honey's

incarceration is a rejection of Frankie's ideas and conceptions in the text. Thus, Frankie acts as a counterpoint early in the novel against these dismissals of the black body but also still suggests that they leave. The night that the law brings Frankie back home is presumably the night that Honey Brown is incarcerated. Yaeger points out that Frankie is free to move about while Honey Brown is constricted by his race. At the same time, Frankie claims, "It was better to be in a jail where you could bang the walls than in a jail you could not see. The world was too far away, and there was no way anymore that she could be included" (157). While Frankie is discussing her own frustration, this quotation also applies to Honey Brown. He had always been in a "jail you could not see" (157). Frankie's discussion of Cuba was an attempt to free him before the law put him in a physical jail.

Honey's ultimate incarceration is also a rejection of imperialism because he is not able to simply "become Cuban." She creates an imaginative alternate possibility for him, albeit one that fails: Honey Brown is incarcerated at the end of the text, and Frankie's dream that his "Cuban expression" could free him from the confines of the South remains ultimately unrealized. This failure of Frankie to control Honey Brown's outcome foreshadows the United States' imperialist failure in controlling Cuba through the sexualization and praise of Batista. Reading this text in a global context allows us to recognize the problematics of legislating bodies for imperialist purposes.

Frankie's dismissal of Honey Brown is not only how white bodies attempt to control black bodies, but also how the white U.S. South attempts to control the boundaries of its borders. Regardless of Frankie's good intent, this controlling of boundaries becomes problematic as Frankie attempts to assert control over Honey Brown. Ultimately, this imaginative possibility for Honey Brown is not realized as he becomes incarcerated. Similarly, Batista is eventually

removed forcibly from Cuba and resides in Daytona Beach where he is celebrated as a hero. However, he becomes whitened as he lives in the fanciest parts of town despite his Afro-Cuban background. While the U.S. South was still completely segregated, Batista lived in the white part of town and was celebrated with a parade. Thus, while Honey Brown's lavender skin fails to protect him, Batista's skin protects him due to the media's manipulation. Connecting Honey Brown to Batista reveals McCullers' own complicated understanding of neo-Imperialism as well as southern literature's simultaneous use and rejection of Caribbean aesthetics.

Chapter Two

“Crossing the Bar”: Reframing Patronage in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Seraph on the*

Suwannee and Erna Brodber’s Louisiana

“I’ve come to see that I’ve worked through the relationship of the mother and the girl to a relationship between Europe and the place that I’m from, which is to say, a relationship between the powerful and the powerless. The girl is powerless and the mother is powerful. The mother shows her how to be in the world, but at the back of her mind she thinks she never will get it. She’s deeply skeptical that this child could ever grow up to be a self-possessed woman and in the end she reveals her skepticism; yet even within the skepticism is, of course, dismissal and scorn. So it’s not unlike the relationship between the conquered and the conqueror” (Kincaid qtd. in Vorda 12).

Jamaica Kincaid’s explanation of a mother/daughter relationship consciously mirrors the relationship between empire and colony. Jamaica Kincaid’s island culture of Antigua is under the imperialist control of the British empire. In this metaphor, the mother represents the empire and is the colonizer of the daughter. Despite the mother’s potentially good intentions, her commandments to the daughter feel like oppression, and the system of colonial patronage becomes replicated.⁶ In Laura Barrio-Vilar’s exposition of Jamaica Kincaid’s work she details how the mother-daughter relationships mirror the colonial patronage: “what originally seems like a beneficial cultural and economic exchange for both women, mirroring the economic and cultural relationship between the U.S. and the Caribbean, eventually becomes a political conflict of interests” (109). While teaching and modeling the behavior that patrons want replicated via their surrogate, the patrons remain deeply skeptical of the potential for progress: “the colonized subject is offered the possibility of becoming like, but not the same as the colonizer” (Stitt 143).

⁶ Laura Niesen de Abruna explores this maternal-colonial matrix more fully in Jamaica Kincaid’s other works (172). See also Victoria Burrow’s *Whiteness and Trauma* which explores Jamaica Kincaid’s relationship with her mother and interrogates the critiques of white feminism in Kincaid’s works.

The skepticism of the mother that the child could be a “self-possessed woman” is reminiscent of how a patron often keeps a beneficiary in a subjugated position.

This system of patronage underlies the work of authors Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber. In the seminal text *Just Below South*, which redefines southern studies to include the circum-Caribbean, Shirley Toland-Dix compares the works of Zora Neale Hurston and Erna Brodber, arguing that they “critique the dominant models of ethnographic research itself” (193). Toland-Dix focuses on how Brodber’s character Ella in *Louisiana* bears a striking resemblance to the ethnographer Zora in *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*. Both Brodber and Hurston interrogate scientific objective ethnography by including spirit possession and ritual rites from the Caribbean. Often overlooked in the discussion of ethnography, however, is the role patron(s) play in the research. Embedded in their critique of the broader concepts of western scientific research, both Hurston and Brodber complicate notions of patron/beneficiary in their novels through relationships between the powerful and the powerless.

Brodber’s *Louisiana* reinvents the role of patron by having the subject being studied possess Ella in order to mentor her, while Hurston reinvents definitions of patronage in regards to race and gender in her much-maligned and often-overlooked text, *Seraph on the Suwannee*. These patron reinventions demonstrate the problematic benevolent infantilization so often embedded in patron/beneficiary relationships, which are mapped onto the bodies of women. The female bodies of the protagonists in *Louisiana* and *Seraph on the Suwannee*, Ella and Arvay, respectively, become the sites of colonization until crossing over into the psychic space of the Gulf. Like Kincaid’s depiction of the mother/daughter relationship as emblematic of imperialism, the patron/beneficiary relationship in these novels also represents a site of

colonialization, and the decolonialization occurs in the Gulf—leaving the repressive, colonizing U.S South for the Caribbean.

Both authors present the Caribbean as a potential utopian space to imagine how patronage and mentorship look without the asynchronous power dynamic. The mother-daughter metaphor that Kincaid uses highly gendered because the female body is always the site of patriarchal domination. In the works of Hurston and Brodber, two other systems of patronage also work to interrogate the role of the Caribbean. While coopting the psychic space of the gulf of the Caribbean as a liberating imaginary remains problematic, much like Frankie in her understanding of Cuba in *The Member of the Wedding*, the U.S. South is similarly a space of colonization: “a space simultaneously (or alternately) center and margin, victor and defeated, empire and colony, essentialist and hybrid, northern and southern (both in the global sense)” (Cohn and Smith 9). Both Hurston and Brodber unsettle the binaries of patron/beneficiary, reimagining the strict power dichotomy between races and genders and even ethnographer and subject.

Hurston and Patronage:

Hurston’s own relationship with her patrons, both within the academy, with Franz Boaz, and with her publisher, J.B. Lippincott, heavily influenced her writing. Scholar Susan Meisenhelder details Hurston’s relationship with patron Charlotte Osgood Mason, who continued to insist that Hurston focus on a “primitivism” and essentialist view of blackness (“Conflict and Resistance” 268). During the Harlem Renaissance it was not unusual for white patrons to supply the financial means for artists and authors to support their craft. Typically, the influence of the white patron exerted a request for the black authors to maintain an “exceptionalist” view of black culture. In

his overview of several patron/beneficiary relationships, Bruce Kellner defines the patronage as “refined racism” as the white patron was still defining the role of the artist, and how he or she wanted to view black cultural aesthetics. Hurston addresses the role of publishers in her work in her 1950 essay “What White Publishers Won’t Print.” In this essay, she describes how the publishers only want to print stories of the “exceptional” black person rather than what Hurston wants to write about, which was black middle-class America. Hurston’s critique in “What White Publishers Won’t Print” is relevant to *Seraph on the Suwannee* because Hurston’s use of primarily white characters is an attempt to avoid the constricting demands of her publishers.

Both white patrons and black scholars have critiqued Hurston's switch to writing about white people in *Seraph*. However, *Seraph*, which Mary Helen Washington once called Hurston’s “worst novel” (21), was written as an attempt to reject the constraints of the publishing world that dictated she only write about exceptional African Americans.⁷ Hurston’s turn to writing primarily about white characters was panned by Washington because she suggested Hurston lost all of her folkloric creativity by crafting a novel about white people: “It was as though, in abandoning the source of her unique esthetic—the black cultural tradition—she also submerged her power and creativity” (21). Noting this departure from the black cultural tradition, Hazel V. Carby explains in her afterward that Hurston wanted to prove that she could write about white people, and she wanted to emphasize the “cultural influence” of black culture on white culture (14-16). However, a common critique of *Seraph on the Suwannee* is that the white characters talk “black,” but Hurston’s intentional in her connecting poor white southerners to the black community. By making her protagonists white, she theoretically avoids dealing overtly with

⁷ Claudia Tate notes as well that Hurston had tried to write a book about middle class African-Americans, but her publishers had refused to publish it.

racial discrimination while explaining economic disadvantages. Despite the characters' whiteness, the novel focuses primarily on the exploitation of many characters through patronage.

This seeming acceptance of patronage as benign by Hurston undermined racial protests from fellow writers, and in 1942, Hurston was already beginning to receive backlash for her political beliefs, particularly in regards to her anti-World War II stance. To avoid both these critiques of her pandering to the white audience, and the benevolent infantilization of her patrons, Hurston crafted *Seraph on the Suwannee* to reconfigure understandings of oppression through both race and gender. Upwardly mobile Jim Meserve whisks into the Crackertown of Sawley and rapes and marries Arvay Henson. Jim and Arvay have three children together and amass quite a bit of wealth while exploiting their workers, Joe, and his family. After a brief separation, they reunite on a shrimping boat off the coast of Florida. This reuniting at the end of the text has alternatively been read as either Arvay's submissive acceptance of domination by her controlling husband or her triumphant entry into upper middle-class society.

“The ‘Pet Negro’ System”⁸

Pairing *Seraph* with Hurston's 1942 essay “The ‘Pet Negro’ System” resolves this dichotomous reading. In this essay, Hurston argues that wealthy whites show preferential treatment to one black person, who they deem exceptional. This undefined system allows the whites to continue their systemic racism, while ‘petting’ someone they like. This “pet Negro” system is prevalent throughout *Seraph*, but not just in the white characters' patronage of their pets. Instead, Hurston crafts a marital relationship that mirrors the pet system. The main

⁸ Portions of this section have been adapted from my master's thesis.

character's marriage demonstrates the pet system's coziness and also deeply ingrained "mutual dependencies" ("The 'Pet Negro' System", 915).

Arvay's subservience to Jim is wholly dependent on her entrenchment in this system of patronage. Meisenhelder argues effectively that Hurston demonstrates throughout the novel "a white world whose exploitative hierarchies deny full humanity to all people—male and female, black and white" (115). Meisenhelder defines the exploitative hierarchy of the "pet Negro" system when she explains Arvay's relationship: "Just as being Jim's "pet Negro" (61) does not fundamentally alter Joe's servitude, Arvay's status as pampered "pet angel" only thinly masks her degradation" (96). Meisenhelder recognizes that Arvay's status as Jim's "pet angel" aligns her with Jim's "pet" Joe. However, Meisenhelder does not elaborate on this connection, but rather she focuses on Arvay's eventual acceptance as wholly subservient to Jim. Meisenhelder's view that Arvay surrenders at the end as a "sexless seraph and nurturing mother" (105) differs from the scholars who see Arvay as eventually transforming herself into an assertive wife.

Adrienne Akins and Brannon Costello have claimed that Arvay transforms at the end of the text as a rise in socio-economic standing. Akins suggests Arvay's transformation in the novel is through a rise in her class as Jim molds Arvay into his desired wife (31). Similarly, Costello uses the framework of the "pet Negro" system to explain that Arvay gradually participates within this system and becomes 'noblefied' just like Jim, which allows Hurston to critique systems of class identity (34). However, the transformation of Arvay, as argued by Akins and Costello, from white Cracker to plantation noble, who actively patronizes the pets, has two significant problems. First, from the beginning, Arvay participates in the "pet Negro" system; thus, her transformation is not indicated by her willingness to embrace this system. Secondly, Arvay, regardless of her white heritage, maintains the position of pet throughout the text. Thus, Hurston complicates the

situation by placing a white woman as the “pet Negro” throughout the text, both exposing the nature of the relationship while avoiding an overt critique.

In the “pet Negro” system, Hurston acknowledges that readers will find her explanation of the system infuriating, but she merely questions: “Is it a good thing or a bad thing? Who am I to pass judgment? I am not defending the system, beloved, but trying to explain it” (“The ‘Pet Negro’ System” 919). While hard to believe that Hurston truly has no opinion on the matter, she does seek to examine the complexities of southern race relations. One way for her to examine these complexities is through using the “pet Negro” system as a framework for gender relations as well. Understanding that Arvay never transforms from pet, yet happily chooses a relationship in which she is wholly subject to Jim, does not indicate that Arvay’s entire life is a critique of this system. In fact, Arvay’s final position keeps her as a satisfied ‘pet’. Hurston recognizes that this system is not attractive, but that it suits Arvay well. Hurston writes in “The ‘Pet Negro’ System”: “Now, my beloved, before you explode in fury you might look to see if you merely know your phrases. It happens that there are more angles to this race-adjustment business than are ever pointed out to the public, white, black or in-between” (“The ‘Pet Negro’ System” 914). The complexity of Arvay’s situation as a pet wife who eventually lives quite comfortably reflects Hurston’s acknowledgement that this patron system works for the beneficiaries. Hurston notes the unpopularity of admitting that such a system has its advantages, but also she recognizes that the beneficiaries utilize these benefits: “It isn’t half as pretty as the ideal adjustment of theorizers, but it’s a lot more real and durable, and a lot of black folks, I’m afraid, find it mighty cosy” (“The ‘Pet Negro’ System” 915).

While Hurston is analyzing the complicit racial relations, the pet system is extended to include not only different races but also genders. The “pet Negro” system can apply to white

characters because Hurston continually troubles the idea of race. Hurston describes herself as pet and petter of others, which crosses both racial and gender roles. Using the “pet Negro” framework to understand Arvey provides readers with an opportunity to understand how and why Arvey ultimately chooses ‘to serve’ Jim. Advocating that Arvey willingly returns to submission can be problematic. However, the unspoken rules of the system include the white person consistently advocating for the success of his pet above all other pets. In fact, the white person always believes that the pet is the absolute exception to their race, often indicating that if all others were as special as his pet,⁹ then he would be for the advancement of the race. The exceptional pet transcends any other stipulations of race because he is smart and honest, exceeding all other expectations as well because something is inherently different about him than anyone else (3). This inherent difference is merely the fact that he has a relationship with the white patriarch.

In addition to explaining how the system benefits the pet, Hurston also argues that the pet actively and willingly participates in the system. A key component of the system is the white patron must be held in high regard by the pet. Thus, the pet feels blessed and respected by the system, and will “chase that white person back on to his pedestal” in order for the white patron to maintain the status worthy of having a pet. In her explanation, Hurston is careful to say she does not advocate the system, but that it is “mighty cozy” (915). After explaining how this system works, Hurston spends time explaining how sometimes a person of color might “pet” a white person. Thus, it is not simply a system of white patronage that is accepted, but rather the reverse

⁹ Complicating this discussion of pet is how Arvey as a white woman as pet differs with the connotation of pet and beast as so often ascribed to black masculinity. For example, see Marlon B. Ross’s discussion of the trope of the black pet in his work *Manning the Race: Reforming Black Men in the Jim Crow Era*.

relationship is possible. If an African American can pet a white man, then it is not a question of race consciousness, but rather a question of power.

Complicating this power dynamic, Hurston also extends the system to include herself and others “petting” white people. Hurston explains “And mind you, the Negroes have their white pets, so to speak. It works both ways. Class-consciousness of Negroes is an angle to be reckoned with in the South” (“The ‘Pet Negro’ System” 915). In the magazine, Hurston describes having white pets, but she uses the qualifier, “so to speak”. She then proceeds to explain that it is important that the patrons are of a high class. In this way, Hurston does not ignore the idea that African Americans are concerned about class. Her published version mentions that this class-consciousness and petting exists. However, her handwritten holograph, with portions transcribed, examine this relationship more fully and more forcefully:

Oh, yes, we pet white people too. Our own white friends are just fine. There are no more like that. We just can't see what the other negro across the way sees in that white person he is cloacking up with. It isn't as if they were like Mr. Joe and Mr. Bert. Out of this inability to see what the other man sees, comes the majority of the charges of “Tomming”...Myself, I have a number of pet white people. For years and years, I have been petting Fanny Hurst, Dr. Franz Boas, Ruthe Benedict, Dr. Carita Dogget Corse, Bob Wunsch, Dr. Henry Allen Moe, Frank Bert Lippincott, Robert Nathan, Annie Nathan Meyer, and Jane Belo, of the Texas Belos, and some others. You cant tell me a word against them, I don't care how black you come. If you cant find something good to say about them, don't bring the mess up. I don't want to hear it... (Yale Library, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, 1030524)

The published versions, both in the book and the magazine, reflect the idea of the system being cozy, but the specific names as well as the identification of African Americans as “petters” is mostly left out. However, notably, this blatant exposition of patronage, thanking her helpers, is actually a place in the text where she examines and argues that she “pets” her patrons, thus reversing the system. While it is possible that Hurston says this to expose the system without accusing patronage, her calling out of others who have pets suggests otherwise. For instance,

Hurston exclaims that she “pets” Fannie Hurst, who was the patron who scholars have critiqued the obsequious nature of Hurston’s relationship with her. In fact, Patterson contends “Hurston’s obsequious behavior toward her “godmother” and her other patrons was one way she coped with the humiliation of having to play the primitive for the master” (180). However, Hurston is certainly not describing herself as the ‘primitive’ in these deleted portions. Perhaps, the publishers did not want to acknowledge the power Hurston had over them. Raynaud also queries “But why were Zora’s lists of thank-yous her autobiographical text as “reconnaissance de dettes” kept to bare minimum? Might it be because the litany of names too blatantly exposed the system of patronage and its exploitation of a young black woman’s creative talent?” (47). While she remains ever contradictory, in her writing she allows for no mistake that she is still negotiating power within this mentor structure.

Arvay as Pet

Similarly, Arvay Meserve is not gaining status by the end of the novel, but recognizing and negotiating her position as ‘pet’. This status as ‘pet’ emphasizes Arvay’s role in securing her place as the pet and protecting it, which makes her a complicit part of the patronage system. This inclusion of Arvay as a pet emphasizes that this pet system is not just an unfair system of patronage in the relationship of the races in the South, but rather a system in which characters all play their part.¹⁰ Furthermore, this portrayal of Arvay allows for Hurston to critique and examine the system without necessarily being accused of raging against the white patriarchy. This system is unfair; Arvay is constantly in service to Jim. However, Arvay is not an ‘exceptional’ woman

¹⁰ While my reading focuses on Arvay being included as a pet, another example of non-African-American pets is the Corregio family who later works for Jim Meserve and receives special attention.

rising above her class status as Jim asserts, rather she is participating in this system as her only option. By destabilizing the idea of the exceptional, Hurston can critique a system that needs to rely on patronage while still accepting her own complicity within patronage. Hurston destabilizes the idea of the exceptional pet, which undermines the dominant focus of publishers at the time. Demonstrating that Arvay is not exceptional calls into question the role of the exceptional pet. Hurston defines one of the most important characteristics in her essay is that the “pet Negro,” “is someone whom a particular white person or persons wants to have and to do all the things forbidden to other Negroes” (“The ‘Pet Negro’ System” 915). As soon as Jim comes to the Arvay’s hometown of Sawley, he designates Arvay as his pet as well as the woman he wants to date. Jim comes from outside of the community and infiltrates the town as if he has the status of an aristocratic white man despite actually having no money. He operates as a patron within this system of patriarchy and decides that while he will raise his status, he can also lift Arvay to a higher class. Without ever giving a reason, he claims she is somehow different than the white crackers and tells everyone: “She just suited him...and was worth the trouble of breaking in” (Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee* 8). Jim acts as if this “breaking in” of Arvay is a requirement in making her his pet, and also notes that there is something different about her in that she has deeply changed him: “You have made me see into something that I don’t reckon you understand yourself” (17). He claims that Arvay is different than everyone else. According to Hurston, this notion that she is somehow different than all others reflects that within the pet system the patron always maintains that his pet or “his John is different” (“The ‘Pet Negro’ System” 915). Jim decides to pull Arvay out from her town and current financial situation, but he does not help elevate anyone else within the white society of Sawley.

The pet system rejects the idea of class or racial uplift through community engagement. Arvey becomes Jim's pet, and he believes she is the only one who should be elevated; similarly patrons of the 'pet' system do not believe in promoting the race as a whole, only their pet. Hurston explains, "If all the Negroes were like them he wouldn't mind what advancement they made" (916). But, the advancement does not extend past the exception. According to Arvey later in the text, Jim argues, "folks are the slums instead of the places they live in...Place some folks in what is called slums and they'll soon make things look like a mansion. Place a slum in a mansion and he'll soon have it looking just as bad as he do" (Hurston, *Seraph on the Suwanee* 304-305). To Jim, Arvey is the exception to the white crackers, much like 'John' is always the exception to the others. Later in the text Jim asserts that he always recognized Arvey was "due a much higher place" (263). He rescues her from the 'slums' of her location and places her on a higher pedestal in connection with him. In the patron's mind, their pet is always due a higher place than their origins. In reality, according to the other patrons, the pet remains from their same class.

In order for this system to work, the patron must be from the upper white class according to Hurston's definitions. Jim claims status from his family background despite his lack of wealth, and Hurston highlights his class by initially associating him with Bradford Cary in the novel (20). Jim mimics Cary's behavior with his wife as he learns to partake in the same system. Interestingly, the example patron that Hurston uses in her essay is also named Cary: "Colonel Cary swings a lot of weight in his community" ("The 'Pet' Negro System" 915). Jim's connection to Cary places him in the role of patron, and Arvey notes this connection. She enjoys his attention and revels in his attention, often noting how he treats her like Cary treats his wife. Although this recognition is a reflection that Arvey wishes to be above the other women in the

text, namely her sister who has always been favored above her. Arvay's association with herself being like Cary's wife seems to indicate that she understands the situation. Scholars often reference Arvay's dumbness and inability to participate within the pet system as a patron until much later in the text.¹¹ However, Arvay recognizes the system and acts as a pet.

In Arvay's relationship with Jim, she positions herself in the same relationship as the pets. Scholar Delia Caparosa Konzett, in her analysis of the changing race relations, believes that Jeff, the son of Joe who is Jim's pet, represents the changing status of the 'pet' system. Konzett argues, "In the character of Jeff and his difference to his father, Hurston depicts the ongoing transformations in the Southern racial hierarchy and suggests the real possibility of the pet system becoming, like the Old South, an anachronism" (142). However, Joe's son, Jeff, only differs in his behavior to Arvay because Arvay does not see herself as above a pet. The system is fully replicated for the younger generation. Kenny, Jim's son, treats Belinda, Joe's daughter, as his pet. Kenny exploits Belinda's headstand capabilities by charging money for others to see her because Belinda was not wearing panties. While Kenny's mistake is perhaps unintentional, he embarrasses Arvay's sense of propriety. When Arvay tells Jim about the incident, he laughs. Arvay is upset that Jim is not concerned about the incident, and she assumes that Jim's loyalty to Joe dictates his response. Arvay completely misses Jim's lack of concern for Belinda's exploitation, but seemingly so does Arvay. Instead, Arvay makes this event about how Jim won't punish Belinda because he trusts Joe. Neither Arvay nor Jim stand up for Belinda. Instead, Jim's response focuses on Arvay's jealousy: "This baby-wife I got can't stand for her husband to think well of anybody but her...Look, Little-Bits, I think as much of you as God does of Gabriel, and you know that's His pet angel. But...But Joe is my helper" (113). Jim refers clearly to Arvay as a

¹¹ Ann DuCille argues that Arvay participates in the system because she is mimicking the part of a southern woman (32).

pet here but argues that the relationship is different than his relationship with Joe. However, Arvay misunderstands the relationship, not because she doesn't understand the patriarchal pet system in general, but because Jim treats her like a pet. While Jim elevates Arvay to the status of angel to console or dismantle her jealousy, she is still the pet angel—a pet that is treated like an angel but still characterized in a benevolent infantilization.

Arvay accepts her apparent successful elevation when Jim claims that she is above Joe. She thinks “As much as Jim thought of Joe, she had more power over her husband than Joe had” (113). Arvay's main desire is that she will be respected enough by her husband. Arvay equates herself with the ‘pets’. However, her estimation of herself as a pet is not her inability to recognize the system. Instead, her return to Jim at the end of the novel is not her moving beyond a pet; rather, Arvay accepts this relationship. Part of this acceptance of her role as pet, is due, in part, to the potential utopic space of the Gulf that Hurston crafts.

Arvay becomes better at accepting her position with her relationship with Jeff and his wife. She gives them gifts as an imitation of Jim; she is not a changed woman, merely accepting her role. While scholars usually tend to view this as an act to participate in the patronage system¹², Jeff and Janie treat Arvay as an equal. She travels to their house in the backyard and “came to the steps and stood there looking up at them and smiling like a child” (311). She smiles like a child because she recognizes that they hold her in contempt, and she must make amends. However, she also seems to finally accept that she cannot place herself above them. Arvay is not in control of the situation or have any power over Jeff and Janie. In response, Jeff and Janie comment, “you felt for us and remembered us. Made us feel like we amount to something with you. We feel proud and glad to work around you” (312). While they claim to be pleased to be

Adrienne Akins also indicates that Arvay becomes like Jim when she gives presents to Jeff and Janie, which indicates Arvay accepts her rise in social class (5).

treated well by her, they do not gain their sense of worth or well-being from her. She is not their patron, and they don't see her as a status to be proud to work for her. Instead, they are merely glad to 'work around' her, not for her. This relationship is a partnership rather than a patronage.

In the resolution of the novel, Arvay returns to the shrimping boat on the Gulf where Jim is working after a separation. Jim essentially mandates their separation because he does not feel that Arvay loves him enough or treats him well after she fails to save him from a snake. However, after their time apart, she is still unable to demand Jim reconcile with her: "was still too unsure of herself to put down any ultimatums on Jim" (116). Arvay merely becomes exactly what Jim has asked of her until they get on the boat. Jim delivers an ultimatum that she must return to him before a year is over in order to 'win' him back. Once Arvay tells Jeff she wants to see Jim, Jeff whisks her away. While with Jim, her attempts to win him back are orchestrated exactly as he wants. Like Jamaica Kincaid's depiction of the mother and child, the mother maintains that her child will not really succeed in this role. Scholar Ann duCille states that Arvay is playing a game and actively participating in this farce. However, Arvay's behavior towards Jim is so timid that it is difficult to believe that she merely acts in playing a ritual. Instead, Arvay actively playing a role would only be the role of Jim's helper. She fully understands her role as pet and colonized helper.

On the boat, Jim wants to show Arvay the sunrise in an early morning storm, but a sailor clings to his leg out of fear which prevents Jim from successfully mastering the boat. Arvay, in her only moment of agency, for once without hesitation, responds as "she flung the door open, leaped upon the Mate and grabbed him by his hair to pull him away from Jim's leg" (346). This episode parallels an earlier scene when a snake wraps around Jim's body, and Arvay fails to move. She is paralyzed by her fear and cannot move. Jeff saves Jim from the snake, and then this

time, Arvey tears the man away unlike the snake. This scene further equates Arvey with Jeff, and she accepts her position as pet. Jim has asked Arvey to understand her role and relationship, while also insisting that she remain in this subservient place. He simultaneously wants her to act while also only acting exactly as he wants. Jim is devastated by Arvey's inability to act the first time, which is an unrealistic expectation for a patron who has conditioned the pet. While this appears to be Arvey acting with agency and responding to a situation of her own volition, it still has her acting as Jim's pet much like Jeff.

Afterwards, Arvey cannot even voice her requests to Jim even if they are requests for merely to be in the same room as him. Arvey's simple requests to act as his wife again as essentially a partner in a relationship are completely subsumed her fear. Physically, she cannot even speak. When Arvey asks Jim to come be with her inside the ship, she states "You can't go below" she stumbled out. "You got to..." (346). But, Jim refuses to acknowledge Arvey's advances and simply tells her not to give him orders. Basically, Arvey's relationship with Jim only changes in that Arvey's role as pet becomes something she can understand. Arvey claims "all these years and time, Jim had been feeling his way towards her and grasping at her as she had been towards him. This was a wonderful and powerful thing to know, but she must not let him know what she had perceived" (349). But she knows that she must remain wholly subservient to Jim in order for the relationship to maintain this seemingly benevolent infantilization. The peace that she gains in the end derives from her realization: "She was serving and meant to serve" (353). Arvey finally recognizes that Jim loves her and this love is "wonderful and powerful," this love is not actual agency. Furthermore, she hides this knowledge so that she does not upset the equilibrium of their relationship's power dynamics. Instead, she maintains her status as essentially a colonized subject.

Scholars of *Seraph* often define the ending of the novel as Arvay's choice to be a subservient wife and mother to Jim.¹³ However, I argue that Arvay's return is due to her inability to leave the "pet Negro" system. Arvay is always entirely reliant on Jim and is fully under the care of her patron and colonizer. The only time the relationship seems to have any equity or parity is in the boat on the ocean. While this is in some ways similar to the equity Janie shares with Tea Cake while working on the muck in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the relationship does not mirror one of romantic love; instead, Arvay gains a semblance of power in which she becomes the mother of Jim. Scholars focus on how Arvay saves Jim from his servant in the same fashion that she had failed to save him from a snake which had led to their earlier separation. Then, she enters into a relationship where she recognizes that he is trembling and reaching out to her with fear as well. However, it's not just that Arvay finally recognizes that Jim sacrifices for her and longs to be with her, nor is it merely that she becomes unparalyzed in that moment. Instead, the ensuing moments after Arvay saves Jim, they are immediately thrust out onto the ocean, crossing the bar, into both natural peace in the ocean and peace in their relationship: "She had never been so frightened in her life as she was now. The boat gave another shudder and then a leap, and glided out onto the calm waters of the Atlantic" (330). Thus, the ship and the ocean become the only place where Arvay is "enchanted" (330). She also describes entering the ocean like giving birth:

The sea vastness, the unobstructed glory of the rising sun, the delicate and forming colors on horizon and sea made new sensations for Arvay. She felt herself stretching and extending with her surroundings. Her eyesight seemed better, and her hearing more keen. The fear that she had experienced while crossing the bar was like a birth-pain. It was already forgotten and gone. 331

¹³ Jackson argues Arvay embraces "universal motherhood" (15) Deborah Plant argues that it is Arvay's choice because she can fully embrace happiness (130). Janet St. Clair also contends that it is Arvay's choice to return to, and she is "affirming her own identity" to return to a happy marriage (55). Claudia Tate also writes that Arvay "assumes the role of omnipotent mother" (156).

Crossing the bar for Arvay represents new life, not just in that her fear washes away immediately like a birth-pain, but because crossing into the psychic space of the Gulf frees her from her previously colonized experience. Up until this moment, Arvay never fully understands her relationship with Jim, but her body stretching and extending is her being birthed into a new understanding, where she finally sees herself as an equal participant in her relationship with Jim. While this scene can be read as Arvay entering into another realm of motherhood, as mother to Jim, I argue that this crossing the bar frees her body from giving birth to children. Previously, in a way, Arvay's body was colonized by her children, but as she gives birth and crosses the bar, the system of patronage is partially broken. Arvay immediately forgets and submerges her fear and pain. The Atlantic simultaneously releases her from her fear and washes her into a new relationship. This image of the ocean becomes a utopia for Arvay and Jim, a utopia with potentially reversed roles as Arvay mothers Jim. However, the hope of this new relationship is tempered by the overarching theme of patronage. Despite Arvay's change in relationship with Jim, she can never fully escape the 'pet' system. The Gulf of the Atlantic offers temporary relief from the patronage system, a space of forgetting the power dynamics and potential utopian space.

Hurston prefigures writers like Toni Morrison and Gloria Naylor who also envision the space of the Atlantic as utopic, and the coopting of the psychic space of the gulf remains problematic. In fact, the imperialist strains of harnessing the power of the Caribbean as the integral part of crossing the bar figures into the problematic imperialist narratives of the Caribbean's indebtedness to the United States. In her recent ground-breaking article, Patricia Stuelke examines how these narratives of the Caribbean in black women's literature match the neoliberal logic of the time:

Through an examination of the relationship of black feminist literature to Reagan's neoliberal nostalgia for a lost free Caribbean, I suggest that US black feminism's matriarchal myths of reclaiming the Caribbean participated in the transition to neoliberal capitalism, creating a compelling vision of the Caribbean as a timeless, eroticized paradise that effaced the Caribbean revolutionary present in favor of a free-market future and precluded US black feminists from constructing solidarity with revolutionary Grenadian women. (118)

Similar to Stuelke's analysis of the economic changes in the 1980s, Rhoda Reddock, who does an extensive study on the history of women's groups throughout the mid-twentieth century, explains the neoliberal policies developing in the 80s as a response to the economic crisis experienced in the 1970s. According to Reddock, the policies enacted by Ronald Reagan to strengthen the threatened economy due to the rising oil prices resulted in changes to the Caribbean as well, which I will address more fully in my next chapter. However, like Stuelke's argument about the neoliberal policies affecting black nonfiction authors, Morrison, Naylor, and Brodber are the literary side of this equation. Reddock explains that the economic crisis of the 1980s resulted in widespread economic turmoil in the Caribbean due to "years of colonial exploitation and structural inequalities" (65). Like Jamaica Kincaid's earlier explanation of colonial power differences, Brodber revisits Hurston's work on anthropology to assess these patronage concerns. Contemporary to Morrison and Naylor, Erna Brodber continues this tradition of recognizing the possibility of the Atlantic to unsettle binary relationships between patronage and western notions of scientific research.

Brodber's *Louisiana* contradicts western rules of historiography through the story of ethnographer Ella Townsend who works for the Works Program Administration, receiving a tape recorder and a task to interview Mammy King. After their first session, Mammy dies and leaves her soul with Ella, whose project changes from one of overt anthropology to a process of

discovering her own Caribbean roots and eventually her role as a seer in New Orleans. She only seems to achieve power once she is restoring the stories lost in the crossing of the Atlantic. Similar to Hurston, who rejected the objective role of the ethnographer and contradicted her patron, Franz Boaz, in *Louisiana*, Ella ultimately rejects this anthropological way of life in favor of being a seer. However, the true power dynamic established is between Mammy and Ella rather than in connection with Ella's academic patron. Mammy's control over Ella calls in to question the alleged hope and peace found through communal engagement at the end of the text. Moreover, Ella's ultimate exhaustion and disintegration of her body complicate the positive potentialities of the African diaspora. As Lisa Hinrichsen notes, "Brodbber questions fantasies about scientific objectivity and anthropological spectatorship and works to dissolve the hierarchical binaries upon which illusions about mastery depend" (164). Brodbber also works to dismantle the hierarchical binaries of not only scientific understanding but the role between interviewer and interviewee. Like Arvay's contested subordinate role with Jim, Ella's relationship with Mammy upends notions of anthropological spectatorship.

Throughout *Louisiana*, Ella is often controlled by Mammy. From the very beginning of the novel, Ella admits that Mammy was "totally in charge" (19) as they each try to ascertain the others' origins while playing a game of cards. Mammy is described here like a trickster who continues to confound Ella both during the game and during the interview. Meanwhile, Ella reverts back to being a little girl who cannot outwit or outplay Mammy. Their relationship always involves a discussion of power and control. Ella pleads, "And Mammy, what we want to know, to be truthful, what those people want to know, but as it happens, I want to know too, is what life was like for you" (17). Ella's own interest in Mammy is hedged around her responsibilities. This wavering between self and scholarship becomes a central concern of the

text. Ella explains to Mammy that this is her job, and Mammy interrogates her, "Little bread and butter and 'them' is all you can think about?" Mammy immediately sets up a dichotomy between them (scholars, patrons, bosses) and Ella. Ella replies, "- The thing is now personal and certainly un-scholastic" (22). The tension between Mammy and Ella parallels the tension between fiction and scientific procedure, what Mammy calls "high science" (21). While Ella works to remain an objective researcher, Mammy refuses to let her remain outside the relationship. Rather than be a spectator, Ella becomes integrally connected to Mammy and her sister, Lowly. This connection further rejects the notion of the researcher as having control over the researched.

Ella Townsend as Louisiana complicates our understanding of the patron because she is simultaneously commissioned by the Workers Program Administration while also her body is commandeered by Mammy King. Her complex working relationship is both with those in power over her academic scholarship, as well as Mammy who quite literally inhabits and controls her body, "leaving her soul" with Ella (38). Scholar Denise deCarries Narain describes this possession "as an invasion of her body," but she argues that the possession "fills her with multiple possibilities" (111). While Narain originally posits this possession as more hopeful than other possessions in Brodber's texts, she ultimately argues that Brodber moves away from "the messy corporeality of the female body towards a more abstracted, or disembodied, notion of the female body" (114). However, while this possession initially gives Ella her powers, she is ultimately wearied from this experience. Thus, Mammy King helps Louisiana come into her own as she recovers her own stories and becomes the seer, but Mammy also plays a frustrating dual role in controlling Ella. Scholar Vera M. Kutzinski notes this control of Ella claiming that she "at least initially, appears to have little choice in the matter" (184). Mammy's control of Ella

complicates Ella's own agency in research as well as her own understanding of her role. The role of rational, objective observer is destroyed through her body becoming the site of knowledge.

Knowledge through Body Possession

While Ella's agency is contested, her body becomes the site of knowledge. Ella has little control, and Kinitra Brooks explains this crossing over experience as a positive, triumphant connection between Ella and the venerable sisters:

Becoming Louisiana prepared her to become a full conduit for the story of Mammy and Lowly. In turn, the release of their story prepares Louisiana for her own crossing-over. Ella incurs only a physical death; her spirit lives, transcendent and joining Mammy and Lowly on the other side (42).

Brodber's portrayal of Ella Townsend in *Louisiana* suggests different ways of knowing than normative western masculine rational understandings often allow. Ella initially uses a tape recorder to document the voices from the grave, the voices that are speaking to her as well as inhabiting her body. This possession ultimately allows Ella to become Louisiana and to see herself as a conduit, not just for Mammy but for others as well:

That hole, that passage is me. I am the link between the shores washed by the Caribbean sea, a hole, yet I am what joins your left hand to your right. I join the world of the living and the world of spirits. I join the past with the present. In me Louise and Sue Ann are joined. Say Suzie Anna as Louise calls Mammy. Do you hear Louisiana there? Now say Lowly as Mammy calls Louise and follow that with Anna as Louise sometimes calls Mammy. Lowly-Anna. There's Louisiana again, particularly if you are lisp-tongued as you could well be. Or you could be Spanish and speak of those two venerable sisters as Louise y Anna. I was called in Louisiana, a state in the USA. Sue Ann lived in St. Mary, Louisiana, and Louise in St. Mary, Louisiana, Jamaica. Ben is from there too. I am Louisiana. I wear a solid pendant with a hole through its centre. I look through this hole and I can see things. Still I am Mrs. Ella Kohl, married to a half-caste Congolese reared in Antwerp by a fairy godfather. I wear long loose fitting white dresses in summer and long black robes over them in winter. I am Louisiana. I give people their history. I serve God and the venerable sisters. 124-125

In this lengthy passage, Ella explains the slippery nature of identity and location. Her name is the venerable sisters' names together and as they call each other, as well as Spanish. Ella embodies all the mismatched locations of both living in New Orleans, where she practices, as well as being the wife of a man who is esteemed for his European, Belgian upbringing despite the fact that he's a half-caste Congolese. She is the embodiment of these seemingly disparate polarities while still allowing people to come to her so that she can see their past. Through her body, she is able to give back those stories that have been lost, forgotten, erased, or altered via the Atlantic. After Ella's rediscovery of her own Jamaican ancestry and connections to the African diaspora, she embarks on a journey that ultimately allows her to become a conduit for not only her own history but others as well. While Shirley Toland-Dix focuses on Louisiana's body as the embodiment of Mammy, Ella's body is also the physical link between the Caribbean and New Orleans. Scholar Denis deCaires Narain examines how originally Ella receives messages from the recorder and then shifts to receiving messages via her pendant. In her evaluation of *Louisiana* as a feminist text in comparison with her other novels, she argues,

The shift in symbols represents Ella's ability to assert some control over her 'calling', but it is interesting that both symbols are articulated in ways suggestive of female sexuality. The hole in the middle of the pendant is suggestive of both Ella's 'sex' and of her childlessness, but neither image gels with the kind of overflowing boundaries associated with 'écriture feminine' or with the assertion of the body language and rhythms associated with a Creole ethos...instead this image suggests an increasingly abstract of disembodied, symbolizing of the community's 'voice' (113).

According to Narain, Ella has minimal agency in controlling her calling and instead is conditioned to the needs of others. To some extent, the Atlantic becomes the hole in the pendant, the linking, the tragic erasure of a past history as well as the beautiful linked body of a white-

robed woman. Much like she changes her garments, she is able to exist in both worlds: the world of the past with the world of the present.

In addition to Ella's body and research being co-opted by Mammy, Ella's body is simultaneously a site of knowledge. She renders story and knowledge through the process of her crossing over. Evelyn M. Hammonds explains, "Black feminist theorists are themselves engaged in a process of fighting to reclaim the body—the maimed immoral black female body—which can be and still is used by others to discredit them as producers of knowledge and as speaking subjects" (12). Brodber reclaims the body as producer of knowledge. In academic research, non-traditional ways of knowing are often dismissed, and this dismissal carries over into our understandings of archives as well, which I will return to in my explanation of Marcus Garvey archives. The non-traditional ways of knowing for Ella are through her body being possessed by Mammy and her role as researcher.

A Different Kind of Historian

As both scholar and seer, Ella complicates the notion of being disconnected from one's research. In an article titled, "Me and My Head-Hurting Fiction" Erna Brodber herself explains that there are different kinds of historians:

—the kind of historian who gives the ordinary people their history. Then there is the book that deals with social science methodology—the problem I have seen, of the native anthropologist who cannot, as anthropology likes to advise its students, separate him-or herself from the field, for they are the field and cannot return to middle America or to Europe with data to be made into a thesis (123).

In this description, Brodber speaks to the complexity of the researcher as both with/ and in the field. Brodber works to unsettle the binary between history and fiction when it comes to understanding the Caribbean connections. While Brodber remains hopeful for this process, she

acknowledges the difficulty in establishing these connections. When asked how she would define “orthodox history,” she claims:

I mean the history that can be checked out, as the historian does. I would like to write the orthodox history of people like me, the blacks of the diaspora, but where is the material? Where is the data? That has always been a problem. Also, because most of the time that I have been writing and thinking, I have not had a steady job. I haven’t had the resources. So I do what I can through the fiction—I put a lot of research, and a lot of history, in the fiction. Some of the connections are guesses—I have data, but I can’t make a straight connection, because I do not have the piece that is needed. So the connections are often fictional. (Brodber qtd in Abrams)

Thus, Brodber asks for a working partnership and relationship between these psychic connections and “orthodox history.” Brodber herself teeters between this acceptance of “orthodox history” and non-western, notions of knowing. In 1987, Erna Brodber wrote a piece for the *Jamaica Journal* in which she explains the necessary shift in focusing on the Jamaican people involved in Garveyism:

It is the intention of this essay to move away from the examination of Garvey and Garveyism and focus instead on the Jamaican people who were in the crowds around Garvey and from whom he might even have got the psychic support which gave him the strength to operate on non-Jamaican soil. (67)

This psychic support is primarily, I argue, what Brodber attempts to understand and unpack in *Louisiana*. This psychic support is demonstrated by the ability of Ella to restore lost stories to those in New Orleans without the traditional definitive notions of history. Brodber herself is also restoring the lost voices of the Garvey movement. As June E. Roberts points out, “In this case she allegorically restores the lost voices of the millions of rank-and-file Garvey supporters worldwide, through the stories of (Mammy) Anna Grant King, a denizen of rural Louisiana and Louise (Lowly) Grant—lost seemingly forever to historical neglect” (256). Mammy and Lowly stand in for the women of the Garvey movement so often forgotten in historical records. For example, in that same *Jamaica Journal* article, Brodber quotes a woman from Jamaica that she

interviewed who spoke of Garvey as “the first man that start to make us open our eyes was that man, the black man there from St. Ann” (70). Similarly, Cou Meme is described as “But it wasn’t until she went to a Garvey meeting that Cou Meme moved from knowing herself to be black in colour to an awareness of herself as part of a group which had a particular kind of relationship to other groups in the society. Cou Meme became politicized then” (71). Garvey’s consciousness raising for Cou Meme is similar to Mammy’s consciousness-raising in *Ella*. While in her research, Brodber focuses on how Garvey was the politicizing force, within the text, the politicizing force is also a place.

In *Louisiana*, a place acts as the politicizing force rather than a person. Chicago politicizes Mammy and Lowly much like Garvey’s role with Cou Meme: “Could be just a land of loud-mouthed sunshine you were looking for though back here in that Chicago cold. Whatever it was, you forced me to think. Not just more, deeper. You dragged everything from me that Cuba had told me about. Chicago had forced race on you” (142). In the text, Chicago is the focal point of Mammy’s and Lowly’s work with the Garvey movement. In a way, Brodber conflates Chicago with Garvey as Chicago forces someone to think, to go deeper, to become politicized. Chicago signifies broader race concerns, and Cuba here also stands in for the idealized Caribbean providing a revolutionary spirit for Mammy and Lowly.

Brodber’s interrogation of ways of knowing and historical insight carries over to archival research as well. As Brodber has mentioned, she lacked the resources to provide in-depth “orthodox history” of the Caribbean connections and even the Pan-African movement, so she attempted to accomplish this via history. Ashley D. Farmer notes the lost histories of many of the women connected to the work of Pan-Africanism. Farmer traces the political activism of two

women who began their career as part of Marcus Garvey's initial team in the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

Similar to the research that Erna Brodber provides on Cou Meme, the archives of Thomas W. Harvey, with many of Marcus Garvey's papers, which are primarily letters from president of the United Negro Improvement Association, Thomas W. Harvey, point to the same concerns that Erna Brodber mentions in her own sociology study, mainly that the archives support a description of the failure and the financial concerns of the UNIA. For example, a typical piece of data is a member commenting about her dues. In addition to the financial concerns, Brodber also points out that much of the focus has been on the philosophies of Garvey and Garveyism rather than the people themselves. However, Brodber's commitment to the role of Garvey, or even the role of the city of Chicago, speaks to the importance of the movement and its lasting effects regardless of loss of members.

While Garvey politicizes, awakens, and self-actualizes these three black conscious women, this politicization ultimately wearies Ella, who becomes exhausted from this project. The withering away of her body suggests the failure of this potential Pan-Africanism. Brodber's text examines the relationships between the Caribbean and New Orleans advocating for an African diaspora. Brodber explains that she wanted to focus on Garvey:

And I wanted the people in the book to be doing the Marcus Garvey back to Africa thing, because I believe that African Americans of the South were very important to the Garvey movement. When I read Tony Martin's book on Garvey I realized that Louisiana had more Garvey units than anywhere else in the world. I told that to my colleague, Carolyn Cooper, and she got goose pimples all over her skin.

Erna Brodber explains her own process and decision in writing *Louisiana*. Brodber comments that she wrote *Louisiana* after hearing a story about Queen Mother Moore who received

someone's spirit as they were passing away which inspired her to write about Ella receiving Mammy's body:

And the other thing was that I needed the spirit of the passing to move from one person to the other—so that as one person's physical body dies, the spirit enters the body of another, and I just didn't know how to do it. One day I picked up the newspaper and read that Queen Mother Moore [a leader of the Universal Negro Improvement Association and founding leader of the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women] had come to Jamaica to be with a friend of hers who was passing, a nurse. And they described how it works, that one person puts the palm of their hand on the other's upturned forearm and strokes down to the fingertips. And I said, "Oh my God, here it is! It's just been given to me." So significant things like that, the things that you wanted to do, were just there for you to pick up. I was lucky. (Brodber qtd. in Abrams)

Queen Mother Moore was also an activist who worked for Garvey in New Orleans and New York.

The earliest reference to Queen Mother Moore in Marcus Garvey's archives refer to her as Audrey Moore Warner because she was briefly married to someone with the last name Warner. However, this reference to her is not positive, as Mrs. Clark of the New Orleans division warns President Sherrill: "Mrs. Audley Moore Warner of New York. She was a member of the UNIA when Mr. Garvey was here. She then went to New York. She is now back in this city and trying her level best to set up the Sons and Daughters of Ethiopia, and she wants to set it up in 400." His response was that he knew Audley Moore Warner, and "she tries to get in everything." This discussion between Sherrill and Clark is fairly indicative of the consistent in-fighting seen throughout the letters especially in the New Orleans district.

Sixteen years later, on June 28, 1972, a new president wrote a letter to Queen Mother stating that she could not go with her to represent the "UNIA at the World Conference of African Women in Dar Es Alaam." However, the president was "sure in your infinite wisdom you will protect our intrest [sic] beyond all eles [sic]" The interests of the UNIA needed to be protected in contrast to the other organizations and clubs, which emphasizes that Queen Mother Moore was

now an accepted member, in spite of her other interests. By the late 1970s Queen Mother Moore is thrown a party by the UNIA documented by a party invite poster. Even Queen Mother Moore's activity with the UNIA emphasizes the important work that *Louisiana* insists is necessary in having a communal voice. Community engagement, hope, and ultimate change are the focus of the venerable sisters despite the failing of these records. In the epilogue, Reuben, Ella's husband comments, "I know now what she knows: mammy would not tell the president nor his men her talk for it was not hers; she was no hero. It was a tale of cooperative action; it was a community tale. We made it happen" (161). While this is ultimately positive, the failure of Garvey, the archival neglect, and the bodily exhaustion of Ella colors the tale of community restoration and hope.

The hopeful cooperative tale of community action in *Louisiana* as told through the body of Ella fails through the disintegration of her body. The organization of the U.N.I.A. demonstrates these same patronage problems—as in those in power mentoring the members of the group ultimately fail because of in-fighting—demonstrates the role women played in pan-Africanism and using the seer-body to resist colonization.

While Ella's body gives out so do the records of the archives. Her husband finally concludes that while he tried to move Ella to Jamaica to be buried, he was unable to do so "...I felt that her burial in their island and hopefully with them present would be the best gift I could give her. Too much red tape" (165). Reuben's own project of restoration is hindered by the red tape that he encounters much like the complex archival records that have been lost.

Louisiana considers how the construction of archives and ethnographic research simultaneously both reentrenches established histories but may possibly excavate and make visible these voices that have been lost. Ultimately, while this "orthodox history" points to the

failure of the pan-African movement, it also points to the need for focusing on the lasting psychic support or effects of these global movements. Despite these problems, the Caribbean as a passageway to restore memories and recover lost histories remains a potential utopic symbol. For both Hurston and Brodber the space of the Caribbean provides an impetus for unsettling traditional power dynamics between patrons/beneficiaries, husbands/wives, and western/nonwestern academic constraints.

Ch. 3

Beyond Language: Mythical Islands as a Resistance to Capitalism and Modernity in Toni

Morrison's *Tar Baby* and Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*

Sea Island Paradise

In a recent article in *Elegant Island Living*, Mason Stewart pens an elegiac ode titled "Perseverance of a Plantation." In this laudatory article, Stewart describes a river plantation in Coastal Georgia, close to the Sea Islands that he compares to *Gone with the Wind*. The plantation, Hofwyl-Broadfield, survived for 167 years despite experiencing the war of 1812 and the loss of slaves in the Civil War. The tone of the article is one of pure praise that this family plantation survived in spite of the war, "For whatever reason, the marauding troops that summarily torched the nearby town of Darien and the other river plantations, they had somehow missed Hofwyl!" However, Stewart laments that with the loss of slaves, "Without a miracle, it too would join the other great river plantations in the cemetery of Southern dreams. That miracle occurred in September 1880 when James Dent, the son of George and Ophelia, married Miriam Gratz Cohen, daughter of Solomon Cohen of Savannah." This miracle combined two wealthy, powerful families which allowed the plantation to survive, however, the plantation was converted to a dairy farm left to "two aging but enterprising sisters, Miriam and Ophelia."

Stewart ends his tale comparing the story to the larger story of America:

Miriam died in 1953, leaving her sister Ophelia as the last heir to the family estate that spanned five generations. An estate that mirrored the birth and growth of this country; growing and expanding from the hard labor of indentured servants and slave labor; beaten down and torn apart by weather and war, pooling unlikely resources to overcome one disaster after another. Always struggling, but always surviving. The story of Hofwyl-Broadfield Plantation is indeed, the story of America.

According to the magazine the “story of America” is the story of a plantation turned into a capitalist enterprise, struggling to survive the horrible loss of slaves rather than the actual existence of slaves. This recent piece typifies the way plantations have been praised throughout southern literature despite their inherent racism. The names in this story of the Hofwyl’s are almost identical to the names in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, which demonstrates how “the story of America” is more than simply a plantation story. The two aging sisters are Miranda and Ophelia rather than Miriam and Ophelia, and the central love story also centers on George and Ophelia’s granddaughter, Ophelia, who also often goes by Cocoa.¹⁴ In *Mama Day*, Ophelia returns from New York to the fictional sea island community of Willow Springs to visit her grandmother and great aunt. The descendants of George and Ophelia are Miriam and Ophelia, which is a reversal of the descendants in *Mama Day*.

This reversal of family lines is emblematic of how Naylor’s story of Willow Springs seems like a reversed historical narrative of the Sea Islands. Rather than a plantation story solely located in a white family’s fortuitous ability to move their slaves away from marauding troops, Naylor’s story is a story of slaves achieving freedom and maintaining sovereignty over their land despite economic hardships. Stewart’s article consciously highlights popular southern narratives by comparing the story to Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* playing into the exceptionalist narrative of the U.S. South as one of resilience and as “indeed, the story of America.” Naylor’s retelling of a mythical sea island plantation invites readers to hear another version of the story of America. A story of America not based on white capitalist patriarchal society. Instead, these two venerable sisters, like Mammy and Lowly, are integrally related to the history of the U.S. South. The plantation of Hofwyl-Broadfield which is commodified into

¹⁴ For clarity, I will refer to younger Ophelia as Cocoa throughout this chapter.

plantation tourism obscures the role of those who actually worked the fields and died for the land. The story of America she presents lies in the resilience and brilliance seen in Sapphira Wade, who receives the deed to Willow Springs from her master/husband. Naylor presents these women as part of a matriarchal lineage who inherit the land. The island community's land remains separate from the United States in a liminal space, neither South Carolina nor Georgia, neither United States nor Atlantic territories.

Willow Spring's resistance to geographical certainty is similar to the story of Sapphira Wade which similarly resists categorization as either a love story or a rebellious slave. At the time of its publication, the actual narrative of Sapphira was controversial:

America, with all its greed and chicanery, exists beyond a bridge. The island was "settled" (if that word is ever appropriate in American history) in the first quarter of the 19th century by an Africa-born slave, a spirited woman named Sapphira who, according to legend, bore her master, a Norwegian immigrant named Bascombe Wade, and maybe person or persons unknown, a total of seven sons. She then persuaded Bascombe to deed the children every square inch of Willow Springs, after which she either poisoned or stabbed the poor man in bed and vanished ahead of a posse. We find out the conditions of Sapphira's bondage only at the end of the novel: love, and not a bill of sale, had kept Bascombe and Sapphira together. Bascombe had given up his land to her sons willingly. This disclosure may make for "incorrect" politics, but it is in keeping with the "Tempest"-like atmosphere of benevolence, light and harmony that Ms. Naylor wishes to have prevail on Willow Springs.

This *New York Times* review is certainly correct in the analysis of the Shakespearean influences throughout this text, scholars Peter Erickson, Missy Dehn Kubitschek, and Gary Storhoff, have all noted and analyzed the influence of Shakespeare in Naylor's works. However, Bharati Mukherjee's blissful reading of love as the guiding influence for Bascombe granting Sapphira her freedom neglects to account that Sapphira's relationship with Bascombe is inherently entrenched in the power dynamics of Bascombe "owning" Sapphira. Furthermore, the whole notion of ownership is problematic not only because one cannot own a human, but also because

throughout the text Willow Springs continually fights for its independence from “America, with all its greed and chicanery.”

In Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, Willow Springs is a fictional sea island in between South Carolina and Georgia with no fixed location or state but fixated instead on the legend of Sapphira Wade who was a slave of Nathan Wade Bascombe, but came to own the island. Her descendants, Miranda and Abigail Day still live on the island and Abigail’s granddaughter, Cocoa becomes the center of the love story. Mama Day, also known as Miranda Day, is the cultural matriarch of the island as well as a conjure woman, who constantly travels to “the other place” which is possibly Sapphira’s grave. Miranda is a healing woman often at odds with others in the tight-knit community. However, she fiercely defends the island and rejects the economic corporate interests of those wanting to create vacation homes in Willow Springs, much like the vacation homes of the plantation tourists, and she fiercely protects the separateness of Willow Springs. Cocoa falls in love with a city boy, former orphan, George and on one of their visits back to Willow Springs, Cocoa is cursed by another woman on the island. George dies trying to save Cocoa from this supernatural curse, but he returns to the other place where Cocoa can occasionally visit and talk with him.

The fated love story of Cocoa and George casts them as a reframing of Juliet and Romeo. The mythical island of Willow Springs is reminiscent of Toni Morrison’s fictional Caribbean island created in her 1981 novel *Tar Baby*. Virginia C. Fowler who has looked at these texts together, explains how *Mama Day*, like *Tar Baby*, is a retelling or revision and update to Shakespeare’s *the Tempest*. In looking at the cultural hybridity of the texts, there tends to be a focus on Shakespeare and African American intertextuality as well as a focus on literary tradition. Both Naylor and Morrison cast their stories as a revision of a Shakespearean text, but

Mama Day and *Tar Baby* have not received scholarly attention together despite their similarities. Like George and Ophelia, *Tar Baby* also features a doomed relationship between principal characters, Son and Jadine. Son swims to the shore of the Isle des Chevaliers and the owner of the estate allows him to stay there. The owner of the estate also acts as patron to Jadine, a sophisticated model who comes home to visit her aunt and uncle. On her visit, she and Son fall in love, but eventually their inability to find roots that match both of their lives destroys their relationship. Like George, Jadine resists the “primitiveness” of the island.

For both Naylor and Morrison, scholarship tends to focus on the emphasis on the primitiveness of the islands and their ancient traditions. However, Yogita Goyal’s explanation of the ambivalence present in *Tar Baby* questions the importance put on the myth and the ancient: “As the novel’s intertext of the folk tale of the tar baby indicates, everything that looks authentic can just as easily be artifice. In the end, a deeply ambivalent representation of the value of tradition emerges as the contradictions embedded in the novel find no resolution in realistic terms” (395). Like the “authentic” plantation of Hofwyl-Broadfield reveals, the great traditions and stories of the past are often mere artifice. The imagined islands resist the capitalism and imperialism of these commonly accepted narratives. The entire world that Naylor has created is a political commentary on the economic impoverishments of black communities. Her creation of the fictional Willow Springs is a direct rejection of economic capitalist control of the island. The complexity in both Naylor and Morrison’s work in regards to navigating between tradition, myth, and modernity, is best analyzed through examining how they are using space as a liminal marker of time and location for the African diaspora.

In this chapter, I examine how the Caribbean imaginary in these works both critiques capitalism while recognizing the inherent capitalist element in exoticizing the islands. The

islands exist in liminal, fictional spaces that provide a rootedness for the African diaspora without actually fully committing to the belief in a return to the island. The island is not the answer to problems. It is a timeless, eroticized paradise in which language fails to sustain a cultural memory. However, neither author is advocating for a return to this pre-language or primitive society. Instead, the Caribbean ends up working as an exceptional space in which southerners, George and Son, work out their own identities. They are no longer cultural orphans, but rather than an idyllic, utopian space, the island swallows them up into an ancient past that's not sustainable. Morrison and Naylor's fictional islands represent how imaginaries, like the Caribbean imaginary and the South imaginary are inherently problematic in their nostalgic longing for rootedness. Moreover, these islands become vacation paradises only for the white people, and a black southern culture with connections to the Caribbean is exploited.

I posit that while Naylor and Morrison recognize the timeless, eroticized paradise of the Caribbean, their choice of fictional islands create an imagined utopia that attempts to resist to economic exploitation; the islands resist capitalism as does language. However, solely returning to the land results in primitivism and death. The islands exist as paradise for the dead—a return to the land. The mythical connection to these islands is not rooted in an actual belief or return to a utopian, Marxist way of life but provides the rootedness that is often lacking in discussions of the Black Atlantic.

Like Brodber's attention to the African diaspora, Naylor and Morrison's texts also figure into the black feminist renaissance of the 1980s. In Patricia Stuelke's seminal article on the regeneration of the attention to Hurston by non-fiction writers of the 1980s:

But these Hurstonian attempts to use the Caribbean to regenerate a lost heritage of diasporic connection occurred at the very moment the U.S. sought to contain Caribbean postcolonial revolutionary nationalism through the exercise of military force and neoliberal economic policy. (124)

This revitalization of Zora Neale Hurston's career coincided with the Reagan administration's Grenadian Caribbean celebration.¹⁵ In 1983, President Reagan ordered troops to invade Grenada after a military coup. Reagan was concerned that Grenada would become Communist like Cuba, and in fact, referred to “Cuba, Nicaragua, and Grenada” as the same country (Collins 34). Merle Collins, a noted poet of Grenada recalls the aftermath of the Grenadian revolution and the fear of the United States. Due to the economic crisis of the 1970s, Reagan’s presidency was hailed as not only a possible change in economic policy but also a commitment to American power abroad (Podhoretz).

Stuelke's article examines how during the 1980's Black feminist women acknowledged their indebtedness to Hurston and her focus on the Caribbean at the same time as neoliberals began to claim the Caribbean as well. These writers "came to use Hurston's work to stimulate and script post-modern, cultural feminist fantasies of the Caribbean as a free zone of individual autonomy and desire"(127). I mention this article because it opens up an area of research within both African American studies and Southern literature studies that underscores the constructedness of place and space. Stuelke notes how constructed visions of spatiotemporal realities can undermine the actual realities of a space:

US black feminism’s matriarchal myths of reclaiming the Caribbean participated in the transition to neoliberal capitalism, creating a compelling vision of the Caribbean as a timeless, eroticized paradise that effaced the Caribbean revolutionary present in favor of a free-market future and precluded US black feminists from constructing solidarity with revolutionary Grenadian women 118-119

¹⁵ This scene recalls my discussion in chapter one of Cuba’s “liberation” in the Spanish-American War, in which Governor Grosvenor demonstrates a paternalistic attitude towards Cuba in the *National Geographic* article. The similarities are in discussing how these celebrations pointed to the US imperialism.

While Stuelke focuses on nonfiction, I examine novels in the 1980s, both from the beginning of the decade and the end of the decade, in order to investigate the picture of the Caribbean during this time. *Tar Baby* is particularly useful for looking at ideas of the Caribbean because of its setting, but also because the white and black characters are investigating the role of the Caribbean in their lives as well. They are both working simultaneously to understand both indebtedness and power in connection with the Caribbean.

Stuelke argues that the Caribbean is constructed as an eroticized, timeless paradise in order to diminish the actual revolutionary potential of the individual islands, and both Naylor and Morrison at times play in to this narrative. However, both are consciously constructing the islands to be a critique of capitalism, which certainly does not play into the Reagan narrative of the 1980s. In Jean Wyatt's analysis of *Tar Baby* she coins the term "Marxist satire" to explain her reading of *Tar Baby*, demonstrating Morrison's rejection of capitalism. Her final argument is that nature is the site of resistance in the text, and that while the island, Isles des Chevaliers, has been exploited for years by Valerian, the candy mogul who has created a plantation on the island, the island keeps resisting the forces of capitalism.¹⁶ Through Morrison's depiction of the island's natural forces, "the creatures of nature supply a corrective to the commodity-mindedness of the humans" (Wyatt 47). Morrison is conscientiously critiquing the capitalist system even while utilizing the neoliberal image of the Caribbean in the 1980s. By making the Caribbean an image of a timeless paradise, the revolutionary, independent potential of the Caribbean was erased. Reagan and the U.S. feared the collapse of Caribbean governments to communist overthrow influenced by the Soviet Union. This fear also led to a further emphasis on capitalism, as

¹⁶ Dayle B. Delancey also examines the critique of capitalism through the lens of the sugar and sweetness in *Tar Baby*, primarily to explain how sweetness becomes associated with mental illness in Morrison's later novels.

evidenced by Reaganomics. The neoliberal policy was to maintain a benevolent paternalism towards the Caribbean, much like the previous relationship with Batista.

Like Morrison, Naylor critiques the effects of capitalism on Willow Springs. Gloria Naylor references the economic uncertainties that African Americans were facing in the late 80s. In the beginning of the novel, Naylor sets up a frame narrative in which the son of Reema, a Willow Springs native, comes back over to the island asking questions about how the inhabitants constantly use the phrase “18&23” (8). After Reema’s boy apparently missed the understanding of the term, the narrator laments that “Anybody woulda carried him through the fields we had to stop farming back in the ’80s to take outside jobs—washing cars, carrying groceries, cleaning house—anything— ’cause it was leave the land or lose it during the Silent Depression. Had more folks sleeping in city streets and banks foreclosing on farms than in the Great Depression before that” (8). The economics of the island were always integrally connected to the island’s heritage. Naylor’s reference to the Silent Depression works to situate Willow Springs as rooted in the realities of the economic present. After Miranda Day’s astute condemnation of Reema’s boy inability to understand 18&23, the narrator invites the reader to HEAR the story. In addition to Mama Day immediately being dismissive of Reema’s boy, she is also dismissive of the mainlanders’ attempt to take their land: “Cause it weren’t about no them now and us later— was them now and us never. Hadn’t we seen it happen back in the ‘80s on St. Helena, Daufuskie, and St. John’s? And before that in the 60s on Hilton Head?...And the only dark faces you see now in them ‘vacation paradises’ is the ones cleaning the toilets and cutting the grass” (*Mama Day* 6). Mama Day’s dismissal of the capitalist builders calls attention to the effect these events are

taking on the Sea Islands and also the Caribbean islands as well.¹⁷

Fictional Islands.

While the sea island of Willow Springs is not geographically located as part of the Caribbean isles, I argue that its relationship as a hybrid space connects it to a Caribbean identity, similar to that of the island in *Tar Baby*. In *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez Rojo claims that the Caribbean exists in “a certain kind of way” suggesting that the collection of islands are connected through the psychological connection of the repeating island because the same stories keep being repeated as well as the same patterns. Benítez-Rojo has been critiqued for his focus on Cuba as not necessarily representative of the Caribbean in its entirety. However, Benítez-Rojo’s focus is to construct a certain kind of understanding of how the Caribbean isles psychically exist. In a retelling of the story of the Virgen de la Caridad, a common story circulating in the Caribbean isles, he highlights the overarching theme of the story, which is “The desire to reach a sphere of effective equality where the racial, social, and cultural differences that conquest, colonization, and slavery created would coexist without violence. This space-which can be seen at the same time as a utopia to be reached or as a lost paradise to be recovered poetically- is repeated time and again in the diverse expressions” (53). Benítez-Rojo’s description of the repeated stories throughout the Caribbean mirrors the diasporic understandings of both the sea islands and the Caribbean. In a way, the construction of the Caribbean in Benítez-Rojo’s mind is much like the fictional islands of Morrison and Naylor as liminal spaces repeating cyclical stories. The constructed image of the islands matches the constructed image of Benítez-

¹⁷ For a detailed history of the sea islands and their fates, see J. William Harris’ *Deep Souths: Delta, Piedmont, and Sea Island Society in the Age of Segregation*.

Rojo as he depicts time as circular. Both islands represent time in non-linear ways. The circularity of time in both islands make them match the explanation of Benítez-Rojo's view of the Caribbean.

Furthermore, in Lene Brøndum's comparison of Naylor, Marshalle, and Dash, she claims that the Sea Islands in *Praisesong for the Widow* are implicitly connected to the Caribbean because the Sea Islands represent "a greater degree of genuine cultural syncretism of Africa/America culture than that formed anywhere else." Brøndum argues that the Sea Islands function as a trope of both being "in the middle" as well as the "most seriously oppressive locations of plantation slavery" (161). While Paule Marshall is not a focus of my study here, I would argue that Brøndum's analysis here also applies to Naylor's works. The Sea Islands as a middle place, a place of in-betweenness, is an obvious reflection of the liminality that Naylor uses throughout her works. The Sea Islands as occupying the middle space between Africa and the United States is similar to that of the Caribbean. Moreover, the Gullah presence on the Sea Island is an African diasporic tradition that is often seen in the Caribbean. While I do not want to conflate the Sea Islands with the Caribbean islands, as a constructed image from Naylor, they are working in the same vein. Daphne Lamothe claims that the use of the fictional sea island allows Naylor to demonstrate the hybridity complicit in this community that is not averse to modernity. Lamothe explains that despite the island's apparent isolation, Naylor actually creates a place of hybridity that does accommodate to change. Like Goyal explains about Morrison, both Morrison and Naylor create spaces that are not solely timeless, ancient, and mythical. Cocoa does not remain on the island, which is not necessarily seen as abandonment of her background. Instead, there is some suggestion that she will one day return to the island and carry on Miranda Day's legacy. However, the tone does not suggest a sense that Cocoa is avoiding her heritage, but rather that

it's not her time yet. Cocoa embodies modernity in that she does not look at Willow Springs as a place to stay. Instead, she moves to New York City to follow and pursue her own career. Even after George passes away, she remains mainland to continue her career.

Complicating Cultural Heritage through Language

Morrison and Naylor create these fictional islands to recreate a historical rootedness. Scholar Lene Brondum argues that Naylor “subverts the traditional standards of historiography” (153), and creates “a composite history [which] functions as a revision of the traditional western definition of history” (156). Naylor is making an “imaginative survival of traditional Sea Islands culture” (158). Both Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby* and Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* investigate liminal islands, albeit fictional, as spaces to not only reimagine sexual relationships and connection to space but also to critique the commodification of bodies within a post-Fordist economy. Both of these novels feature women who leave the island and become part of sophisticated cities, Paris and New York City, respectively. Their subsequent relationships both off and on the island are intimately connected to the islands. In *Tar Baby*, Jadine falls in love with Son. However, she cannot adapt to his life in the South, and ultimately Son returns to the island and becomes part of the landscape. In a reversal of this storyline in *Mama Day*, George cannot adapt to Cocoa’s southern, magical life on the islands. His inability to reconcile himself with the ways of the island causes him to die as he strains to save Cocoa from a curse. While George dies on the island of Willow Springs, Son returns to the Isle des Chevaliers permanently as well. His somewhat ambiguous ending on the island as he becomes one of the blind horsemen relegates him to being forever on the island as George is forever in the Other Place. The

relationships between George and Cocoa and Son and Jadine ultimately hinge on the bodies' connections to the land.

Time and Space in the *Isles de Chevaliers*

In *Tar Baby*, in a scene between two lovers who cannot seem to reconcile Son and Jadine both question each other: "Mama-spoiled black man, will you mature with me? Culture-bearing black woman, whose culture are you bearing?" (269). For Son, Jadine feels the weight of his Southern heritage when she visits his home. She cannot adjust to the life there and feels the gender roles are repressive. For Jadine, Son feels as if her education and European life make her seem "cultured" but not in her own culture. These questions plague Jadine and Son.

Throughout the novel they fumble trying to find the language and the words to connect their disparate upbringing, and the novel emphasizes that the language is inadequate. First, we see the white male patron digressing about the inadequacies of language and by the end of the novel the uneducated woman also cannot "talk." Other scholars have noted the use of language in *Tar Baby*; however, scholar Anthony J. Berrett, notes the "village-making function of music" (Berrett 283). Similarly, Joyce Hope Scott also notes the collaborative nature of the language with multiple narrative threads: "The novel's various intersecting narratives represent an example of the assault of African American vernacular language on the ideological hegemony of Euro-American capitalism and its trend of exploitation of the Caribbean landscape and indigenous peoples" (Scott 34). Rather than focusing on the collaboration of language, I argue that the limits of language demonstrate that the Caribbean isle exists in a liminal space that cannot be examined via language, time, or geographic certainty. The fictive isle in *Tar Baby* represents the influence of the Caribbean imaginary on Toni Morrison as a potential utopian space that attempts to

accommodate myth and modernity, but the language cannot sustain the cultural rootedness so many of the characters long for in both Morrison and Naylor's novels.

The opening lines of *Tar Baby* frame the depiction of the Caribbean in the eyes of Son: "He believed he was safe" (3). At this moment, Son is in the ocean of the Caribbean struggling to find a way to land. However, his belief that he was safe depicts the vision of the imaginary of the Caribbean in the novel for both black and white characters. This location, the Isle des Chevaliers, has become a safe haven for the white patron of the novel, Valerian Street. He too believes he is safe from the capitalist world of Philadelphia. He spends all day sitting in his greenhouse attempting to find meaning for his life after his own son refuses to take over his business. For both Son, a deserted man, and Valerian, a man deserted from his capitalist dreams, the isle in the Caribbean becomes an idealized space for them to exist. It is notable that Morrison chooses a fictional isle because this emphasizes the inability of a peaceful, safe, cohabitation between two competing ideologies. Eventually, Street's family and servants will fight, and Son and Jadine will leave the island as well. However, the space appears, at first, to be an idealized space.

While Son is still believing he is safe in the ocean, he is also "going counterclockwise" in his attempts to find the shore. Son's inability to move through the ocean is representative of two things: one, the intentional difficulty in achieving the island emphasizes the island's geographic uncertainty. Second, the island's fictive location that Son keeps grasping for and not being able to achieve also emphasizes the island's timeless location. Stuelke contends that the nonfiction writers of the Caribbean viewed it as a "timeless, eroticized paradise" (118). For Son, the Caribbean also becomes timeless as he becomes trapped. It's the paradise he's longing for, and freedom from the law.

The island becomes eroticized as the various sexual interactions between the couple are attached to the land. When Son is seducing Jadine, he tells her to become a star, to close her eyes, he makes her feel the sand, and she clings to a tree swaying in the mudhole. Thus, the island is intimately connected to the body, and when they leave the island their relationship falls apart. Furthermore, when they discuss having sex, Son says, "I don't call it anything. I don't have the language for it...To which Jadine replies, "I mean if you had the language what would you do?" (213). Thus, the island is an eroticized space and language is inadequate to communicate those desires, instead the land communicates eroticism.

On the island, language also obfuscates the understanding of the island. Valerian Street, with his wealthy mansion and essential sovereignty over the island is also holed up in his green house, where he feels frustrated by the changing mores, and language of his society:

"He read only mail these days, having given up books because the language in them had changed so much-- stained with rivulets of disorder and meaninglessness" (14). For Valerian, the novels are lacking in meaning, and he cannot enter into the meaning-making function of the novel because of his bourgeois capitalist mindset. Jadine has had an impressive European education facilitated by Valerian, and yet she never quite feels at home. When Valerian invites Son to eat dinner with them, the table represents an idealized space of racial equality. However, the eruptions and fights that eventually break out reject the imagined hope of the Caribbean isle.

Son rejects the mindset and lifestyle of Valerian and criticizes Jadine for allowing him to be her patron. However, Jadine argues that there is no alternative to the mindset of Valerian. She critiques Son for fantasizing that he is above money:

Another time, okay? Just hold your head still and stop making excuses about not having anything. Not even your original dime. It's not romantic. And it's not being free. It's dumb. You think you're above it, above money, the rat race and all that. But you're not

above it, you're just without it. It's a prison, poverty is. Look at what its absence made you do: run, hide, steal, lie" (171).

This harsh critique of Son eventually falters as Son does become above the rat race by becoming part of the island. However, Jadine's cynicism speaks to the failure of the island to sustain their relationship. Son's becoming part of the island is a consumption of his body. Like George and Louisiana, his body fails. While Son is still alive, he has effectively left his entire life behind, and he is devoid of language and vision. While Stuelke argues that this vision of the Caribbean plays into neoliberal policies and beliefs akin to Jadine's worldview, Naylor critiques this capitalism while attempting to demonstrate the problematic fetishization of the Caribbean.

In addition to Valerian and Son's distrust of language, Therese, an islander, also rejects language. First, she rejects English, and ultimately rejects language in favor of knowing rather than seeing or understanding: "The more she invented the more she rocked and the more she rocked the more her English crumbled till finally it became dust in her mouth stopping the flow of her imagination and she spat it out altogether and let the story shimmer through the clear cascade of the French of Dominique" (108). The body is in direct contention with language. As her body takes over, her language fails, and the body is connected to the isle. Therese seems like Louisiana here in that her body has withered from holding the culture of the Caribbean. The English crumbling into dust in her mouth represents a death of not only her imagination but also a death of the island's culture. For Therese, the language of French shimmers and allows her culture to be present on the island that has been overrun by Valerian Street.

Like Therese, Son's body becomes one with the island. Therese's inability to "talk" the directions represents that the island's ancient roots are beyond language. Finally, "The men. The men are waiting for you" "They are waiting in the hills for you...If she answered, he could not hear it, and he certainly couldn't see her, so he went...Son becomes part of the blind race that is

from the ancient stories of the island: “Then he ran. Lickety-split...Lickety-lickety-split” (305). The novel notably ends in darkness, ancient, time with no language. The island is a place for Son who could not find his belonging anywhere else, and yet the island consumes him. The island as both safe haven and consumptive troubles the narrative of the Caribbean imaginary.

Cultural Outsiders and Orphans

Six years prior to Erna Brodber’s *Louisiana*, Gloria Naylor began *Mama Day* with a similar frame narrative introducing another academic with a tape recorder “gone down south” to understand the ways of the people: “And then when he went around asking us about 18&23, there weren’t nothing to do but take pity on him as he rattled on about ethnography, ‘unique speech patterns,’ ‘cultural preservation,’ and whatever else he seemed to be getting so much pleasure of while talking into his little gray machine” (8). This opening story about Reema’s boy who simply couldn’t listen/understand the community sets up Willow Springs as a fictional, “no-man’s land” island as a site of resistance—not necessarily a resistance to being recorded, historicized, or modernized, but a resistance to being fixed, commoditized. The opening narrative takes a playful, sarcastic tone towards Reema’s boy, who decides that 18&23 is the backwards longitudinal/latitude lines of the island, and that Willow Springs residents were “asserting our cultural identity” and “inverting hostile social and political” parameters, before pivoting to inviting the reader to learn about 18&23, Willow Springs, and Cocoa and George (8). This dismissal of knowledge from the tape recorder mirrors the opening of *Louisiana* and reorients the reader to the narrative of unstable language and geography. Reema’s boy is also similar to Michael in Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*. Michael is the son of Valerian, who owns a sizeable portion of Morrison’s fictional island, Isle des Chevaliers:

Michael was a purveyor of exotics, a typical anthropologist, a cultural orphan who sought other cultures he could love without risk or pain. Valerian hated them, not from any hatred of the minority or alien culture, but because of what he saw to be the falseness and fraudulence of the anthropological position. The Indian problem, he told Michael, was between Indians, their conscience and their own derring-do...the Michaels could enjoy the sorrow they were embarrassed to feel for themselves. 145

Michael's cultural orphan status is because he rejects the business of Valerian but also rejects the islanders' ways as well. Valerian recognizes the hypocrisy of Michael and yet there is no alternative for him either. Michael develops the anthropological language and rails against society and yet is a "cultural orphan." Through Michael, Morrison critiques the objectification of culture for those who are outside of the culture—because Michael risks nothing. He can love without pain or risk. His disconnect from his family and his home represents his lack of connection to the island. Both Michael and Reema's boy represent the cultural outsider, the one who leaves the island, the academic who comes back full of useless knowledge because their knowledge is a profit of someone else's. Both sons represent outsiders profiting off of the fictional island, and yet the islands also exist as potential utopian space to provide the rootedness for the cultural orphans of the text. For Reema's boy and Valerian's son, the islands are not their homes or even places of welcome. However, for Son, Jadine, Cocoa, and George the islands provide potential for romance as well as cultural rootedness.

The limits of language are also critiqued in *Mama Day*. When George becomes frustrated in his ability to understand, he lashes out at Miranda "Well, you're talking in a lot of metaphors...It's only in her eyes that Miranda is slowly shaking her head. Metaphors. Like what they used in poetry and stuff. The stuff folks dreamed up when they was making a fantasy, while what she was talking about was *real*. As real as them young hands in front of her" (294).

George's failure is his inability to expand to understand the images from Miranda because they did not fit into his rational western understanding. Scholars have noted that George sacrifices himself in order to save Cocoa in what appears to be a savior narrative.¹⁸ George cannot understand the place of the island in part because of his lack of language and his lack of cultural rootedness. Much like Jadine's attempt to be cultured and like Valerian, Susan Meisenhelder describes George as "a black cultural orphan, trained to be a parody of the stereotypical white male" (406). George grows up in a boys' home for orphans where the headmaster, continually reminds him, "Only the present has potential, *sir*" (27). George has been trained to be a productive member of society, casually remarking, "Sure, the arts were waiting for poor black kids who were encouraged to dream big, and so was death row" (27). When George first brushes past Cocoa, he cannot explain his reaction, his twist in his gut: "My life was already made at thirty-one. My engineering degree, the accelerating success of Andrews & Stein, proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that you got nothing from believing in crossed fingers, broken mirrors, spilled salt—a twist in your gut in the middle of a Third Avenue coffee shop" (33). George is opposed to any sort of magic and myth. However, he critiques the artifice he sees in Cocoa, claiming, "Yeah, I knew your type well. And you sat there with your mind racing, trying to double-think me, so sure you had me and the gave down pat. Give him what he wants. I fooled you, didn't I. All I wanted was for you to be yourself. And I wondered if it was too late, if seven years in New York had been just enough for you to lose that, like you were trying to lose your southern accent." (33). His critique of Cocoa is that she is jaded and her mind is racing only to figure out how best to play the game. George sees his life as already made up at thirty-one. He is

¹⁸ Adrienne L. Ivey and Kathryn M. Paterson both extensively discuss George's death as a retelling of a savior narrative.

unable to recognize that his own life is a parody, even though he can recognize it with Cocoa. This tension between George and Cocoa determining each other's role is continually upended, much like the community of Willow Springs.

The tension between modernity and myth also plays out in Cocoa's job search as Miranda insists on Cocoa sending a follow-up letter to George that Miranda mails with a special dusting of spice. While Miranda has meddled in Cocoa's application, it is still Cocoa's own use of make-up to pretend to have been beaten up in order to trick her boss into avoiding her. Cocoa participates in dress up that keeps her able to maintain her job without being consistently sexually harassed. Naylor consistently defies the easy categorization of mythical fairy godmother dust achieving the happy ending of a job or a marriage.

Naylor reframes the narrative of African American identity on the hegemonic sea islands as Cocoa cuts herself to make sure she had red blood. In other texts, like Janie in *Their Eyes* and James Weldon Johnson in his own autobiography describing the moment they discovered they were black. In this retelling, Cocoa is relieved to find out that she's black like everybody else by retelling a common narrative trope of the child finding out she's black to Cocoa cutting herself to make sure she's black: "She remembers the little girl running home crying and almost taking off her middle finger with a butcher knife, fearing she really had the white blood she was teased about at school—she wanted red blood like everybody else" (47). While in one sense this positioning black as the ideal and the hegemonic norm of the Sea Islands seems like a positive reversal of the trauma suffered in early years in being called out as different, this scene is representative of how Naylor carefully crafts this ambiguity throughout the novel, as this scene is still a scene of trauma, although self-imposed by Cocoa herself. This scene could easily have been a tale of celebration of blackness and confirmed identity. However, instead, despite the

cultural unity and hegemony of the Sea Islands, there's still a clash between the islanders and the mainland between what counts as authentic blackness. In Meisenhelder's analysis of *Mama Day*, she argues that George is being welcomed into the cultural authenticity and rootedness that did not belong to him as a cultural orphan. However, Daphne Lamothe critiques this analysis explaining that it is not as easy as identifying authentic blackness vs. whiteness, which I think is corroborated to some extent through the example of Cocoa. Even amidst the cultural hegemony of blackness, the trauma of identity at a young age is filtered through Cocoa's experience, which demonstrates the resistance to the dichotomy between white and black, good and bad, or even South Carolina vs. Georgia.

Naylor embodies this dichotomy as she explains, "I was born in New York, but conceived in Mississippi. No, I am not from the South, but was born in a southern home. As a first born of southern parents I was very much influenced by the South, its language, behavior and food in particular. By the time I was 7 or 8 years old, southern speech was all that I had heard" (1433). Naylor acknowledges her southern roots and identity as part of her own cultural heritage in telling this story, which is a retelling of so many stories: *The Tempest*, passion narratives, historical understandings of the sea islands, and even homecoming narratives of the African diaspora. *Mama Day* resists being categorized into just one of these narratives, much like Willow Springs and Isles des Chevaliers resist an easy categorization of a utopian paradise for cultural orphans.

Chapter 4

Peeling Away the Layers of Mythic Heritage in Roberto Fernández's *Holy Radishes!*

“Remember Chepaika!” pierces the air of Belle Glade, Florida, in 1963, as the Ku Klux Klan burns down a store, owned by a Jewish holocaust survivor and his alleged nephew—an impostor holocaust survivor, who is in actuality a Cuban in exile. In this scene, the satirical cry of remembering the Indian man who supposedly raped one of the Klan’s grandmothers rips through the Cuban exile community and makes the town believe that their town is being terrorized in revenge for a former battle. This turn of phrase marks more than either the stupidity of the KKK for emphasizing and fantasizing about the Chepaika, or the trickery of the KKK pretending to be fighting for Chepaika. Instead, the phrase "Remember Chepaika!" reveals how Cuban-American novelist, Roberto G. Fernández, in his 1995 text *Holy Radishes!* details a parodic portrayal of a Cuban immigrant community just outside of Miami in Belle Glade, Florida. Each character, from fetish-obsessed Nelson¹⁹, to former high school sweetheart and fake southern belle Mrs. James B. Olsen II, to Cuban immigrant posing as a Jewish Holocaust survivor, Reuben, invents their identity in relation to an imagined past. Through subverting and revising their fantasies of heritage, Fernández critiques the fallacy of nostalgia which eclipses past traumas and current threats in favor of opining a lost way of life based on wealth and social hierarchies.

Holy Radishes! is a critique of first-generation Cuban immigrants who long for a mythical Havana and craft stories of their past lives in a vain attempt to re-create a moneyed elite on American shores. The protagonist of the story, the quintessential moneyed elite Nellie, spends

¹⁹ I use the term “fetish” here to refer to a particular sexual proclivity of Nelson which defines the majority of his storyline. Nelson falls in love with a woman dressed as a squirrel, and he continually tries to reunite with her.

her time reminiscing about her homeland, and this homesickness for a mythic land, lost but never possessed, is forcefully critiqued through parody in Fernández's novel. Fernández's critique of Cuban immigrants is not to dismiss suffering and trauma but rather to demonstrate that these fantasies erase cultural realities. This mythical Havana is akin to the mythical South so often recreated in white fantasies of capitalist cultural heritage. By historicizing the social world that Fernández parodies, we can more clearly see how his depiction of the Cuban immigrant world of Belle Glade closely aligns the fantasies of Cuban immigrants with fantasies of the U.S. South. These fantasies of a "lost cause" and "next year in Havana" emphasize the dangers of romanticizing a past, which is still part of current national discourses. While *Holy Radishes!* at first seems a mere parody of the trauma of Cuban exiles, the layers of hybrid, metafictional stories demonstrate the importance of uncovering and revealing immigrant stories apart from commonly accepted narratives.

Fernández's own immigrant story began when he emigrated from Cuba in 1961 at the age of ten, and his family also worked in a radish plant. He refers to himself as "an exile from Miami" because he critiques the insular, often exclusionary, Cuban community in Miami (36). Fernández primarily describes this Miami culture in his first English novel, *Raining Backwards*, and the understandings of the insular Cuban culture of Miami undergird his representations of the exilic community in *Holy Radishes!* His texts work to reject simple narratives of exile: Fernández has elsewhere described *Holy Radishes!* as "a post-exile narrative" (37). These disparate narratives elide this insistence on one Cuban identity while also still reasserting the seminal idea of Cuban-American identity being determined by living on the "hyphen," in between Cuban (-) American. This hyphenated identity, first coined by Gustavo Pérez Firmat, is central to Cuban-American novels and elucidates the importance of the cultural and linguistic

hybridity in *Holy Radishes!* Fernández plays with this hybridity²⁰ and describes his work as “a kind of parody of magical realism” (34). Other popular Cuban-American novels such as Cristina García’s *Dreaming in Cuban*, and Ana Menéndez’s collection of stories, *In Cuba, I was a German Shepherd*, also work to blend magical realism, with a narrative account that accurately portrays the nostalgia and fantasies of exilic literature. Fernández builds on this intertextual literary background while also overtly parodying the fantasies of the exiles.

Fernández coalesces multiple heritages to emphasize the problems of mythic fantasies. Through an examination of the distorted nostalgia in Cuban-American literature, I argue that Fernández critiques mythic heritage as an inherently consumerist ideology that effaces the revolutionary power of immigrant narratives. In Dalia Kandiyoti’s work on Cristina García and Ana Menéndez, Kandiyoti contends the two authors “struggle both with an overpowering sense of nostalgia *and* with its transformation into a consumer product” (82). While both authors “are repelled by the way nostalgic discourse and commodities mold multidimensional identities, sentiments, and ideologies into an unchanging, absolute narrative of the past,” unavoidably the texts remain “testaments to the complex, ambiguous forms of Cuban nostalgia” (82). Kandiyoti’s analysis of Cuban nostalgia in these works is representative of much exilic literature, demonstrating a critique of nostalgia while still participating in this longing. Fernández’s texts overtly connect this critique of nostalgic, exilic literature with the romanticizing literature of the U.S. South. Like Kandiyoti’s explanation of commodified nostalgia—a nostalgia based on wealth, hierarchy, and capitalism that you can idealize and monetize—Scott Romine similarly argues that the idealized images of the antebellum South were already coopted into consumerist

²⁰ For a thorough account of the uses of hybridity in Fernández’s heteroglossic texts, see Lisa Hinrichsen’s *Possessing the Past: Trauma, Imagination, and Memory in Post-Plantation Southern Literature*.

ideology as an economy “based on consumption and the flexible accumulation of culture” (30).

To remember and to preserve the heritage of the idealized South was to desire to own this heritage. Fernández portrays the desire for heritage as a consumerist impulse through the character of Mrs. James B, who buys photos of Southern belles pretending that they are her ancestors:

When she was finished, she had bought enough pictures to have a three-generational family, including a couple of very recent snapshots of two children, a girl and a boy. The boy was dressed as a cadet. The girl, in a hoop skirt and carrying a small parasol, was standing near the entrance of a finishing school for young belles. (202)

She has literally bought her southern heritage.

Fernández’s parodic representation of this fantasy of heritage throughout the text dismantles images of belonging based on this consumerism. Ironically, the central relationship of the text is arguably between the protagonist, Nellie, and Mrs. James B. Olsen, her neighbor and colleague in the radishes factory, Mrs. James B, who bond over a perceived sense of loss—Nellie for Mondovi and Mrs. James B for her pre-Civil War Southern heritage. Neither woman has actually experienced either of these losses: Nellie has never actually been to Mondovi, and Mrs. James B’s heritage is entirely fabricated. While nostalgia literally means home sickness, neither character longs for their home. In this way, Fernández further demonstrates how nostalgia, is always, already “imagined, as idealized through memory and desire” (Boym 20). Fernández’s pairing of these two women together based on a shared memory of loss, highlights the critique of those lingering in an imagined past. While Mrs. James B and Nellie share a common trauma of physical abuse, neither of them acknowledge this connection, instead, embracing a fictional fantasy of a long ago time and place.

Their fantasies of heritage work as a “parody of nostalgia” to emphasize the way nostalgia erases revolutionary narratives and impulses. Nostalgic desires often function as

utopian impulses, and yet these idyllic representations of the homeland re-entrench racial and economic hierarchies. Jon Smith critiques the ways nostalgia so often re-entrenches outdated longings for a past undeniably rooted in racism. Smith argues convincingly that the problems of discussing modes of nostalgia in southern literature is the identification of white supremacy as the loss being mourned. The parody of this nostalgia is important in order to point out that nostalgia is inherently based on a myth. The nostalgia of Fernández's texts is framed around an absence or loss of that which did not happen.²¹ In Svetlana Boym's explanation of nostalgia, she highlights the ways in which nostalgia obscures actual memory and longing: "the nostalgic desires to obliterate history and turn it into private or collective mythology," (6). The collective mythology of the Cuban exiles becomes the fantastical Havana of the Cuban imaginary.

While *Holy Radishes!* focuses primarily on the moneyed elite mercilessly satirizing their way of life, each mythic heritage is mourning a loss of, essentially, nothing. Grounding his argument in the work of Slavoj Žižek and Sigmund Freud, Smith further discusses how "southern trauma" works as "a particularly addictive, unacknowledged, and prerational disposition toward endlessly circling loss itself," regardless of that which is being missed: "what matters is having the threat—or, more precisely, the fear—of a life without the fantasy threat to structure it, to keep the drive in motion" (364). Throughout *Holy Radishes!* is a continued endlessly circling loss of not only Cuba, but also the particular losses of each individual and each community. The artificial loss, however, in many cases, is covering and obscuring the very real trauma experienced by the characters.

Nostalgia is a way for Nellie to remove herself from her present situation to escape past trauma. As a child, when Nellie's mother passes away, she refuses to speak until given a pet pig.

²¹ For an overview of nostalgia in Cuban-American literature, see Kandiyota's article "Consuming Nostalgia: Nostalgia and the Marketplace in Cristina García and Ana Menéndez."

This early trauma and subsequent silence foreshadows the later revelation that Nellie was raped in order to attain passage to the U.S. She never reveals her rape to her husband or anyone, instead concocting a story that her rescuer was a friend from Mondovi who pulled strings. Nellie intends to find him in Mondovi and blithely claims that the sailors are whistling at her and Mrs. James B because her rescuer has told them of her coming. However, the whistling from the sailors “grew into a wild hissing sound as Mrs. James B.’s tight jeans came into view” (298). Her fantastical belief becomes deeply troubling when the whistles turn into menacing hisses as a forewarning in that she is perhaps walking into another scene of rape and trauma.

Fernández creates shocking parodies of these characters’ lives, which does not diminish their traumas but obscures them from view, at least initially. This parodic nostalgia and layers of revision hide the heartbreaking sadness of the characters’ lives. For example, in the community of Belle Glade where the women work peeling radishes, the alleged freedom fighters practice their fighting for the Cuban homeland by storming cardboard labeled “in big letters BARRACKS, and in parentheses (Soon to be again the Ladies' Tennis Club)” (265). The “Ladies’ Tennis Club” is a recreation of a social club that most of the radish factory workers all participated in Cuba, and these parentheses pretend and recall a fancy socialite club. The pretended cardboard barracks for the freedom fighters even within their own inscription attempt to recall something else. Even the make-believe is signifying upon a potential recreation of community life, which is representative of the layers of “endlessly circling loss” throughout the text. The imagined cardboard barracks are not even standing in for themselves; there is one more layer of removal.

The freedom fighters and the other immigrants of Belle Glade are first generation Cuban Americans, and yet, are already removed from the reality of life in Havana. In Fernández’s first

English novel, *Raining Backwards*, these layers of revision are seen in his depiction of the city of Miami. In his analysis of *Raining Backwards*, John Lowe argues that Miami stands in for Havana, as an imagined Havana. Grounding his argument on Jean Baudrillard, Lowe discusses how Little Havana in Miami becomes a simulacrum of the real Havana. However, Lowe is careful to note that the creation of Little Havana is far from the reality of Havana. In fact, he describes much of the new Miami is based on a Cuban imaginary—an idealized representation of the island. Fernández invokes this imaginary through the creation of fake cardboard barracks, which are eventually to become the social club. Nothing is real, and even the simulacrum is standing in for something else. In Linda Hutcheon’s description of parody she notes the general pervasiveness of self-reflexiveness and meta-discursive writing in the postmodern age (1). Hutcheon explains how parody both references and recalls an object while also self-reflexively admitting its fakeness. Essentially, Fernández parodies nostalgia by simultaneously invoking it and disregarding it—the memories are based on an imaginary. Through this parody of nostalgia, Fernández is unsparing in his comparisons between these cultures, comparing Cuba and the U.S. South and critiquing the mythic heritage of each of these characters.

Fernández refers to his novel as a “post-exile” narrative, which further removes the characters from their place of exile. Similarly, Nellie only imagines “returning” to Mondovi not her actual place of exile, Xawa. When she first meets her neighbor, Mrs. James B. Olsen, Nellie hastens to identify that she is “from Xawa, but I was meant to be born in Mondovi” (17). Xawa is an Eden-like fantasyland that represents Cuba, further emphasizing that the Cuban imaginary is a myth, a non-existent place that never truly existed but is a creation of what Fernández calls “distorted memory,” a blurring of fantasy and reality (del Rio 36). As Lowe notes, Fernández’s work draws parallels between the U.S. South and Cuba, in part, due to the U.S. South often

figuring as a blurring of fantasy and reality. Lowe examines how Fernández “simultaneously draws lines of comic connection between the twin lost causes of the Old South and Old Havana” describing both places connected to a mythical time and place that exists in the imaginary (317). Just as nostalgia recalls an imagined time and place, the imaginaries of Cuba and the U.S. South invoke a fantasyland complete with a mythical heritage. Fernández makes this connection unmistakable in the friendship between Mrs. James B. Olsen, a fake southern homecoming queen, and Nellie.

Mrs. James B creates a fictionalized account of a privileged, secure southern background as she buys photos from a pawn shop. Uncle Ben, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, owns the pawn shop which carries the old photographs that Mrs. James B purchases to create a southern belle’s life. Similarly, Mrs. James B. Olsen II purchases her heritage, thus solidifying the nature of what Scott Romine calls “productive nostalgia” (35). The nostalgia produces in one a desire for consumption—to own heritage. Romine’s description of nostalgia in southern studies focuses on how the re-creation of culture becomes one based on the “consumption and flexible accumulation of culture” (30). When asked who buys the photographs, Ben replies, "Southerners longing to rescue the mythical pre-Civil War days" (194). He further explains, “The past is always more expensive than the present” (201). Ben’s claim of mythical pre-Civil War emphasizes again the historical inaccuracy of community stories. Nellie’s own fictional story connects her to the southern woman pretending to have a background as the southern belle. The Civil War then figures in the text as similar to the Cuban uprising. However, both stories are inaccurate and reduce the narratives to tales of financial solidarity rather than cultural solidarity. In interviews, Fernández has critiqued the lack of cultural solidarity between first and second-generation Cuban immigrants, and in *Holy Radishes!* the lack of cultural solidarity erases the

revolutionary potential of a community.

Nostalgia often erases the potential for cultural solidarity because the shared longing is the endlessly circling loss rather than actual loss or trauma. Nellie is a perfect representation of a nostalgia which lacks an object because she claims to miss a country that she has never seen, and yet she “was meant to be born” there. Nellie Pardo sympathizes with Mrs. James B’s fabricated story: “I understand, Mrs. James B. Believe me, I understand your suffering, your humiliation. Don’t you worry, I can assure you, you will be with me at Mondovi” (151). Her memories of the other Cuban exiles are entirely determined by their wealth and wealthy heritage. And yet, her own mythos is rooted in a land she has never even seen. While Nellie seems to be even more egregiously misrepresenting her past, her claims about the other women are similar as well. She claims that they did not have as much as they claimed:

She is not like Pituca, Loly, Vicky and the rest. They pretended to have what they didn’t. I know them from Xawa, and they didn’t have as much as they say they did. Mrs. James B’s family lost it all during the Civil War. She has endured immense hardship like we are now, but there’s still some class in her. Class is like matter; it can never be destroyed. (225)

The irony of this passage is twofold: not only is Mrs. James B’s wealth, status, and class false, but also Nellie’s disgust with “the rest” further underpins her own falsehoods. She never claims Xawa as her homeland like the others, but as a Xawan (Cuban) exile she is even further removed from that which she is apparently missing. This loss becomes a shared heritage for Nellie and Mrs. James B, whose actual heritages have nothing in common other than the fantasy. Nostalgia connects them through the shared fantasy of loss, but, as Boym explains, nostalgia quickly breaks down:

the moment we try to repair longing with belonging, the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity, we often part ways and put an end to mutual understanding. *Algia*—longing is what we share, yet *nostos*- the return home—is what divides us. (2)

If either Nellie or Mrs. James B returned to their fantasies of “home” their connection would be lost. Their only connection is a fabricated loss. Fernández’s pairing of Nellie with Mrs. James B rather than Nellie with the other Cuban women further highlights the way he is parodying this nostalgia. Boym claims that “the danger of nostalgia is that it tends to confuse the actual home and the imaginary one. In extreme cases it can create a phantom homeland, for the sake of which one is ready to die or kill” (6). In addition to Boym’s dire warning of the consequences of nostalgia, Fernández’s critique focuses on how nostalgia obscures historical realities and glosses over current threats.

Erasing the Threat of the Cold War

Nellie’s nostalgia envelopes her in an idealized world where she can remember her past life through her photos, which insulates her from her present. In one of her first memories, she reflects on a picture of herself and an inscription has been added—“To remember is to live again, but I feel like dying when I remember. Belle Glade, Florida. 1963. (Still in exile)” (10). Much like the parentheses on the cardboard barracks, this inscription does not actually reference the physical presence or location. Instead, her commentary on the photo is her present moment’s reflection of how she feels when she sees the photograph. Her inscription is a reflection of how she is remembering the past, albeit with the paradox of the necessity of remembering and the painfulness of remembering, which is potentially a reference to her own trauma she silences. Photographs are assumed to be an accurate portrayal of a point in time, but through Nellie’s inscription, the photograph becomes less a record of the past and more a record of her own emotional state.

Within the first few pages of Nellie's memories, she establishes that her set of girlfriends took on the names of 1950s Hollywood stars: Joan, Ginger, Hedy, Betty, Debbie, Lana, and Irene, like the famous American actresses. One of the photographs is Nellie and her friends, who now work with her in the radish factory, at the Havana Yacht Club²² dancing a Conga with a Sultan, who was the focus of the girls' infatuations. The women in *Holy Radishes!* were referred to as "eight delightful damsels, society's best" and were dancing "The Odalisque's Conga" as part of a "make-believe harem" (10). These women are play-acting being dressed up as a harem of odalisques²³ which demonstrates how this play-acting and escapism is ingrained. Similarly, her attraction to *The Donna Reed Show* has its basis in "the similar secondary characteristics shared by the sultan and Carl Betz" (11). This reference to Donna Reed connects the escapist nature of Nellie's life to the escapist nature of Cold War America. In Richard Schwartz's brief overview of 1950s American television, he notes the lack of any reference to the Cold War. Nellie's own escapism is replicated by the 1950s TV shows, and the connection emphasizes the diverse ways that both the U.S. and Cuba are invested in escapism, especially escapism through a nostalgia which is without an object. The shows of the 1950s were deeply entrenched in acting out the perfect family; not coincidentally, these shows are also the shows that are often referred to as the "good old days" reference some sort of imagined past of a nuclear family that is, in fact, merely a representation, a façade, of an imagined nostalgia. *The Donna Reed Show* is a particular emblem of the American dream replete with the white house and picket fence to which Mrs. James B. Olsen aspires. While Nellie suppresses her own traumatic crossing to Cuba, both

²² This Havana Yacht Club is the same club rumored to have refused entry to Fulgencio Batista based on the color of his skin. This widely repeated story of Batista acknowledges the color consciousness of the club and the high society of Cuba.

²³ Odalisque also stands for a Turkish chambermaid, foretells the reversal in station between Nellie and her father's chambermaid which will be discussed later.

The Donna Reed Show and Nellie and her compatriots are engaging in a form of escapism through play-acting.

While this connection may seem tenuous at first, the title of *Holy Radishes!*, which is made in reference to the radish packing plant of Nellie and her friends, also connects this story to a poem about the Cold War. A poem titled “How to Survive a Nuclear War,” written by Maxine Kumin in 1984, references “holy radishes” referring to the annual radish festival in Oaxaca, Mexico. Titling his work *Holy Radishes!* Fernández jokingly combines Mexican and Cuban heritage to criticize the homogenization of Latino cultures, and one of the funnier scenes in the text is when a minister attempts to convert the “Mexicans.” In addition to the reference to the Mexican festival, the use of the phrase “holy radishes” matches this poem which is a reflection of the fear of nuclear activity:

Brought low in Kyoto
too sick with chills and fever
to take the bullet train to Hiroshima
I am jolted out of this geography
pursued by Nazis, kidnapped, stranded
when the dam bursts, my life
always in someone else's hands.
Room service brings me tea and aspirin.

This week the Holy Radish
Festival. Pure white daikons
one foot long grace all the city's shrines.
Earlier a celebration for the souls
of insects farmers may have trampled on
while bringing in the harvest.
Now shall I repent? (171-173)

This poem, like the novel, coalesces multiple heritages and places—fear of Nazis, atomic bombs and environmental distress—into one lament of the dying. However, in Fernández’s novel, the Holocaust survivor becomes the only character revered for his cultural heritage. This novel is a replication of hierarchical suffering with almost a complete disregard for the female

narrative of trauma. Instead, at the end, without much sympathy, Mrs. James B. Olsen and Nellie are tripping off to the sea for an imagined fantasyland that will almost certainly involve a recreation of their own abuse as they blithely join a lecherous group of sailors, while Ben's narrative of his family history as Nazi holocaust survivors becomes the only narrative that retains its truth. The Cuban exile, Bernabé, Nelson's best friend, also creates a new identity by pretending to be a Holocaust survivor. He pretends to be the long lost nephew of Uncle Ben who Bernabé believes has a fortune. His belief of Ben's fortune was based on Ben's attention and honor to community. In Bernabé's mind, the cultural connection was a result of financial standing. In contrast, Uncle Ben claims all in America is "prefabricated" and mentions a "mythical pre civil war south" (194). So Bernabe attempts to gain Ben's fortune for himself. However, after the burning of the shop by the KKK, the most treasured possession of Uncle Ben's is actually only a photograph. Thus, Ben becomes the representation of eschewing wealth and capitalism in favor of a true historical record, a true heritage. Ben stands in contrast to the other "prefabricated" characters, which places the narrative of Cuban exiles in the same narrative of the imagined mythical pre-Civil War South. Despite Uncle Ben's assumed true photograph of his Jewish heritage, he refuses to believe that Bernabé is not truly his nephew. Instead, at the end, the two forge a relationship based on a fabricated and imagined shared cultural memory through nostalgia.

However, the connection here is not necessarily suggesting the Holocaust as the only true memory of trauma, but rather, as Smith suggests in his analysis of trauma in southern studies, an alternate understanding of how to remember the past. In Smith's critique of the way nostalgia tends to romanticize the trauma of white southerners and make the reality of racism abstract, he references how Germany never lamented the fall of the Nazis and never erases the horrors and

atrocities of the regime: “abstract out the racism, and ‘the South’ becomes yet another sympathetically melancholy victim in an academic regime that loves professing its sympathies with melancholy victims” (360). *Holy Radishes!* critiques the nostalgia of the Cuban Americans as well as the U.S. South, but not necessarily the nostalgia of the Jewish diaspora. However, it is significant that both the poem and the novel align multiple tragedies with the Holy Radish festival which is possibly an intentional reference by Fernández. Regardless, the cultural hybridity of both the poem and the novel emphasize the universality of nostalgia and the combining of the tragedy of nuclear war with the Holocaust.

This connection between the fear of nuclear war and the idealized domesticity of shows like *The Donna Reed Show* is manifested throughout Nellie’s memories. Her photographs refer to the Ladies Tennis Club, which has documented photographs in the Cuban Heritage Collection. The Lawn and Lyceum Tennis Club began in Havana in the 1920s. Nellie presents her own tennis club as being this exoticized dancing group of women. Nellie fabricates an idyllic, exoticized memory when in reality her domestic life is more akin to that of Donna Reed. Furthermore, both the girls naming themselves after Hollywood movie stars and the immediate connection to the classic domestic life that Donna Reed portrays point to the affinity between the ladies of Havana, Cuba, and the women of the United States. This connection demonstrates the hybrid culture of their truly Spanish-American identity as described in the pamphlets of the Lawn and Lyceum Club as well as the ways in which both *The Donna Reed Show* and Nellie’s memories erased political moments of upheaval in favor of a retreat to domesticity and escapism.

The Lawn and Lyceum Club

As the archives at the Cuban Heritage Collection at the University of Miami reveal, the Lawn and Lyceum Tennis club, a real club similar to Fernández's fictional one, was a progressive group of Cuban women beginning in 1929.²⁴ The group hosted international women's conferences, brought in international authors of renown, and carefully crafted hybrid identities as both Spanish *and* American. The progressive women of the Lawn and Lyceum Club are a stark contrast to the narrative that Nellie has crafted of her domestic life. The Lawn and Lyceum Club joined with the Ladies' Tennis Club in 1939, and Nellie frequently mentions the Ladies' Tennis Club as well. Nellie's previous life was primarily centered around her inclusion and participation in these club activities. Nelly's descriptions of her club activities as well as the memories of the other women focus primarily on dinners, dances, and shows. The largest collection of photographs associated with the Club in the archives is the yearly flower show, for which the club became internationally renowned.²⁵

However, in contrast to this notoriety and the way the club is depicted in *Holy Radishes!*, the club actively participated in creating literacy classes, libraries, author readings, language classes, and women's events. The Lyceum Club originally began in 1929 under the feminist founder Berta Acena. In one of the early pamphlets describing the role of the club, *El Lyceum*, these words declare the club's philosophy: "la cultura era producto de la sociedad y a ella se debía por lo que nunca limitó sus actividades al disfrute exclusive de sus socias o de grupos

²⁴ For clarity, I will refer to the Lawn and Lyceum Club from the Cuban Heritage Collection's archives as the Lyceum Club, and the fictional club will be referred to as the Ladies Club from this point forward.

²⁵ One of the entries of winning flower shows was won by Maria Teresa Batista de Mestre, who is the mother of the now Grand Duchess of Luxembourg. She still maintains her Cuban heritage; however, she has been quoted as saying "her parents taught her not to focus on "nostalgia," and she is of no relation to Fulgencio Batista. The family emigrated from Cuba in 1959 after the revolution.

elitistas sino que, ajena a prejuicios y privilegios, abrió de par en par sus puertas a todos sin distinción de sexo, clas, credo religiosos o militancia política” (2—El Lyceum: Sociedad Femenina Creada para Promover el Progreso Cultural y Social de la Mujer y al Servicio de la Comunidad en General CHC Digital Collection).²⁶ The club overtly states their interest in avoiding any prejudice or privilege, which is not at all in accordance with Nellie and the other women’s depictions of their club. In their memories, the club was an elite institution, exactly in opposition to the stated goals. This disconnect between the goals and memories associated with the club further highlight how the text emphasizes how memory and nostalgia obscure historical realities and further demonstrate the distorted memories Fernández references.

Ten years later, the club joined with the Ladies’ Tennis Club, becoming the Lawn and Lyceum Tennis Club. The club was most recognized for its annual flower arrangement contest, which became known internationally. However, much of their work was dedicated to educational pursuits; in fact, their organization created the first library in Cuba. The records that exist in Miami primarily house the monthly activity programs from 1930s until the club was disbanded under Fidel Castro’s reign in 1968. These programs demonstrate a far wider sphere of influence than horticultural life. In addition to their monthly routine, several conferences were held. Notably, the first intellectual women’s conference was held in 1942. This conference clearly outlined the goals of the club to enhance the intellectual pursuits of the women as well as defining what it meant to be a Cuban-American woman.

Situada en el cruce de dos civilizaciones, entre la tradición española y la influencia norteamericana, nuestra isla combina en las múltiples modalidades de su carácter el vago idealismo latino y practicismo anglosajón. Este choque contradictorio de dos ambientes

²⁶ Culture was a product of the society and the women should never limit the activities to the exclusive enjoyment of the elite groups without avoiding the prejudices and privileges open to par en par the doors to all without distinction of sex, class, religious creed or political militancy. The Lyceum: Feminine Society Created to Promote the Cultural and Social Progress of the Woman and Community Service in General. (My translation.)

opuestos ha impreso en la mujer cubana una huella de inquietud e indecisión. El Lyceum es el producto de la lucha secular, apareciendo como una amalgama curiosa de salón a la francesa, “muy siglo XVII” y de club norteamericano del presente Memoria de la Trabajos Presentados a La “Primera Fiesta Intelectual de la Mujer” Celebrado en la Habana en el mes de Mayo 1935 (CHC Digital Collection)²⁷

This description of Cuban women already positions them as a hybrid identity wrestling with their role as progressive women who attempt to navigate their club’s social construction apart from merely a high society socialite club. Furthermore, the generalizations of the Latin idealism and practical Anglosaxon also demonstrate the ways in which these imaginaries affect their own construction of their identities.

Both the fictional club of the text and the actual Lawn and Lyceum Tennis Club portray a symbiotic relationship between the U.S. and Cuba. The President of Nellie’s club was Fanny de Fern, who was originally from New Orleans. Nellie had “never liked Fanny because she was a foreigner, and Nellie would have loved to have been one too” (118). Nellie’s xenophobia differs from other characters in the text such as Mrs. James B. Olsen’s husband who would not approve of his wife’s friendship with Nellie, or the minister who comes to the radish plant and refers to everyone as Mexicans, or the members of the KKK who attack the Jewish Holocaust survivor’s pawn shop. Instead, Nellie’s dislike is rooted in jealousy. At the last dinner club night before immigration, Fanny is honored as president and as she sails through the room, her husband requests that the musicians play “When the Saints go Marching In” as “a bit of nostalgia for her native land” (118). This is another parallel connecting Havana with the Old South, and even

²⁷ Situated in the cross of two civilizations, between the Spanish tradition and the north American influence, our island combines in the multiple modalities of their character the vague Latin idealism and Anglo-Saxon practicality. This clashing contradiction of two opposing ways has impressed on the Cuban woman a trace of restlessness or indecision. The Lyceum is the product of this public fight, appearing like a curious amalgamation of a French club in the 17th Century and a North American club of the present.

Fanny, in a position of power indulges in nostalgia. Moreover, Fanny's husband, Joseph Fern, was "Xawa's most respected sugar baron" and had wooed Fanny from New Orleans with "his suave manners and old-world charm at the debutante balls during Mardi Gras" (124). The focus is repeatedly on an "old-world" charm, so even prior to exile, this club is engaging in this nostalgia for a native land. Fanny is honored as "a seed from far away that has rooted deep in the red clay of Xawa" (124). Fanny's role as a fancy southern belle becoming president of the club further demonstrates the parallels between southern belles and the ladies of the club.

While the records of the Lyceum do not contain any non-Cuban residents, the women of the Lyceum attempt to directly engage the women of the United States. The Lyceum Club incorporated a plea to its American neighbors to continue purchasing more sugar. In an appendix to the International Women's Conference after the Decalogue describing the rules of the women, appendix B presents a request to the women of the United States in opposition to the wartime slogan "Eat no sugar. Help Win the War." This pamphlet refers to "Our Sugar Problem" which details how the reduction of sugar is problematic for the women of Cuba and begins with a reference to the Good Neighbor Policy, ostensibly to begin with the common ground and support between nations:

The Good Neighbor Policy, sponsored by President Roosevelt and supported by general opinion throughout the hemisphere, coupled with the full cooperation which you must expend in your own "all out" war effort, may make it difficult for you to see your duty.

In this pamphlet, the "Women of Cuba" are reframing the war effort to include eating sugar because they feel the Sugar Problem has not been "understood or considered by the American Public." The document ends with a final appeal that mimics biblical language:

We cannot live on sugar alone; *You* cannot live without it; but the threat of this new slogan, the fear that it may become a part of wartime psychology is so great,

that we implore your immediate, close, and sincere cooperation in this, The Problem of the Women of Cuba”

*Economic Committee of the Lyceum Club
October 18, 1942*

As a rhetorical argument, this document, which may not have enjoyed a wide readership, establishes the commonalities between these women just as *Holy Radishes!* also connects the women of the U.S. and Cuba, although less positively. More importantly, it further demonstrates the Lyceum Club’s interest in political and economic affairs. It also speaks to the economics of the text in which the disparities of money rarely seem to register in the characters’ minds.

Those outside of this moneyed elite are barely present within the memories. In fact, Rulfo, a key character in Nellie’s traumatic escape, is always at the periphery of the scene quite literally hanging from a tree to peer in and spy on the glamorous lives of Don Pardo and his friends. Similarly, Dinah, the prostitute, flits in and out of many characters’ lives, surviving on the kindness of strangers linking the wealthy men throughout the text. Arguably, Rulfo and Dinah control a large swath of the narrative. In fact, Nellie, at one point, exclaims “it’s been you this whole time,” and yet for readers, Dinah and Rulfo barely register throughout the novel, much in the same way the servants in Eudora Welty’s classic *Delta Wedding* move the action of the text from the background. However, Fernández does not absolve anyone in his text, and Rulfo is, in fact, Nellie’s rapist. As such, Fernández avoids a hierarchy of pathos and honor in this text; no character is left unscathed. His parody of nostalgia and exilic literature is at once satirical and poignant in its ability to commingle multiple mythic heritages, sparing none.

Holy Radishes! explodes these notions of nostalgia by connecting typical American products and images of Hollywood with the archives to reject the “absolute narrative of the past” of both consumer culture and characters (Kandiyota 82).

Nellie, Milkmaid, and Mass Consumerism

The nostalgia of Nellie is rooted in a classist society based primarily on wealth; the life of her pet pig is more important than her maid, Delfina. Nellie's selfish, obliviousness represents more than a spoiled, rich child but rather a focus on consumerism and products. Nellie's nostalgia for the past is never about missing a homeland but rather some intangible way of life in imagined Mondovi. However, this intangible way of life was made possible by the undying work and compromises of Delfina and the other workers. Fernández further demonstrates the exploitation of these workers by using quintessential American products—bubble gum and condensed milk—as commodities exchanged for sex. Don Andres forces his servant Tomasa to play sexual games with him in the bathtub in exchange for one can of condensed milk, Milkmaid per month. Two years prior to publication of *Holy Radishes!*, Fernández published a short story titled "Milkmaid," which is reprinted almost verbatim in *Holy Radishes!* The only significant change in the chapter is the line "Nellie felt powerful for the first time in her life" after she yells at her attackers (165). In the novel, this line is absent, which strips Nellie of her one powerful moment and the later revision remains even more unhelpful much like her final encounter with her father.

In a reversal of the final scene in *Grapes of Wrath*, Nellie does not feed her father with her breastmilk. The mother and daughter in *Grapes of Wrath* share an unspoken agreement for Rose of Sharon to milk a complete stranger: "Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharon's eyes, and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into each other" and Ma finally says, "you got to" and the mother and daughter wordlessly understand the sacrifice to be made for a complete stranger. In contrast, when her own father was dying of starvation Nellie refuses to

breastfeed him. Delfina, the loving, obsessive maid of the family, tries to convince Nellie to offer her own breastmilk to her father: “Nellie couldn’t believe Delfina’s plan. Actually, she couldn’t quite grasp its significance. She didn’t say much after that conversation” (167). However, Nellie understands and the next time she sees her father she begins to breastfeed her father, and “his swollen tongue started out of his mouth” (169). However, Nellie stops from embarrassment, and her father dies that day. This scene is a reversal of the power and wealth that Don Andres had forced a young girl to give him sexual favors for one measly can of condensed milk, when a moment of breast milk could have eventually saved him. In addition to this scene being a reversal of Don Andres’ relationship with Tomasa, this scene is also a reversal of the ending of *Grapes of Wrath*. Nellie refuses to offer herself to her own dying father, while Rose of Sharon nurses a dying stranger. *Grapes of Wrath* despite intolerable hardship evokes a sense of hope, whereas *Holy Radishes!* decidedly eschews all hope of redemption and safety for Nellie and her family.

In addition to the reversal of *Grapes of Wrath*, Fernández also invokes the reversal of the Middle Passage. During the revolution of Cuba, Nelson Pardo crosses the Atlantic supposedly carrying his family’s fortune. However, he instead lets the suitcase drift into the ocean because he has felt consumed with dread as he has handled his father’s excessive riches. In fact, as he sees the suitcase sailing away, “the bobbing rectangular object drifting towards the Gulf Stream, thirty-three years of serfdom came to an end” (145). In this scene, we see the ability of the Atlantic’s obvious power to change fortunes. But more importantly, it rewrites the typical narrative of success and status. For Nelson, his status as a wealthy man actually makes him a serf. He watches the Atlantic carry away his wealth, but this reversal of fortunes—the willingness to part with that which made him successful—rewrites the way we typically think of

the Atlantic—as a place carrying slaves. He is, instead, surprisingly freed from the tyranny of capitalism rather than placed within it as a commodity. Fernández further emphasizes this point with the ship that Nelson rides, noting that “he boarded the ‘Tawana.’ In true revolutionary spirit, the coal burning locomotive had been christened ‘Tawana’ in honor of an African martyr” (140). Nelson’s breaking free from the tyranny is similar to the revolutions of African slaves, which is particularly the class that Nelson has been oppressing. He rewrites his narrative of freedom through his passage of the Atlantic through his role reversal. Nelson is being connected to the African diaspora and martyrdom of slaves, even though he is choosing to give up his wealth. This reversal of commonly accepted narratives of the Middle Passage and the Great Depression in Middle America suggests a remapping of cultural heritage. Nelson voluntarily gives up his wealth in a parody of the slaves coming from Cuba. Contrasting Nelson’s exile with slavery parodies the exaggerated nostalgia and trauma of the Cuban exiles. Through his blending of multiple narratives of trauma, Fernández critiques the fantasies and memories borne out of a commodified, productive nostalgia. These fantasies ultimately align the Cuba imaginary with that of a United States in the 1950s avoiding the Cold War and that of the plantation South. Regardless of time and space, *Holy Radishes!* demonstrates the escapism of nostalgia which rejects complicated immigrant histories in favor of a “one size fits all” narrative akin to mass market consumerism.

Conclusion

In 1998, Peter Sagal, now host of NPR's popular Saturday show "Wait, Wait Don't Tell Me," wrote a screenplay titled *Cuba Mine* about the political revolution of Cuba in 1959. He was commissioned to write the script, but it lay dormant until six years later, when the script was finally updated and retitled *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights*. While often scripts lie for several years waiting to be picked up by a company, this particular change of script provides a perfect representation for the ways in which the politics of the Caribbean, specifically Cuba, are often erased. In fact, the politics of the film were almost completely erased in favor of a love story. The film ends with the overthrow of Batista's government and the lovers—a revolutionary Cuban teenager and a wealthy white immigrant from the States-- are torn apart forever. In his discussion of the screenplay, Sagal mentions that part of the necessity for the film was to have the couple forever separated much like the original *Dirty Dancing*, where it was most likely that the couple would not see each other again.²⁸ Javier, played by Star Wars' Diego Luna, is a revolutionary Cuban thoroughly in support of Castro's new regime, which is interesting given the fear of the Communist Castro and the ultimate refusal of the United States' to acknowledge the government of Cuba until 2014. This movie was a full ten years before the U.S-Cuban thaw but points to many of the changing views and how the Caribbean imaginary still shapes popular culture.

Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights is a perfect example of the sexualized playground of 1950s Cuba complete with dirty dancing. The dismissal of the politics of the movie in favor of a light-hearted dancing film also represents much of the Caribbean imaginary. However, the

²⁸ The interpretation that the lovers will never see each other again in the original *Dirty Dancing* is perhaps not shared by all viewers.

popular view of the Castro government in 2004 also points to the softening of the relationship between Cuba and the U.S. Throughout this conclusion, I will link popular culture items to the charting of the Caribbean imaginary to demonstrate the continued significance of recognizing the problematic effects of an Imperialist worldview.

In 2014, when President Barack Obama signed the *détente* formally recognizing the Cuban government, the immediate reactions on Facebook and other social media sites were reveling in planning future trips to Cuba. The ideological underpinning of Cuba and the Caribbean as a tourist space full of unimaginable fun and luxury immediately resurfaced in the wake of the thaw. This reaction to Cuba and tourism is unsurprising given that much of the Caribbean is a tourist haven. In Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban* the grandmother mourns, "I've heard too many stories of young girls destroyed by what passes as tourism in this country. Cuba has become the joke of the Caribbean, a place where everything and everyone is for sale. How did we allow this to happen?" (164). The grandmother is a staunch supporter of the Castro government, and at the time she was writing she used to scour the seas and lands looking for the invaders from the U.S. The grandmother's concern that Cuba was a joke of the Caribbean is a stark contrast to its earlier description as the "pearl of the Antilles" as described in the 1940s in various ads and news. However, Cuba as pearl and Cuba as joke both speak to the ways in which the U.S. was imagining the Caribbean as a site of tourism and moral licentiousness. Furthermore, the description of tourism as essentially purchasing women alludes to the sexual objectification of the Caribbean as well as the commodification of culture.

The 2017 best picture winner, "Moonlight" also points to a greater recognition and discussion of Afro-Cuban, Afro-Caribbean populations. A single line by one of the main characters, Juan, mentions, "Lotta black folks in Cuba but you wouldn't know it from being here

in Miami.” This brief mention of black Cubans demonstrates the evolving demographics of Miami, especially when the focus is so often on first generation white Cuban populations (Bodeheimer). While my discussion of Fulgencio Batista examines the different race constructions between the U.S. and Cuba, this shift in recognizing Afro-Cuban, and even Afro-Caribbean populations is a shift from the colorism of the Caribbean. Even if Batista was viewed much differently in the U.S. and Cuba, the racism and colorism was very much still present in both nations. It is also widely circulated today, such as in *Dreaming in Cuban* which mentions that Batista was denied entry into the Havana Yacht Club for being too dark (García 2007). While Cuba stands in for the Caribbean imaginary in much of my project, there’s also a shift in how the Caribbean views itself. In poet Merle Collins’ address to Grenada about the 1980s revolution, she explains how Grenada ,Cuba and Nicaragua were seen as one country by Ronald Reagan, specifically as a threat to democracy, in a dominoes concern theory of the red scare. At the height of the Cold War in the 80s, Collins emphasizes that she doesn’t see the Carribbean embracing its one heritage enough:

I remember the US president Reagan’s fear that “Cuba, Nicaragua and Grenada” were “one country” and the implication that this wasn’t something good, but I also remember the excitement of getting to know something more about the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. I remember that strong affirmation of the period that the Caribbean was one Caribbean and that were all united in our stories. (34)

In contrast, Erna Brodber feels that this idea of the Caribbean is too complicated to be seen as one nation. There’s a shift from what Collins suggests to a diasporic space of blackness but not a homogenizing oneness (Abrams). Much like Brodber’s different opinion about the Caribbean, she also had a much different opinion of Marcus Garvey. Erna Brodber’s extolling of Marcus Garvey is far different than her predecessor’s mocking of him. In the chapter on Hurston and Brodber, I examine the different ways that they upend patronage systems. In 1925, Hurston

wrote a short story about the biblical character of Moses titled “The Fire and the Cloud” in which Hurston mocks Marcus Garvey as a charlatan because he had recently been convicted of mail fraud and sentenced to prison (81). Marcus Garvey was never pardoned for this sentence despite President Calvin Coolidge commuting his sentence. In the last days of Obama’s administration he denied an appeal to pardon Marcus Garvey. This appeal was driven by Garvey’s son, Julius, who had the support of the Congressional Black Caucus and thousands of signed petitions. Hurston and Brodber’s different approaches to Marcus Garvey point to the shifting change toward embracing black nationalist heritage.

The Tony award winning musical, *Hamilton*, by Lin-Manuel Miranda quickly became a cultural phenomenon. *Hamilton* reinvigorates the story of Caribbean-born Alexander Hamilton and clearly points out that the United States was never the monolithic white, Christian founding fathers so often described in history textbooks²⁹. However, even more salient than *Hamilton* is Lin-Manuel Miranda’s first full-length musical, which has direct affiliations with the third chapter. Miranda’s *In the Heights* recounts the story of a Dominican-American neighborhood in Manhattan in which the main character, Usnavi, longs for a return to the Dominican Republic. Although he has never actually been to the Dominican Republic, he has created a fictional island in his mind that will connect him to his deceased parents. In the resolution of the musical Usnavi decides to remain in Manhattan singing “I’ve found my island, I’ve been on it this whole time- I’m home.” Much like the search for the mythological roots in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day* and Toni Morrison’s *Tar Baby*, Usnavi’s roots are created by his diasporic community rather than the physical land of the Caribbean. Both novels express an ambivalence towards historical

²⁹ While certainly the whitewashing of history is prevalent throughout, a most salient example is Texas Education legislature’s recent history book adaptations.

rootedness and the contradictions between modernity and myth. Like Usnavi, George in *Mama Day* is an orphan in New York city looking for cultural community and Son, in *Tar Baby* is also searching for the island culture. This musical points to the diasporic Caribbean community shunning a return to the physical land while also still preserving cultural unity. Cocoa visits her family of Willow Springs, but remains mainland. In contrast, Son in *Tar Baby* is swallowed up by the island. While the neoliberal policies as well as the Communist scare of the 1980s were instrumental in attempting to dismantle the cultural solidarity of the Caribbean, both Morrison and Naylor also participate in this ambivalence in embracing Caribbean culture. Miranda's *In the Heights* overall provides a more positive, hopeful immigrant community experience, while demonstrating that his island community of the Dominican Republic is rooted in an imagined nostalgia.

The commodified nostalgia of the Cuban diaspora is also represented in the recent remake of the 1980s family comedy, *One Day at a Time*. The new version features a Cuban American family in Echo Park, California. This version attends to specific Cuban experiences, recounting stories of Operation Pedro Pan and even chastising characters for wearing Che Guevara shirts. The showrunner, Gloria Calderon Kellett comments on the specificity of the show, "What happened with the Latino shows is that because we're so different and divided, when people are programming for Latinos, they want to homogenize it a little bit to cover everything. The specificity goes away, and when that goes away, you lose something" (Fernández). Much like the chapter on *Holy Radishes!* discusses the need for specificity in immigrant narratives, *One Day at a Time* points to a hopeful increase in depictions of the multicultural U.S. All of these recent iterations of the Caribbean experience demonstrate that the

Caribbean imaginary is still a reflection of U.S. imperialism, but multifaceted, heteroglossic narratives continue to contribute to a more accurate depiction of current demographics.

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