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Los Angeles

Urban Intimacies:  
Reading Public Women in the Postcolonial Caribbean

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in  
Comparative Literature

by

Dana Marie Linda

2017

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Urban Intimacies:

Reading Public Women in the Postcolonial Caribbean

by

Dana Marie Linda

Doctor of Philosophy in Comparative Literature

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor Jennifer A. Sharpe, Chair

This dissertation is the first book-length study of Caribbean island literatures from the English- and Spanish-speaking regions to explore the material and metaphorical geographies of prostitution anchored in the port cities of Jamaica, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Although studies of urban space are typically oriented towards metropolitan centers of Caribbean migration, this project foregrounds the port city as a geographical space that is bound up with the figure of the public woman in what I am calling a relationship of intimacy. Its alternative literary historiography extends post-independence Caribbean literature of citizenship and nationhood to contemporary writers who destabilize both the island paradise myth and national conceptions of unity. In particular, I argue that this alternative gendered spatial imaginary provides a dynamic model that complicates the imposed colonial boundaries of race, gender, class, and nation that have been reproduced by the postcolonial state. My dissertation builds on sociological studies

of sex work in the Caribbean by making a case for the role that creative narrative interventions play in bringing greater legitimacy and visibility to women who are marginalized within nationalist discourses

The case studies to follow examine eight primary texts set or produced over the course twentieth century that center the major port cities of Jamaica, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. Each chapter pairs a canonical work from the post-independence era with a more recent fictional engagement, and each pairing informs a culturally-responsive approach to the public woman and her associated spatial tropes of prostitution. The first chapter looks to the novels of diasporic Jamaican authors Orlando Patterson and Kerry Young, arguing that while Patterson uses a rhetoric of fallenness and uneven geographic mobility to show the limits of Jamaican multicultural modernity, Young exposes the metaphors of containment and abjection that underline this narrative. The second chapter investigates performance-oriented works of Earl Lovelace and Tony Hall from Trinidad for the way they redirect a national discourse of increased indebtedness away from imperial dynamics of domination and dependency in favor of celebrating the Carnival public woman. The third chapter turns its attention to Puerto Rican writers Luis Rafael Sánchez and Mayra Santos-Febres and their divergent engagements with tourist and nationalist discourses through the female figure of the brothel in San Juan and Ponce. The fourth chapter bridges the gap between “official” and “dissident” Cuban novelists, arguing that both Miguel Barnet and Fernando Velázquez Medina employ the *rumbera* and the recurrent trope of Havana’s ruins to recuperate an alternative literary vision of the city that rejects the sex-based and text-based repressions perpetuated by the revolutionary state.

The dissertation of Dana Marie Linda is approved.

Jorge Marturano

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## PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

- Linda, Dana M. "Oonya Kempadoo" and "Pedro Mir" entries. *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography*. Edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Franklin W. Knight. Oxford University Press, 2016.
- . "Affect Theory: Embodiment and the Archive." *Spotlight on Faculty Research*. UCLA Center for the Study of Women, 7 January 2015.
- . Rev. of Shona N. Jackson's *Creole Indigeneity: Between Myth and Nation in the Caribbean* (2012). Edited by Edward Cavanagh and Lorenzo Veracini. *Settler Colonial Studies*, 13 November 2013. 222-225.
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- "Shipwrecked Sailors and the Circum-Caribbean Imagination in Crane and García Márquez's early works," American Comparative Literature Association, Providence, Rhode Island. April 2012.
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## INTRODUCTION

### Urban Intimacies: Reading Public Women in the Postcolonial Caribbean

“A la luz del recuerdo, porque de los ojos  
se han perdido, las presento:  
formales, finas, serias; ellas, las  
que dieron más que recibieron  
en esa compra-venta del vivir a diario  
a como se pudiera.  
De la memoria, saltan al papel, hablando  
del sinuoso tiempo, largo como ofidio.”

[By memory’s light, because my eyes  
have lost them, let me introduce  
those women: formal, refined, serious  
women who gave more than they got  
in the daily buying and selling  
as one could.  
Out of my memory they appear on this paper,  
speaking of that difficult time, long as an era.]

—Georgina Herrera, “Calle de las mujeres de vida”

“You cannot stop  
those street gals  
those streggehs  
Allamanda  
Cassia  
Poui  
Golden Shower  
Flaunting themselves everywhere...

You cannot erase the memory  
of my story”

—Olive Senior, “Meditation On Yellow”

In “Calle de las mujeres de vida” [Street of Working Women, 1974], the Cuban poet Georgina Herrera creates a roadmap that imaginatively recovers the struggles of urban living for black and working-class women such as herself. This poetic route begins

on Calixto García – an infamous street for prostitution in 1940s Jovellanos<sup>1</sup> – and ends in 1970s Havana with the persona of the poet inscribing her memories of those “women of the world” [las mujeres de vida]<sup>2</sup> into the pages of revolutionary history. Significantly, prostitution was considered officially eradicated from the island and a taboo to even mention publicly at the time “Calle de las mujeres de vida” was published. Herrera, who moved to the island’s capital shortly before the 1959 Revolution to work as maid, would have been acutely aware of the racial, gendered, and class hierarchies underpinning the Havana campaign to “rescue and reeducate” thousands of Cuban women into proper and productive citizens<sup>3</sup>; as well as the heightened consequences for writers who treated politically sensitive and controversial topics.<sup>4</sup> Recognizing that she might be “running some risks” “[corriendo algunos riesgos], Herrera appropriates the language and spaces of revolutionary respectability as ways to speak out against the stereotyped representations of women working in prostitution and to counteract their systematic erasure from the hegemonic discourses of national identity. The street becomes especially symbolic in this respect since it “places” the *mujer de vida* within a public domain of

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<sup>1</sup> Although Jovellanos is not a port city, it was considered one of Cuba’s largest black majority cities in the early twentieth century. See Herrera’s chapter entitled, “El Pueblo, Para Siempre” [The Town, Forever] in *Golpeando* for further details on the city’s history.

<sup>2</sup> While *mujeres de vida* more accurately translates to “working women,” a common euphemism for a promiscuous woman or prostitute, I have retained Margaret Randall’s original translation, “women of the world” here because it captures Herrera’s strategic rescripting of prostitution through state discourses of respectability.

<sup>3</sup> According to both Karina Céspedes (2007) and Rachel Hynson (2015), despite the revolutionary government’s official commitments to racial and gender equality, many of its reform campaigns that sought to “capture” women’s labor for the revolution were tightly interwoven with white, middle class ideals of femininity.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, *El Puente*, an independent literary group with which Herrera was briefly associated, eventually disintegrated in 1965 after many of its young writers were sent also sent to reeducation camps for their own perceived practices of sexual deviance and literary decadence (Kapcia 196).

national honor through its very name, which pays tribute to the one of legendary heroes<sup>5</sup> from Cuba's struggle for independence. In doing so, Herrera compels us to rethink the existing notions of citizenship that have been silent on the topic of prostitution within postcolonial nations.

Writing two decades later, Jamaican poet Olive Senior follows Herrera's lead and uses the localized figure of the prostitute to unravel the imposed grammars and imagined geographies that reinforce rigid racial, sexual, and spatial hierarchies in the postcolonial era. Initially written as a standalone poem, and later republished in her 1994 collection *Gardening in the Tropics*, Senior's "Meditation on Yellow" is part of her attempt to replace persistent myths of tropical exoticism mapped onto women's bodies with a "creative flowering that is rooted in the tongue" ("Poem as Gardening" 48). But rather than simply confront the foreign vacationer's neocolonial desires for "local color," Senior's rhetorical meditation on yellow also extends its dialogic critique to the equally problematic gaze of the Caribbean male writer. This becomes apparent when we take into account the excerpt that precedes the poem, in which the Colombian magical realist Gabriel García Márquez describes his favorite color as "[t]he yellow of the Caribbean seen from Jamaica at three in the afternoon" (*Gardening* 11).<sup>6</sup> The above passage can be read as a response to his belief that the "magical world" of the Caribbean "is like those invincible plants that are reborn under the cement" [nuestro mundo mágico es como esas

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<sup>5</sup> Calixto García y Iñiguez was a general in the Cuban revolutionary movement against Spain in 1868-98 and also fought against the subsequent US invasion. Many public buildings, centers, and streets are named after him throughout Cuba.

<sup>6</sup> In an early publication of the poem, Senior provides this information in the epigraph, which is taken from García Márquez's 1982 interview with Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza, "The Fragrance of Guavas." See Senior (1992).



plantas invencibles que renacen debajo del cemento].<sup>7</sup> Taking the image of “unconquerable plants” even further, Senior infuses these invincible “roots” with a very different set of figurative connotations. Here the Jamaican women who participate in various kinds of sex work in the island’s resort towns and cruise ports metaphorically unite with “Allamanda,” “Cassia,” “Poui,” and “Golden Shower,” all of which refer to “tropical plants with beautiful golden blossoms” that “are often used in street plantings” (“Gardening Glossary” 3). These “golden” street gals, moreover, act as foils to the “high yellow,” or light-skinned *mulatas* who repeatedly figure as naturalized sites of sexual conquest in García Márquez’s fictional world. By “flaunting themselves everywhere,” Senior’s *stregghes* remap the divisions of public and private and the traditional gendering of the tropics since the poet imagines them “bursting through/the soil reminding us/of what’s buried there” (17)<sup>8</sup> Like Herrera, Senior engages an urban imagination that challenges the construction of Caribbean women as symbols – rather than constitutive subjects – within the dominant spaces of national belonging. Although separated by historical, national, linguistic, and even formal genre boundaries, the Cuban *mujer de vida* and the Jamaican *streggh* share textual space with the comparative literary geographies of prostitution explored throughout this dissertation.

“Urban Intimacies: Reading Public Women in the Postcolonial Caribbean”  
examines Caribbean literatures of the English- and Spanish-speaking regions for their depiction of material and metaphorical geographies of prostitution anchored in the port

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<sup>7</sup> García Márquez borrows this idea from the Dominican Juan Bosch in his essay “Caribe mágico,” available in the 1996 collection, *The Archipelago: New Writing From and About the Caribbean* and, more recently, online via the Colombian newspaper, *El Espectador*:  
<<http://www.elespectador.com/especiales/caribe-magico-articulo-555493>>

<sup>8</sup> “Macca” is a carefully chosen image since its thorny exterior conjures up García Márquez’s “unconquerable plants” and implies Caribbean women’s sexual strength through its fertility-enhancing properties.

cities of Jamaica, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, and Cuba. My approach to this topic is grounded in methodological framework that I refer to as “intertextual intimacy,” which takes inspiration from Édouard Glissant theory of “relational poetics” and the main trends emanating from Caribbean sexuality studies. To demonstrate the intellectual benefits of this comparative method, it explores four cases emanating from the major literary traditions of Jamaica, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, and Cuba in which the metaphorical ties between urban space and women’s sexuality have been central to destabilizing the “proper” boundaries of postcolonial national citizenship. In particular, each chapter explores how post-independence and contemporary writers from each nation have engaged the operative metaphors of racial and spatial exclusion embedded within prostitution in order to destabilize the island paradise myth and statist conceptions of creole unity. In ways similar to Herrera and Senior’s poems, the eight literary works addressed in this project engage with literary strategies of adaptation that tackle the imposed colonial frameworks of exoticism and respectable state-making while offering vital alternatives to historically and geographically insular models of reading. Before outlining the theoretical and historical parameters of this project in further detail, I would first like to clarify the rationale behind my use of the somewhat antiquated term “public woman” as a paradigm for studying the intertextual relation between prostitution and port cities in postcolonial island writing.

### **Caribbean Discourse on Public Women**

Given that there has been much feminist debate over the political and moral agendas embedded in the language used to describe the wider sex trade, this project takes seriously its usage of “public woman” as a key term for studying Caribbean literary

representations of prostitution. In their introduction to *Global Sex Workers: Rights, Resistance, and Redefinition*, Kamala Kempadoo and Jo Doezema argue in favor of the gender-neutral epithet “sex worker” as a concept that is not only “inextricably related to struggles for the recognition of women’s work, for basic human rights and for decent working conditions” but also “insists that working women’s common interests can be articulated within the context of broader (feminist) struggles against the devaluation of ‘women’s’ work and gender exploitation within capitalism” (8). While this project is similarly concerned with the extent to which women’s sexual labor is rooted in a longer history of capitalist exploitation in the Caribbean, my decision to center the category of “public woman” is meant to draw attention to the racial and sexual dynamics of prostitution that are inextricable from imposed colonial orderings of space, place, and gender in port cityspace. As a translatable term across English and Spanish, the phrase public woman, or *mujer pública*, came into prominence during the nineteenth century when the dominant geographical imagination of public (male) and private (female) space underwent widespread restructuring both in the imperial metropolises and their colonies. Following the abolition of slavery across the islands, the influx of Afro-Caribbean women into the capital cities in search of formal and informal waged work made them key targets in the national debates and regulation campaigns against prostitution.<sup>9</sup> With this in mind, as Belinda Edmondson has noted, a Caribbean discourse on public women “illustrate[s] the historical nature of state and class interests in women’s behavior in the

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<sup>9</sup> As scholars such as David Trotman (1986), Luis Martínez-Fernández (2010), Rosamond King (2011), and Mimi Sheller (2012) have pointed out, across the Anglophone and Hispanic regions, black women’s public visibility in the markets, yards, streets, and labor protests during post-emancipation era starkly contrasted to the “homebound” expectations for colonial elite women. It is also important to note that, as in the case of Puerto Rico and Cuba, even if black women did not numerically dominate prostitution in the capital cities, their perceived illicit sexuality figured prominently in anti-prostitution policies and popular discourses. See Sippial (2013) and Suárez Findlay (1999) for examples related to Havana and Ponce.

public area of the street, in the lowbrow arena of dancehalls and the carnivals, and...the traditional attitude of the respectable and aspiring-respectable classes toward (usually black) women in public sphere” (*Caribbean Middlebrow* 111).

In line with Edmondson’s thinking, this dissertation argues that the literary history and aesthetic value of the public woman figure not only alerts us to the legacies of colonialism and anticolonialism that have shaped postcolonial articulations of national belonging and sexual citizenship; the critical coupling of “public” and “woman” also complicates gendered and geopolitical divisions of space across various local, regional, and global scales. My main argument centers around four distinct yet overlapping figurations of the public woman that range from adaptations of more conventional prostitution tropes (i.e., the fallen woman and the brothel mother) to island-specific figures (i.e., the carnival street performer and the cabaret dancer). For the post-independence and contemporary Caribbean writers featured in this study, each of these figures is intimately bound up with the complex (and often contentious) relationship between urban space and the (re)configuration of national identity.

### **Contribution to Existing Scholarship**

In the past two decades, there has been a dramatic increase in scholarly research related to prostitution in the Caribbean as well as to the broader field of sexuality studies.<sup>10</sup> To date, Kamala Kempadoo’s *Sexing the Caribbean: Race, Gender, and Sexual Labor* (2004) remains the most comprehensive study in terms of its historical range and

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<sup>10</sup> See Sharpe and Pinto (2006) and Kempadoo (2003, 2009) for critical overviews research related to the growing field of Caribbean sexuality studies, as well as Rosamond King’s “Sex and Sexuality in English Caribbean Novels—A Survey from 1950” (2002), Linden Lewis’ “The Culture of Gender and Sexuality in the Caribbean (2003), and Jafari Allen’s *¡Venceremos?: The Erotics of Black Self-making in Cuba* (2011) for broader interdisciplinary discussions.

geographic and cultural scope. Most recently, scholars such as Amalia L. Cabezas (2009) and Megan Daigle (2015) have provided ethnographic and cultural histories of sex tourism that are attentive to the both contemporary political and economic situations and national discourses of prostitution in the Dominican Republic and Cuba.<sup>11</sup> Others, such as Elaine Suárez Findlay (1999), Lara Putnam (2003), and Tiffany Sippial (2013) have devoted considerable attention to the historical relationship between prostitution and the port cities across the island and continental Caribbean. However, literary approaches to the topic are few and far between. Several notable publications, including Donette Francis' *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship: Sexuality and the Nation in Contemporary Caribbean* (2011) and Angelique V. Nixon's *Resisting Paradise: Tourism, Diaspora, and Sexuality in Caribbean Culture* (2015), have incorporated contemporary fictional works that address recent issues of prostitution and sex tourism in their critical engagements with broader transnational issues of Caribbean sexuality and citizenship.<sup>12</sup> But there has yet to be a book-length project that highlights the literary intersections of prostitution and port cities and the ways in which this compound trope produces a regional imagination that critiques racially- and sexually-charged political desires of the postcolonial nation state. In an effort to map this unexplored aspect of island literary histories, "Urban Intimacies" brings post-independence island fictions in dialogue with their contemporary counterparts to trace their intertextual relationships to the public woman as a figure that complicates the imagined geographies and communities of the nation state. Despite this

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<sup>11</sup> For other studies related to the topic of sex tourism, refer to Kempadoo's 1999 anthology *Sun, Sex, and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean*, Denise Brennan's *What's love got to do with it?: Transnational Desires and Sex Tourism in the Dominican Republic* (2004), and Mark Padilla's *Caribbean Pleasure Industry: Tourism, Sexuality, and AIDS in the Dominican Republic* (2008).

<sup>12</sup> Esther Whitfield's *Cuban Currency: The Dollar and Special Period Fiction* (2008) and Rosamond King's *Island Bodies: Transgressive Sexualities in the Caribbean Imagination* (2014) also contain chapters respectively related to the national and interregional contexts of sex tourism.

shared thematic concern, the eight literary works taken up in this study offer a diverse – and at times conflicting – set of alternatives to the gendered colonial myths of racial respectability and island exoticism and their twentieth century legacies across the Anglophone and Hispanic Caribbean; thus, reflecting the need for a dynamic comparative methodology for addressing between prostitution and port cities across distinct island literary histories and cultural geographies.

### **Grounds for Comparison**

Each set of readings taken up in the four chapters of this project are intended to highlight the port city as a shared concept-metaphor across four disparate island literary traditions that have rarely been studied together within the context of urban space and sexuality studies. But rather than develop a singular line of thinking across distinct cultural, political, and historical landscapes of postcolonial nationalism, the larger goal of this project is to engage a model of inter-island comparison that can accommodate what Glissant calls an “intertwined poetics,” that privileges concepts of worldly difference and relation over those of sameness and exclusion—especially, within our practices of reading.<sup>13</sup> While scholars such as J. Michael Dash, Silvio Torres-Saillant, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, Raphael Dalleo, Robert Márquez, and many others have pushed for “less insular” paradigms for reading the Caribbean, this project takes its strongest cue from Natalie Melas’ important insights about the literal space of postcolonial comparison. Though not exclusively Caribbean in focus, Melas’ *All the Difference in the World* (2007) provides a useful template for my own thinking about the “problems of studying literature in an expanded geographical scope” (33). In the second chapter, titled

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<sup>13</sup> See Glissant’s “Introduction to a Poetics of the Diverse” (1999) as well as “The Unforeseeable Diversity of the World” (2002).

“Empire’s Loose Ends,” she warns about the “totalizing temptations” of globalization theory and its process of drawing “too absolute a boundary between the various phases of decolonization and postcolonialization that precede it” (112). The bulk of Melas’ metacritical exercise is dedicated to deepening our understanding on the cultural and historical limits of a world-inclusive “space” of comparison; and she goes so far as to highlight its uncanny parallels with the past practices of imperial geography which also “welcomed all the difference in the world, so long as all those differences could occupy fixed places on a hierarchical scale” (19, 29).<sup>14</sup> Comparison, according to Melas, continues to be indistinguishable from imperial progress when it presumes western modernity’s principle forms, such as the nation-state, the individual citizen-subject, and the idea of literature itself, as a familiar basis for equivalence. To keep these Eurocentric/expansionist tendencies in check, Melas develops a postcolonial itinerary for an “emancipated comparison that is qualified and undercut by a focus on the incursion of contrary and incommensurable forces upon it” (43). She also surveys several the works of Caribbean writers such Derek Walcott, Aimé Césaire, and Simone Schwartz-Bart to test out her formula of comparison without equivalence – or, in her terms, “incommensurable relation” – and suggests that the disjunction between the particular postcoloniality of each island and the circumstances of uneven development that connect the region activates another kind of global dialogue—one that “produces a generative dislocation without silencing discourse or marking the limit of knowledge” (31).

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<sup>14</sup> In this respect, *All the Difference in the World* answers Ali Behdad’s call for a “historically informed engagement with the unequal geography of globalization” that is attentive to “cultural attitudes, political practices, and economic strategies from the colonial period that persist today” (On Globalization, Again! 77). Both Behdad and Melas write in favor of a longer institutional memory of globalization that takes into account its colonial, anticolonial, and neocolonial dimensions, and are skeptical of the “deterministic configuration of progress or change and, in tandem, the inordinate claim for the novelty of the present” that runs through the current academic literature on globalization (*All the Difference* 22).

This concept of incommensurable relation is relevant to my project's critical framework in that the set of texts studied in and across each chapter "share a ground of comparison but no basis of equivalence" (Melas 227). Rather than try to impose a "unifying" standard of comparison on four island nations that don't fit neatly under a common postcolonial rubric, "Urban Intimacies" looks to the ways in which the female figures and spatial metaphors of prostitution embedded in each island literary context not only forge unexpected links but also express fundamental differences between the various national, sociocultural, and geographic terrains of the port cities that form the basis of this study. In each chapter, I pair a canonical text from the post-independence period with a more recent fictional engagement from each island, and each pairing is intended to trace intertextual threads running through the cityscape in question. Writing at the height of post-independence nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s, Orlando Patterson, Earl Lovelace, Luis Rafael Sánchez, and Miguel Barnet have inscribed their woman characters into the contentious urban landscapes of the past in order to disrupt popular narratives of island nations as isolated or unified wholes. Through highly innovative uses of prostitution as a rhetorical strategy, these four writers highlight the extent to which female sexuality and cityspace are linked in ways that critique the foundational myths, representative symbols, and ideological pitfalls of cultural nationalism. But for the most part their fictional accounts tend to reinforce Caribbean women's symbolic subordination within male-authored narratives even as they advocate for greater inclusivity in civic terms. It is for this reason that I position the contemporary literary works of Kerry Young, Tony Hall, Mayra Santos-Febres, and Fernando Velázquez Medina and their revisionist approaches



to heteropatriarchal models of reading public women as critical responses to their literary predecessors.

As Rivke Jaffe contends in her introduction *The Caribbean City* (2008), it is imperative to keep in mind that, as in “all Caribbean matters, the cities of the region display both great variety and remarkable parallels” (3). My dissertation pays special attention to the ways in which differential patterns of empire, decolonization, and nation-building have impacted the port cities of Jamaica, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, Cuba and the ways in which these various urban forms are projected in the island literary and cultural production. In the case of Kingston, which is largest city in the Anglophone region and home to more 30 percent of the Jamaica’s inhabitants, the old colonial divisions of the city are spatially and symbolically mapping into “uptown” and “downtown.” Whereas uptown registers in the popular imagination as linked to the legacies of creole cultural nationalism and its associations with brown middle-class respectability, downtown is characterized by extensive zones of deprivation that carry implicit meanings of poverty and blackness. This binary mapping of the city along class and color lines has especially informed the narrative practices surrounding the figure of the public woman in second half of the twentieth century. For Port of Spain, on the other hand, the colonial slum districts of the capital are not coterminous with those of its Jamaican sister city; instead, post-slave barracks yards in the hillside suburbs above the city center are the key point of focus in Trinidadian literature because of their historical connections to the origins and development of Carnival and calypso culture. In my discussion of the public woman in Port of Spain, it is evident that representations of public woman become inextricable from cultural prostitution of festival to the modern tourist industry.

The case studies that I analyze in the context of Puerto Rico and Cuba are likewise unique in their material and metaphorical meanings that stem from much longer histories of slavery and US intervention. As Isar P. Godreau explains with respect to Puerto Rico, the centrality of *blanqueamiento* [whitening] to ideas of modernity, progress, and development has meant that nationalist articulations of Hispanic and US “civilizing” influence became increasingly prominent in the second half to the twentieth century; thus, minimizing black contributions to the historic and cultural development of the island’s port cities. My dual consideration of San Juan and Ponce demonstrates how these dynamics are spatially expressed around racialized discourses of respectability and exoticism in relation to the figure of public woman and trope of prostitution in the “heritage” sites of each city. Here, the binary mapping that we encounter in Jamaica’s capital is more expansively split across the island of Puerto Rico to spatially express the conflicting cultural narratives of internal cohesion and modernization in San Juan that are strategically distanced from the black folkloric and exotic markers of Ponce. While Cuba historically shares these anxieties around the foundational myth of *mestizaje* nationalism, the post-revolutionary capital carries a long-standing reputation for its fetishization of the *mulata* that resonates with tourist zone of Old Havana and adjacent inner-city municipality of Centro Habana—both of which have bear stigmas of crime and delinquency and explicit connotations with prostitution that starkly contrast with the state conceptions of internal cohesion and sexual politics under socialist morality. Thus, my decision to organize these readings around a distinct geographic figuration or literary motif of the city – such as the metaphorical dynamics of urban fragmentation in Kingston or the palimpsestic image of a “ruined” Havana – highlights the interplay between real

spaces and their symbolic imaginaries.

### **Intimate Encounters: Sexual (and Textual) Citizenship**

In addition to tracking how Caribbean writers mobilize the geographic expressions and symbolic contours of each port cityspace in their representations of prostitution, this dissertation also seeks to engage with the current dialogues emanating from studies of Caribbean sexuality.<sup>15</sup> Like Donette Francis' work on fictions of feminine or intimate citizenship, I am similarly concerned with "[u]ntraveling the politics of intimacy, how it is narrated, and what it can reveal about the social history of the Caribbean" (2). According to Francis, this alternative understanding of citizenship extends feminist dialogues around the gendered divisions of public and private and its attendant binaries of aberrant and absent female sexuality and provides a means to disrupt those distinctions across local, national, and global organizations of space. While Francis argues in favor of recuperating an "archive of intimacy" that draws on contemporary Caribbean women's writing that "reconceive[s] master narratives, whether they be imperial, national, or diasporic, to imagine a different sense of belonging," my contention is that the "intimate" – or private – domain is not the only place to reveal the existing boundaries of citizenship. Indeed, for the writers studied in this dissertation – and their diverse gendered, physical, and ideological proximities to their "home" spaces – the port city also registers a particularly suitable repository through which to retrace and, in some cases, overwrite the ways in which Caribbean women's sexuality has been regulated by

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<sup>15</sup> I limit my discussion to Francis' work due to its direct engagement with literary practices of sexual citizenship; however, Mimi Sheller's *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom* (2012) and Faith Smith's introduction to *Sex and the Citizen: Interrogating the Caribbean* (2011) have been two other important theoretical sources to emerge in the field of Caribbean sexuality and citizenship studies in the last several years. Building from the work M. Jacqui Alexander's concept of erotic autonomy and canonical study "Not just anybody can be a citizen," these scholars turn our attention to the necessity of attending to the specificities of geography that structure "citizenship from below."

imperial and national regimes. Like Francis's book, this project is also invested in forging a feminist approach to postcolonial fictions of citizenship and their relationship to the sexual realities of women throughout the region. But for the purposes of this study, I argue that with respect to the figure of the public woman we need to extend our reading practices to the predominantly male-authored canons of the mid-twentieth century and the narrow racial and gendered agendas that underpin their critiques of national unity to better understand how and why contemporary writers are refiguring prostitution in the urban spatial imaginary in terms of sexual citizenship.

### **Chapter Summaries**

The first chapter, "The Manichean City: Uneven Developments of the Fallen Woman in Kingston," reads Orlando Patterson's *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964) and Kerry Young's *Gloria* (2013) to explore how Kingston has served as a prime location for pinpointing the legacies of slavery and its intersection with the moral topographies of Jamaican creole nationalism. Patterson and Young, trained in sociology and social work respectively, make significant departures from the pre-independence formal realist traditions that inscribe the fallen woman into the physically and symbolically polarized cityspace.<sup>16</sup> Patterson's adaptation of the trope draws on philosophical registers of existentialism and his emergent theories about freedom and social death to metaphorically map the ways in which the fragmented nationalism of the postcolonial state reinforces the disintegrative terrain of the city. Although his novel offers a

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<sup>16</sup> Herbert George deLisser (1878-1944); Claude McKay (1889-1948); and Roger Mais (1905-1955) are the most well-known proponents of this tradition from the early to mid twentieth century. For examples of how these writers employ the fallen woman trope, see especially deLisser's *Jane's Career: A Story of Jamaica* (1914); McKay's "A Midnight Woman to the Bobby" from *Songs of Jamaica* (1912); and Mais' *The Hills Were Joyful Together* (1953) and *Brother Man* (1954).

sympathetic reading of the material conditions of black women's lives in prostitution, its allegorization of the fallen woman belongs to a wider post-independence Caribbean literary tradition of figuring the postcolonial nation's prostituted position within neo-colonial relations. More than this, Patterson's critique of national unity – as expressed in the Manichean layout of the city – takes on a black nationalist orientation that delimits its mapping of uneven and unequal development on local and global scales that reinforce a binary conception of race, wherein the black urban masses are positioned in diametric opposition to both the city's brown elite and the “filthy white capitalists” from abroad. Young's novel, on the other hand, relies on historical romance genre to shift the narrative trajectory of the fallen woman away from Patterson's vertical, disintegrative mapping of the city and towards female-centered, cosmopolitan vision that realigns the pan-ethnic urban fragments of Kingston with new expressions of creole citizenship.

The second chapter, “The Carnival City: Unmasking *Jamette* Performance Genealogies in Port of Spain,” examines how Trinidadian writers have mobilized the public woman as a vehicle for expressing the historical-cultural nexus of female street performance and prostitution of the Carnival city. Departing from the alternative paradigms of literary realism of the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on what Antonio Benítez-Rojo calls the “double performance” embedded in textual and theatrical representations that are specific to the Afro-Creole origins and development of Carnival in Port of Spain. In my analysis of Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* (1979) and Tony Hall's *Jean and Dinah* (1994), I demonstrate that – much like the postcolonial literary trajectories of the fallen woman in Kingston – these works engage the social and metaphorical spaces of the port city as expressive vehicles for restructuring the

parameters of creole citizenship established in nationalist discourse. However, their invocations of the *jamette* are more readily in dialogue with earlier eras of barrack-yard fiction, its calypso sources, and post-emancipation masquerade aesthetics. Although both Lovelace and Hall employ these genealogical metaphors as a way to challenge the post-independence commercialization of the festival for tourism, I argue that Hall's play poses a comparable challenge to Lovelace's hetero-masculinist aesthetics of the Carnival city—and that of calypso tradition more broadly.

The third chapter, "The (Dis)Enchanted City: Permutations of the *Puta Madre* in San Juan and Ponce," builds upon the previous discussion around tourist-oriented urban development to trace out an intertextual intimacy between the works of two Puerto Rican writers—Luis Rafael Sánchez's *Los ángeles se ha fatigado* [The Angels are Fatigued, 1960] and Mayra Santos-Febres' *Nuestra Señora de la noche* [Our Lady of the Night, 2006]. This chapter shifts the focus to the competing poles of national and cultural identity featured in rapidly expanding tourist landscapes in San Juan and Ponce in the early- to mid-twentieth century. Reflecting on the idealization of Puerto Rico as *la isla del encanto* [the enchanted island], the works of these two island writers tackle the illusory nature of cultural nationalism through the ambivalent trope of (dis)enchantment. Building on Foucault's theory of heterotopias, I read the composite figure of *la puta madre* [the whore mother] and the spatial trope of the brothel in Sánchez's self-reflexive melodrama as disenchanted counter-sites that contest the image of *la isla del encanto*. In particular, my reading pays close attention to the ways in which Sánchez's theatrical discourse of disenchantment plays against tourist and nationalist fantasies of Old San Juan – the city's colonial "heritage" site – that quite literally build up the Hispanic

foundation of island's creole identity. While Sánchez's "whitened" representation of prostitution and its inextricable links to the play's trope of illusions is meant to pose a challenge to the racialized hierarchies with Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, Santos-Febres' novel redirects our attention to the uneven development of the island's black cultural spaces that fall outside the capital's respectable counterparts in Ponce. Her text relocates the brothel in the black working class barrio of San Antón and rewrites the figure of *la puta madre* through the mythico-historical figure of Isabel la Negra. In my exploration of this novel, I explore how Santos-Febres contests the whitened image of *la isla del encanto* through the re-enchantment of San Antón's Afro-Puerto Rican musical, dance, and religious cultures of *bomba*, *plena*, and *espiritismo popular* [popular spiritualism].

The fourth and final chapter, "The Palimpsestic City: Rewriting the *Rumbera's* Performative Space in Havana," builds upon the scholarship of Cuban literary critic José Quiroga to analyze the ways in which the figure of the *mulata-rumbera* [mixed-race cabaret dancer] and her implicit relationship to terrain of prostitution in Havana is revived as a central spatial metaphor across the post-revolutionary and post-soviet eras. Miguel Barnet's *Canción de Rachel* (1969) and Fernando Velázquez Medina's *Última Rumba en La Habana* (2001) present us with two competing visions of prostitution via the *rumbera* that, although disparate in their chronological context and political ideologies, are thematically linked through the physical and symbolic spaces of the city. Despite the ideological differences that they reflect in Cuban writing produced "on" and "off" the island, both novels creatively layer Havana's past and present to dismantle the repressive racial and sexual tenets of revolutionary respectability. In doing so, they invite

us to reread evolving figure of the *rumbera* through an expanded vocabulary of the urban palimpsest—revealing collective uses and expressive rights to the “lettered” city of Havana for sexually- and textually-deviant citizens who have been have been effectively barred from it. But whereas Barnet repeats the ideology of cultural and racial whitening of prostitution as part of its effort to simultaneously appeal to and protest against state forms of repression, Velázquez Medina poses a challenge to the narrative silencing of black women who only exist at the margins of Barnet’s novel. Overall, the central goal of the thesis is to trace out an alternative Caribbean literary historiography of nationalism and citizenship by analyzing how the latest generations of island writers have recuperated the major female figures and urban forms of the cultural past to confront the racial, gendered and sexual hierarchies that continue to structure the political inequalities of the present.



## CHAPTER 1

### The Manichean City Uneven Developments of the Fallen Woman in Kingston

The colonial world is a compartmentalized world... Yet if we penetrate the intimacy of this compartmentalization we will at least have the benefit of highlighting some of its lines of force. This approach to the colonial world, to its order and geographical arrangement, allows us to delimit the backbone on which the decolonized society will be reorganized.<sup>17</sup>

—Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*

V.S. Naipaul frames *The Middle Passage* (1962), his controversial travelogue on the newly independent states of the Caribbean, with the underlying idea that nowhere is the “flawed modernity” of the region more visible – and perhaps better left unwritten – than on the urban fringes of its small island nations (34). In the closing chapter, “On to Jamaica,” the Trinidadian writer revisits this opening claim while surveying the “two unrelated worlds” that spatially express the sociopolitical and economic divisions of post-independence Kingston (233). He begins in the urban zone most familiar to the prototypical foreign visitor—that of the affluent business districts and suburban enclaves that stretch into the city’s northern foothills. This Jamaican middle-class world, he tells us, is defined by “its spaciousness and graciousness, its tradition of hospitality, its PEN meetings and art exhibitions, its bars expensive or bohemian,” and other cultured spaces that are “so physically disposed – almost by design, it appears – that one can move from suburb to suburb and never cease to be sheltered from offending sights” (224). From

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<sup>17</sup> I have modified Richard Philcox’s 2004 English translation slightly to highlight Fanon’s original focus on the intimacy of the Manichean city and its thematic connections with the Kingston entry from Naipaul’s travelogue: “Le monde colonial est un monde compartimenté... Pourtant, si nous pénétrons dans *l’intimité de cette compartimentation*, nous aurons au moins le bénéfice de mettre en évidence quelques-unes des *lignes de force qu’elle comporte*. Cette approche du monde colonial, de son arrangement, de sa disposition géographique va nous permettre de délimiter les arêtes à partir desquelles se réorganisera la société décolonisée.” (*Les damnés de la terre* 41).

there, he goes on to investigate the historic slum districts assembled along the city's waterfront, where "[f]ilth and rubbish are disgorged everywhere" and "everything has dwindled beyond what one would have thought possible" (225). He continues:

*And wherever you look you see the surrounding Kingston hills, one of the beauties of the island: freshening now into green after rain, blurred in the evening light, the folds as soft as those on an animal's skin. Against such a view lay a dead mule, its teeth bared, its belly swollen and taut. It had been there for two days; a broomstick had been playfully stuck in its anus.*  
(225, my emphasis).

While the various entries that fill Naipaul's travel narrative might employ ironic naturalism, this particular entry appears to play into the very "atmosphere of fantasy" that he intends to critique (227). In recalling the squatter settlements that line the port, Naipaul employs animalistic metaphors to describe the two conflicting sides of Jamaica, in which the island materializes both as a tropical paradise and a poverty-stricken urban jungle. While he depicts the majestic Blue Mountains of Jamaica that surround the city with a feminine beauty and softness, the metaphorical language he uses to describe the slums is far less romanticized. Here the conditions of urban decay are channeled through the corpse of a dead animal that not only litters the landscape but also perversely eroticizes it. Beyond its initial shock value, this passage makes clear that additional fears of sexual transgression contribute to the imaginative distance between "New Kingston" and "the vaster, frightening world beyond it" (233). In this case, the spatial figure of the slum appears to stand in for the "climax and futility" of postcolonial island histories,

where, according to Naipaul, “there were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect” since “the size of the islands called for nothing else” (19).

I begin this chapter with Naipaul’s description of the unequal topography of Jamaica’s largest and capital city because it introduces some of the central themes and tensions that have steered the dominant spatial imagination of Kingston in the postcolonial Jamaican novel. Orlando Patterson’s *The Children of Sisyphus* (1964) marks a starting point for this tradition in the post-independence era. Published two years after Naipaul’s book, *The Children of Sisyphus* takes a comparatively cynical view towards the possibilities of decolonization in Jamaica and invokes the Dungle, one of the most notorious slum districts in Kingston, as a prime location through which to map the limits of postcolonial citizenship. While the novel can be read as an experimental template that conveys Patterson’s burgeoning ideas about freedom and social death, it also engages with issues of space and sexuality in more explicit terms than Naipaul’s travelogue. Set in the decade leading up to independence, Patterson’s novel takes a retrospective look back onto the late colonial spatial ordering of the city to interrogate the political failures of a Jamaican creole nationalism that sought to integrate the black marginal masses into a unified and respectable state. Drawing on the work of Albert Camus and Frantz Fanon, the text puts forth an existentialist allegory of Sisyphean resistance through the story of its central female protagonist, Dinah, whose repeated “fall” into prostitution stands in for the paradoxes of freedom in postcolonial Jamaica.

Looking back and expanding on that moment in time, Kerry Young’s *Gloria* (2013) reinterprets the figure of the fallen woman to imagine past the binary model of the city that has characterized the neocolonial dynamics of unequal development in Kingston

on local and global scales. Although both novelists write from a diasporic Jamaican perspective, Young mobilizes a vision of the port city conceived in terms of its transnational and cross-cultural connections while charting a longer trajectory of decolonization that spans from the 1938 labor rebellion to the decade following formal independence in 1962. In doing so, her text breaks down the heteropatriarchal and geopolitical metaphors of containment that deny women any subjectivity in Patterson's gendered reading of national fragmentation. To pursue this dialogue further, I turn to Frantz Fanon's influential concept of the Manichean city as a comparative spatial framework that lends itself particularly well to the urban landscape of Kingston that each novel maps in relation to their shared thematic concerns with the possibility of postcolonial unity.

### **1.1 Mapping Postcolonial (Dis)Integration**

In *Black Skins, White Masks* (1952), Fanon outlines the basis for his theory of the Manichean city across several passages in which he describes the fragmented urban geography of Martinique's capital, Fort-de-France. The two areas he surveys – the port and the villa – are diametrically opposed to one another. From the perspective of the port, he argues that the city appears as “truly lackluster and shipwrecked,” making it easy to understand why the black Antillean feels like a “prisoner on his island, lost in an atmosphere without the slightest prospect” (5).<sup>18</sup> From the perspective of the villa, which

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<sup>18</sup> In her comparative study of the Manichean city across *Black Skin, White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth*, Nalini Natarajan argues that while the latter text theorizes the concept in greater detail as it relates to both the peasant and elite sectors of the colonial Algerian city, the former tends to prioritize the living spaces of the Fort-de-France's Creole middle classes, who “travel to the urban centers of the metropolis as a further means for determining power” (96). Although this earlier formulation speaks to the ways in which Fanon sees the Manichean city as a microcosm for world-scale patterns of uneven and unequal development, Natarajan also reminds that his lack of attention to the localized power dynamics “has

lies on a hill above the city, Fort-de-France materializes as a “boulevard of Martinican dreams,” where “acceptance into high society” means “whitening oneself magically as a way of salvation” (27). For Fanon, these two opposing sectors of the city are not simply the product of recent twentieth century urban expansion but rather part of a colonial apparatus that was “built to last” (*Wretched* 4). He elaborates and expands on these initial observations in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), arguing that the racialized geography of power that “first governed colonial society is maintained intact during the period of decolonization” (14). Like Naipaul’s disjointed map of Kingston, Fanon takes up the trope of the Manichean city to capture both postcolonial nationalist and imperial projects of uneven development. As several critics have noted, Fanon’s engagement with the “intersecting networks of injustice at work in the Manichean city” highlights the extent to which urban space functions as a “key terrain of struggle for national liberation, decolonization, and postcolonial citizenship” (Herbert 201).<sup>19</sup> Read in this way, Patterson and Young’s discrete novelistic engagements with the uneven spatiality of Kingston present us with a meaningful opportunity to think through how and why it is these diasporic island writers are invested in the postcolonial Jamaican model of creole unity.

In his 1965 essay “Outside History: Jamaica Today,” Patterson provides a detailed critique of the Jamaican Creole nationalist movement<sup>20</sup> that reflects the

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important implications for Fanon’s insertion to the field of ‘Black Atlantic’ studies, where the Afro-Caribbean urban classes have been key” (90).

<sup>19</sup> For similar arguments, refer to Varma (2012, 2016) and King (2009).

<sup>20</sup> Deborah Thomas defines Jamaican creole nationalism, as it developed over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as a mobilizing political tradition that was coded in western patriarchal ideologies of racial uplift and respectability for Jamaica’s black majority population. Moreover, this vision of “modern blackness” underlying creole nationalist rhetoric fostered a compound sense of national-global integration through Afro-Jamaican cultural practices. As Obika Gray explains, the emergence of the postcolonial state and its egalitarian discourse of multiracial harmony not only marginalized non-black diasporic cultures but it also

ideological foundations of his first novel. As he argues, the “disintegrative force of slavery has created a social-psychological situation in which collective action is almost impossible... and thwart any possibility of a working-class movement” (42-43). Patterson applies this perspective further to the nationalist project of creole multiculturalism, which he interprets as its own kind of fiction:

That out of the many races which formerly inhabited the island a synthesis has emerged, culturally and racially, or as the national motto puts, ‘out of many one people.’ All this is merely a vacuous myth. Originally there were only two races in Jamaica and *the manner in which they blended together is hardly something to be proud of*. That a national motto should have been made of it is a sublime piece of irony. (38, my emphasis)

While this brand of anticolonial nationalism sought to redefine racial and class unity under the banner “Out of Many, One People,” Patterson peels back its unifying rhetoric of inheritance to expose its problematic origins in slavery, reminding us that the symbolic birth of the nation was emphatically labored through the bodies of black women.

Accordingly, *The Children of Sisyphus* employs the spatial figure of Manichean city as a way to juxtapose “the crafty myths of multiracial harmony and democracy” with a “complete lack of integration, either within or between the sub-cultures” (*Sisyphus* 126; “Outside History” 39). Rather than a place of productive “synthesis,” Patterson’s

bifurcated mapping of the city directly responds to the state’s narrow vision of cultural

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“blurred the experience of racial discrimination and ferreted out residues from the slave past associated with black submissiveness and obeisance toward their social betters” (83). While the creole nationalist projects of the state sought to redefine racial and class unity under the banner “Out of Many, One People” and through the symbolic representation of the marginal masses, such integrationist frameworks, as Patterson alludes, promoted a narrow vision of cultural citizenship and progress that further distanced the black and brown elite “both from the ‘backwardness’ of Africa and from the rural and urban proletariat whose practices—and values—were seen as a throwback to the slavery period and, therefore, as disruptive to a modern social order” (Thomas 55-56).

citizenship and progress that further distanced the black and brown elite “both from the ‘backwardness’ of Africa and from the rural and urban proletariat whose practices—and values—were seen as a throwback to the slavery period and, therefore, as disruptive to a modern social order” (Thomas 55-56). It is precisely for this reason that Patterson takes the legacy of the Manichean city as the novel’s focal point. By strategically positioning the Dungle as a marginalized, insular space of racial and sexual otherness via the prostitution narrative, Patterson links urban disintegration to what he sees as the country’s increasingly fragmented national identity, as represented not only by the rivaling political factions of the country’s two-party system but also in its alternative forms of black nationalism.<sup>21</sup> While *The Children of Sisyphus* no doubt raises important questions related to issues of gender and sexuality within this geopolitically divided landscape, its allegorical links between women’s bodies and the “disintegrative forces of slavery” falls short in its efforts to “writ[e] about the predicament of working women” (142).

In contrast to an unraveling of the neocolonial dynamics of the Manichean city in *The Children of Sisyphus*, *Gloria* brings the fragmented geography of Kingston into a common ground for articulating a more complex sense of creole cultural identity that, to use Françoise Lionnet’s phrase, “contains difference without reducing it to the same” (Lionnet “Continents and Archipelagos” 1509). In her novel, Young does not pursue an uncritical celebration of Jamaican creole nationalism but rather calls its traditionally understood models of political engagement into question. Shifting the focus away from the conventional uptown/downtown binary, Young rewrites the fragmented urban

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<sup>21</sup> Scholars of twentieth century Jamaica such as Nettleford (1972), Knight (1978), and Levi (1990) have argued that, like much of the region, Jamaica faced “an inordinate difficulty in creating and maintaining a strong, cohesive national sensibility” which resulted in “the genesis of a fragmented nationalism.”

geography by foregrounding the city's lesser-known intercommunal cultural and political alliances within and beyond Kingston. As in Patterson's text, the prostitute-as-fallen woman also functions here as a figure for addressing the "[h]istorical circumstances of colonialism and slavery, a part of which was the occupation of the body – the legacy of which *Gloria* must come to terms" (Young "Three Voices"). However, Young situates her protagonist within a longer historical trajectory that recovers working-class black women's public political presence in Kingston. More than this, the novel maps a set of urban intimacies absented from Patterson's text via the liminal space of the port, drawing together the downtown area's diverse ethnic enclaves following the 1938 labor riots and spanning out even further to trace its bilateral relations with Cuba in the post-independence era. At one level, *Gloria* complicates the foundational racial dichotomy of creole multicultural nationalism through its principal inclusion of the often-overlooked connections between black and Chinese Jamaicans. At another level, it opens up a regional dialogue between the Anglophone and Hispanic Caribbean by connecting its minoritized female characters in Kingston to the epicenter of revolutionary activities in Santiago de Cuba. It is in this way that Young offers a corrective to the binary and insular models of Jamaica's Manichean city and its dominant mappings of a unified creole citizenry.

## 1.2 Patterson and Intertextual Existentialism

As the novel's title indicates,<sup>22</sup> *The Children of Sisyphus* reflects the strong influence of western tragedy and existentialism on Patterson's representation of slavery's

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<sup>22</sup> When New York's Pyramid Press published the novel in 1968 it was retitled, "Dinah" with references to the Dungle as "The Heart of Darkness" and "The Nightmare World of Voodoo." The cover includes an image of a black woman posing full frontal, with her body framed by African masks and a black male



afterlife in the postcolonial present. In the introduction to his 2013 interview with Patterson, David Scott writes that both Camus' *Le mythe de Sisyphe* [The Myth of Sisyphus] (1942) and *L'homme révolté* [The Rebel] (1951) have served as central influences to Patterson's early fictional and sociological writings on slavery and social death.<sup>23</sup> Patterson's first novel opens with an epigraph from Camus' 1942 essay on the "irrational and wild longing for clarity" in world of absurdity as well as two passages from the book of Isaiah that allude to the Rastafari belief system via the dichotomy of "the daughter of Zion" and "the daughter of Babylon."<sup>24</sup> Patterson's channels these two philosophical foundations through his lead antiheroine, Dinah, whose status as a "fallen" woman "signif[ies] the Sisyphean condition [in its] most philosophical sense of endless strife, meaningless strife, meaningless efforts...but also the fact that literally their life was Sisyphean" (Patterson "The Paradox of Freedom" 148).<sup>25</sup> This critical experimentation with western philosophical and anticolonial nationalist traditions have made *The Children of Sisyphus* a difficult text to place within the established conventions of the Caribbean realist, nation-building novel. Though his visceral depictions of urban Jamaican poverty

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priest whose outfit resembles the Cuban Abakua Ñáñigo rather than the Jamaican Obeah. According to Olmos and Paravisini Gebert (2011), "[a]s a rule, Jamaican Obeahmen do not wear any distinctive clothing or marks of their trade" (161). See Appendix A.

<sup>23</sup> For Fanon's influence on Patterson's thinking, see the Jamaican writer's 1966 review of *The Wretched of the Earth* and also Kwame Dawes' 2012 introduction to the novel.

<sup>24</sup> According to Richard C. Salter, "Zion is the countryside, the forest, Africa, and other places where one is free," while "Babylon...refer[s] to problems corrupting the world (e.g., the system of forces in society that conspire to maintain humankind in captivity)" (Taylor 1345).

<sup>25</sup> Patterson lends further perspective with regards to his larger interest in representing black women's lives in downtown Kingston. As the son of an unmarried working woman, Patterson spent his high school and early college years moving between family homes in West and East Kingston. During this time, he wrote numerous works centered on the themes of "women-against-the-world" and "working-class uplift ideology," including a lost play entitled *The Do-Good Woman*, his unpublished novels *Lilith* and *Jane and Louisa*, and several short stories published in the *Jamaica Star*. These early thematic concerns, coupled with the slum intensification of the late 1950s, played a crucial role in Dinah's Sisyphean character as a "fallen" woman from the Dungle who attempts and ultimately fails to transgress the uptown/downtown divide.

earned the young writer the first prize in fiction at the Dakar Festival of Negro Arts in 1966, Patterson had yet to gain notoriety for his now well-known sociological theories of slavery and social death. Following its immediate publication, major Caribbean critics such as Derek Walcott and Mervyn Morris were quick to dismiss *The Children of Sisyphus* for its “phony poeticisms” and underdeveloped plot (Dance 375). C.L.R. James, on the other hand, favored the novel’s experimental aesthetic form and Rastafarian social scene but found that it was exemplary of the West Indian novelist who writes “thousands of miles from home, about the West Indies, for a British audience” (“Rastafari at Home and Abroad” 76). In more recent decades, critical readings often focus on the novel’s unprecedented sociological explorations of urban poverty and, subsequently, cite it as a metaphysical extension of Anglophone Caribbean barrack yard fiction.<sup>26</sup> However, in his 2012 introduction to the novel, Kwame Dawes insists that Patterson had few literary influences on which to model his work; novels like James’ *Minty Alley* (1936) had been long out of circulation by Patterson’s time and the first wave of national Jamaican writers to depict the black urban masses remained largely invested in rural folk culture. “What Patterson chose to do that no Jamaican writer had done before,” in Dawes’ opinion, “was to tell the story, not simply of the working poor, but of the abject reality of people who could scarcely be more bereft of all the material security in a society still growing from having achieved independence” (9). Whereas most Caribbean literary and cultural critics

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<sup>26</sup> Scholars often point to the clear parallels between *Sisyphus* and Roger Mais’ earlier novels *The Hills Were Together Joyful* (1953) and *Brother Man* (1955), which build on the social realist depictions of the urban slums established by C.L.R. James and Trinidad’s Beacon Group in the 1930s. As a result, most critics focus on Patterson’s critical engagement with reggae and Rastafarianism rather than prostitution, a recognized trope of the barrack yard tradition. See Middleton (2015), Roberts (2015), Hodges (2008), Pradel (2000), and Brathwaite (1967) for relevant examples. In addition to Mais’s yard novels, *Voices under the Window* (1955) and *Strangers at the Gate* (1956) by John Hearne offer vivid descriptions of Kingston’s uneven socio-spatial development; but whereas Mais focuses his narrative perspective on the black marginal masses, Hearne emphasizes the challenges facing the light-skinned creole class.

have glossed the novel's titular reference to Camus as a way to embrace the Sisyphean extremity of the postcolonial writer, my reading departs from existing interpretations that overlook the trope as it relates to Patterson's ambivalent treatment of prostitution (Reiss 2001, 313).<sup>27</sup> Along with Dinah, black prostitutes are positioned collectively in the novel as "fallen" figures of existential alienation and tragic despair, which is amplified by their immiserated fixity in the Dungle. Although Patterson makes a concerted effort to depict these characters in a sympathetic light and realistic terms, the novel's omniscient male perspective reinforces Spivak's idea that, "between patriarchy and imperialism...the figure of women disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'Third World Woman'" (Morris 280). My reading, thus, pays special attention to specific moments in the novel where the absence of female citizenship is made visible through spatial metaphors of social death and sexual violence and, in turn, works to express masculine anxieties around the possibilities for a redemptive personhood in post-independence Jamaica. As I explain below, it is the fallen woman who performs the double conceptual labor of being both the city's expelled Other and its indispensable gauge for measuring the country's progress, or lack thereof in Patterson's case.

### **1.3 The Fallen Woman and the Fragmented City in *The Children of Sisyphus***

Keeping with Fanon's ideas about the Manichean city – particularly, its physical and psychic processes of disintegration – Patterson's novel traces the residues of slavery

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<sup>27</sup> After Patterson, Kamau Brathwaite is the most notable Anglophone island writer to engage the Sisyphean narrative of futile repetition as a metaphor for Caribbean history. He writes, "the Sisyphean tradition, w/whatever individual & timely xceptions, is very much a part of our history & structure, and represents our 'reality' of stasis & emprison—the literature of the negative catastrophe." See Reiss *Sisyphus and El Dorado* (2003) and *Geography of a Soul* (2001).

to the historic colonized sector of downtown Kingston. Significantly, the novel opens with three garbage men hauling their trash carts into the overcrowded and expanding slums of Spanish Town Road, Back-O-Wall, and the Dungle, all of which appear “as meaningless as the garbage stacked behind them” (*Sisyphus* 29). Much of the men’s collective disbelief about the “worthless, lousy, dirty life” that characterizes these areas is concretized in the Dungle since it has become the literal and symbolic dumping ground of the city’s waste and human surplus (27).<sup>28</sup> This can be seen in the following passage, where Sammy, the only garbage man we know by name, internally contemplates his own existence and how it connects to those who inhabit Kingston’s municipal landfill: “Those things. Those creatures of the Dungle. No, they weren’t human. If anyone told him that they were human like himself he would tell them that they lied. Those eyes peering at him. Deep and dark red and for what he carried. And for his own blood, too, he was sure” (30). Sammy’s description of this inhuman landscape of racialized waste and violence sets the startling backdrop for the main events of the novel in which Dinah attempts to escape the “stinking stench of stale dung and debris” (45). Despite her characteristic “ambition,” Dinah’s story is coded as an endeavor of aimless urban wandering and dwelling that ultimately make it impossible to “give up [her] life of whoredom an’ live like a normal woman” (*Sisyphus* 48). As the text follows her circuitous routes through the downtown area, it becomes more and more clear that Patterson’s omniscient narrator adopts the male sociologist’s authoritative perspective on prostitution as evidence on the moral and material decline of the nation. While juxtaposing the “ruined landscape” of the

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<sup>28</sup> Located above the harbor, the Dungle became home to tens of thousands of rural migrants in the 1950s. The city razed its grounds in 1966 to build Tivoli Gardens, a government housing project sponsored by the Jamaican Labor Party under Normal Manley. Michelle Cliff draws on this historical moment in her second novel, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), which, as some critics have argued, models many of its descriptions after Patterson’s representation of the Dungle.

Dungle with “ruined” women working as prostitutes enables Patterson to explore the intersections of racial, sexual, and gender normativity that were mobilized under creole nationalist discourses of modernization and social uplift, it also plays on an allegorical figuration of the fallen woman that necessitates rather than negates her social exclusion.

As Dinah travels from place to place, inching closer to uptown’s proverbial “Hope” Road, she is repeatedly rejected on the basis of her “dirty” past as a “whore from de Dungle” (48). Ann Stoler (2008, 2011) offer important insights on the underlying connections between degraded environments and abject personhood that can help us better understand constraints of allegorical social death in Patterson’s novel. Building upon the work of Zygmunt Bauman and his critical linking of human waste production to wasted lives, Stoler argues for a postcolonial model that can engage with what she calls “imperial debris,” or “the longevity of structures of dominance, and the uneven pace with which people can extricate themselves from the colonial order of things” (“Reflections” 193). Patterson’s focus on the Dungle certainly fits with the “zones of abandonment” that Stoler characterizes as “[t]he social terrain[s] on which colonial processes of ruination leave their material and mental marks” (204) However, it also aligns with the problems Stoler finds in Bauman theoretical construct of “wasted humans,” which as she argues “can only account for the fact of accumulated leftovers, of superfluous, obsolete, and bypassed people and things,” but not “more effective histories...that ‘connect fragments to wholes’ of the imperial present.” (204). While Patterson’s analogy between the derelict landscape and the “ruined” women of the Dungle certainly makes visible “who bears the debris,” it does not make an effort to unpack the ways in which this gendered spatial equation was central to the Manichean logic of the colonial Jamaican city.

Charles Carnegie (2014) and Winnifred Brown-Glaude (2011) have more recently engaged with the ways in which Kingston's uptown/downtown divide is intimately bound up with Jamaican women's sexual identities. In his study of Kingston's twentieth century demographic and geographic expansion, Carnegie stresses that although the city's racialized markers of privilege have undergone much critical scrutiny, gender frequently remains absented from "the more insidious, closely intertwined understandings and assertions of personhood and worth that are embedded in Jamaican discursive forms and symbolic practices such as 'inside'/'outside,' 'uptown'/'downtown,' and 'lady'/'woman' (75). Brown-Glaude expands on these ideas in her examination of the Jamaican higgler, arguing that women's informal work in downtown Kingston "has often been associated with pollution, dirt, and disease" (144). She continues:

These predominantly working-class and poor dark-skinned women are stereotypically typed in the public discourse as loud, aggressive black women who are vulgar, unruly, and essentially unfeminine, a stark contrast to the construction of the Jamaican lady...[who] are socialized to take up as little space with their bodies as possible" (161)

While black men and women who inhabit the slums both experience racialized forms of social death in Patterson's novel, the ways in which women's bodies function as metaphors for the "filthiness of poverty" is especially striking (61). In spite of their secondary roles, Rachael and Mary are two characters who provide a framework for understanding the ways in which the figure of the prostitute and the trope of urban decay are mobilized together in the service of a male nationalist critique. Much like Dinah, these women epitomize the residues of Jamaica's slave past through the commodification

and containment of their bodies. Near the beginning of the novel, Dinah's covert plans to escape are interrupted by Rachael, the so-called "overlord of the Dungle by virtue of her long establishment there" (47). Rachael is described in the following manner:

Her large withered face, beneath which you could see the skull marks clear and precise, was held placidly forward. Her ragged clothes, patchy and smelly, hung loosely upon her lean, spare frame...Furthermore, it was no use trying to hide anything from her. Sooner or later she would know anyway. She just had a way with other people's business. (46)

Decrepit in age and physically marked by the "dung and debris" that surrounds her, Rachael provides a cynical counter-narrative to Dinah's ambition since she has never been able to leave the Dungle. As a veteran of the sex trade, she knows all too well the structural inequalities poor women face in and outside the slums:

Yu t'ink is one or two time ah did leave dis place an' did 'ave to come back. An' why? Why? 'Cause ah had was to come back. When Massah God mek yu an' put yu in ya 'im mean dat is where yu goin' stay. I 'member when dis place was a swamp, Dinah, dat time when me was a gal an' de flesh still 'pon me body an' ah could still catch de fattes' Yankee sailor-man 'pon Harbour Street. . . Me was one o' de firs' person to walk 'pon dis land o'shit here, gal. An' when de dirty police dem raid de squatters dem in Back-O-Wall when Backra ready fe buil' 'im factory, me

was de firs' person fe hit 'pon de idea fe come an' live ya. Yu can't run a man off of shit, dat is wha' ah say. (46)<sup>29</sup>

While Rachael seemingly explains away her confinement to the Dungle as destined by fate, the commentary that she provides reveals that sex and sanitation are linked and, consequently, can permanently stain a woman's reputation. In contrast to Patterson's own distinct memories of lower-middle class Kingston, where "the smell of porcelain in the bathroom" signaled it as "a purely functional place," Rachael's vivid recollection of the steady transformation of the Dungle from a swampland into a landfill help us understand the "shitty" foundations upon which an industrialized, modern Kingston has been built ("The Paradox of Freedom" 114). Although Dinah initially dismisses Rachel's comments, the potency of the old woman's words continues to haunt her as she moves into more "respectable" areas of the city. Here, the prostitute's downhill/dunghill connotation serves more as a gendered metaphor for the degenerative state of Jamaican national identity than a symbolic mediator for new definitions of sovereignty.

Patterson uses the narrative of Mary, in addition to Rachael, to foreshadow Dinah's inescapable "fall back" to the dehumanizing conditions of the slums. Here, the trope of prostitution as dirty work is used to more directly calls attention to the exploitation of women's bodies and labor by national and imperial economic formations of masculine power. Not only does a local constable threaten to arrest Mary if she does not share her profits, but one of the drunken sailor men swarming the port uses his Yankee dollars to violently coerce her sexual services. In a desperate effort to defend herself, Mary crashes a bottle over the sailor's head and "[runs] with all her might,

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<sup>29</sup> Patterson's use of patois in these lines bears a strong resemblance to Louise Bennett's 1940s poem "Dutty tough" (The Ground in Hard), which describes "a society where the markets of prosperity may be foregrounded but the opposite serves as the more controlling reality" (Davidson 43-44).



forgetting all the pain she had just suffered” (154). As we soon discover, the relentless policing of the gendered and sexual borders of citizenship by the neocolonial Jamaican state means that Mary will never be able to make a “clean” getaway:

She couldn't see them, but they were all around her. Suddenly she heard a shrill loud whistle to her right. She ran in the opposite direction down a narrow lane with zinc fencing on either side. But suddenly from in front her heard the same stark shrill. They were taunting her. If she could only see them. They were nowhere. They were everywhere. They were closing in on her...Why didn't they just take her? They knew where she was but they were tormenting her...The whistles were now unbearable, piercing. They were everywhere, mocking her, taunting her. In front of her, behind her, beside her. Footsteps, whistles, sirens, flashlights. She darted back through the opening in the fence. Suddenly she saw one! Then she felt it. The baton slashed her across her breasts. From behind another swiped her across her back. Then a third came crashing down upon her ear. She fell heavily to the gutter, her teeth biting into the slimy filth. (154)

As these scenes suggests, Mary provides a more detailed illustration of “the liminality of prostitution: when one is both hypervisible and invisible” (Francis 68). The abuse she suffers at the hands of both the American sailor and Jamaican police, moreover, recapitulates the conventional narrative of prostitution as victimhood. Patterson's figurative use of Mary's powerlessness in both cases exposes the destructive patterns of patriarchal control operating at both national and international levels. However, immediately after her arrest, we are once again reminded of her abject state: “Her mouth

rested half open on the concrete. She did not taste the little stream of urine that drained down into the puddle of faeces she had deposited earlier when they would not let her out” (184). The trope of human waste here becomes an especially graphic signifier for capturing Mary’s status as a “wasted human” in Bauman’s terms. In ways similar to Rachael, her story alludes to social death in order to recognize the emerging postcolonial state’s collusion in practices of exclusion and abjection that are the legacies of slavery. Yet, Patterson does not prompt his readers to imagine past this problematic correlation of the prostitute with metaphors of filth and degeneration, even as he calls our attention to the paradoxical meanings of freedom for women who don’t conform to the governing modes of feminine racial respectability and normative sexual citizenship. In addition to suggesting that the prostitute is synonymous with the Dungle’s ruined matter, Patterson also effectively displaces women’s subjective perspectives from the sexual violence they experience throughout the novel. As Dinah combs the city’s streets in search of a place where she can “live like a normal woman,” she becomes increasingly disoriented about what it means to define and assert autonomy on her own terms. By juxtaposing the scenes that depict her repeated falls into prostitution, it becomes clear that women’s stories of sexual abuse and economic exploitation are mobilized to interrogate defective aspects of male leadership and power.<sup>30</sup>

The paternalistic trajectory of *Sisyphus* can be gleaned through the various sexual-spatial arrangements Dinah takes up on her path towards respectable gendered citizenship. The first and most obvious is her abusive relationship with Cyrus, the

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<sup>30</sup> Patterson suggests something similar in his 1972 essay, “Toward a Future that has No Past—Reflections on the fate of Blacks in the Americas,” which argues that “[t]he Caribbean ex-colonies are incapable of transforming themselves whatever the nature of their leadership—whether bourgeois nationalist, black power nationalist, or Castroite socialist”(60).

Rastafari man with whom she lives in the Dungle. In this opening storyline, Patterson magnifies prostitution as a form of sexual violence to typify what he sees as the Rastas notoriously poor treatment of women.<sup>31</sup> When she first moves to the Dungle from the countryside, Dinah rejects Cyrus' initial advances because she knows that Rasta "t'ink dat woman did only mek to serve an' slave fo [man]" (40). In response, Cyrus consummates their relationship through rape:

She was halfway up when he pounded upon her. He pawed her across her shoulders and spun her around. He sank to the ground upon her. He ravished her. Long and cruelly and sweetly till the purple mountains had dissolved into complete nothingness and the Sargasso a black mass hovering over them, he raped her, he mauled her, he gushed her being with complete rapture. (42-43)

What is especially disturbing in this scene is the way in which Dinah's experience of sexual violence becomes simultaneously explicit and abstract in relation to her allegorical social death. The moment Cyrus "pound[s] upon her," she completely dissolves into the landscape, leaving us only with an emptied figure of woman that is devoid of any agency. This preliminary event sets the tone for the remainder of text and the important symbolic role women's bodies play in Jamaican men's quest for a new sense of national unity and identity. As we later learn, Cyrus cajoles Dinah into prostitution in order to sustain a livelihood in the slums while he spends his days with other Rasta men pontificating over their eventual repatriation to Africa. It is through Rastafari ideologies that Cyrus conveniently excuses his own complicity in Dinah's exploitation. Drawing on the image

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<sup>31</sup> Dinah aligns with what Jeanne Christensen (2014) calls the "Rastaman Woman," a term that evokes the marginalization of women within the movement. In addition to Christensen, Rowe (1980), Yawney (1994), and Lake (1998) offer comparative feminist critiques of traditional Rastafari gender ideology.

of the “children of Israel suffering for the misdeeds of their fathers,” Cyrus rationalizes that “when he allowed his woman to follow the path of wickedness and the ways of whoredom he was actually doing what was right. He might even receive some recompense in Ethiopia for his penitent submissiveness” (53). For Cyrus and the other men, their repatriation to Africa requires that they “allow” their women to submit their bodies to both foreign sailors and the local elite. Yet, it is Cyrus and not Dinah who will be rewarded for this “submissiveness”—notwithstanding the sexual and economic exploitation she endures at his hands. When she finally decides to leave, he interprets it as a conspiracy leveraged by the “filthy white capitalists” and the “brown traitors” against the black man and his progeny: “birth control and all dem other stunt is a plot fe kill de negro race” (56). In response, he vengefully declares that when he finds her he is going to “murder her an’ teach her de place of womankind” (55). It is important to note that, while Cyrus fears what non-procreative forms of female sexuality might mean for the black family under the postcolonial state, he also fails to account for the fact that his spiritual and economic needs directly depend on the non-productive nature of Dinah’s sexual labor. More than this, his logic comes close to recapitulating the legitimating discourses of respectability that emphasize a woman’s reproductive and domestic roles within the family. Ultimately, Cyrus absolves the Rastafari from the repressive structures that bolster their religious-political system by blaming both the black woman and the state for the deterioration of his race.<sup>32</sup> While Patterson’s critique here is multivalent, it is clear that he, above all, sees this alternative nationalism as severely undercut by the

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<sup>32</sup> Although Patterson is engaging the trope of Black family to critique the top-down hierarchies of Rastafari nationalism, he also projects some of his own thoughts about the Black woman’s negative contribution to this “culture of poverty.” His 1995 essay “Blacklash” has garnered much criticism for its dismissive approach to black feminist thinking.

“desperate proletarianization and self-deceptive black power ideology of its increasingly reckless and helpless leaders” (“Toward a Future” 60).

Dinah’s second sexual-spatial arrangement takes place in a tenement yard in Jones Town, one of the more “civilized” inner-city slums. In an effort to reform herself, Dinah abandons her title of being “the best whore on Harbour Street” to play the role of the kept woman for one her frequent clients, Alphanso (40). Patterson places Alphanso in direct opposition to Cyrus’ lawlessness and disenfranchisement on the basis of Jamaica’s rigid social class-color hierarchy. As a special constable from the Jamaican “brown” class, Alphanso appears to Dinah as a much better suitor since he seemingly embodies the “superiority of urban high culture” through his professional status and well-mannered appearance (Patterson “Towards a Future” 36). She also interprets his advances as more “civilized”—especially, since “while ‘im should be on ‘im job prosecutin’ [her]” instead he offers to give her life in which “she would be living like a human being” with “four walls round her at nights [and] she would have a bed to sleep on even when she was not whoring” (48, 79). But once relocated in the private space of the home, Dinah quickly becomes aware that Alphanso proves to be little help in her quest to become civilized. Despite representing the authority and order of the creole state in public, Alphanso corresponds with the trope of the weakened patriarch behind closed doors:

That heavy navy-blue uniform with the broad, ridiculous cloth belt seemed to be a kind of shield to him....and [he] hid behind it everyday so that no one could touch him, for no one really ever saw him, not the white superintendent whom he feared so much...not the black irascible sergeant

who would penalize every man below him...and when he took of his uniform he was such a snail without his shell. (135)

This passage evidences Patterson's later ideas that "[t]he West Indian who throws in his lot with the high-culture goes through a terrible process of deliberate spiritual exile and re-culturation" ("Towards a Future" 36). This is certainly true for Alphanso who trades in his "cocoon of folk culture" in the St. Elizabeth countryside for the urban "shell" of independence he displays around Jones Town, which Dinah belatedly discovers is "considered by outsiders just as much a part of the slums" (103). As the reader learns along with Dinah, Alphanso occupies the bottom-rung of the late colonial rank and file and shares with Cyrus a sense of alienation from the respectable state even as he is deeply implicated within it. Alphanso's lack of economic and institutional power also conveys a broader lack of structural change for the working and rural migrant classes under the auspices of postcolonial progress. In fact, when compared with Dinah's prostitution, Alphanso appears to be just as mired in the residues of slavery since he remains subject to the state's exploitative labor practices without every making any substantial gains, which further emasculates him from the narrator's perspective. Ultimately, Alphanso's own prostituted existence becomes proof that "far from being independent," all Jamaicans "are the slaves of an alien culture" (126). As Patterson's persona in the text clarifies, the true and most tragic heritage of colonialism is "the Jamaican himself who is now his own slave-master" (126). Ultimately, Alphanso parallels with this version of the spiritual exile and unable to fulfill Dinah's "longing to move forward" (103).

The third and final sexual-spatial arrangement that Dinah enters is with Shepherd John, the leader of a Zion revivalist<sup>33</sup> church in Trench Town.<sup>34</sup> At this point in the novel, Dinah is getting desperate: she feels wildly out of place in the uptown estates of St. Andrews, where she is consigned to domestic work, and has just learned that Mabel set an obeah curse on her with grave dirt that will soon transform her into a living Sisyphus. According to the women in Jones Town, Dinah needs to healer who can cleanse her “dirty” soul otherwise she will be in danger of tumbling back to the Dungle. While he promises to anoint her with the “oil of goodness” – a potent cure to Mabel’s oil of fall back – Shepherd John appears to the reader as more of a con man than a godly one. A look into the order of the church itself makes it abundantly clear that, along with Cyrus and Alphanso, Shepherd is yet another man who gets off on subordinating women. Although church is comprised of both men and women from the downtown districts, Shepherd’s lechery does not go unnoticed by one of the city’s garbage men who “didn’t like the way he kept looking at the young women members as they caught the spirit under the pretence that he was searching for the chosen one” (29). Not unsurprisingly, the church is also organized around a hierarchal gender order in which Shepherd exercises his paternal power over his spiritual “daughters.” In preparing for her baptism, Dinah gains insight into the cultist order of things from another female devotee:

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<sup>33</sup> Members of the Zion church distinguish themselves from the Pocomania branch of revivalism, since the latter tends to evoke more negative connotations because of its association with spirit possession and superstition (literally, it translates to “little madness). Fernández Olmos and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (2011) and Pinn (2009) provide excellent overviews on the distinctions between these Afro-Creole religions in Jamaica.

<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the most notorious neighborhood of downtown Kingston, Trench Town was a key site of the government housing development projects of the 1950s and 1960s. Since these yards were used to accommodate the working class voters of whichever party was in office, the area became increasingly characterized by a garrison-styled order of political divisions. See Rhiney and Cruse (2012).

At de top yu 'ave Shepherd; den below 'im de Elder Moder; den below 'er de Water Moder and de two armour-bearer them. Den yu 'ave de three Daughters o' de Firs' Order...An' den yu 'ave de three more Daughters o' de Secon' Order...Only de Elder Moder an' one o' de Daughter o' de Firs' Order live wid Shepherd. De Daughter livin' wid 'im do anything 'im want. (173)

In this passage Patterson demonstrates that, despite revivalism's ideological differences with the Rastafari movement, Shepherd John's sect represents another corrupted faction of black nationalism. Dinah wants to believe that she will be "saved" – with all its religious and gendered connotations – by Shepherd, and, in exchange, gives him absolute power over both her body and soul as his "chosen one." Unlike with Cyrus or Alphanso, Dinah's sexual encounter with Shepherd is described as one that *she* desires and that dissolves her "into an infinite awareness of a passing self-destruction. 'Jesus! she cried again. 'Oh, sweet father Jesus'" (183). While Dinah's orgasmic bliss seems to suggest that she, for once, is an erotic agent, it is difficult to interpret their affair as equitable given the patriarchal order of the church. Moreover, his hidden motive to abandon his "sheep" for England shows that his god-given mission is not so much self-sacrificing as it is self-serving. His own rationale for leaving is a case in point: "In de en' is only you'self one yu goin' be responsible fo' on de judgment day...So de 'Oly Spirit tell me...So I mus' obey" (197).

Shepherd's deceit, coupled with the Zionist daughters' jealousy of Dinah, leads the church into total chaos under his reign—the Elder Mother not only kills him, but she frames Dinah for the murder. As the narrator reveals, this moment signals not only the



breakdown of the church, but also Dinah's impending downfall after the congregation viciously attacks her:

They dashed upon her. They ripped the clothes from her. They bashed her head against the floor. They ripped the hair in large chunks from her scalp. Fingernails clawed her. Teeth fastened down around her ear and ripped it half apart. More teeth upon her belly. Upon her back. Then deep into her breast they sunk. A hand jerked sideways and the breast ripped out from the base of her chest. They kicked her. They pinched her. They spat upon her. She begged. She winced and turned and screamed. But there was no mercy. There could be no mercy. (206)

Whereas Dinah's body completely vanishes during the novel's opening rape scene with Cyrus, the narrator chooses to focus on its literal and graphic dismemberment during the spontaneous attack in Trench Town. We can read this passage and the closing scene in which the prostitute's body figures as broken down, ruined matter as emblematic of Walter Benjamin's theorization of allegory as an architect of ruins. Through the dismemberment of Dinah's body, the reader is forced to confront not just the potency of her Sisyphean "curse" but also the disintegrative forces that impede a cohesive vision of the nation. Moreover, in blatantly transforming Dinah's body into allegory, Patterson returns us to the novel's underlying tropes of social death and emancipated citizenship via Cyrus. Consider the last lines when Cyrus is finally reunited with Dinah as she "falls" back into the Dungle:

Could not the spirit of the Holy Emperor bring her back to life. Babylon was wicked. He had never realized it could be so wicked. But no matter

what they did, there was nothing which the Holy Emperor could not repair. He made all things; he destroyed all things; and he could remake all things. And so he kissed her gently on her lips. He said a short prayer for her. 'Tomorrow,' he whispered over her with all the deep fervour of his faith. 'Tomorrow we shall meet again in paradise.' (216)

In circling back to this male-centered perspective, Patterson strategically shifts the focus away from the allegorical fallen woman's literal death and towards the possibilities of political life for a postcolonial nation that is rooted in alternative expressions of black liberation. The once violent figure of the Rastafari man becomes unexpectedly gentle and compassionate, with his eyes towards a future "paradise" that is based on his and Dinah's mutual inclusion. Despite the anti-patriarchal sentiments that close the novel, we should be careful not to overestimate this fictional model of redemptive personhood since it precludes women's active participation from the process of reimagining a postcolonial Jamaica.

There exist scarce opportunities for Jamaican women to project themselves as "proper" subjects within the Manichean city of Patterson's novel. In fact, even when women are found in positions of political power, they also inhabit the role of the prostituted victim. As a foil to his fallen woman, Patterson presents us with the "faithful" Gloria, who he describes as "a gracefully built, well-groomed black woman with a quiet, confident smile" (113). As the secretary to Massah Montesaviour (a fictionalized caricature of Jamaica's first prime minister, Alexander Bustamonte), Gloria is more a figurehead for the creole nationalist project than a legitimate bearer of its racial and gendered promises. Her role as the state-sponsored yes woman in the Jamaican Labor

Party serves to strategically obscure Montesavoiur's rather disingenuous commitment to equitable citizenship. Though she is perceived by the masses as the proverbial benchmark for their prospective upward mobility, Patterson ultimately uses her minor storyline to underscore a painful link between the novel's various female figures across the urban divide: whether abjected from or built-in into the body polity, women are better deployed as vital symbols rather than genuine subjects of a new postcolonial collectivity. While Patterson explores the bounded racial and gendered spaces of the Manichean city in order to put forth not only his theory of social death but also a viable alternative to existing nationalist masculinist rhetorics, Kerry Young's *Gloria*<sup>35</sup> maps an alternative configuration of the city that refuses to make absent the significance of working-class black women in its political history. In this sense, *Gloria* represents an important break from Patterson's allegorical figuration of the fallen women not only in terms of narrative form but also in its critical remapping of the Manichean city into a female-centered space of urban intimacies that replaces statist conceptions of national unity with a broader, regional sense of creole solidarity.

#### **1.4 Young and the Relational Poetics of Romance**

Kerry Young is an emergent novelist of mixed Afro-Chinese ancestry born in Kingston, Jamaica in 1955. She migrated to England with her mother in 1965, the same year Patterson completed his Ph.D. in sociology from the London School of Economics. Young also went on to pursue a doctorate in sociological studies but chose instead to take a non-academic career in youth advocacy work, which she cites as an informative

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<sup>35</sup> Young's use of the name Gloria appears to be more directly connected to the novel's intertextual relationship to Martí's poetic "gloria por la patria" [national glory] than to Patterson's female foil to Dinah.

research foundation for the issues of gender and sexuality presented in *Gloria*.<sup>36</sup> As part of Jamaica's second generation of postcolonial writers, Young represents a small but growing canon of authors who give voice to the region's Asian diasporic communities.<sup>37</sup> Her first novel, *Pao* (2011), was shortlisted for the Costa First Novel Award, the East Midlands Award, and the Commonwealth Book Prize. *Pao* documents Jamaica's changing political landscape from the 1938 labor riots to the 1989 reelection of Michael Manley through the story of its lead character, Yang Pao, who immigrates to the island amid the turmoil of the Chinese Civil War. Settling in downtown Kingston, Pao enters into the underground economy of the city's historic Chinatown rather than the "Chiney shop" that colors most stereotypical literary representations of Jamaica's Chinese community. While the bulk of the novel is dedicated to mapping the fraternal order of this diasporic cultural space, it also expresses a less documented history of solidarity between the city's black and Chinese laboring classes through Pao's long-standing affair with Gloria Campbell, a rural migrant who hires him to safeguard her brothel in the East Kingston neighborhood of Franklyn Town. Young describes their romantic relationship through Pao's eyes as follows:

It make me start think that maybe this is how it suppose to be with a man and a woman. Ordinary, just calm and regular. That maybe this is what it would have been like all these years if I just go marry Gloria in the first

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<sup>36</sup> Biographical information on Young can be accessed through both the Free Word and Space Between Words podcasts, as well as her 2011 Bloomsbury video interview.

<sup>37</sup> Patricia Powell (Jamaica), Jan Lowe Shinebourne (Guyana), Meiling Jin (Guyana), and Cristina Garcia (Cuba) are among the foundational novelists from the 1980s and 1990s to represent the Caribbean Chinese experience in more recent years; their works specifically focus on national histories and legacies of indentureship. There is also younger generation of Jamaican writers and artists such as the performance poet Staceyanne Chin and novelist Hannah Lowe whose work navigates their multiple diasporic positions. For recent critical summaries of the Chinese diaspora in Caribbean literature, refer to Anne-Marie Lee-Loy (2014); Tao Leigh Goffe (2013); and Judith Misrahi-Barak (2012).

place. If I never let myself get distracted by what she was, and what everybody else think 'bout it. If I never set my sights on being married to Henry Wong's daughter like that was going lift me outta being a second class citizen from Matthews Lane. (210)

This passage demonstrates how the parameters of respectability cut both ways for downtown men and women who markedly fall outside creole nationalist space. Despite his deep affection for Gloria early on, Pao overestimates the value of marrying an uptown “chiney royal” like Fay Wong, who better fits the mixed-race ideal. Initially, he sees their impending union as his ticket to upward mobility among the Chinese middle class who have assimilated into dominant society since Fay does not have “any doubt whatsoever about her place in this world” (*Pao* 16). Although he marries into a wealthy Chinese creole family, Pao remains stigmatized within the urban hierarchy of Jamaican immigrants and realizes that “maybe it not so simple for those of us that...too black to be white, or too Chinese to be either” (115). In Young's second novel, Pao and Fay's marriage is described as one of convenience rather than mutual affection; however, his informal union with Gloria registers as a far less debased form of sexual-economic change since they are presented as equals not only romantically but also on a “business basis”: Pao pays Gloria for sex and she pays him “protection money” to keep an eye on her tavern “like he watch over Chinatown” (*Gloria* 93, 73). While it might be fair to say that this alternative romance plot does not completely escape the heterosexist foundations that Doris Sommer identifies as “irresistible” in nation-building fictions,<sup>38</sup> a closer look at

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<sup>38</sup> Although Sommer's *Foundational Fictions* narrows her study of national romance to nineteenth century canonical novels of Latin America and the Hispanic Caribbean, her commentary on how the Boom writers of the 1960s “rewrite, or un-write, foundational fiction as the failure of romance” suggest a way to

how Young reassembles the fallen woman/fragmented city motif in *Gloria* will demonstrate an expanded range of urban intimacies that challenge the homogenizing desires of the nation state.

In *Rethinking the Romance Genre* (2013), Emily S. Davis argues that, despite the recent resurgence of romance as a popular representational mode in postcolonial – and especially women’s – writing, scholars have been slow to embrace the genre as “an especially malleable tool” for representing “legible political concerns related to colonialism, neocolonialism, and globalization” (2). As she points out, this largely has to do with the long-term critical devaluation of issues related to gender and sexuality within the institutional development and circulation of non-western and diasporic world literary canons. As a genre that is perceived to traffic in the less “intellectual” realm of the body and feminized values of love and family, romance – in its contemporary iterations – continues to be bracketed under the “lowly” category of popular mass-market fiction. This critical bias within the field of postcolonial studies, according to Davis, overlooks the important distinctions among texts that “make strategic use of the genre to raise questions about gender and sexuality that frequently get ignored by the predominantly male writers who have achieved the greatest fame and the widest circulation within global markets” (20-21). It is precisely for this reason that I position Young’s effort to think outside the binary and insular model of the city alongside Patterson’s dystopian vision of it. In her revisions to the traditional romance plot, Young follows Patterson’s lead in mobilizing the fallen woman story as a microcosm of Jamaica’s struggles to attain “full and proper self-government” (*Gloria* 118). But, in this allegorical figuration, the

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understand Patterson’s strategic use of disintegrative tropes in the post-independence era inasmuch as the more recent female-centered modifications to the genre in Young’s *Gloria* (27).

titular character Gloria is used to express unlikely places of solidarity grounded in lateral transnational networks rather than a vertical, disintegrative mapping of the city. This is not to say that Young's novel remythologizes the "romance" of interracial unity touted by the creole nationalist movement. *Gloria* more exactly aligns with transnational feminist aesthetics of Caribbean historical fiction that "moves beyond a simple strategy of historical recovery" and, instead, "offer models of what can go right or wrong in cross-cultural interactions," an ethical imperative that Elena Machado Sáez (2015) argues is also paradigmatic for the managing reader-text relationship (Machado Sáez "Mixed Blessings"). Drawing from several recent interviews related to *Pao* and *Gloria*, Machado Sáez reminds us that Young is acutely aware of the mainstream publishing demands incumbent on her as an ethnic minority writer in the UK. Unlike Patterson who wrote with an elite diasporic and predominantly male Afro-Caribbean audience in mind, Young positions her work in relation to a broader non-Caribbean readership that may not be privy to "why the island has had the troubled and sometimes violent path it has" (Young, "East Midlands"). *Gloria's* tactical reinterpretation of the Romantic Bildungsroman, in which questions of national belonging, cosmopolitan identity, and global education are linked, thus follows the current literary trend that Machado Saez and Donette Francis have both analyzed as "an alternative to the binary of anticolonial romance and postcolonial tragedy" (Machado Saez "Fictions" 103).

### **1.5 *Gloria* and the Global Intimacies of Kingston**

Young's *Gloria* consists of 38 chapters that are divided into six sections, each of which correspond to a specific historical moment in Jamaica's nation-building process between 1938 and 1972. This extended timeline is important for several reasons. First, in

beginning in 1938 Young positions Gloria's storyline within a historical frame of labor protest and trade union mobilization that contextualizes the rise of the modern nationalist movement for independence. This immediately connects the violent act Gloria commits at the opening of the text to an island-wide rebellion that was "part of a Caribbean-wide phenomenon" and "largely a radical and violent response by West Indians to the harsh economic conditions caused by the worldwide depression" (Rose 228). Second, in extending her chronology to the decade following independence in 1962, Young ends on another landmark moment in Jamaica's political history: the 1972 election victory of the People's National Party under Michael Manley's leadership. It is noteworthy that Young chooses to stop here, as opposed to following the endpoint in *Pao* to 1989. As she describes it, Manley's ideas about creating a "fair and just Jamaica" hinged on a "politics of participation" that distanced itself from the existing hierarchies underpinning dominant articulations of anticolonial nationalism (*Pao* 199). In alluding to this participatory process, and leaving us at the start of a new and alternative path for the island, Young calls on not only her community of characters but also her readers to imagine a Jamaica "like we never knew before" (*Gloria* 381).

At first glance, the setting and plot of the book appear to map a similar trajectory to that of *The Children of Sisyphus*—beginning simultaneously with Gloria's personal history of sexual violence and amidst the growing political unrest on the island. But we encounter some noteworthy distinctions within the first several pages of the text. For instance, whereas Patterson's book locates its key intellectual point of inspiration in the western philosophical tradition of existentialism, Young draws the reader's attention to the long history of anticolonial intellectual production in the Caribbean through a series



of epigraphs taken from Cuban national hero, José Martí. I will discuss Martí's intertextual influence in more detail towards the end of this chapter, but for now I would like to direct us to his words in the introductory epigraph, which were written at the height of Cuba's antislavery and independence movements of the 1880s:

A people is not independent once it has shaken off the chains of its masters; it begins to be once it has extirpated from its being the vices of vanquished slavery, and, for a homeland and to live anew, rises up and gives form to concepts of life radically opposed to the customs of past servility, to the memories of weakness and adulation that despotic rule uses as elements of domination over the enslaved people.<sup>39</sup>

Early on in the novel, we learn that the psychological legacy of slavery haunts Gloria in much the same way it did Dinah. But, unlike Patterson who leaves no room for Dinah to achieve the kind of mental decolonization that Martí speaks about in the epigraph, Young puts forth a narrative in which her female protagonist "gives form to concepts of life radically opposed to the customs of past servility."

My point isn't to argue that Young trades one masculinist vision of Caribbean nationalism for another in order to promote her allegorical reinterpretation of the fallen woman via the romance tradition; rather, I would like to explore the way in which *Gloria* interjects an intersectional and transnational Caribbean feminist consciousness into a heteropatriarchal model of creole nation-building. The first section of the novel, for

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<sup>39</sup> The epigraph is taken from Martí's article in "Revista Universal," Mexico, May 25, 1875. Volume 6, p. 209. The original Spanish reads: "Un pueblo no es independiente cuando ha sacudido las cadenas de sus amos, empieza a serlo cuando se ha arrancado de su ser los vicios de la vencida esclavitud, y para patria y vivir nuevos, alza e informa conceptos de la vida radicalmente opuestos a la costumbre de servilismo pasado, a las memorias de debilidad y de lisonja que las dominaciones despóticas usan como elementos de dominio sobre los pueblos esclavos."

example, is framed by Martí's most celebrated poem, "Yo soy un hombre sincero" [I am a sincere man], which more obviously asserts a nationalist consciousness that is male-gendered.<sup>40</sup> On one level, the excerpted line "I hear a sigh across the earth," can be read as a reference to the political backdrop of 1938 that opens the novel. To make the connection clear, Young cites the protest cries emanating from the Frome estate in Westmoreland, where "all sorta mayhem break out wid striking and burning the cane fields and police and shooting, and four people get dead and a load more wounded and almost a hundred arrested" (18).<sup>41</sup> On another level, however, Martí's sigh suggest that these are not the only activities that give rise to Gloria's path toward political activism and leadership. More immediately, the sigh is used to introduce into the narrative the sexual abuse that Gloria and her sister Marcia experience at the hands of Barrington Maxwell, who we – along with the characters – later find out is Gloria's own father:

I grab a piece a wood and I hit him. And I hit him. And I hit him. *And all I can hear is the dull thud like when yu bash open a ripe watermelon and the juice splash all over yu.* And then I hear Marcia screaming as she trying to get out from under him. She shoving him off of her but my arm is still moving because all I am thinking about is how he done it to me...how the smell of him, the thick, sour sweat of him, mek my stomach turn and mek me want to heave but I just lay there like a piece of board

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<sup>40</sup> The full stanza from which Young samples reads as follows: "Oigo un suspiro, a través/De las tierras y la mar,/Y no es un suspiro,—es/Que mi hijo va a despertar." ["I hear a sigh across the earth,/I hear a sigh over the deep:/It is no sigh reaching my hearth,/But my son waking from sleep."]

<sup>41</sup> The Frome revolt is often cited as the beginning of the 1938 labor rebellion and trade union movement, when Tate and Lyle's West Indies Sugar Company refused to accommodate workers demands for adequate wages and more equitable working conditions. See Obika Gray (1991) and Robert Alexander (2004) for more detailed accounts.

until it was done. This is what I am thinking while my arm is swinging and swinging. (3, my emphasis)

Compared to Dinah's passive and figuratively displaced "shoulder," Gloria's swinging and actively defensive arm introduces us to tropes of female strength notably missing from conventional modes of female allegory. The subjective standpoint of Young's protagonist suggests individual agency and also a double-voiced narrative that amplifies issues of sexual violence against women while critiquing the patriarchal family romance of postcolonial nation-building. Here the epigraphical "sigh" figures as both Barrington's last breath after he is killed by Gloria and Marcia's initial screaming that rouses her sister to come to her defense. By juxtaposing these disparate cries alongside Martí's poetic expression, Young's opening scene strategically gives voice to a marginal political consciousness without subsuming Caribbean women's stories of rape into a metaphor for male nationalist struggles. Unlike Dinah, whose rape Patterson problematically romanticizes from the perspective of a male narrator, Gloria speaks the systemic sexual abuse she experiences directly to the reader. Moreover, this opening scene gives rise to the plot of the novel. Immediately following the attack, Gloria and Marcia abandon their lives in the rural countryside and move to Kingston, where despite the politically-charged character of the city's labor movement, black women continue to struggle to make ends meet.

In a 2013 interview with BBC news, Young explains that *Gloria* is a novel about "the oppression of shame" (Young "Women's Hour"). According to Young, the following passage expressed by her female protagonist best captures this overarching theme: "It was my fault for being wanton, and stupid and irresponsible in the first place

like the slave that get caught for being too slow and careless” (379). While Gloria’s journey to the city holds the promise of leaving her “past servility” behind, she receives constant reminders on the streets by men about her worth as a woman even if she “act decent...talk respectable” and is repeatedly subjected to men’s leering, catcalls, and obscene gestures such as “the man rubbing himself on the bus” (34, 52). Interestingly, Young does not depict Gloria’s entry into prostitution as symptomatic of this persistent shame; but rather it is through sex work that Young’s protagonist forges a politicized identity within a community of “others” that liberate her from the psychic residues of this purportedly shameful past. We can see this personal growth and identity development not only through Gloria’s location with the novel’s complex set of intersecting, interracial love stories but also in terms of the education she gains during her *Bildungs* narrative within the new female community she has forged in East Kingston. In this sense the novel deliberately shifts the narrative trajectory of the fallen woman away from Patterson’s male-centered tropes of fragmented nationalism and postcolonial redemption through its deliberate remapping of Kingston via the intimate relations Gloria shares with various characters in and around city, as well as beyond its borders. In what follows, I look to key sections from the novel that invite us to consider, in line with Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih’s thinking, the ways in which minority and diasporic peoples across the port city “necessarily participate, though differentially...within the space of global integration” and also “produce new forms of identification that negotiate with national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries” (*Minor Transnationalism* 7-8).

Against Dinah’s perpetual displacement from patriarchal authoritative space, we can read the tavern in *Gloria* as a female-centered domain to raise consciousness around

the intersections of race, gender, sexuality, and class in the struggle for decolonization. As Brian Moore and Michele Johnson (2000) and Dalea Bean (2011) have observed, the taverns, inns, and lodgings that often covertly doubled as brothels in Jamaica's ports were predominantly female owned and operated. Young plays on this historical detail and infuses into the narrative a longer, obscured tradition of black and working-class women's activism in Kingston.<sup>42</sup> Young's fictional rendering is not meant to idealize prostitution as an expression of sexual or economic liberation but rather to contextualize it in terms of the limited opportunities available to women of color in the city and to correct the narrow vision of the early feminist movement that contributed to the creole nationalist respectability. Honor Ford-Smith (2004) and others have argued that the emergence of black and brown women's leadership within multiracial, middle-class nationalism often failed in its efforts to achieve cross-class solidarities.<sup>43</sup> Subsequently, working-class black women's political participation underwent significant decline in the era leading up to independence due to what Rhoda Reddock (1984) has defined as the growing "housewifization" of women, a policy that "was aimed directly at the working-class women who in the 1930s as workers were fighting against their low wages and increased unemployment" (*Caribbean Affairs* 100). Gloria and Marcia are initially inducted into this gendered spatial system when they enter Miss Sissy's boarding house in Franklyn Town upon their arrival in Kingston. Although the boarding house provides basic materials needs, it offers little refuge from the exploitative labor practices or sexual

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<sup>42</sup> In *Citizenship from Below: Erotic Agency and Caribbean Freedom*, Mimi Sheller documents the contributions of working-class women to the formation of an Afro-Jamaican counterpublic in Kingston during the post-emancipation period. While this history precedes the timeline of Young's text, it is worth noting given the strong influence of the late nineteenth century anticolonial and black movements on creole nationalist ideologies.

<sup>43</sup> See also Joan French (1989); Ford-Smith (1994); Reddock (1990, 1994); Thomas (2004); and Rosenberg (2010).

harassment to which the girls are subjected in the private sphere as domestic laborers. In fact, when one of Gloria's uptown male employers corners her to solicit sexual favors, she realizes there is practically no way to regulate the abusive conditions she experiences behind the closed doors of private homes. Reflecting on her double bind, Gloria makes her dilemma clear to us: "either I go willing to him and the wife find out and fire me, or I kick up a stink that nobody going pay no mind to and most likely call the police and have me arrested for a thief, or I just walk outta here right now. Sudden, like the last girl. No last week's wages. No references" (33). At this point, Gloria has few alternatives: her first employer at the Chinese shop on King Street doesn't have the means to rehire her; she refuses to go back to the "dirt yard" in Back-O-Wall, where the girls briefly roomed with a family friend; and Miss Sissy is on her last nerve with Marcia, who has been "taking lessons" in being a downtown "lady" from Sybil and Beryl, the two women who run the neighboring tavern (46).

Gloria is initially scandalized by this house of ill-repute but reluctantly agrees to the women's offer to employ her and Marcia as domestics in exchange for room and board, holding fast to the middle-class ideologies that a woman's proper place is in the home. But Gloria's preconceived prejudices about what it means to be a "whore" begin to break down the more she interacts with Sybil and Beryl, who together embody the novel's underlying feminist conscience. When we first meet Sybil, she explains to Gloria that the sexual and economic exploitation of black women runs deeper than her and Beryl's business at the tavern. As she asserts, "People think being a whore got to do with what gwaan in the bedroom but it not. Being a whore is about who is in charge" and "[to men] every woman is a whore so they can take what they want from her because she is

not a real person” (52). Importantly, these remarks follow the abusive treatment that Gloria receives uptown as a domestic and reorient both her and the reader to prostitution as a more lucrative alternative to “mek enough wages so yu can be yu own woman” (53). While Sybil is careful not to equate her “business” with black women’s liberation from Jamaica’s residual colonial patriarchal structures but rather a way to exercise their agency and resilience in “making do” through resourceful strategies that are “neither strictly ‘forced’ nor completely ‘voluntary’” (*Working Miracles* 130-131). Early during her stay, she realizes that the lessons Sybil and Beryl have to offer exceed “drawing on eyebrow pencil and squeezing tissue paper to blot off the excess after yu spread on the lipstick” (46). According to Sybil, Jamaica’s march towards independence means little if “woman is still living her life under the control a the man, under his law and regulation and goodwill” (52). She continues,

And when yu suffer that realization day in day out, year after year, life after life, what it do is shape how every woman see herself. Weak and subservient like she cyan do nothing without him say so, she cyan even think nothing for herself. She completely relying on him to know who she is, and all she can do is carry on just the way him want her to and hope for the best. Just like the slave. (53)

Exchanges like these – while reminiscent of the slavery metaphor in *The Children of Sisyphus* – introduce into the narrative a female-centered perspective that rejects the futility of freedom made clear by Patterson. Sybil, responding to the city’s operative gender norms and racial power dynamics, does not glamorize her labor since it involves “who can mek who do exactly what they want the other one to do however meaningful or

shameful” (52); and yet, the tavern doesn’t manifest as an institutionalized hierarchical space like the brothel Mary enters in Patterson’s novel, where the “mother” of the brothel is analogized to militarized and economic imperialism via the US and the IMF. Instead, the tavern becomes a “homeplace” – in bell hooks’ understanding of the term – where black female political consciousness takes shape in “the face of the brutal reality of racist oppression, of sexist domination” (*Yearning* 42). It is important to note that Young narrates Gloria’s entry into sex work as an adult as primarily an economic decision rather than a moral fall as we see in Patterson’s novel, which is made clear in the following passage: “I been sitting here down in this house all these months watching Sybil and Beryl do it ever day, day in and day out, and they still good people. They kind and honest...At least if I go do it Beryl can have one day sick without having to tek no aggravation over it” (60-61). Young certainly does not shy away from representing the heightened risks of sexual violence prostitutes face from their clients (as evidenced by the ruthless beating of Marcia by a sailor), but this passage represents one of many that also destigmatizes the women who inhabit the space of prostitution in early twentieth century Kingston. The fictionalized tavern, consequently, becomes a communal space anchored in the level of care and nurturance that hooks deems necessary for black women to restore “the dignity denied [to them] on the outside in the public world” (43).

While the tavern “houses” a different vision of racial and class solidarity among the women, it is not the only place that fosters their political participation in the novel. In the sections that cover Jamaica’s transition toward independence, Gloria refers the reader to the women’s political organization that she and Sybil join in support of the PNP, whose meetings are reminiscent of their own gatherings in the tavern: “It remind me of



all those hours I spend sitting at that kitchen table in Franklyn Town listening to [Sybil] spout forth...The whole room erupt in so much clapping and cheering, I never hear nothing like it in my life” (206). Inspired by the literacy campaigns of the Cuban revolution, Sybil centers her political platform on gender and education because “every woman deserves to have dignity and choices. Opportunity and equality. This is how to create a Jamaica that will truly progress and prosper” (206).<sup>44</sup> In the next section, I trace Gloria’s geopolitical movement as it expands from East Kingston to the eastern provincial capital of Santiago de Cuba, which is considered the birthplace of the 1959 Revolution.<sup>45</sup>

Returning to Cuba’s significance in Young’s project, the aim here is to support my argument that intertextual intimacy facilitates a postcolonial reading of Anglophone and Hispanic Caribbean island literatures that is both transhistorical and transnational. For the purposes of establishing a connection between these regional traditions, I offer a more detailed analysis of what the image and discourse of Cuba’s “founding father,” José Martí means to *Gloria*’s narration of Jamaica’s political “love affair” with Cuba. Her inclusion of the excerpt from “Soy un hombre sincero” is the first in a series of epigraphs that frame the novel’s six sections, all of which are sampled from Martí’s poetic autobiography, *Versos Sencillos* [Simple Verses, 1891]. Each epigraph alludes to the setting or plot of the novel: the second section, titled 1945, includes the line “When the

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<sup>44</sup> Elise Andaya (2014) notes that, while not often highlighted, women played key roles in the revolution beyond their symbolic representation as the “social barometer” for the new Cuban state. For instance, in the early 1960s, nearly 55,000 urban women joined the campaigns in the rural countryside—breaking the *casa/calle* (house/street) that supported not only the colonial gender binary but also its race and class differences.

<sup>45</sup> Located in the Oriente province, Santiago de Cuba is the second largest capital and port city on the island and was also declared in the provisional capital of the Cuban Republic, further cementing its political significance in the revolutionary imagination.

sun first shines its light” to contextualize the end of the war when “business was booming” for the tavern;<sup>46</sup> while section three, set in 1950, enfolds Martí’s verse directly into Gloria’s story when Pao gives her a necklace “Of the rarest Chinese jade”;<sup>47</sup> and section four prepares us Gloria’s inter-island migration during the early 1960s with the line, “From the land where palm trees grow.”<sup>48</sup>

But why Martí? And why *Versos Sencillos*? According to his critics, this collection has come to represent a “building block in creating a Cuba libre” because its publication came on the heels of the poet’s involvement in both the Pan-American Conference (1889-1890) and the International Monetary Conference (1891).<sup>49</sup> Unlike the scathing representations of modern urban life featured in his posthumous *Versos Libres*, *Versos Sencillos* channels anticolonial agendas raised by its critical precursor, *Nuestro América* (1891), both of which reflect his nationalist and regionalist concerns while in exile with U.S. hegemony in Cuba and Latin America. Among his most celebrated works, this poetic autobiography, as some of have called it, demonstrates the extent to which

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<sup>46</sup> This line is taken from verse three: “To the vain the gold that’s softest/In crucible burning bright,/Give me the eternal forest/When the sun first shines its light.” [Denle al vano el oro tierno/Que arde y brilla en el crisol:/A mi denme el bosque eterno/Cuando rompe en el el sol].

<sup>47</sup> From verse 190: “Over the delicate ears Luxuriously falls the hair, Like a curtain in mid-air, Which at the nape disappears. Her ear was divinely made of the rarest Chinese jade.” [Por sobre la oreja fina/Baja lujoso el cabello,/Lo mismo que una cortina/Que se levanta hacia el cuello./La oreja es obra divina/De porcelana de China.]

<sup>48</sup> The remaining sections are titled follows: section five, 1965, “While more deeper is the wound” [verse 37]; section six, 1972, “And so my life its way will wend” [verse 46].

<sup>49</sup> A. López summarizes the conference as a “refinement of the Monroe Doctrine to consolidate U.S. power in the hemisphere by extending its influence among Latin American states” and Martí’s columns in *La Nación* and other news sources in Latin America and the U.S. worked to both raise “the exiles’ awareness of the conferences’ implications for the prospects of Cuban independence and rallying Latin American public opinion against its aims” (*José Martí: A Revolutionary Life*, 242-243).

“Martí’s writings offer some of the earliest examples of the *modernista* tendency to envision literary and political concerns as one and the same.”<sup>50</sup>

Defining Martí’s project of liberation has generated a substantial amount of scholarship in recent years both nationally and hemispherically, but rarely for an inter-island comparison of Cuban and Jamaican literatures. Lillian Guerra and Alfred López describe the “multiple Martí’s” that have emerged to represent “different, conflicting interpretations of nation” (3). López cites Martí’s divergent legacies in Cuba and Cuba-America as “part of the larger postcolonial problem of national building and the role of literature within nationalist projects” (7). Martí is best remembered in broader Caribbean and pan-American scholarship for his revolutionary campaign of *la patria* [best translated here as fatherland], which insisted that “the new struggle for Cuba” could only be achieved as “a people’s war,” one in which “the Negro had to be treated ‘according to his qualities as a man’ and the worker ‘as a brother with the consideration and rights which must assure peace and happiness as a nation’” (Foner 18).<sup>51</sup> Martí, along with other *independentistas*, appealed to a fraternal anticolonial movement that dissolved Cuba’s existing color-class hierarchies in the name of a sovereign republic. Historian Ada Ferrer summarizes the new language of “raceless nationality” that defined Cuba’s nineteenth-century revolution as follows:

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<sup>50</sup> As numerous scholars have noted, Spanish American modernism is not equivalent to European or Anglo-American modernism as a literary movement, the latter of which “drew on successive French schools — romantic, parnassian, symbolist — for a ‘declaration of cultural independence’ from Spain. Martí’s poems of the 1890s are understood as the origins of this tradition, later popularized by Darío (Anderson 3).

<sup>51</sup> Manuel Martínez reminds us that in Spanish *patria* both evokes the maternal (“la madre patria”) and displaces the feminine: “*patria*, having both feminine and masculine elements, would seem, on the surface, to reconcile the two genders. It strikes a balance that would seem to recognize both. However, the Latin root tends to inflect the word’s meaning with a masculine characteristic... therefore it is not surprising that we can identify the dialectical tension between the maternal component of ‘homeland’ and the masculine component of ‘*patria*.’” This tension can be seen in a chain from the earliest days of Cuban national consciousness.”

Espoused by both white and nonwhite members of the movement's civilian and military branches, it asserted that the very struggles against Spain had transformed Cuba into a land where there were 'no whites and no blacks, but only Cubans.' It thus condemned racism not as an infraction against individual citizens but as a sin against the life of the would-be nation. Revolutionary rhetoric made racial slavery and racial division concomitant with Spanish colonialism, just as it made the revolution a mythic project that armed black, white, and mulatto men together to form the world's first raceless nation. (32)<sup>52</sup>

Thinking about Martí's mythic project in the context of Young's novel, at first glance, might suggest that the text wholly promotes the political leader's thoughts on creolized brotherhood; but the novel reveals its own set of critical responses to the limited conceptions of racial and gendered labor put forth by his campaign. In this historical novel about a black female prostitute in Kingston, Young reiterates the concerns of *Pao*, which responds to the lack of effort to complicate discourses of cultural creolization that have become central to Caribbean history and national identity across the islands. To this extent, the significance of Gloria's relationship with Pao is central because it forges a politicized intimacy between black and Chinese Jamaicans and their labor histories, a cross-racial alliance notably missing from Martí's ideal of the national citizenry, or Patterson's critique. As two characters left out of the Martí's masculinist discourse of creole nationalism, Pao and Gloria overwrite the lack of labor solidarity between minoritized Jamaicans during an era when black and Asian ethnic divisions were

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<sup>52</sup> Ada Ferrer offers important insight to this topic, particularly in both "Cuba, 1898: Rethinking Race, Nation, and Empire" (1991) and "The Silence of Patriots: Race and Nationalism in Martí's Cuba" (1998).

aggravated by recurring waves of anti-Chinese violence during the first half of the twentieth century (in 1918, 1938 and 1965).<sup>53</sup>

While celebrated for his stances against racism and militarism, a closer look at the gendered metaphors in Martí's literary writings suggests that his discourse of anti-colonial nationalism is also upheld by his lesser-studied but no less prominent patriarchal ideologies. This is particularly evident through the competing signs of woman represented in the love poems of *Versos Sencillos*, among other works. His strategic ambivalence towards women is characteristic of a political attitude that reflects his status as a writer in exile caught between the demands of multiple national audiences and their competing visions of independence. As scholars such as Suzanne Kocher and Oscar Montero have explained, Martí's rhetoric of gender cannot be abstracted from the emergence and widespread growth of feminist consciousness both in the US and Cuba in the second half of the nineteenth century. For Kocher, Martí's symbolic woman, whether idealized or vilified, reworks the dominant metaphor of nineteenth-century Latin America that encodes women's bodies with the symbolic value of nation.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in his love poems, it is in fact men, not women, who stand for and in place of the nation: "Martí paradoxically portrays woman as being simultaneously a passive object and an active oppressor. In political terms, this legitimates Latin America's struggles for freedom, but simultaneously justifies men's oppression of women" (14). For Montero, the centrality of

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<sup>53</sup> Relatedly, recent discussions in Cuban studies have demonstrated that Martí's writings on the need for a transracial union ideal of the nation paid scant attention to both Chinese men and women of all races who participated as "freedom fighters" in the wars for independence. Refer to Kathleen López's *Chinese Cubans: a transnational history* and Teresa Prados-Torreira's *Mambisas: Rebel Women in Nineteenth-Century Cuba*.

<sup>54</sup> Cirilio Villaverde's *Cecilia Valdés* (1839, 1882) represents the most familiar Cuban female figure of nation.

the national male subject in Martí's poetry and prose becomes all the more complicated when we consider his journalistic writings from New York, and more specifically his reflections on the political potential of the women's rights movement at the end of the century "to grapple not only with the inequities of gender politics but with a broad spectrum of issues, which together would determine the future of the United States, and would surely impact on Cuba's own struggles for independence in the shadow of its mighty, ambitious neighbor" (55). Although Young's epigraphic engagement with Martí might suggest a somewhat problematic appropriation of his male-authored *patria*, I would like to approach her practices of reference otherwise by offering a reading of Gloria's burgeoning love affair with Cuba.

The novel's entangled narrative with Cuba is most evident in the scenes when Gloria becomes romantically involved with the Cuban revolutionary, Ernesto, during a trip to Santiago de Cuba with Sybil to support Castro's literacy campaigns in 1961. Young's decision to bridge a trans-urban connection between Kingston and Santiago, rather than Havana (discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation), is significant because, as the island's second major port city, Santiago has been lionized as the birthplace of 1959 revolution and as the center of Afro-Cuban culture. In a scene immediately following her arrival to Santiago, Gloria learns from a local woman named Aida that "Santiago was the first city in Cuba to get African slaves... So Santiago a little different from other towns in Cuba. More mix" (215). Gloria then realizes, beyond their shared connection to a distant homeland, the reason Aida looks and speaks like her is because "[her] people come from Jamaica a little time back" (215). This, I believe, is important because it establishes a basis for Gloria's transnational connection with Cuba

that is then developed in later scenes that depict Jamaica's "romance" with the Cuban Revolution through her relationship with Ernesto.

Ernesto personifies the tradition of the Cuban "new man" and revolutionary love that runs through the pages of both Martí's writings and that of his political successor, Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Although the affair between Ernesto and Gloria suggests, along with the aforementioned scene, another politicized intimacy between Cuba and Jamaica, later scenes in the novel make clear that Young uses this allegorical romance to also critique Cuba's representative male genealogy of postcolonial nationalism. In a telling scene when Ernesto arrives in Kingston to spread the "love of the cause," he mentions to Gloria that, in Cuba, they have programs for women like her—referring to early revolutionary governments rehabilitation camps for prostitutes and other sexual dissidents. As Carrie Hamilton notes in *Sexual Revolutions in Cuba* (2012), official government positions and practices against prostitution are often couched in terms of the Revolution's mutual commitment to gender and class equalities, but – as explored further in Chapter 4 – the reeducation of prostitutes also served a heteropatriarchal agenda that was not only coercive but also reinforced white, middle class notions of femininity. Gloria reiterates this critique in her response to Ernesto: "Yes, since yu make prostitution illegal and decide yu have to re-educate us" (236). Later, she explains to the reader that, "[b]eing a whore wasn't what I did. It was who I am, and that realisation I couldn't run from. Not even if I run to Cuba and into the arms of the revolution and Ernesto Sánchez" (236). This represents a critical turning point in the novel—Gloria abruptly ends her affair with Ernesto to fully embrace her love of Jamaica, which is represented by the future she envisions and carves out for her and Pao's only daughter, Esther. By

committing herself fully to women's and girls' rights to education, Gloria offers a broader challenge to Caribbean nationalist ideals of womanhood and heteronormative domesticity.

Compared to the absence of female citizenship and lack of communal cohesion in Patterson's novel, *Gloria* forges lateral political alliances between minority and diasporic Caribbean subjects that centralize women's active participation in forging new forms of collective identity. We see this principally through the primary love triangle between Fay, Pao, and Gloria, in which the metaphorical national family undergoes a radical revision from state-sponsored "romances" of creole unity. Whereas the allegorical social death of Dinah displaces women's bodies from the gendered narratives of productive and redemptive citizenship in the Manichean city, the tropes of intercommunal solidarity and familial love in *Gloria* enables Young to challenge reductive and exclusionary notions of citizenship. For instance, we can trace an urban intimacy not only between Chinatown and Franklyn Town via Pao and Gloria's love story but also between downtown and uptown Kingston through the unanticipated commonalities that emerge between Fay and Gloria. While Fay's is presented early on in the novel as a foil to Gloria in terms of their class and color differences and differential relations with Pao, Young brings two together at several points in the novel to highlight their interconnected personal experiences as women of color. Fay eventually confides in Gloria that she also has encountered her fair share of adversity in Kingston's socially fragmented landscape: "The white girls didn't mix with me, and neither did the Chinese because I wasn't full Chinese and that mattered a great deal in those days. Still does. And the black girls, few and far between as they were, stayed together" (316). We also learn that before Fay's arranged marriage with Pao



is the result of her mother's disapproval of "her fair-skinned daughter" going out with a black man in public (317). After relaying her own unrequited love story to Gloria, Fay concludes their meeting by telling her: "I suppose I just wanted you to understand something about me. Know me, not only what is said about me. What have shared such a lot it seems there should be more between us" (320). By strategically transforming Fay and Gloria's relationship as one of mutual understanding and acceptance, Young is able to move beyond the classic romance plot that represses women's individual and collective development in national allegory.

In Young's reconfiguration of collective belonging to Kingston, Gloria and Pao never marry; their Afro-Chinese daughter is in love with an Indo-Jamaican man named Rajinder; and Marcia, who we find out – in an unexpected turn of events – is not Gloria's biological sister, lives between Kingston and Miami with her partner, Loretta. The novel ends with Esther's graduation with these and other various nonfilial members of Gloria's extended family "sitting side by side in the beautiful university gardens at Mona" (381). This ending scene provides a means to reexamine the privileged black nationalist perspective that undergirds Patterson's critique of the Manichean city. Rather than wholesale object the Jamaican motto, "Out of Many, One People," Young's novel repositions previously marginalized – ethnic, sexual, and diasporic – citizens into a more complex sense of creole collectivities than that of the homogenizing myth of the state. It also challenges the more simplistic reading of the city as divided and contained by ending with her downtown cast of characters in the uptown suburban hills. While it is tempting to read this scene as indicative of Gloria's individual redemption as a fallen woman, I would like us to consider instead that Young self-consciously employs the pedagogical

metaphor to allegorize the relationship between the foreign fiction reader and the “real” Jamaica. In this way *Gloria* creates an imaginary milieu in which the allegorical figuration of the fallen woman can help meditate the transnational conditions of unequal exchange and uneven development at the level of reader reception.

## 1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has mapped a persistent critique of Jamaican creole nationalism from the varying perspectives of its diasporic writers. In engaging the culturally specific expression of the Manichean city as it relates to Kingston, my readings of Patterson and Young’s novels suggest that the recurring figure of the fallen woman has been integral to the intertextual paradigms for expressing each writer’s particular desires for the postcolonial nation. The continued reliance on the Manichean city in *The Children of Sisyphus* reveals the extent to which Patterson remains doubtful of the potential for national unity when the colonial cartographies of race, gender, and class identities remain firmly in place. In *Gloria*, however, we find a range of diasporic and minoritized communities that challenge the traditional binary organization of the city. This transnational paradigm of cross-cultural solidarity not only revises Patterson’s insular, male-centered vision, but also enables an allegorical mode of representation that implicates readers in its redemptive interpretation. In the next chapter, I shift the focus from the geography of the Manichean city to the genealogy of the Carnival city to show how the recurring figure of the public woman participate in larger transhistorical and cross-cultural dialogues across the postcolonial literary traditions of Trinidad.

## CHAPTER 2

### The Carnival City Unmasking Jamette Performance Genealogies in Port of Spain

Genealogy is history in the form of a concerted carnival.

—Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory Practice*

In her lyrical essay collection, *A Genealogy of Resistance* (1997), the self-described *jamette* poet M. NourbeSe Philip dedicates several chapters to the performance traditions, or in her words, genealogies of the Trinidadian public woman whose historic appearances in the steel pan yards and on the street corners have captured the interests of local male writers since the early twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Rather than begin there, she traces her poetic genealogy of the *jamette* further back to its late nineteenth century usage. According to Philip, this feminized form of the *patois* word *jamet* – or *jametre*<sup>56</sup> – stemmed from the linguistic combination of the French *diamètre* [boundary] and the Wolof *jaam* [slave] to more broadly reference the “singers, drummers, dancers, stickmen, prostitutes, pimps, and ‘bad johns’” that comprised the black subcultural sphere of Port of Spain. As she suggests in her critical gloss on the term in “Dis Place—The Space Between,” the *jamette* later evolved with almost exclusive reference to the moral-sexual

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<sup>55</sup> Philip’s exploration of the relationship between body, memory, and performance in relation to the trans-urban contexts of Caribbean Carnival merits comparison with the work of Joseph Roach. In *Cities of the Dead* (1996), Roach analyzes the origins and development of Carnival in New Orleans as a case study for his theory of performance as a “process of surrogation, the enactment of cultural memory by substitution” (80). Drawing from Paul Gilroy’s model of the “Black Atlantic,” Roach argues for a “region-centered conception” of circum-Atlantic performance “that is at once a map of diasporic diffusions in space and a speculation on the synthesis and mutation of traditions through time” (30). Much like Gilroy’s, Roach’s theory relies heavily on the Caribbean for its conceptual mapping of circum-Atlantic performance even as it bypasses much of the region to exclusively focus on the Global North cities of New Orleans and London. In terms of prostitution and port cities, Roach’s project does offer a useful point of comparison in its brief examination of New Orleans as a “behavioral vortex” for the nation’s libido (231). See Chapter 5 in *Cities of the Dead*, pp. 224-233.

<sup>56</sup> I follow Samantha Noel (2010) in her use of the gender-neutral *jametre* – as opposed to the more widely used *jamet* (masculine)/*jamette* (feminine) – when referring to the newly emancipated class and distinctive African-derived traditions of Carnival in Port of Spain.

stigmas and illicit spaces associated with prostitution:

Jamette! A “loose” woman, a woman of loose morals, whose habitat is the street. A woman possessing both the space between her legs and the space around her. Knowing her place on the streets of Port of Spain. . . . Men *and* women living above the diameter/diamètre would be calling these women out of their names, describing them over the years as wajanks, jackabats, spoats, and hos (whores). We calling them jamettes. For the present. Is what they doing in these places? Only servicing men?

Signifying another reality? About the balance between the inner and outer space? (77)

Philip’s etymological deconstruction of the *jamette* pushes us to reconsider the most commonly held views about prostitute as it relates to notions of “loose” sexual morals and degraded feminine identities. As she makes clear, the social panics over “jamettes, possessing their inner and outer space” have less to do with the need to protect black working class women from “the possibility of the uninvited and forceful invasion of the space between the legs” and more to do with the perceived threat to they pose to “the hegemony of those who control the outer space” (75, 96). After establishing this important historical shift in meaning, Philip uncovers the hidden connections between these “public women” who “posing and selling what the all men wanting” and the past “women in public” that came before them (84-85). What connects these generations of *jamettes* are both their common “habitat” – not only the streets but also the city’s hillside slums – and collective refusal to comply with the restrictions placed over bodies in everyday life and during Carnival in particular. This chapter takes its inspiration from

Philip's female-centered genealogy in order to think through the ways in which the *jammed* has been central to the origins and development of the Carnival city and, by extension, its predominantly male-authored literary representations.<sup>57</sup>

Beginning with Earl Lovelace's 1979 novel *The Dragon Can't Dance*, I argue that the figure of *jammed* has been particularly useful for the postcolonial male writer to establish an urban intimacy with *jammed* forms of masquerade in the wake of an increasing commodification of Carnival in the late 1960s and 1970s. Existing scholarship on the novel has largely concentrated on Lovelace's call for new forms of creole collectivity that can more meaningfully represent Trinidad's post-independence motto of "All O' We is One." Unlike Patterson's fragmented and tragic vision of the Manichean city, Lovelace uses the cultural practices of inversion and rebellion associated with *jammed* Carnival to establish his novelistic "quest for personhood," which – according to Daryl Dance – is frequently "threatened as his characters encounter the impersonal, dehumanizing urban world" (Dance 227). As Lovelace (2013) remarks elsewhere, his concept of personhood has its historical foundations in the struggles of "the jammeds, the rebellious, the loud and unruly" for the "survival, expression and innovation of the cultural forms that emerged out of people's struggle to declare themselves against a dehumanising system" (70). He continues:

Blackpeople were fighting to be accorded the rights and responsibilities of human beings. But this culture, because it was effectively banned, was forced into the underworld. The bad johns, stickfighters, pan men,

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<sup>57</sup> My focus on the Carnival city in relation to Trinidad is not meant to marginalize Tobago from the discussion but rather to highlight the extent to which, as Philip notes, island's premier festival in Port of Spain has been a prototype for other Caribbean carnivals both in the region and abroad. Moreover, Patricia A. De Freitas (1999) reminds us, despite being a twin-island nation, Trinidad and Tobago do not share a seamless historical or cultural trajectory, especially with regards to the Carnival ethos.

calypsonians, mas men, prostitutes – the jamettes – were all lumped into one. They would occupy the same physical and perhaps aesthetic space. In this sense the cultural struggle was the political struggle. The fight for Culture would constitute rebellion. And those advancing it were the people of what had become and would remain the underworld—tagged, not as freedom fighters, but as delinquents. (70)

Written in the midst of the Black Power movement and oil crisis of the 1970s, *The Dragon Can't Dance* recreates this “underworld” of rebellion in the post-independence era. The novel takes place on Calvary Hill in the East Dry River—the birthplace of *jametre* Carnival in the 1860s and its modern elements of steelpan, calypso, and mas’ [masquerade]<sup>58</sup> at the turn of the century. As I will explore in more detail below, Lovelace draws on the Afro-Creole cultural legacy of Carnival as way to challenge the festival’s emergent neocolonial and tourist-oriented consumer culture. Within this context, the female body becomes a particularly charged metaphorical site for exploring the Carnival city in relation to “conflicting processes of self-creation, cultural co-optation and [u]topian resistance to capitalist values of ownership” (Balderston and Gonzalez 322). In focusing on the figure of the *jamette*, my reading of *The Dragon Can't Dance* aims to make visible the ambivalent place of female sexuality within both the novel’s critique of Carnival’s cultural prostitution and its desired criterion for personhood.

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<sup>58</sup> Distinct from the related concept of masking, the creole word mas (from masque or masquerade) indexes the historical Carnival bands based on European costumes and themes and is used here to distinguish its African syncretic forms in the post-Emancipation and postcolonial eras. Notable adaptations include popular characters such as the Dame Lorraine and Pissenlit as well as the *kalinda* (stickfighting) bands and sailor bands. For more detailed accounts, refer to Daniel J. Crowley’s “The Traditional Masques of Carnival” (1956) and Errol Hill’s “Traditional Figures in Carnival: Their preservation, development and interpretation” (1985). Relatedly, across her writings on the *jamette* and post-emancipation Carnival, Philip frequently cites the 1890s newspaper, the *Port of Spain Gazette*, and includes historical details that are also highlighted in the 1956 *Caribbean Quarterly* special issue on Trinidad Carnival.

From there, I then to turn Tony Hall's 1994 play, *Jean and Dinah*. . . *Speak Their Minds Publicly* to argue that the titular protagonists shatter dominant expectations of black women's "proper" place within the Carnival city. Whereas Lovelace strategically figures the growing presence of woman-as-spectacle to suggest that Carnival has lost its anticolonial character, Hall presents the sexualized performances of its protagonists as a logical extension of the late nineteenth century *jamette* tradition. For his purposes, the theater constitutes a more effective and translatable genre through which to explore Carnival as an expressive strategy social protest and community building. *Jean and Dinah* responds directly to Mighty Sparrow's 1956 calypso "Yankees Gone," which features Jean and Dinah as prostitutes whose bodies serve as metaphorical sites for anticolonial struggle between Trinidadian and American military men. Against this misogynistic parlance, Hall appropriates the language of calypso to expose the historical silence surrounding the centrality of the *jamette* – and by extension black women's sexuality – to the political dimensions of Carnival as a strategy for social protest. Principally, Hall's play recovers the *jamette*'s vocal and bodily performances as flag women whose historical leadership roles in the all-male steelbands of the early twentieth century remains a hotly debated topic among Carnival historians to this day.<sup>59</sup> The play is staged in two acts that together trace continuities in the performance patterns for women across the post-emancipation and post-independence periods. In doing so, Hall provides

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<sup>59</sup> This term refers to women who carried the flags and cleared the path for their respective bands during the street processions on Carnival Monday and Tuesday, though men also have historically participated in the band as flag wavers. While the origins of the role remain unclear and heavily disputed, it appears to have emerged as a female-gendered phenomenon during the steelband movement took off in the 1940s when women began to take on more visual and secondary roles as dancers in the band culture. Lord Kitchener, a contemporary of Mighty Sparrow, amplified the female-gendering of the term with his 1976 calypso, "Flag Woman." According steelpan historian Kim Johnson and literary critic Gordon Rohlehr, the decline of this particular art form can be attributed to the cultural shift away from steelband as a communal and street oriented performance.

us with a representation of the *jamette* performance legacy that radically departs from both the blatant and benevolent forms of patriarchy that are represented in both Sparrow and Lovelace's male-centered texts. My reading will focus on how the play engages with issues of sexual and domestic violence against women as well as elements of gender transvestism in traditional *jametre* masquerade to produce what Philip calls "the missing text" of black women's cultural significance to Carnival city.

## 2.1 Carnival's Woman Question

Before turning to Lovelace and Hall's works, I would like to first briefly sketch out recent feminist discussion around the female carnival street performer emanating from Caribbean studies in order to highlight how the *jamette* fits into this project's larger concerns around issues of exoticism and respectability. Carole Boyce Davies provides an important starting point for interrogating how these colonial ideologies continue to circulate in Caribbean and Brazilian carnival discourse. In "Black/Female/Bodies Carnivalized in Spectacle and Space" (2010), Boyce Davies makes a distinction between the "carnival of resistance" and the "carnival of cooptation and tourism" that have largely shaped feminist debates concerning women's freedom of expression in the festival. While the former is often characterized as a "taking space" that echoes the slave rebellions and uprisings, *canboulay*<sup>60</sup> festivals, and other anticolonial practices that subvert societal norms, the latter has more to do with the state "making space" for the black female body

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<sup>60</sup> Canboulay or *cannes brulées* literally translates to "burning cane," and was originally associated with the routine practice of rounding up enslaved Africans to fight fires in the cane fields on plantation estates. Prior to emancipation, the white planter class would masquerade as "negre jardin" [black field workers] and reenact the *cannes brulées* as part of their pre-Lenten festivities. Following the abolition of slavery in 1838, black communities in Trinidad appropriated the ritual to celebrate their emancipation and later incorporated their own music and dance traditions into the street processions. See "The History Behind Mas" (2009) and "Canboulay—Reminiscences of an Ancient Ritual" (2013).



as a commodity in order to sell the tropics as a site of pleasure that is readily available to both insiders and outsiders (189). In the context of Trinidad Carnival, numerous scholars have attempted to complicate this binary by shifting the focus of the discussion away from the absence/presence of women's resistance in Carnival and towards questions that tackle the competing performative desires of the state, spectators, and masqueraders in transhistorical and cross-cultural contexts. For instance, Patricia De Freitas (1999), Pamela Franco (2007), Belinda Edmondson (2009), Gerard Aching (2010), and Samantha Noel (2010) have all argued in favor of an analysis that historically links the popular discourses and political regulations that surrounded the marginalized *jamette* in pre-independence Trinidad to the present-day anxieties over women masqueraders of all class and ethnic backgrounds who perform public expressions of "vulgar" sexuality during Carnival time.

Interestingly, none of these studies have considered tracing this genealogy through or alongside any sort of substantial engagement with Trinidadian literary representations of the *jamette*—a repetitive practice that I argue can be traced from early to late twentieth century. Drawing from calypso musical influences, the literary public woman (whether in the yard or on the street) was regularly used to represent Trinidad's desires for political, cultural, and economic and political independence in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>61</sup> As Saunders (2007) and Rosenberg (2000, 2001) have noted, these emergent nationalist representations were often ambivalent in their treatment of working-class women, ranging from humorous sexually-charged stereotypes to exploited victims. Among the most well studied writers to represent such figures include CLR James, Alfred Mendes, and Kathleen Archibald. In the mid-twentieth century local authors

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<sup>61</sup> See also Reinhard Sander's cataloguing of such texts in *Trinidad Awakening* (1988).

began to incorporate Carnival performance genres more readily into their representations of *jamette* women. Novels such as V.S. Naipaul's *Miguel Street* (1954), Herbert de Boissiere's *Rum and Coca Cola* (1954), and Errol John's play *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* (1957) all rely on the standard narratives of the working-class woman in calypso inasmuch as they adapt its musical qualities for literary composition.<sup>62</sup> In addition to *The Dragon Can't Dance*, Marion Patrick Jones' *Pan Beat* (1973) and *J'Ouvert* (1978) also attempt to reimagine the figure in relation to the postcolonial predicament; however, these texts are much more focused on middle class women's sensibilities and sexualities which place them beyond the thematic considerations of this chapter. Since *The Dragon Can't Dance* and *Jean and Dinah* are two of the most recent texts to take up the *jamette's* ambivalent and evolving legacy in the Carnival city, this chapter examines the ways in which Lovelace and Hall engage the existing traditions of yard fiction and calypso to expose the dilemmas of postcolonial nation-building through their female characters.

## **2.2 Princess or Slave Girl?: The Prostitution of Carnival in *The Dragon Can't Dance***

*The Dragon Can't Dance* begins with a three-part prologue through which to glean how Lovelace's Carnival city is crosscut with an ambivalent treatment of black women's sexuality and space. In the first section, entitled "THE HILL,"<sup>63</sup> the calypsonian narrator orients us to the main setting of the novel, which is located "behind-the-bridge"—a catchall term used to refer to the notorious slum communities that spread over the

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<sup>62</sup> Other examples within the Carnival tradition that are beyond the scope of this project include Sam Selvon's *A Brighter Sun* (1952), Michael Anthony's *King of the Masquerade* (1976), Willi Chen's "Mas' is More than a Creole Thing" from *Chutney Power* (2003), and Oonya Kempadoo's *All Decent Animals* (2013).

<sup>63</sup> At the beginning of "The Hill," Lovelace adapts a fictional reference to the area featured in Sam Selvon's *I Hear Thunder* (1963) as a place where "Christ carries his Cross" in a mock-religious gesture to the artifice of the national hero-figure (Selvon 66). Both texts also highlight some of key landmarks of Laventille and Calvary Hill.

surrounding hills of East Port of Spain in the post-emancipation era. As Derek Walcott alludes in his earlier poem, “Laventille” (1965), the colonial spatial dynamics of this area bear closer resemblance to the favelas of Rio than to those of Port of Spain’s sister city, Kingston. Following the abolition of slavery, the hills became populated not only by emancipated slaves from the rural plantations, but also free Africans of Yoruba, Rada [from Allada in Dahomey], Igbo, Hausa, and Congo ethnic groups, who had been liberated at sea.<sup>64</sup> These communities set up enclosed and ethnically-mixed village enclaves that resembled maroon settlements and barracks courtyards, and in the post-indenture period the area became populated by other racial and ethnic communities, including immigrants from neighboring islands (*Trinidad Yoruba* 40; Bissessar 120-123). Though East Port of Spain is often characterized as a racial and class homogeneity and associated with the city’s black cultural and political heritage, the area has historically contained a greater diversity than the other cities featured in this project.

Lovelace calls our attention these particularities on “THE HILL” through the lens of a fictional barrack yard located on Alice Street. This particular neighborhood, we are told, which is “named for Princess Alice, the Queen’s aunt – Alice – soft word on the lips” and “before which grows a governor plum tree that has battled its way up through the tough red dirt and stands now...a bouquet in this desert of a place” (10). At one level, this opening image of the yard is meant to serve as an introduction to what Lovelace elsewhere calls the “regal poverty”<sup>65</sup> of the hill, a trope reinforced by the narrator’s use of

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<sup>64</sup> See Appendix B, figure 5 for a photograph taken from the “Yarraba Village” heritage site in East Port of Spain, which includes a sign that details this history, as well as Maureen Warner Lewis’s *Guinea’s Other Suns: The African Dynamic in Trinidad Culture* (1991); Peter Mason’s *Bacchanal!: The Carnival Culture of Trinidad* (1998); and Andrew Carr’s landmark study, “A Rada Community in Trinidad” (1955).

<sup>65</sup>From Maria Grau-Perejoan’s 2016 interview with the author in *Atlantis*.

the expression “blue bloods of a resistance lived their ancestors...as Maroons, as Runways, as Bush Negroes, as Rebels” (10). In sense the “royal bloodline” of Alice Street is not tied to the island’s earlier forms of crown colony government but rather the rebellious communal spirit of the *jametree* class and their struggles against “the colonial machinery that kept on grinding” (10). At another level, the Hill’s “royalty” are also firmly rooted (pun intended) in the genealogical symbol of the governor’s plum tree. The likening of the tree to a “bouquet in this desert of a place” offsets the seemingly unnatural, squalid, and barren wasteland of slum life; but, more than that, it is directly tied to images of women tending gardens and the historic maroon villages, contributing to a more fertile, vibrant, and sovereign sense of community. Importantly, the fecundity of this landscape artfully challenges the notion that the “birthplace” of Carnival is a purely masculine cultural space, particularly in the third and final section of the prologue, entitled “CALYPSO.” While the men of yard are described as temporarily abandoning their regular posts as limers<sup>66</sup> for the higher power of steelband tent, which becomes their “cathedral” during Carnival season, the women become “earth goddesses” who extend the governor tree metaphor of feminine resiliency:

Up on the hill with Carnival coming...everybody catches the spirit and these women with baskets and with their heads tied, these women winding daily down this hill on which no buses run, tramping down this asphalt lane slashed across this mountain’s face, on their way to Port of Spain city, to market, to work as a domestic, or to any other menial task they inherit because of their beauty; these women, in this season, bounce with

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<sup>66</sup> In colloquial use, the word *limer* is used to describe someone who is “[a]n idler; a time-waster; one (usu[ally] a man) who stands around with others on the sidewalk or in some public place watching people go by, and sometimes being mischievous” (*Dictionary of Caribbean English* 349).

that tall delicious softness of bosom and hip, their movements a dance, as if they were earth priestesses heralding a new spring. (13)

Unlike the men's steadfast commitment to the yard's "Trinity of Idleness, Laziness, and Waste," the women's domestic and sexual labors around the city are celebrated as the reproductive life force that sustains the Hill. Importantly, the narrator characterizes their daily physical trek into the city center as a "winding down" that is reminiscent of "wining down the waist"—the sensuous dance movements principally associated with black working-class women in Carnival. Moreover, in describing Carnival as akin to an ecological "season" that naturally links women to the landscape, Lovelace's narrator sets the tone for the sanctioned gender roles that undergird the novel's symbolic rebirth and renewal of the Carnival city.

Despite the decidedly feminine and eroticized landscape that opens the novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance* has largely been celebrated for its "considerable sensitivity to the issue of gender" in relation to Trinidadian masculinity (Mohammed 182). For instance, Linden Lewis (1998), Kenneth Ramchand (2004), and others have focused on the larger internal conflict surrounding the competing definitions of national manhood as represented by the central male characters who are modeled after conventional Carnival types: Aldrick (the Dragon, a traditional character from the early twentieth century), Fisheye (the Bad John), Philo (the Calypsonian), and Pariag (the Spectator). Though I agree with the general critical reception of the novel concerning its metaphorical quest for new models of masculinity, I am hesitant to read the gender ideologies embedded in Lovelace's Carnival city as entirely unproblematic insofar as women's bodies and sexuality are concerned and the intertextual relation it holds with the canonical literary

and oral traditions of Trinidadian barrack yard culture. A closer look at the feminine subtext of the novel through Sylvia – the *jamette* figure – will reveal that, despite its efforts to locate women’s sexual autonomy in and outside of Carnival, the novel’s extended metaphor of cultural prostitution and – more significantly – the potential resolution presented to it offers limited expressions of freedom and personhood to women.

Before turning to Sylvia’s individual storyline and how it functions as a social and political metaphor for the nationalist project, I would first like to explore how Lovelace’s earlier treatment of women’s sexuality and national belonging in his 1978 allegorical play, *Jestina’s Calypso*. Inspired by a 1939 field recording of the song, “Congo Justina,”<sup>67</sup> Lovelace’s play can be read as a simultaneous response to both western anthropological and local calypso rhetorics that sensationalize the black female body as the exotic other. Unlike the prologue to *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, which uses the rhythmic speech patterns of calypso to foreground its idyllic feminized landscape, *Jestina’s Calypso* employs the genre to tell the story of an impoverished black woman whose downtrodden state stands in for that of island. As the play unfolds, we learn that the title character is unable to procure a husband because she does not fit the fair-skinned ideal of feminine beauty despite her desperate attempts to “mask” (in the performative sense of playing mas’) both her poverty and physically undesirable appearance. Lovelace situates Jestina’s crisis of marriageability not only to comment on the problem of national integration in Trinidad as it relates to race and class barriers but also to directly confront the sexist attitudes towards women in calypso music. When Jestina is forced to come

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<sup>67</sup> Taken from Melville J. and Frances S. Herskovits’ research trip to the rural village of Toco, where Lovelace was born.

face-to-face with a potential ex-pat suitor from abroad, she is encouraged by the other women in the play to drop her masquerade act and embrace her true “beauty.” In the following passage, the character Prettypig performs Jestina’s individual plight as part of a play within the play that is clearly meant to draw connections to a larger national critique:

I hoped, I believed that you would be able to look at me and say: This is my woman. This is my island with the bruises and sagging breasts, with the teeth marks of soucouyants on her thighs, still standing after the rapes: this is my love, the beautiful old battleaxe with her nose twisted by the ungloved fists of her captors and the traitors’ knife scars in her back. (36)

While some critics have praised *Jestina’s Calypso* for its insertion of female voices and perspectives into the traditionally male-dominated domain of calypso, the above passage warrants further consideration—especially, if we treat the play as a precursor to the allegorical performance of female personhood featured in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*.<sup>68</sup> Not only does Prettypig’s performance self-consciously play on the classic stereotypes, sexual innuendos, and metaphors that inform images of women in calypso,<sup>69</sup> but it also suggests, through the inferred “you” in the monologue, that it is Trinidadian men who must lead the charge against oppressive gender norms and expectations for women. I would argue that we encounter a similar male savior complex and benevolent sexism in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, which also engages elements of calypso culture and its literary

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<sup>68</sup> For more detailed discussions of the gender dynamics in Lovelace’s play, see Elaine Savory (1995, 2003), Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tomkins (1996), and Concepción Mengibar Rico (2009).

<sup>69</sup> In “Treat ‘Em Rough” (2007), Maude Dikobe reminds us, gendered-based and sexual violence against women has been a pervasive representational strategy of calypso music. Dikobe’s 2003 doctoral dissertation, “Doing She Own Thing: Gender, Performance and Subversion in Trinidad Calypso” also touches on this topic.

iterations in the barrack yard tradition. In fact, Lovelace considers “the whole book as the movement of a calypso” and was also actively involved in the calypso scene during the late 1950s (*Growing in the Dark* 94; “Bacchanal Connection” 1). With this in mind, I want to suggest that, despite being both critical of the “metaphor of male sexual conquest” that haunts the genre and cognizant of the *jamette* legacy in Sylvia’s performance, *The Dragon Can’t Dance* verges on recapitulating the normative gender and sexual codes of the public sphere that black women’s performances in Trinidad Carnival have historically worked to counter (*Dragon* 112).

Sylvia’s significance to Lovelace’s Carnival city is confirmed through her lower royal rank as the yard’s “princess.” As heir to the title of Carnival queen, Sylvia’s presence in the yard amplifies the key debates around whether or not women control their bodies—both through her specific sexual forays into prostitution and her desire to participate in the post-independence era pretty mas’ aesthetic. While there is no denying that *The Dragon Can’t Dance* moves around a male-driven plot, it is worth noting that Lovelace chooses to begin the text with two individual chapters dedicated to the novel’s central female protagonists, titled “Queen of the Band” and “The Princess,” respectively. Although it appears both women perform a commodified sexuality to offset the yard’s harsh and dehumanizing living conditions, Lovelace approaches Miss Cleothilda’s “queenship” with much more scrutiny. At the start of the novel it is evident that Miss Cleothilda’s “rush of friendliness” each Carnival season is nothing but a feigned performance—one that echoes the creole multiculturalist agendas of the People’s National Movement (PNM) under the country’s first Primer Minister, Dr. Eric



Williams.<sup>70</sup> Like the PNM, Miss Cleothilda has spent the last eleven years of her reign proclaiming, “we is all one people” to “show how fully she had become one with the yard” but still prioritizes middle class values that are “not identical with her mulattohood, but certainly impossible without it” (19). The other women of the yard have particularly grown tired of her fickle attempts to better advertise herself during Carnival season:

And all the friendly-friendly thing she give off for Carnival is just a smoke-screen to hide the wretch she really is, to make you forget the things she do all though the year...And we so stupid and without shame, ready to embrace her again, every Carnival, without asking no question or she giving no explanation. (21)

Cleothilda’s “jubilant friendliness” during Carnival starkly contrasts to her otherwise routine “strutting about the yard with...her nose lifted above the city” (24, 17). She also represents the materialistic, superficial side of Carnival through her lavish and elaborate designer costumes that for Lovelace’s titular dragon, Aldrick Prospect, signal a grave departure from the old masquerade forms and principles of the Hill. As Belinda Edmondson notes in *Caribbean Middlebrow* (2009), the popular expansion of the pretty mas’ festival during the 1970s and the increased visibility of women from all class and

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<sup>70</sup> The People’s National Movement was formed in 1956 and headed by Williams, who was an Oxford-trained scholar of the creole middle-class. Williams served as the prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago from the country’s independence in 1962 until his death in 1981. Lovelace (2013) argues that Williams and the People’s National Movement “took up a position to speak on behalf of the people” yet established “a national party with a narrative that did not challenge the one embraced colonial middle class” (71-72). It is also important to note that in this context that, unlike the class-race-color hierarchy of Jamaica, which has been historically divided between the brown middle class and black poor, Trinidad’s burgeoning ethnic nationalism was split between the opposing middle-class nationalism of its Afro-Creole and East Indian political parties, represented by the PNM and the People’s Democratic Party, respectively. Lovelace reflects this tension through the Indo-Trinidadian characters on the Hill. For further discussion on Afro-Indo Trinidadian relations in *Dragon*, see Kenneth Ramchand’s 1988 essay and Masood Raja’s more recent 2006 study. Jocelyn Guilbault’s “The Question of Multiculturalism in the Arts in the Postcolonial Nation-State of Trinidad and Tobago” (2011) also provides an important perspective on multicultural nationalism as it more broadly relates to Trinidad Carnival.

ethnic backgrounds has often been deemed part of the “touristification” of the festival under the PNM nationalist agenda and, consequently, associated with its “decreased sense of agency and creativity, and increased exclusivity” (133).<sup>71</sup> In this sense, as the symbolic “queen” of the Alice yard band, Miss Cleothilda represents a creole middle-class nationalist Carnival city that is “not rooted in the cultural rebellion of the black working class” (“Reclaiming Rebellion” 71).

If Cleothilda’s reigning supremacy on the Hill represents the negative possibilities for the Carnival city under multicultural nationalism, then Sylvia – as her young and impressionable successor – is meant to reiterate, together with Aldrick, Lovelace’s concern with the potential rebirth of the Hill. When we first meet Sylvia in the second chapter, it becomes apparent that her “apprenticeship of being the whore” has less to do with existing status as a prostitute and more to do with her susceptibility to reproduce a highly decorative – but ultimately inauthentic – Carnival woman persona of under Miss Cleothilda’s influence. Take, for instance, the following passage in which the narrator describes Sylvia’s “whoredom” as form of masquerade:

her mind was never in it, and she had watched the whole act, felt the trembling knees, the groping hands, the hard thing scraping against the web of fine hair butting around, trying with no help from her to pierce the dark crevice between her thighs. She had watched, felt, the whole performance as if she wasn’t there, from a distance...the virgin fucked but untouched. (25)

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<sup>71</sup> Although the tourism plays a minor role in Trinidad’s economy compared to the oil industry, Edmondson argues that the tourist ideal is still very much embedded in the island’s Carnival culture. As she argues, “[t]he idealized tourist image is important because it allows Trinidadians to reimagine themselves as global citizens, as agents of a modern, transnational world...It is an image of Trinidadianess that is cultural” (132).

Though the term is carefully avoided, Sylvia is for all intents and purposes not simply the yard “princess” but also its most desired prostitute. However, she is not whatsoever marked by the same stigmas that haunt the prototypical fallen woman (see chapter 1). Lovelace fictional transformation of the “whore” into “the virgin fucked but untouched” notably destabilizes the conventional meaning of prostitution in this instance so that we are more likely to recognize Sylvia’s entry into the trade as a matter of survival rather than one of moral weakness. Moreover, the narrator’s deliberate characterization of Sylvia’s wayward sexuality as a performance also foreshadows the novel’s female-centered drama, which revolves around whether or not Sylvia will hold fast to the Hill’s rebellious Carnival heritage or abandon it in favor of the commercialized (and highly feminized) mystique of the festival. It is the latter option that comes to more exactly represent the novel’s major thematic concerns with not just the prostitution of women’s bodies but also, and especially, that of Trinidadian culture.

In order to substantiate my reading of cultural prostitution and its relationship to the *jamette* narrative in *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, I want to first examine how the novel recycles a major protagonist of the barrack yard tradition: the kept woman. In the early writings of CLR James, Alfred Mendes, and others, the unruly public woman of calypso and Carnival lore was refigured into one that is “kept” under the private control of man. In her chapter, “The Trinidad Renaissance: Building a Nation, Building a Self” (2007), Patricia Joan Saunders recaps the significance of this allegorical woman to the island’s anticolonial literary foundations.<sup>72</sup> As she conveys, writers from early to mid-twentieth century “appropriated women’s sexuality as a trope for national resistance...[and] the

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<sup>72</sup> In addition to Saunders, Victor J. Ramraj (2001), Leah Rosenberg (2001), Aaron Kamugisha (2011), and Simon Gikandi (2016) also provide analyses of this tradition.

transitions taking place politically during this period” (29). The allegorical figuration of the “sexually and socially wayward woman” became a hallmark of nationalist writing that sought to represent the island’s colonial/imperial relations into the postwar era. But, as Saunders explains, the narrative template underwent drastic changes in the aftermath of the island’s labor unrest of the late 1930s. Although earlier writers such as James and Mendes used the figure of the kept woman to challenge middle-class cultural values and social institutions of decency, later novelists such as De Boissiere illustrated the individual and communal consequences for those who crossed “respectable” gender identities (50-51).

Interestingly, *The Dragon Can’t Dance* picks up on both these established conventions in his representation of Sylvia’s sexual and cultural waywardness. We can particularly detect this intertext through the novel’s repeated references to Sylvia’s “triumph,” a common representation of the barrack yard woman narrative since its earliest conception.<sup>73</sup> First and foremost, Lovelace adapts and nuances the kept woman metaphor through Sylvia’s compulsory relationship with Mr. Guy, the yard’s rent collector. But rather than use the trope to strictly reflect the individual woman/nation’s desires for autonomy, Lovelace turns his critical gaze inward by placing the emphasis on the internal neocolonial conditions that undergirds the newly-independent state.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, Lovelace introduces their relationship immediately following the earlier descriptions of Sylvia’s youthful and rebellious character. At first, we are told that,

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<sup>73</sup> See, in particular, James’ short story “Triumph” (1929).

<sup>74</sup> I do want to acknowledge that both Raphael Dalleo (2011) and Richard McGuire (2016) have made important contributions along the lines of Sylvia’s allegorical figuration for both Trinidad’s relationship to global capitalism and the specific neocolonial cooptation of the Carnival cultural economy. I am, however, more concerned with the extent to which Lovelace’s negative representation of the pretty mas’ aesthetic also might be interpreted as a broader dismissal of the perceived “feminization” of Carnival—a reading I hope to pursue further in the future revisions of this chapter.

despite giving herself over to whoredom, “Sylvia ain’t have no man” and “moved too fast for things to penetrate her” (24, 26); but later, these attributes of sexual/symbolic agency are threatened by Mr. Guy’s two-fold proposal to alleviate her family’s rent and buy her any costume she wants for Carnival in exchange for sex. Along with Miss Cleothilda’s authoritative performance style, Mr. Guy’s “patronage” represents another middle-class influence that is perceived by both the narrator and the central male protagonist as a individual threat to Sylvia and communal threat to yard’s *jamentre* cultural heritage of “a humanness unlinked to the possession of any goods or property, arrived at, realized, born to, in consequence of their being (150).

To further this reading, let’s consider the alternative communal connection that the novel forges between Sylvia and Aldrick. Here I am particularly interested in how Lovelace mobilizes the cultural memory of the *jamentre* Carnival as a way to construct an ostensibly gender-inclusive vision of personhood. Whereas Mr. Guy – whose name alone suggests his stereotypical gender role in the novel – pushes Sylvia to fulfill her feminine duties by playing a princess or lady-in-waiting, it is Aldrick who encourages her not to abandon her rebellious roots. When asking his advice as to whether she should play a princess or a slave girl, Sylvia isn’t necessarily seeking Aldrick’s guidance or approval since she continues to associate with Cleothilda and Guy; instead, she is looking for validation of the choice that she has already made and it is one that falls outside the popular standards for “pretty” masquerade. Like Aldrick’s dragon mas’ – a persona which is mean to capture an “ancestral struggle for freedom” – Sylvia’s desire to play a slave girl reveals that Carnival still offers her possibility of a performing transgressive identity. In “Writers Playin’ Mas’: Carnival and the Grotesque in the Contemporary

Caribbean Novel” (1997), Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert offers further insight into Lovelace’s strategic use of the dragon – or devil – masquerade that can help to elucidate the rationale behind Sylvia’s alternate slave girl costume as well. As she notes, Aldrick’s dragon costume harks back to the old mas’ folk rituals of the 1920s that subsequently declined in popularity in the decades leading up to independence. “To be the reigning beast (or dragon),” according to Paravisini-Gebert, “was in the past considered the highest honor possible in the Trinidadian carnival, since the fight of the beasts against the imps who held it by chains hindering its progress was one of the festival’s main events” (219). Feminist scholars have pointed out that we must be critical of the tendency to equate “traditional” with “authentic” since, in the case of Trinidad Carnival, it has been used to cultural nationalist discourse to pit “male-dominated characters on one side and the contemporary women’s mas on the opposite side” (Franco 26). However, I believe the construction of Sylvia’s “traditional” mas’ as female-centered provides a way to understand *jamette* identity at the performative juncture of black women’s past and present cultural contributions to Carnival. While the dragon mas’ dominated the Carnival of the early twentieth century, the slave girl character emerged out of the state-sponsored efforts to expand and institutionalize the preexisting pretty, or fancy, band culture in order to “clean up” the festival.<sup>75</sup> As Patricia A. De Freitas (1994) and Rochelle Rowe

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<sup>75</sup> According to Crowley (1956), during the relatively prosperous era of the 1940s and 1950s, historical mas bands were encouraged to engage with a royal social hierarchy that “faithfully reflect[ed] both the African and the Crown Colony societies” based on “Kings, Queens, High Priests, Priestesses, Sun Gods, Generals, Pashas, Knights, Warriors, and several ranks of ordinary soldiers and slave girls, known as “floor-members”” (219). It also important to consider that the both the royal court and the pretty mas’ aesthetic has been around since at least the 1890s. Although largely affiliated with the festival’s middle-class orientation in the mid-twentieth century, the idea of “dressing up and looking good” has also played a significant role in Afro-Creole Carnival forms from the late nineteenth century onward. Both Milla Cozart Riggio’s edited anthology *Carnival: Culture in Action—The Trinidad Experience* (2004) and Pamela Franco’s essay, “‘Dressing Up and Looking Good’: Afro-Creole Female Maskers in Trinidad Carnival (2000) offer worthwhile historical analyses in this direction.

(2016) have argued that, during the 1940s and 1950s, the introduction of the royal mas hierarchy and the Carnival queen show, in particular, to the *Dimanche Gras* (Carnival Sunday) festivities provided modes through which the PNM could at once present local alternatives to the island's colonial culture and rebrand the festival with values of respectability and modernity. According to both De Freitas and Rowe, the state's desire to replace *jametre* aesthetics with markedly European costuming and ceremonies ultimately aimed to "de-Africanize" Carnival in order to make it fit for tourist consumption.

With this in mind, Sylvia's decision to play a slave girl instead of the token princess suggests her ancestral identification with the *jamette*. Lovelace provides several scenes that amplify this connection and, in a way, turns the male-centric dynamics of the novel on its head. For instance, when Aldrick catches Sylvia during the *J'ouvert*<sup>76</sup> procession on Carnival Monday he realizes that he may not be "the last one, the last symbol of rebellion and threat to confront Port of Spain" (121). This encounter, as the following passage illustrates, alerts him to Sylvia's own expression of rebellion:

Then he saw Sylvia, dancing still with all her dizzying aliveness, dancing wildly; frantically twisting her body, flinging it around her waist, jumping and moving, refusing to let go of that visibility, that self the Carnival gave her; holding it balanced on her swaying hips, going down and coming up in a tall, undulating rhythm... a cyclone of tears rejoicing in a self and praying for a self to live in beyond Carnival and her slave girl costume. He watched her, perspiration flowing down her face, bursting onto her skin,

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<sup>76</sup> From the French patois *jour ouvert* (meaning, daybreak), *J'ouvert* or *Jouway* marks the official beginning of Carnival and was an extension of the Canboulay parades, which closely links it to the celebration of emancipation.

drenching her costume; and he wanted to reach out and hold her, not to tame her to the truth that Carnival must soon end, but to join her in the tall, rejoicing dance, cry; to swirl with her in the cyclone of affirming tears, and lose himself and gain himself in her. (127-128)

It is important to highlight several possible readings of this passage. The first is the extent to which Sylvia's sexualized performance makes visible the rebellious legacy of the *jamette* in contemporary mas' as an expression of her personhood. In refusing to fully conform to the state-sponsored aesthetics for contemporary women masqueraders, Sylvia embraces a version of "self" that is not detached from what Samantha Noel calls an "embodiment of defiance" (65). According to Noel, the increased efforts to police and control the sexuality and movements of black bodies in and outside Carnival into the twentieth century subsequently prompted Afro-Trinidadian women to "appropriate[e] primitivity in their performances as a means of challenging the colonial order" (76). Sylvia's "wild" dance maneuvers and suggestive hip oscillations recall this desire for an "unharnessed freedom," thus suggesting the extent to which Lovelace's model of personhood might be inclusive of "other" sexualities (192). The second way to understand this passage is to consider it as an extension of the novel's male-narrated perspective. While Sylvia does, indeed, possess agency in this scene she is proverbially stripped of any interiority, leaving us only with what her movements mean to Aldrick: "a strange new caring and respect for the girl and a kind of warrior's pride in himself that he had chosen her, Sylvia, in that very instant, to be his woman" (128). Ultimately, moments such as these ultimately serve to reinforce competitive networks between men even as it efforts to break down heteropatriarchal constructions of masculinity.



At one level, the tensions between Aldrick and Guy revolve around who gets to “keep” Sylvia at the end of Carnival. In other words, her *jamette* performance and its seductive appeal reveal more about each man’s private desires than her own needs for economic, social, or cultural independence. At another level, the allegorical solution that Lovelace poses to counteract the prostitution of Carnival and create a democratic vision of postcolonial collectivity in the process becomes problematically reduced to Sylvia’s “choice” between Aldrick and Guy. In contrast to Guy’s objectification of her, Aldrick sees Sylvia not as a “female person to be pursued, captured and fucked” but rather as a queen who “want[s] to be a self that is free” (214, 202). Yet, the struggle on the Hill to define what will count as a liberated, nationalized body, in large part, reinforces heteronormative domestication since the novel ends with the impending union of Sylvia and Aldrick. The novel emphasizes by way of Sylvia’s narrative trajectory out of whoredom that female sexuality can only operate as an exciting “prospect” for a new generation of black male leadership. In the “New Yard” and “with the way the world going,” we are given little hope that much is bound to change for women like Sylvia since her body is not hers alone in the allegorical sense, but one “that others – the whole Hill – could lay claim to” (151). It is worth noting that in the 1986 theatrical adaptation of *The Dragon Can’t Dance* Lovelace introduces a twist to this ending that leaves us with Sylvia standing between Aldrick and Guy “not knowing which to choose” (*Dragon in Black Plays* 44). Though not so radically different from the novel, the play does downplay Lovelace’s earlier allegorical form of cultural prostitution. Moreover, in its concluding stage directions, the revised dramatic production self-consciously reveals that Sylvia’s individual “choice” between being prostituted or exercising agency remains

limited in significant ways by men's resistant ideologies and politicized desires for womanhood/nationhood. In leaving Sylvia's decision open-ended, this version of Lovelace's Carnival city invites the audience to imagine other options for Sylvia that may exist beyond the preexisting heteronormative matrix.

### **2.3 Speaking Their Minds Publicly: *Jamette* Consciousness in *Jean and Dinah***

While in *The Dragon Can't Dance* the concept of personhood privileges both *jametre* society's stickmen "who assembled each year to keep alive...the practice of warriorhood" and the offshoot steelband and calypso cults of masculinity, Tony Hall's *Jean and Dinah...Speak Their Minds Publicly* tackles the misconceptions surrounding the so-called "feminization"<sup>77</sup> of the Carnival city. Typically rendered as *Jean and Dinah* in theatrical reproductions of the play, the title page of the 2002 printed edition sheds further light on Hall's specific literary intervention: *Jean and Dinah... Who Have Been Locked Away in A World Famous Calypso Since 1956 Speak Their Minds Publicly*. The full title not only reveals to the uninformed reader that Jean and Dinah are the featured female subjects of a popular Trinidadian song but it also alerts us to the issue that perhaps its creator – Mighty Sparrow – failed to represent these women accurately. As suggested earlier in this chapter, Sparrow's calypso, which was previously known as "Yankees

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<sup>77</sup> As mentioned earlier, Patricia A. De Freitas (1994, 1999), Belinda Edmondson (2003, 2009), Pamela Franco (2007), and Samantha Noel (2010) all offer important insights on this topic. To drive the point further, the prevailing views that women's sexualized performances are only a recent phenomenon, inauthentic, or, better yet, exist solely for the purpose of entertaining male fantasies fails to account for a longer historical trajectory in which "behaving badly" has been central to *jamette* masquerade. As the aforementioned scholars have all explained, the general backlash to women's increased participation in the festival since the 1960s and 1970s can be linked back to earlier colonial patriarchal patterns of regulating women's relationships to public space.

Gone,”<sup>78</sup> provides a social commentary on the United States military occupation of the island between 1941 and 1947. But rather than simply denounce the new imperial presence of the United States, Sparrow situates women’s bodies as a metaphorical site where war is waged between the American “yankees” and Trinidadian men.

Hall opens the play with Sparrow’s original lyrics, where Jean and Dinah materialize among the parade of prostitutes that assembled near the port and military bases<sup>79</sup>: “So when you bounce up Jean and Dinah/Rosita and Clementina/Round the corner posing/Bet your life is something they selling/And if you catch them broken/You can get it all for nothing...Yankees gone, Sparrow take over now” (xvii). The song drives home that, with the closure of military bases in the aftermath of World War II, there was “trouble in town” for women like Jean and Dinah who performed illicit deeds for the yankee dollar. Relying on the calypso device of *picong*, or verbal banter, Sparrow manages to both ridicule the working-class women who “feeling bad/No more Yankees in Trinidad” and reassert local men’s sexual and social dominance over their bodies within the broader context of decolonization, reminding us that “yes it’s a competition for so” (xvii). As a counter-narrative to Sparrow’s underlying misogyny, Hall’s *Jean and Dinah* attempts to liberate the public women who have been discursively trapped and muted within calypso’s historically oppressive gender system. Echoing Philip’s *jamette*

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<sup>78</sup> According to Dave Thomas (2002) and Millia Cozart Riggio (2004), Mighty Sparrow (also known as Slinger Francisco) first performed “Yankees Gone” at the Queens Savannah Club on February 12, 1956, and the song also won him both the Carnival King and Road March titles that same year. However, the song became known more popular as “Jean and Dinah” after Harry Belafonte covered it in the early 1960s.

<sup>79</sup> Historians such as Michael Anthony (1978) and Harvey Neptune (2009) clarify that, while the presence of commercial sex work was strong in late colonial Trinidad long before the arrival of U.S. militarism, the influx of American men between 1941 and 1947 led to explosion of the industry in Port of Spain as well as its increased representations through the island’s cultural and political discourse. Not only did the military occupation raise and mix issues of public health and sexual morality—and their racial and gendered bodies – based on local and foreign men’s access to Afro-Trinidadian women, but it also inspired numerous postwar calypsos.

performance genealogy<sup>80</sup> that began this chapter, Hall is similarly concerned with uncovering – to paraphrase Katherine McKittrick’s reading of the poet – “histories, names and places of black pain, language, and opposition, which are ‘spoken with the whole body’ and present to the world, to our geography, other rhythms, other times and other spaces” (xxvii). His depiction of Jean and Dinah within a *jamette*-related paradigm refuses to erase black women’s gender-specific contributions to and conflicts within the Carnival city while also illuminating the ways in which female-centered mas’ is not separate from the cultural-political dimensions of the festival.

*Jean and Dinah* made its theatrical debut in Port of Spain in the fall of 1994 at Planteurs Cocktail Lounge and Art Gallery on St. Vincent Street, and went on win five Cacique awards for theater in Trinidad and Tobago later that year.<sup>81</sup> Since then, the play has toured across numerous cultural centers of the Anglophone Caribbean, North America, and the UK. Recently, a 2014 staging in Brooklyn, New York commemorated both the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the play and the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Brooklyn’s annual West Indian Labor Day Parade with its original cast, Penelope Spencer and Rhoma Spencer. The play not has not only gained international success but also received favorable criticism from the region’s most well known writers. Despite his general cynicism towards Carnival as a starting point for Caribbean theater, Walcott proclaimed the play to be “one of the finest pieces of West Indian theater” for “its rhythm that mimics that of

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<sup>80</sup> In “Fugues, Fragments and Figures—A Work in Progress” (2005), Philip reproduces and extends her analysis of Sparrow’s calypso. Here she offers new arguments and insight into how the calypso’s social memory challenges us to “remember those who meant us no good as slave men and Black women” while “working to erase woman and the reason why Jean, Dinah, Rosita and Clementina might be forced to sell the space between their legs; forgetting that Sparrow might be taking over but all a we losing in the forgetting. Of woman” (81).

<sup>81</sup> See Appendix B for *Jean and Dinah* press kit-related materials and other visuals related to Trinidad Carnival in Port of Spain.

Carnival music” (vi).<sup>82</sup> Lovelace also wrote a raving review of the play’s premier production in the Trinidad Sunday Express, and commended the actresses Rhoma and Penelope Spencer for “evoking the rambunctious poetry of a theater that is self-confident, passionate and fearlessly their own” and, more notably, a “glamorous heroism” in their performance of working-class women’s experiences in prostitution (“The Case of Jean & Dinah”). Remarkably, few scholars have addressed the significance of the place within contemporary Caribbean theater and adjacent literary depictions of Trinidad Carnival. To date, Andrea Davis’ scholarly introduction to the play, “Rewriting Calypso as Feminist Discourse: Jean and Dinah ‘Take Over Now’” (2003) and her comparative essay, “Sex and the Nation: Performing Black Female Sexuality in Canadian Theatre” remain the only published sources to extensively study Hall’s play.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps, as Camille Stevens suggests, we can for this oversight, in part, due to the general lack of critical engagement with the theater arts in Caribbean literary studies.<sup>84</sup> Yet, Hall’s theatrical text marks a

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<sup>82</sup> Unlike the Trinidadian playwright and theater critic Errol Hill, who sees “possibility of carnival being the mandate for national theatres in the Caribbean,” Walcott opposed the hallucinatory attempts to represent the transformation and commercialization of the festival under state-sponsored tourism. For critical summaries of these debates see Omotoso (1982), Burnett (2000), and Stevens (2014).

<sup>83</sup> Davis’ introduction was also featured for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary commemorative lecture of *Jean and Dinah* at the Lloyd Best Institute of the West Indies (located in the Tapia House in Tunapunda, Trinidad), which was delivered on November 29, 2014. In “Sex and Nation,” Davis analyzes *Jean and Dinah* alongside another two-woman play written by Afro-Canadian playwrights Debbie Young and Naila Belvett, which is entitled, *yagayah: two.womyn.black.griots*.

<sup>84</sup> In “Caribbean Drama: A Stage for Cross-Cultural Poetics” (2014), Stevens writes that “[i]n contrast to the absence of drama in much Caribbean literary criticism, performance is continually invoked in the analysis of other genres in the Caribbean literary canon” (87). This is most evident in the work of Édouard and Antonio Benítez Rojo. For Glissant “[i]t is nothing new to declare”, for the region, “music, gesture, dance are forms of communication, just as important as the gift of speech” that emerged from the plantation (*Caribbean Discourse* 248-249). Since these “original circuits of knowledge” are so deeply ingrained in Caribbean cultural formations, Glissant recognizes that “the street is already a stage where abundant performances of everyday life and folk customs take place” (197). Rojo also looks to performance, in general, and Carnival, in particular, as indicative of “the supersyncretic culture from which it emerges,” which “spreads out through the most varied system of signs: music, song, dance, myth, language, food, dress, body expression” (*The Repeating Island* 29). For a comparative analysis of performance across the postcolonial and contemporary literary traditions of the Anglophone, Francophone, and Hispanic

significant break from the existing literary and artistic depictions of Trinidadian women in Carnival; one that responds to a mix of Errol Hill (1972) and Édouard Glissant's (1971) respective calls for a Caribbean theatrical tradition that foregrounds Carnival's social and political significance while "orient[ing] it towards the shaping of a popular consciousness" (*Caribbean Discourse* 195).

*Jean and Dinah* is the first of Hall's stage productions to showcase his *jouway process*, a street theater model that brings together late nineteenth and early twentieth century Afro-Creole mas' aesthetics and community theater techniques that emphasize social action and collective awakening.<sup>85</sup> Hall's later plays that are organized around this performance method include his 2004 "meta-village theater" *Red House [Fire! Fire!]* and his 2005 radio play *Flag Woman*, the latter of which also earned numerous Cacique awards for outstanding theater. As in his other works, sexuality and space are given careful attention in *Jean and Dinah*. While references to the urban landscape of Port of Spain are relatively minor in this particular piece, the characters Jean and Dinah establish a strong engagement with the urban imaginary by transforming the theater's "house" into the Carnival city's streets and key staging grounds for the women to publicly air their social complaints. Accordingly, the play's audience is positioned as not simply passive spectators of Jean and Dinah's fictionalized world but active participants in the woman's festive takeover of this public social space.

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Caribbean, refer to Jeannine Murray-Román's *Performance and Personhood in Caribbean Literature: From Alexis to the Digital Age* (2016).

<sup>85</sup> For more detailed descriptions of the *jouway* process, see Hall's 2009 essay, "PTP: An Approach to Play-Making (Two Case Studies - JEAN & DINAH and TWILIGHT CAFE)" and its 2012 revised web version, "The Case of Jean & Dinah" published on the *Jouway Institute* web home <jouwayinstitute.blogspot.com>. Pat Ganase's introduction to the play in the 2002 text edition also provides a summary of Hall's method.

As a critical frame, the *jouway* process offers within its carnivalesque structure of performance a set of *jamette* figures that are less idealized or historically “real” than a narrative accumulation of the gender and sexual politics that inform Caribbean women’s intimate occupations of and sexual labors in the urban streets. According to Hall, the original idea for the play stemmed “those women from whom we have not heard officially” in Sparrow’s popular hit, but with “no real thoughts of carnival or mas” (“The Case of Jean & Dinah”). It was through research into the lives of women who inspired the calypso that Hall, along with two of his past students from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Susan Sandiford and Rhoma Spencer, infused the characters with a “full *jamette* consciousness that allied them with the older women of the street” (“The Case of Jean & Dinah”). Reflecting on the Sandiford and Spencer’s vital contributions to the process, Hall writes:

By the time we started they were close friends with many of the women from Sparrow’s calypso through research they had done on earlier projects. Some of these women had migrated to the United States; others had died. However, Rhoma and Susan were able to improvise monologues and scenes from interviews they had with Jean Clarke (the famous Jean in Town) and other informants. I videotaped the improvisations, which I then had to turn into a play. (“The Case of Jean & Dinah”)

As middle-class Trinidadian women who worked in the public service prior to their professional ventures into theater, Spencer and Sandiford, who was later replaced by Spencer’s cousin, aided Hall in fashioning a collaborative project that was built around intellectual solidarities with working-class women. In this ways the *jouway* process seems

to align with the feminist strand of testimonial theater that was forged by the Kingston-based collective, Sistren<sup>86</sup> in the 1970s. In deliberately recasting the women of Sparrow's calypso as derivatives of the historic *jamette* through the Carnival masquerades of the post-emancipation era, Hall and his co-playwrights also circumvent the sexual objectification of women embedded in both calypso and the standard ethnographic practices that he describes above.

Importantly, in focusing on the particular nexus of militarism, tourism, and prostitution embedded in Sparrow's calypso, *Jean and Dinah* more closely explores the set of colonial circumstances that led to the rhetoric of Carnival cultural nationalism challenged in *The Dragon Can't Dance*. Divided into two acts, that cover the period between 1956 and 1991, the play tells a very different story of its two eponymous leads than the one marketed as a part of mainstream Trinidadian entertainment. Following Lovelace's lead, Hall's work also begins with a prologue that blends calypso into its introductory narration; but whereas the former detaches the authoritative voice from the female body to sexualize the landscape, the latter juxtaposes an original recording of "Jean and Dinah" with an otherwise silent scene that disrupts the romanticization of the Carnival city. Hall's prologue opens on a split stage: Jean, positioned downstage right, and Dinah, upstage left. While Sparrow's energetic words play in the background, Jean, a

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<sup>86</sup> The Sistren Theater Collective was founded in 1977 by an independent group of predominantly working-class women that likewise drew on communal theater techniques to explore social, political, and legal issues related to domestic and sexual violence, poverty, women's health, among other concerns. Since its inception, Sistren has administered a professional theater group, popular education programs, and quarterly magazine, and helped build grassroots regional networks committed to gender justice-oriented research, programming, and education. For further details and a sample of works, refer to *Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women* (1987) and Sistren's webhome <<http://www.groots.org/members/jamaica.htm>>. Raphael Dalleo's chapter, "The Testimonial Impulse: Miguel Barnet and the Sistren Theatre Collective" (2011) also thoughtfully explores Sistren's role in shaping the postcolonial Caribbean testimonial narrative, a genre which often limited to Latin Americanist thought and, more specifically, the Cuban literary innovations to the genre. For further discussion of the genre, see Chapter 4 of this dissertation.



56-year-old ex-Carnival queen, carefully applies her brightly-colored makeup before the audience, which the stage direction describes akin to “the feeling of someone creating a bright and alive mask” and with “plenty of air to it” (xxiii). Dinah, who is nearly ten years Jean’s senior, appears lying on her deathbed in a dimly lit and dirty room. Jean and Dinah’s aging and “disfigured” bodies (a modifier used throughout the play) appear in stark contrast to both Sparrow and Lovelace’s public women characters. However, this disfigurement is not completely akin to the abject female bodies we encounter in either Patterson’s *The Children of Sisyphus* (see Chapter 1) or Lovelace’s *Jestina’s Calypso*. In terms of bodily representation, both women are portrayed as physically disabled – Jean’s hand is crippled and Dinah is blind – due to the domestic abuses and combat-style injuries they have had to endure over their lifetimes, as prostitutes, working-class single mothers, and flag women. On the one hand, both the “public” street violence and “private” assaults that mark the Jean and Dinah’s bodies are meant to simultaneously dramatize gendered power relations and kalinda tradition (i.e., stickfighting) built into the original “warrior” culture of Trinidad Carnival, in which *jamettes* were not only targets but also active participants. For instance, despite their close bond and companionship, we learn towards the end of the play that major tensions between them stem from a bottle Jean pelted at Dinah during a past steelband brawl, which is the likely cause of her going blind. On the other hand, in opening the play with their disfigured bodies, Hall also confronts the dominant and one-dimensional images of the sexy Carnival dancer—raising important questions about what kinds of bodies are tactically absented from this particular cultural guise of national unity.

In the two acts that follow the resounding silence between the main characters established in the prologue is interjected with a long string of back-and-forth dialogues, momentary flashbacks, and interactive mas' performances that imaginatively vacillate between Jean's bedroom in the present and the city streets of the past. At this point, the inflected trope of "speaking their minds publicly" is not merely a multicultural feminist bid for a public voice previously denied to women of color. Rather in this case Jean and Dinah's spoken and embodied performances are thoroughly embedded in a Carnival-related practice of social protest that is specific to the *jamette* persona in the post-emancipation era. From its earliest inception Trinidad Carnival was characterized by a black protest culture where rivaling mas' bands ritualized racial and class tensions through the mock violence of stickfighting, which was "iconically coupled with a violence of the tongue" (Njoroge 28). Known as the chantwell or chantuelle, the lead singers of the bands would inspire members of the band through rallying cheers, witty lyrical numbers, and verbal jabs at competitors that were designed to entertain during the festival processions. As Funso Aiyejina reminds us, the chantwell's position as a storyteller, critic, and commentator is not only reminiscent of African griots but also forms the artistic foundation of calypso music ("Unmasking"). Relevant to this study's purposes, Aiyejina's focus on the figure as a narrative trope in Lovelace's fictional works overlooks a central historical component of the chantwell/chantuelle—that is, more often than not, these lead vocalists were women up until the intensified gender and sexual policing of Carnival at the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, as Noel illuminates in her path-breaking research on the *jamette*, women's participation in Carnival extended

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<sup>87</sup> In his analysis of *The Wine of Astonishment*, Aiyejina intimates that because the narrator is a woman she "is not a chantwell by *normal definition* although she affirms the notion of women as the active carriers and, by extension, vocalizers of tradition" ("Unmasking," my emphasis).

beyond mock humor and revelry through their impromptu songs, which along with their mas' performances, often targeted both the working-class and elite male sectors of society who contributed to the maintenance of their oppression (65). As respectable gender norms and racial identities continued to steer the restrictive policies towards the festival in the early twentieth century, it became increasingly common for women to be seen but not heard during Carnival season. Noel further details:

The male stickfighters, once praised by the chantuelles in song, now replaced them, transferring into musical composition the energy previously used to challenge their opponents physically, and appropriating the female chantuelles' banter, gossip, and abuse. . . . Although these women knew that the voice was the most effective tool for expressing displeasure with social and political circumstances, they cunningly gauged the potential of their exposed bodies as a locus of rebellious and expressive energy through which their discontent. (66-67)

With an eye towards these histories of grievance, both Noel and Samantha Pinto (2009) have argued that the gradual transformation of the festival's gender dynamics – especially the growing numbers of female masqueraders and calypso/soca<sup>88</sup> performers – from the 1970s onwards recall the embodied and verbal forms of complaint that are at the heart of *jamette* performance. We can account for both these genealogical articulations of *jamette* grievance in Hall's *Jean and Dinah*—especially, in the play's efforts to make the physical and sexual violence embedded in the Carnival city's interconnected popular, military, and tourist cultures explicit and to tackle those legacies through performance. In

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<sup>88</sup> Soca is a spin-off subgenre of calypso that takes significant influence from Indo-Trinidadian chutney music.

order to further elucidate the *jamette* performance genealogy in *Jean and Dinah*, I will turn to the play's three main mas' characters—the Fancy Sailor, the Baby Doll, and the Midnight Robber—as representative of an alternative frame for interpreting personhood through women's expressions of public grievance.

The first – and most obviously anticolonial – performance identity that Jean and Dinah assume is the Fancy Sailor—a historic mas' character that dates back to the nineteenth century but was particularly popular during the U.S. occupation of the 1940s. In the glossary that accompanies the print copy of play, Hall tells us that in its heyday this mas' played up the “bad behavior” of the yankee imperialism addressed in Sparrow's song. In his assessment, the Sailor mas' “displayed the freedom and ‘gay abandon’ which [locals] observed the ‘drunken’ yankee sailors enjoy[ing] on the streets of Port of Spain” (85). Towards the end of Act One, appropriately entitled “The Preparation,” Jean coaxes to Dinah to play Sailor mas' with “a pretty kinda rainbow stick” on Carnival Monday. The Rainbow Sailor persona, we are told, has the capacity to capture the vibrant spirit of J'ouvert celebrations but it is also clearly prompts the reawakening of a liberated female sexuality:

JEAN: Rainbow sailor. (*Dinah gets up out of the bed.*) And we go drop so and drop so and drop so. Where yuh stick? We go seek revenge on dem glamour boys again. (*Dinah is starting to dance by this time. Jean is in full flight.*)...Get a stick. Get a flag. Get a man. Eh? . . . .Another lusty rounds of applause for this busty Freeport Queen. (*Jean starts to sing the calypso, “Jean and Dinah”.*)

DINAH (*Dancing forward, she sings*): The Yankees gone and Dinah take over now. (40-43)

As the opening ceremony to the women's *jamette* backstory, this scene complicates the performance of masculine virility and strength often linked with kalinda combat rituals by demonstrating Jean and Dinah's control over the male "stick" through their wining maneuvers. Moreover, prior to this performance, Jean alludes to both one yankee sailor's breach of promise to marry her and the cycle of physical and financial abuse from her local man who benefits from her work in the city's red light district. With respect to the latter situation, she further explains: "He beat me up with a three canal cutlash and tell me if I would only shut my cunt we would be better off. (*Pause.*) He use to feel I was his property. But I was to get my freedom somehow and Carnival time was a time when I used to go on my own. Nobody could own me" (33). As these lines reveal, while prostitution does offer Jean a small amount of economic agency to leave her abuser, Carnival time is the only time she feels unconditionally free. Returning to the women's initial incentive to adopt the sailor mas', we can see that this particular character enables a *jamette* imaginary in which women can reassert control of their bodies and "take over" the popular narratives that have reduced them to physical and metaphorical sites for expressing male nationalist desires.

It is principally in the vein of this character persona that the play encourages readers to think about the negative consequences of sex work without resorting to a politics of victim blaming. In an earlier scene, Dinah reminds Jean about one man who wanted to "chop" her, and her response is:

What? That little poowatee man? He? The problem with he was he wanted

a little screw and a little feel up balls for a little five cents...I didn't want to have nothing to do with he and every time he see me he want to insult me.

When I see he, I used to spit on he...I use to hawk and sssspit on he" (3-4).

While Jean continually asserts herself in verbal defense against such exploitative practices, she also recalls that she suffered numerous subsequent attacks that left her body mutilated to the point that she was unable to work again. A later scene recalls Dinah's reaction and, by extension, the dominant social attitudes towards women who enter this line of work. Responding to Dinah's criticism of Jean's "complicity" in her abuse, Jean declares:

You suppose to be my friend. Now, you hear what I have to say.

You feel because I is a whore, I must go with any and everybody. That little pissin' tail man who want to pay a little \$2.00 and a little \$3.00. I don't go with them kind of man. That little half a man from behind the bridge. He can't give me stick. Cave man come to town. I don't want to see he. And every time he see me, he only ridiculing me, that now the Yankees have gone I have to take what I get. That good for Dorothy so. Not me. (55-59)

While busy berating Jean, Dinah conveniently overlooks her own set of circumstances that brought her to the island's capital to find gainful employment in its booming nightlife and entertainment industry. Although she alleges (and Jean refutes) that she was not a prostitute per se, the commodification of her body as a waitress who also "makes fares" as an exotic dancer at the Lucky Jordan likewise makes her a target of persistent and often unsolicited sexual advances by the club's male clientele (23). Remembering the

routine police raids, Dinah ultimately discloses there were, in fact, a number of male officers made it their “bounded duty” to get “lucky” and, in exchange, allowed her to virtually run the place (21-24). Consequently, the Sailor mas’ is conceptually linked to the intersections between militarized violence – in both its imperialist and state-sanctioned expressions – and prostitution and this mas’ performance offers Jean and Dinah an alternative to how that particular historical juncture in the island’s history is remembered.

The second mas’ performance that the women adopt is the Baby Doll,<sup>89</sup> which takes place in Act Two and gives way to their interactive “street” performance with the audience. According to Hall, the Baby Doll was also popular in the 1930s and 1940s and, like its name suggests, often incorporated a large doll prop (83). Hall categorizes the Baby Doll as an act of “instant theater” because it involves performer “stopping, on Carnival day, any respectably dressed gentleman and by the way of a long speech about renegade fathers she insisted that he help her mind the child, represented by the doll” (83). Despite donning a frilly feminine persona, this mas’ also invokes the kalinda concept of warriorhood (or of Lovelace’s personhood) that is not delimited by men. A majority of the stories that revolve around intimate violence are relayed through Jean, whose crippled hand, we find out, is the direct result of previous domestic abuse. Not unrelatedly, she describes her forced migration from the country to the city as triggered by recurrent patterns of sexual abuse in childhood:

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<sup>89</sup> Like many of the historic mas’ performances from the early twentieth century, the Baby Doll mas’ is not restricted to Trinidad Carnival. See Kim Vaz’s *The ‘Baby Dolls’: Breaking the Race and Gender Barriers of New Orleans Mardi Gras Tradition* (2013) for a cultural history of the masquerade in relation to New Orleans’ creole carnival roots.

From the time I was ten, Uncle start to interfere with me. He come just so, early one Sunday morning when Aunty gone to church, and lie down on top of me on the bed. I jump up and push him off. I was always a fighter. . . .I tell him I go tell Aunty and he hold me tight, he cover my mouth, he was hurting me. He say if I tell Aunty he will me. He say I was a bad girl. (13)

In this scene, Jean recalls that not only did her uncle violate her trust and sense of safety in her own home but he also reveals the potential and fatal consequences of her tattling: “Two days later, I find the dolly by the latrine outside in the yard with the left hand break and the head rip off” (13). Jean’s subsequent portrayal of the Baby Doll persona in Act Two resonates as a performative strategy to both “right” the sexual injuries to which she experienced at the hands of her uncle as well as those projected onto her own “broken” play doll. But, more than this, it also appeals to a maternal strength that reflects both her resiliency as a single mother and the feminine ancestral urban memory that binds her to the city’s most infamous *jamettes*. In the first case, the Baby Doll mas’ empowers Jean to wage complaints against lack of social support available to impoverished, single mothers. The stage directions indicate that Jean moves into the audience and performs the mas’ is if the spectators have gathered on the street before her as she proclaims, “why you wouldn’t support this child? You know what I going through to mind this child? You breed me and leave me” (64). To connect the audience directly to the experience, she expresses to men as well as women that “this child belong to you too, you know” and, with respect to the man that “breed her and leave her,” she elaborates that he “is the same boy who break in you house and tie up you and your wife and your little daughter and



hold gun to your head...He is your son. But you don't know him" (65). By implicating the hypothetical sons of the audience into the scene, Jean forces us to rethink the larger social context of intergenerational cycles of trauma and violence. In the case of her *jamette* lineage, Jean uses the motif of maternal ancestry to challenge the male historical – and in Lovelace's case, fictional – bias that women simply offer the fertile grounds for Carnival's male "seed" to grow: "But you don't know who I is? Look at me well, look at me. Well, I descend from the seed of Petite Belle Lily and Alice Sugar The Former. I trod the centuries from Na Na Yah come down. I is woman. Watch form. Ebony. From that one seed, I stand up. I grow to these proportions" (65). The women that Jean evokes, Petite Belle Lily, Alice Sugar, and Na Na Yah, are all mythical but very much real figures from Caribbean history that are exemplary of women's slave and post-slave resistances to the colonial spatial order. The first two are legendary female stickfighters whose exploits, as David Trotman notes in his criminological study of colonial Trinidad, "earned them places in the archives of the oppressed, the calypso" (182).<sup>90</sup> The final, Na Na Yah, is a reference to Jamaica's Queen Nanny of the Maroons, and also denotes the title of Sistren's 1980 production *Nana Yah*. Jean's decision to trace her maternal lineage

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<sup>90</sup> In "The Streets," the embedded "missing" dramatic text that gives way to "Dis Place—The Space Between," Philip incorporates white Trinidadian Cedric le Blanc's lyrics from one of the calypso legends that features *jamettes* from this era: "Boadicea the *jamette* who we all know/Is a real disgrace to we Cariso/I really can't understand/Why she didn't take the training of the Englishman/Roaming all about the vicinity/Cat and dog passing they mouth on she/Is better she die or lock up in jail/She disgrace every woman in Port of Spain" (Genealogy 83). In the preliminary notes to "The Streets," Philip retells the history of these rivaling bands of stick-fighting and flag-bearing women resulting through the embattled love triangle between Boadicea, Piti Lili, and Cutway Rimbeau. As a theatrical riff on the legendary status of these urban women who, following the brutality of slavery, "returned violence in like measure as they received it," Philip's fragmented vignettes accumulate traces of this history that have fallen into "the cracks of silence" (78-83). Boadicea's reclamation of the streets will be challenged at virtually every turn by calypsonians, middle-class women in the marketplace, and the city's barristers and judges that are featured the play's partial vignettes. Like the other fragments of this text, the final scene in the play's third act consolidates Philip's theory of black women's "dis/placement" as a Caribbean feminist alternative to the public/private split typical of colonial patriarchal patterns of place-making.

even further back in time and across island geographies expands the meaning of *jamette* warriorhood in a way that rebels against narrow nationalist genealogies of independence.

The third and final mas' character incorporated into *Jean and Dinah* is the Midnight Robber. In her preamble to the poem, "Shay's Robbertalk," the Indo-Trinidadian writer, Ramabai Espinet describes this until recently extinct mas' character in the following way: "The Midnight Robber is a wild, extravagant, mock-heroic figure" who is historically gendered male and thrives off menace (Espinet in Razack 171). Espinet employs this particular Carnival persona to develop her metaphorical mode of "robber-talk"—a monologue form that renders the spectator "immobile through its duration, is full of heroic exploits, improbable feats, and a sense of having survived insurmountable odds. It is intentionally bizarre, and extremely disrespectful of the boundaries of civilized society and 'the limits of propriety'" (171). In ways similar to Hall, Espinet appropriates the Midnight Robber to speak to (and from the perspective of) Trinidadian women's long historical struggles with racism and other related modes of systemic oppression.<sup>91</sup> Following the lead of Jean's performance, Dinah executes a

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<sup>91</sup> Inspired by Daniel J. Crowley's and Gordon Roehler's respective annotations on the Midnight Robber and "his" mode of speech, Espinet has written several poems and performance pieces on the figure. In her writings, robbertalk can be described as a "mock-heroric and boastful self-identification, sung by the sootra dhara/griot/storyteller in the guise of the 'mocking pretender,' an 'everywoman' character, in praise of the author of the text. Across her poems and collaborative performance pieces, Espinet uses the language of robbertalk to trace the Indo-Trinidadian's woman experiences and historic memories of indentureship, global migration and diasporic relations, and the impact of these journeys on the Caribbean imagination. Most useful for my analysis of the *jamette* is her poem, "Shay's Robbertalk"—where the poetic persona, Shay (a stand-in for the author) uses the self-reflexive "I and I" of Calypso/Caribbean musical cultures to recast her as a "warrior-woman" with a global history that stretches across the deserts of Arabia to Trinidad to Canada. Here Carnival's historical relationship to subversion and "looking back" comes to the fore with lines like: "Domination must end/Is a new invention/No more subjection/Better direction/and no malediction" (178). She also positions the Indian woman as a vital part of Carnival culture, a point that is often overlooked when we focus strictly on *the jamette* in Afro-Trinidadian history. For an in-depth discussion on Indo-Trinidadian cultural practices in Carnival, see J. Vijay Maharaj's "Carnival Poetics and Politics: Lakshmi Persaud's *For the Love of my Name* and Niala Maharaj's *Like Heaven*" (2012).

macabre dance under the guise of a Black Baby Doll mas' that is reminiscent of the Midnight Robber while chanting:

Stop! Drop your keys and bow your knees and call me the *Princess of the Dead*. I is a woman who deliver my own self out of my mother womb. And I come down Blap! Just so. I get up and slap my own bottom and I gone...I fight stickman from the free port to this port of Spain and then down to the main and I still fighting. Across the borders of Uropa and Merica *my dragon* straddle – *dance* the water, the agony, all the pain, and the brain drain. I never afraid of any kind of stick yet. No bois could deceive these eyes. No bois could dislocate these sockets because there is a long line of us you know. (67-68, my emphasis)

In reading what she calls the *jamette's* “double cross,” Rosamond King (2008) explains that Carnival-related displays of gender and racial transvestism creatively intervened into “the colonial social hierarchy because it was an attempt not only to change the meaning of their bodies, but to briefly superimpose onto their bodies power and subjectivity” (207). While not typical of women’s cross-dressing in the post-emancipation parades, both Hall and Espinet’s appropriations of this “robbertalk” and “bad man” façade unravel the male bravado of calypso culture to redress (and re-dress) the past grievances that continue to loom large around the public women who enter into the Carnival city. In this penultimate scene of the play, Dinah comparably pronounces her rightful place within the *jamette's* “royal” line of descent. Reflecting back to Lovelace’s cult of “warriorhood,” we can see that *her* “dragon” *can* dance in a manner that not only parallels the male leaders of Calvary Hill but is also “word famous” as it symbolically straddles the continents of

the island's long and embattled colonial history to "dance the water, the agony, all the pain, and the brain drain" (68). Here the poetically fluid linking of "agony," "pain," and "brain drain" pose a vital and embodied alternative to colonial, national, and private (read: corporate) enterprises that have attempted to historically – if not metaphorically – strip the Trinidadian public woman – in all her variations – of her urban intimacies with the *jamette*'s rebellious legacy. The fact that this particular mas' continually appeals to transgressive images of death to wage complaints helps to blunt the play's heartbreaking epilogue in which Carnival Tuesday concludes on Dinah's death bed. In doing so, Hall refuses both the tragic fate of Patterson's fallen woman and the uplifting union that rebrands Lovelace's *jamette* into a respectable citizen. Dinah proclaims instead that "[b]efore [she] depart[s] the world you have to pay up" (68). Here the "you" can be read simultaneously as Sparrow, the audience, and last but not least, the postcolonial state.

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that both Lovelace and Hall's postcolonial literary representations of *jamette* performance and personhood are in dialogue with Trinidad's male-authored barrack yard and calypso traditions. While Lovelace's fictional deployment of Trinidad Carnival aims to challenge the neocolonial commodification of Carnival and women's bodies by proxy, the novel's more conservative reliance on the established anticolonial allegory of the kept woman and its heteronormative appropriation of the *jamette*'s expressive freedom falls short in its efforts to imagine a more liberated vision of personhood for black working-class women in Port of Spain. Departing from the male-dominated cultural spaces and discourses that circumscribe Lovelace's Carnival

city, Hall's *Jean and Dinah* presents us with two female characters that directly challenge the underlying misogyny emanating from calypso's male nationalist cultural lineage. In this theatrical text, Hall reminds us that, despite being traditionally understood as a masculine domain, calypso has its roots in the gender-bending expressions of a female-centered *jamette* Carnival. Drawing on a wide array of traditional mas' characters, Jean and Dinah are able to "speak their minds publicly" about sexual violence against women in the Carnival city and, in doing so, recuperate the female protest traditions that have been largely written out of the historical record. To keep with my focus on the exoticism of women's bodies within the tourism landscapes of Caribbean port cities, the next chapter turns to Puerto Rican literary traditions that have configured the public woman and her place within the cityspace through an intertextual intimacy of (dis)enchantment.

## CHAPTER 3

### The (Dis)Enchanted City Permutations of the *Puta Madre* across San Juan and Ponce

Ponce was a very beautiful town, but it could never compare with San Juan.

—Rosario Ferré, *The House on the Lagoon*

While the last two chapters have focused on Kingston and Port of Spain as singular and exemplary spatial figures and forms for addressing intertextual intimacies of the public woman in the Anglophone Caribbean, this chapter shifts the focus to the competing poles of national and cultural identity featured in San Juan and Ponce. On the one hand, San Juan – the northernmost port of Puerto Rico – invokes the enduring image of the port as a gateway to island paradise based on its old world Spanish colonial charm and as an attractive outlet for American political and economic capital. Ponce, on the other hand, has been historically understood as the island’s alternate urban center that retains not only the African heritage of Puerto Rico but also its earliest labor, feminist, and pro-independence movements. Today, both cities represent the most important destinations for promoting Puerto Rico as *la isla del encanto* – the island of enchantment – a slogan that has appealed simultaneously to both national and tourist campaigns while operating as a key site of discursive struggle for many of the island’s writers. By focusing the emergence and development of this alternative poetics of (dis)enchantment, I argue that these two opposing faces of the island – that of San Juan and Ponce – have been mutually constituted through the figure of *la puta madre* [the mother whore or founding whore] in the post-commonwealth literary tradition.

To make my case I will first analyze Luis Rafael Sánchez’s *Los ángeles se han fatigado* [The Angels Are Fatigued, 1960], focusing specifically on how it mobilizes the

burgeoning tourist landscape of Old San Juan to critique the illusory nature of the island's "free association" with the United States following the creation of the Commonwealth in 1952. In this play, the literary representation of the brothel serves to express a profound sense of disenchantment with the false illusion of independence that pushes its female protagonist to madness and confinement. Recognized as part of the "post-boom"<sup>92</sup> generation and a strong proponent of Puerto Rican independence, Sánchez has distinguished himself as a multi-genre fiction writer, essayist, and playwright committed to exploring the cultural and political taboos surrounding anti-black racism, sexuality, and the effects of US influence on the island. His long and varied engagement with these central themes are evident in popular works such as his 1966 collection of short stories, *En cuerpo de camisa* [In Shirt Sleeve]; his two major novels *La Guaracha del Macho Camacho* [Macho Camacho's Beat, 1976] and *La Importancia de Llamarse Daniel Santos* [The Importance of Being Daniel Santos, 1988]; and the titular essay from his 1994 critical collection, *La guagua aérea* [The Air Bus].<sup>93</sup> While perhaps better known to the US academy through the widely circulated English translations of these publishing successes, Sánchez launched his literary career in Puerto Rico's burgeoning theater scene of the late 1950s and early 1960s. As a young playwright, Sánchez engaged the lyrical patterns and metaphysical concerns with Puerto Rican identity that emerged from this artistic movement, most notably advanced by established writers such as Francisco Arriví

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<sup>92</sup> For an analysis of the post-boom tradition in the Hispanic Caribbean as it relates to prostitution, refer to my discussion of Miguel Barnet's *Canción de Rachel* in Chapter 4 of this dissertation.

<sup>93</sup> While *En cuerpo de camisa* tackles overlapping issues of racial and class discrimination through its conscious integration of Afro-Puerto Rican experiences and cultural practices, *La Guaracha del Macho Camacho* and *La Importancia de Llamarse Daniel Santos* have been praised for their respective engagements with popular urban culture and the erotic potential of Puerto Rican music. Additionally, "La guagua aérea" plays on the dynamics of circular migration between the US and Puerto Rico not only to creatively capture, what Jorge Duany calls, "la nación en vaivén" [the nation on the move] (2, 33) but also to represent overlooked theme of Puerto Rican homophobia based on sexual motivations for migration.

(1915-2007) and René Marqués (1919-1979).<sup>94</sup> But unlike his predecessors, Sánchez was much more hesitant to embrace the homogenizing discourses refashioned by state-sponsored forms of political and cultural nationalism. As such, *Los ángeles se han fatigado* takes up the figurative splitting of woman into a mother and a whore in order to contest the limitations of these discourses and the illusory nature of what constitutes the “proper” terms of citizenship and belonging within a postcolonial colony of the Hispanic Caribbean under Anglo-American empire. In this play, Sánchez parodies the archetypal fallen woman narrative and reassembles it into a melodramatic comedy about the allegorically “split” personality of mother and whore in order to comment the farce of Puerto Rican unity—especially, as it plays out within the established foundational myth of *la gran familia puertorriqueña* [the Great Puerto Rican Family]. While the play is groundbreaking in this regard, Sánchez’s burlesque treatment of the protagonist’s moral/mental decline into prostitution veers on restigmatizing the female body for the sake of allegory—an adverse effect that he attempts to remedy in his later treatment of this figure in his 1966 short story “Tiene la noche una raíz” [The Roots of the Night].

Taking partial inspiration from Sánchez’s short story, Mayra Santos-Febres revisits the central trope of *la puta madre* – or, what she calls, the founding whore – in her 2006 historical novel, *Nuestra Señora de la noche* [Our Lady of the Night]. Although both authors employ the city space of the brothel as a vehicle for exposing contradictory narratives about national unity, Santos-Febres further undermines the existing gendered and geopolitical oppositions between San Juan and Ponce that Ferré’s narrator alludes to

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<sup>94</sup> Sánchez studied drama at the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan, where he was a member of both the Tablado del Coquí and the Comedieta Universitaria theater groups and won several awards as a promising young actor in the 1950s. As a playwright, his early works include *La Espera* (1958), *Cuento de Cucarachita Viudita* (1959), and *La farsa del amor comprado* (1960). His 1968 *La pasión según Antígona Pérez* is frequently referenced as his most successful production to date.



in the epigraph to this chapter. Rather than an exotic other to the city of San Juan and its main tourist space, Ponce – and more specifically, the black working-class neighborhood of San Antón – are presented in ways that radically reread the island’s trademark of enchantment through the city’s historico-mythical figure of Isabel la Negra—the legendary madam who gained a certain folkloric notoriety when she refused to sell her brothel, Elizabeth’s Dancing Place, to the US Army during World War II.<sup>95</sup> Santos-Febres is certainly not the first local writer to draw inspiration from Isabel la Negra’s life story, as I will explore in further detail; however, her fictional re-telling – like Sánchez’s two earlier models – recuperates the *puta* figure to destabilize the homogenizing myth of *la gran familia*. A leading member of the second wave of post-Commonwealth writers, Santos-Febres identifies the heterogeneous terrain of the city as “the primary ‘graphic’ of her generation,” where collective identities are founded on “chance and not according to any determining condition sufficient for the forging of an identity” (Santos-Febres in Montes Garcés 195). With this in mind, I am primarily interested in how *Nuestra Señora de la noche* conjures up that graphic to challenge not only to the national myth of *la gran familia* but also earlier allegorical figurations of Isabel la Negra that repeatedly consign her as the exotic other that reinforces the island’s geographical imagination of Ponce. Here I focus on how the figure of the *puta* is used to destabilize the contesting cultural narratives that surround the Isabel la Negra and her metaphorical terrain of prostitution in San Antón. In Santos-Febres’ vision, the polarizations of woman (split into the virgin/whore) and marginalized cityscape of Ponce can be reconciled by ascribing a new

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<sup>95</sup> See Pérez “Una vida llena de contrastes.” *El Nuevo Día*. 6 Jan 2013. Web. 1 February 2015. < <http://www.elnuevodia.com/noticias/locales/nota/unavidallenadecontrastes-1421497>>

epistemological meaning of enchantment to her protagonist—one that exceeds the narratives perpetuated in tourist promotion and in nationalist ideology.

### 3.1 La Puta Madre and la gran familia puertorriqueña

To better appreciate why Sánchez and Santos-Febres draw on the *puta madre* dichotomy as a figurative device to contest the seductive spaces of both tourist and nationalist discourses, this section provides a brief historical overview of the island's cultural nationalism in relation to its political consolidation as an unincorporated territory of the United States.<sup>96</sup> As Arlene Torres (1998), Frances Aparicio (1998), and Jorge Duany (2002) have all explained in their landmark studies related to the conflicting narratives that surround Puerto Rican identity, the ideology of *la gran familia* has its historical roots in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when it was mobilized by the white *criollo* elite and landowning class as a strategic response to the combined political subordination and economic displacements that accompanied the annexation of the island to the US in 1898. In this configuration of *la gran familia*, *criollo* landowners were repositioned as benevolent father figures equipped to protect their venerated workers from commercial exploitation under US control of the island's sugar economy. Importantly, even as it espoused a preindustrial rural image of *convivencia* [coexistence]

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<sup>96</sup> With the Treaty of Paris ending the Spanish-American War in 1898, Puerto Rico began its transition from a Spanish colony to an U.S. “unincorporated” territory, a new geopolitical category that delineated it as neither a constituent entity nor a sovereign country, but “foreign to the United States in a domestic sense.” Between 1901 and 1922, the U.S. Supreme Court established the territorial incorporation doctrine in a series of rulings known as the *Insular Cases*. While the McKinley administration had intended to annex Puerto Rico into the union, the idea of extending citizenship and free trade to the island was widely opposed by both the general public and the sugar and tobacco industries. As a result, the Court created for Puerto Rico the ambiguous status of territorial unincorporation. This unprecedented revision to the imperial project of Anglo-American expansionism was steered by the popular belief that, while valuable for military and commercial reasons, Puerto Rico's perceived cultural and racial differences made it ill-equipped to handle and uphold U.S. standards of citizenship. See Duffy Burnett (2005) and Terrasa (1994) for more detailed summary of the doctrine and its effects.

between landowners and workers, this preliminary model of *la gran familia* deliberately excluded emancipated black coastal classes and recent non-Hispanic immigrants from its discourse of national unity (Aparacio 6, Duany 20). As Hilda Llorens clarifies, *criollo* nationalists were invested in the image of a white Puerto Rican nation that was distinct from that of its Anglo-American colonizers: “In the early years of the American occupation particularly, white (Hispanic Catholic) Creoles deployed the *jibaro*—that essential rooted peasant, son of mother Spain, shaped and sustained by the fruits of the topical Puerto Rican soil—as the iconic representation of the Puerto Rican nation” (21).<sup>97</sup> It wasn’t until the decline of the sugar industry during the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s and the new political alternative forged under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín and the Popular Democratic Party (Partido Popular Democrático, or PPD) that the national ideology of *la gran familia* began to take on a racially inclusive discourse of *mestizaje* [mixing] as part of its whitened image of Puerto Rican unity.

As Duany notes in his book chapter, “A Postcolonial Colony?: The Rise of Cultural Nationalism in Puerto Rico during the 1950s,” Muñoz Marín and the Popular Democratic Party was bent on promoting the 1952 political status change from a colonial possession to commonwealth as a postcolonial arrangement that emphasized the island’s “free” association with the United States. As Muñoz Marín saw it, the initial plans for the *Estado Libre Asociado* – the so-called Commonwealth in English<sup>98</sup> – was to formally end the island’s half-century US occupation and define national sovereignty on its own terms.

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<sup>97</sup> As Kelvin Santiago-Valles (1994) clarifies, while the *criollo* elite tended to image the *jibaro* as a white peasant majority, this is not necessarily historically accurate given that “important segments of this mountainous peasantry were of mixed African and Iberian heritage”(44).

<sup>98</sup> As numerous scholars have pointed out, the schism between “commonwealth” and “free associated state” in the English and Spanish renditions of the 1952 Puerto Rican constitution is emblematic of the ambiguities and contradictions built into the island’s continuing colonial relationship with the United States.

But President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress approached the status question with a different set of goals in mind. In 1950, Public Law 600 was introduced to modify the territorial arrangement established by Congress under the organic acts of 1900 and 1917,<sup>99</sup> which enabled the U.S. to strategically comply with the terms of the United Nations decolonization mandate while keeping its juridical control over the island in tact. Rather than contest the administrative ambiguities built in to the revised Commonwealth model (and risk losing U.S.-backed economic development opportunities already underway in the late 1940s), Muñoz Marín abandoned his pro-independence platform and redefined the island’s postcolonial nation-building project on the basis of cultural – rather than political – autonomy. As Duany explains, Muñoz Marín understood the island’s deepened political and economic dependency as a necessary evil that could be blunted by the establishment and articulation of a strong Puerto Rican “personality” within the new state apparatus (124). Duany summarizes the governor’s approach to the development of national identity as follows:

On the one hand, he realized that the Commonwealth had to affirm the Island’s cultural autonomy to gain local as well as international support as a noncolonial formula. Thus, he proposed that Puerto Rican identity—especially its Hispanic heritage—should be conserved and promoted, as many pro-independence intellectuals demanded. On the other hand, Muñoz Marín was convinced that the Island’s progress depended on continued political association with the United States. Hence, everyday

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<sup>99</sup> These acts are known as the Foraker Act and the Jones Act, which respectively established a civilian government and U.S. citizenship in Puerto Rico, though neither altered the island’s status as a territorial possession.

practices and values would undergo increasing Americanization, which many statehood supporters celebrated. (128)

Despite or, perhaps, because of these contradictory impulses, Muñoz Marín's cultural nationalism gained widespread popularity in the early 1950s—especially, among the Puerto Rican literary and intellectual elite who he called upon to “codify the values, symbols, rituals, and practices that would represent the Puerto Rican nation to itself and to the world” (123). Once again, the main tenets of *la gran familia* were regularly invoked to mitigate ideological split between cultural and political forms of citizenship as well as the increasing Americanization that came with the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the island under Operation Bootstrap. To offset the negative effects of foreign influence, Muñoz Marín's concomitant cultural campaign – known as Operation Serenity – aimed to “aimed to provide a sense of spiritual balance to a society threatened by the rapid social change caused by the new economic policies...by reference to an idealized past” (Dávila 34). Moreover, as Duany further reports, the government's efforts to “rescue” the island's traditional (read: rural) culture and reinstate its ideal paradigm of the national family was reified in the major literary discourses emanating from this era.

### **3.2 The Disenchantment of Old San Juan in *Los ángeles se han fatigado***

At the end of his 1997 essay, “¿Por qué escribe usted?” [Why Do You Write], Sánchez explains that, “Puerto Ricans have, as notable footholds of our collective identity, music, miscegenation, and migration” [Los puertorriqueños tenemos, como apederos notables de nuestra identidad colectiva, el son, el mestizaje y la errancia] (my

translation).<sup>100</sup> For these reasons, he sees the major aim of his work as providing a story that can at once capture and challenge the dominant imaginings of Puerto Rico produced from within and outside the nation:

My work wants nothing more than to write a biography about my country more so than about me. Not the placid country deformed by postcards that promote it as an Edenic paradise without the snake. The other country is what interests me when I write literature. The one that is chaotic, torn, and hostile...I write, thus, to confirm life as fabric of abrupt and unpleasant realities. (my translation)

[Mi obra no quiere hacer otra cosa que biografar, más que mi persona, mi país. Más, no el plácido que halla su deformación en la postal que lo promociona como un paraíso sin serpiente. El otro país me interesa a la hora de literaturizar. El caótico, el despedazado, el hostil.. me doy cuenta que escribo, en fin, para confirmar la vida como un tejido de brascas y desapacibles testualidades.]

We can take Sánchez's comments here as instructive for reading *Los ángeles se han fatigado*, which represents one of his earliest literary interventions into the picturesque postcard image of the island and its post-Commonwealth rhetoric of social and political cohesion. *Los ángeles se han fatigado*, which premiered as a double bill production under the title *Sol 13, Interior* [Inside Sun Street, Number 13]<sup>101</sup> at the fourth annual Puerto

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<sup>100</sup> Both English and Spanish translations of the essay can be found online at "Encyclopedia de Puerto Rico": <<http://www.encyclopediapr.org/esp/article.cfm?ref=09050102>>

<sup>101</sup> *La hiel nuestra cada día* [Our Every Day Bitterness) was the first play featured in this set. Like *Los ángeles*, it draws on broader themes of cultural alienation and the desire for change but employs more formal elements of tragedy through its re-writing of the doomed lovers, Pyramus and Thisbe from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. *La hiel's* depiction of Puerto Rican *espiritismo* in the urban slums also made it a standout

Rican Theater Festival in 1961, presents us with a less politically correct story that unravels on the chaotic, war-torn, and hostile landscape of San Juan in the early years of the Commonwealth's formation. This was bold move considering that play premiered less than ten years after the 1952 status change and also that festival was sponsored the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture, which sought to found national theater that could affirm Muñoz Marín's political revival of *la gran familia*. That is certainly not to say that the festival did not forge a tradition of socially conscious theater; however, I would argue that *Los ángeles* was exceptional for its time and innovative in terms of genre as a comedy that plays against the paternalism of a predominantly masculinist-oriented literary culture. Written in the form of a dramatic monologue, the play tells the story of a "white" rural transplant to Old San Juan, named Angela, whose combined failed marriage and illegitimate maternity push her towards a moral/mental decline into brothel prostitution. In the course of the plays two acts, Angela recounts her story through an erratic stream-of-consciousness that registers the multiple and contradictory "personalities" that have come to define the politically and socially incoherent state of post-Commonwealth Puerto Rico. Rather than the reiterate the tragic narrative of the fallen woman studied in the earlier chapters of this dissertation, *Los ángeles* treats Angela's madness as a performance strategy for reassessing Puerto Rican political/cultural unity while poking fun at the narrative tropes employed by its predecessors. Importantly, *Los ángeles* made its theatrical debut alongside Arriví's *María Soledad* [Maria of Solitude; 1947] and Marqués' *La Carreta* [The Oxcart; 1953] and resourcefully adapts and combines the female-centered dramas of madness, prostitution,

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from the more well-known ethno-national realism of Marqués' *La Carreta*, which was also featured at the fourth festival.

and *la gran familia* taken up by Arriví and Marqués in these and other works. Playing on the social and psychological crises of their allegorical women characters, *Los ángeles* intersperses Angela's "unreal" hallucinations with roundabout political digressions that work to dismantle the paternalism that undergirds both nationalist and imperialist efforts to "protect" the island.

In the introductory production notes, Sánchez gives us the following cue: "This play documents a sequence of events in the life of a Puerto Rican woman, on any given day...Like any piece of self-conscious theater, it experiments with the art of illusion; but does not follow the logic of a traditional comedy" (my translation) [Esta pieza es un itinerario de situaciones en la vida de una mujer un día cualquiera...Como pieza de teatro es una ilusión; por tanto, no sigue el orden lógico de cualquier otra comedia].<sup>102</sup>

Sánchez's stress on the "art of illusion" is amplified by Angela in multiple ways. First, she tells that us "[her] name is Angela, but they call [her] Illusion" [Mi nombre es Ángela, pero me dicen Ilusión(14)]; and over the course of the play she repeatedly couches the memories of her "respectable" life in the inner highlands of Puerto Rico and the various "decent" characters she encounters in the brothel in equally illusory terms. The brothel also vacillates between the "real" and imaginary dimensions of Angela's hallucinations and its significance as another space of illusion becomes all the more evident when she alludes to the audience that she may already have been committed to a psychiatric hospital:

They took me to a room with a man who asked me many things, questions

I didn't know how to answer. He was a smooth talker and promised to

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<sup>102</sup> Since *Los ángeles* has yet to be officially translated into English, I have provided a working translation of the play in-full in Appendix C.



take me back to Corsica. But he told me something I did not understand. I think ... (*hesitates*) yes ... that Corsica had changed ... it was full of white beds ... people dressed in white. It's weird.

[Me llevaron adonde un hombre que me preguntó muchas cosas, preguntas que no supe contestar. Me habló muy suave y me prometió devolverme a Córcega. Pero me dijo algo que yo no entendí. Creo que... (*dudando*) sí... que Corcega había cambiado... que estaba llena de camas blancas... que la gente vestía de blanco.]

While she never physically leaves the confined space of her brothel, which is located in a tenement yard on Calle Sol, Angela frequently blurs the distinctions between it and the various other places that are featured in her hallucinations. In this sense we can compare Sánchez's spatial figuration of Angela's brothel and its deliberate foregrounding of theatrical artifice to Foucault's notion of heterotopia, a term he uses in contradistinction to the "unreal" spaces of utopia, which "present society itself in a perfected form" (#). In "Of Other Spaces" (1986), Foucault argues that, like colonies, the brothels constitute an extreme example of heterotopia and "create a space of illusion that exposes every real space, all the sites inside of which human life is partitioned, as still more illusory" (26). Sánchez similarly creates the brothel as a space of illusion that not only exposes Angela's madness but also destabilizes utopic rhetoric of cultural nationalism that positions the historical colonial city as emblematic of the Hispanic basis of Puerto Rican creole identity. With this critical frame in mind, we can interpret Sánchez's speaker and the various illusions she confronts within the brothel as metonymically invoking the wider

social ills and confused sense of identity that are the result of the island's continued colonial status.

As previously mentioned, one of the major “illusions” that Sánchez tackles in this play is that of *la gran familia*, which Angela presents as both a major symptom and cause of both hers and country's madness. The play creates a dizzying chain of paternalistic authority, beginning with the “benevolent” presence of American marines and soldiers in San Juan and then continuing onto the local patrons of the brothel who abuse their fictive power over easy targets like Angela, whose status as a wayward mother-turned-prostitute positions her outside this greater national family. The first social ill that the play tackles within this complex masculine genealogy of imperial relations is the island's unhealthy dependency on US militourism. The setting of *Los ángeles se han fatigado* in Old San Juan is particularly important for this reason. Declared a national historic site in 1949, Old San Juan represents the colonial section of the city and lies between the port and the historic el Morro—both of which signal the island's strategic importance as a military outpost under empire. In “Negotiating Cold War Paradise,” Dennis Merrill refers to the renewed interest in Old San Juan as part of the Commonwealth government's economic agenda to develop and promote the tourism industry. According to Merrill, the Muñoz Marín administration “tap[ed] into the tourist's thirst for authenticity” through its restoration of Old San Juan's eight by ten block district, including its Spanish colonial architecture, blue ballast stone streets, and the various churches and fortresses that line the walled city center (199). By the 1960s, the area had been completely revamped with a mix of old and new world charms, the latter of which included upscale restaurants, gift shops, and both US and Puerto Rican tourists (199).

In Angela's mental mapping of Old San Juan, she transforms the PDD's advertisement of the old colonial city as a dazzling and modernized tourist zone into a disorderly and abusive landscape riddled with the violence wrought by US occupation. For example, when attempting to plot out the brothel's exact location in Old San Juan, she highlights the various foreign and local hotspots: "Count from Carmelo's bar over there. First the bar on the corner, then Felo's little market, then Cyril's pool hall, no...First Tom's Bar and Grill and then Cyril's pool hall then here" [Cuenten desde el bar de Carmelo hacia acá. Primero el bar, después la placita de Felo, después el billar de Cirilo, no...Primero el Tom's Bar and Grill y después el billar de Cirilio y después ésta] (15). Here the mish-mash of bars, pool halls, corner markets, and franchise restaurants are juxtaposed against Angela's "rural past" in Yauco, which she describes as follows: "A huge piece of land without beginning or end. The workers broke their backs tilling the plots, but it was impossible. Our land never ended. (*In total discouragement.*) This is not the same. This place ends across the street." [Un pedazo inmenso de tierra sin principio ni fin. Los peones abrían los ojos fijar la guardarraya, pero era imposible. Nuestra tierra no se acababa nunca. (*En total desaliento.*) Esto no es igual. Esta calle termina ahí enfrente.] Nostalgic lines like these not only immediately recall scenes Marqués' classic *jibara* drama but they also point to the contradictory aims of the PPDs economic and cultural agendas. Elsewhere in the play, she dismantles the "illusion" of tourism by disclosing to us: "Calle Sol, Sun Street...no sunshine here...Old streets given a facelift by strange signs. Melody Inn, Peter Bar and Grill, Two Dice Club...and the desperate, frantic, mad, bitter, dirty music. Oh! Papa Loves Mambo" (7) [ Calle Sol...Sol roto, sol oscuro...Calles viejas con rostros remozados por letreros entraños. Melody Inn, Peter Bar and Grill...y la

música desesperada, frenética, loca, amarga, sucia. ¡Oh Papa loves Mambo] (19). Rather than an island paradise, *Calle “Sol”* in Old San Juan appears and is described by Angela as a miserable place, and her own unhealthy mental state almost seems to signal a warning sign for European women who move to the tropics about the dangers of “going native.” In this scene Angela inverts the typical tourist image of Old San Juan and replaces it with Americanized landscape of sites and sounds (most notably, the commercialized mambo) that obscure any semblance of a distinctive Puerto Rican cultural identity.

This chaotic scene of American cultural and economic influence is the coupled with its military dominance over the city center. In the scenes where Angela’s dependency on the “stinky sailors” and “bawdy marines” who occupy the port is invoked, Sánchez employs the paternalistic image of the benevolent father figure only to quickly upend it as just another illusion. When describing her heroic “angels,” Sánchez uses dramatic irony to suggest that, despite what Angela believe to be “holy and peaceful and good” about the Yankees, their benevolence is linked to a bestial force. Take for example the following scene:

And those angels who were holy and peaceful and good in the beginning became crazed vultures who madly bit me with kisses that felt like a venomous snake. And those angels who in the beginning were holy and peaceful and good spit in my face to show their dirty hatred for this life. The angels’ shouts mingled with the horror of music... (*Imitating voices of officers.*) Dirty, dirty, dirty, whore, whore, whore. And the music climbing up ... Oh papa loves mambo, whore, dirty, mama loves mambo. And the

angels singing... Whore, whore, whore... The desperate voices of tired angels, sick angels, angels who despise, who hate, who destroy.

[Y aquellos ángeles que en el principio eran santos y serenos y buenos me escupían el rostro para demostrar su sucio odio a la vida. Los gritos de los ángeles se confundían con el horror de la música... (*Imitando voces de oficiales.*) Dirty, dirty, dirty, whore, whore, whore. Y la música subiendo... Oh papa loves mambo, whore, dirty, mama loves mambo. Voces desperadas de ángeles cansandos, ángeles enfermos, ángeles que desprecian, que odian, que destruyen. (25)

The horrific swirl of voices that Angela hears in her head presents an altogether different nexus of meanings about the Yankee men she erratically deems her saviors. In other instances, she describes them “stink[ing] like mustard and hot dogs” [marinos apestosos a mostaza y hot dog] and as “tycoons who trample [her] life but bring us our daily bread” [magnates que me pisotean la vida pero que traen pan nuestro cada día (13)]. In the same breath, Angela refers to the marine boots that trample her underfoot as the shoes her son will fill some day: “My son’s shoes are generals’ boot, soldiers’ boots, marine boots, officers boots, boots of all men from the land that has rented my body” (4). [Los zapatos de mi hijo son botas de generals, botas de soldados, botas de marinos, botas de oficiales, botas de todos los hombres de la tierra que han aquilado mi cuerpo] (13). As this line reveals, the Jones Act not only extended US citizenship to Puerto Ricans but it also requires military service from the island’s men. By inserting her “son” – who the stage notes indicate is strictly imaginary – into this “great” military family, Angela gives the island’s “bootstrap capitalism” new meanings when the economic freedoms gained

through tourism are seen as inseparable from older and enduring imperial forms of militarism.

*Los angeles* also contains numerous and jumbled references to empire, including Queen Isabel of Spain, Napoleon Bonaparte, Emperor Maximilian of Mexico, and Adolf Hitler. While these figures and historical events seem to come up at random throughout the play, Sánchez is careful to trace an imperial genealogy for Puerto Rico that extends from enlightenment-era European expansionism to American neo-imperialism on the island. In these instances, Angela's imaginary relationship to Corsica<sup>103</sup> connects her rural landowning family to another colonial island context that contains multiple histories of territorial occupation. At first, Angela's relationship to Corsica as a "direct migrant" appears to cast her as metaphorical outside to the island's hispanophile culture; but, she divulges that it was her great-grandfather who came from France to settle in Barina plains of Puerto Rico, which reaffirm her place among the island-born elite. Rather than take these repeated and inconsistent claims to migrant identity literally, we can read them as symbolic of "The Great Migration" of 1950s and 1960s as well as the subsequent back and forth movements between the island and US—both of which trouble cohesive definitions of self-governing national family from foreign influence.

While Angela speaks of both Corsica and Yauco as civilized societies when compared to the bastardized cultural conditions in Old San Juan, the string of references to European and American imperial powers make it clear that Angela – and by extension the island – is a victim of various and intersecting colonial histories. For instance, despite

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<sup>103</sup> Corsican immigration to Puerto Rico and to Yauco, in particular, was prompted by the incentives of the Real Cedula de Gracias in 1815, which opened the island to an influx of Catholic immigration in the 19th century. Yauco, subsequently, became an agricultural center of coffee under the cultivation of Corsican-owned plantations.

her family's steadfast allegiance to European monarchies, Angela is constantly confusing and collapsing her status as a respectable colonial subject with the repeated colonizations that these figures of empire imbue. The main instances where we see this in the play are directly related to militarism. For instance, she tells us—nearly in the same breath—that her “[p]apá was a veteran of the civil war. And my great-great-grandfather was at Waterloo. With Napoleon of France” [Papá fue veteran de la guerra civil. Y my tartarabuelo estuvo en Waterloo. (27)] Con Napoleon While it is unlikely that Angela's immediate forefathers fought in the Napoleonic wars or in the Corsican civil war (since these events occurred in the late eighteenth century), it is worth considering why Sánchez repeatedly brings Angela's various father figures into close proximity with more visibly tyrannical ones. Aside from bringing the time and space of Puerto Rico's colonial relations into disarray, these scenes are also frequently used to unpack the destructive historical patterns of racism, sexism, and classism that continue to divide the nation. For example, another imaginary character that accompanies Angela in the brothel is her parrot named Hitler. Over the course of the play it becomes apparent that Sánchez's decision to name the bird after the German dictator serves as another allusion to Puerto Rico's own dogmatic discourses about racial/cultural purity, which is projected through Angela's “aristocratic” family values as a supposed member of the landowning class. During one of her tiffs with Hitler-the-parrot, Angela brings our attention to the extent to which *la gran familia* promotes anti-black racism:

If you insist on interrupting me, you will have to return to Germany. And it will be more painful. Americans have mixed with your pure race. (*To a man outside.*) You do not know what it is to mix a race. So dangerous

*(Haughty.)* Papá repeated to us. “The world follows a logical order. These with these and those with those.” It seemed to be right. Hitler also understood this. But nobody paid any attention. Not even the Germans themselves, with their aristocratic flair. Just enough whiteness to forge ahead. *(Angela is amazed to have discovered a neat explanation for her decadent system of ideas, and begins to smile.)*.

[Si insistes en interrumpirme tundra que regresar a Alemania. Y sera más doloroso. Los americanos se han mezclado con tu raza pura. (A un señor.) Usted no sabe lo que es mezclar una raza. ¡Peligrosísimo! (Altiva.) Papá nos lo repetía. “El mundo sigue un orden lógico. Estos con estos y aquellos con aquellos.” Parecía tener la razón. Hitler también lo entendía así. Pero nadie le hizo caso. Ni aún los mismos germanos, con su instinto aristócrata. Sólo bastó un gesto de los anglosajones para que se hiciera la fragua. *(Maravillada de haber descubierto una explicación ordenada de una sistema decadente de ideas, comienza a sonreír, y en su sinceridad llama a Petra con gran fuerza.)*] (28)

The “logical order” that Angela envisions directly mirrors the colonial policies of *blanqueamiento* [whitening] that were absorbed into *la gran familia*. Moreover, Angela’s appropriation of Hitler’s white supremacist politics are important to consider in light of Sánchez’s sustained commitment toward integrating the Afro-Puerto Rican perspective into national literary representation. Angela also uses Hitler, the dictator, as a euphemism for the various local characters who exploit her, such as the Nuyorican Don Alejandro and Petra, the actual brothel mother – or madam – of Calle Sol Number 13. In this sense,



the play utilizes Hitler and other dictator personas to “parrot” the paternalistic system of race and gender relations that remodel Old San Juan into a hostile – rather than attractive – site of the island’s colonial heritage.

The final and perhaps most impressive set of social ills that *Los ángeles* tackles are those related to women’s gendered sense of place – as dutiful wives and devoted mothers – within *la gran familia*. As part of Angela’s backstory we learn that she was promised to marry the son of a landowner whose social standing would earn her a title akin to the “Princess of Yauco.” But rather than a happy union, Angela is left at the altar with no explanation other than a letter that simply states, “Not meant to be” [No pudo ser] (18). As Angela’s recollection of the event reveals, the dissolution of this prospective marriage “locks [her] into oblivion” [para echar la llave al olvido] before she is sent to San Juan to “rest and forget” [descansar y olvidar] the damage done to her ostensibly aristocratic façade (29, 18). Moreover, her failure to secure her position as a respectable wife scandalizes the entire community. While admiring the tattered wedding dress that hangs in her room, which has yellowed from the passage of time, Angela characterizes the episode as akin to funeral—an image that is amplified her evocation of the townspeople grieving and her parents taking refuge in the hills to hide their immense disappointment. The hyperbolic emphasis on Angela’s failed marriage as a communal tragedy functions to some extent as a comedic aside; but, in its over-the-top display, the scene also forces us to rethink the consequences for women who cannot – for whatever reason – conform to this social standard. To drive this point home, *Los ángeles* features several scenes in which Angela moves in and out of racial, sexual, and class standards of decency—ultimately, pointing to the invented nature of these categories. At some

moments, Angela elevates herself to the role of a European lady “[a]ccustomed to the best. Courtesy and refinement” [Acostumbrada a lo mejor. Atenciones y distinciones] and strictly adheres to the existing class system despite being ostracized from it (28). At others, she abandons this false sense of morality to highlight her second-class citizenship as a prostitute who is not only dependent upon the foreign and local men who solicit her services but also the pimps and madams who benefit these transactions. In straddling the lady/whore opposition, Angela reveals the extent to which both sides operate in the service of a multi-level patriarchal arrangement that oppresses all women.

Despite *Los ángeles*’ critical engagement with the rigid codes of race, gender, class, and sexuality embedded in Puerto Rican cultural nationalism, the central issue here is not women’s agency but rather focused instead on their repackaging their deviant bodies as pathological metaphors that expose the contesting cultural narratives that belie the enchanted terrain of the colonial city as the privileged domain for promoting the island’s tourist fantasy. In equating the allegorical space of the brothel as virtually indistinguishable from the insane asylum, Sánchez fails to completely unpack the underlying stigma associated with women who rebel against dysfunctional familial-national norms. In fact, the only instances where Sánchez does seem to take Angela beyond her aesthetic illusion are when she reconstitutes her prostituted identity into that of a “decent” maternal figure, which directly plays against the typical brothel “mother” signified in the character of Petra. Angela’s maternal subjectivity to some extent counteracts her otherwise dehumanized madness and further complicates the gendered roles divvied up to women by highlighting where they overlap. However, that *Los ángeles* leads with the production of a feminized hysteria and ends on a similar note

makes it difficult to interpret the figure of woman as anything other than an outlandish dramatization of country conceived in the interest of national progress.

### 3.3 *La Puta Madre* and the (Dis)Enchanted City in “*Tiene la noche una raíz*”

Sánchez’s 1966 short story, “*Tiene la noche una raíz*” presents us with an altogether different image of the brothel and its central female figure.<sup>104</sup> Rather than reprise the stigmatized female body featured in *Los ángeles*, this text makes a more concerted effort to model an alternative to the stereotypical links between women’s moral/mental decline into prostitution. In this story, we meet Gurdelia Grifitos, another brothel “mother” whose African origins are made painstakingly evident by her name (derived from *grifo*<sup>105</sup>) and the slurs hurled at her by her “respectable” neighbors: “Gurdelia Grifitos, the most shameful of the shameful, the sinner of the whole town . . . . gossipy, big lipped, ancestral, musical gourd, hollowed out and played by every one, loud and quick-tempered” (my translation) [¡La Gurdelia Grifitos nombrada! !La vergüenza de los vergonzosos, el pecado del pueblo todo. . . . lengüetera, bembetera, solariega,

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<sup>104</sup> Another obvious example is the *mulata*-mistress figure from *La Guaracha de Macho Camacho*, China Hereje. Since studies of this figure are numerous, I chose to limit my focus to Sánchez’s less-discussed short story. Specific scholarship related to the Madonna/whore complex in Sánchez’s novel can be found in Elba D. Birmingham-Pokorny’s bilingual edited volume, *The Demythologization of Language, Gender, and Culture and the Re-mapping of Latin American Identity in Luis Rafael Sánchez’s Works* (1999).

<sup>105</sup> The use of *grifo* as a derogatory epithet has been common in Puerto Rico since the late nineteenth century; the term was popularized in colonial Spanish America with the development of the *casta* paintings genre in the late 1700s and carried negative connotations of hybridity and animality since *grifo* could refer to the monstrous griffin (from classical Greek mythology); tropical birds with hooked bills; or mixed-breed dogs. It is commonly used to reference someone who is dark-skinned with kinky hair. For more on this, see John Beusterien’s *Canines in Cervantes and Velázquez* (2013) 121, note 18; Duany’s *The Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (2002) 237-238; and Marily G. Miller’s *Rise and Fall of the Cosmic Race: The Cult of Mestizaje in Latin America* (2004) 165, note 21.

güichara<sup>106</sup> registrada, lavá y tendía en tó el pueblo, bocona y puntillosa” (21-24)]. Sánchez subtly juxtaposes the town’s holier-than-thou persona with images of pious women who enter the church “with a spirited hope to finish the rosary quickly and return to their hypocritical lives” [con la sana esperanza de acabar de prisita el Rosario para regresar al beaterío (21)]. The omniscient narrator underscores respectable society’s malignant hypocrisy with images of women’s relentless snooping into Gurdelia’s life and the vudú spells cast against her “ever since the night of the storm when she arrived to the town” [desde la noche de la tormenta en que llegó al pueblo] (22). As Laura Lusardi suggests in her reading of “Tiene la noche una raíz,” this two-facedness – viewed as decency hiding everyday debauchery – not only breaks down the binary oppositions of good and bad women but, more importantly, it reveals the extent to which women can be complicit in the very patriarchal systems that force them to conform to cultural codes of propriety and feminine modesty.

To take this critique even further, Sánchez’s story reveals – as the title suggests – that the “root” causes of Gurdelia’s prostitution are linked to the enduring colonial structures of racism, sexism, and poverty that disproportionately impact black women in Puerto Rico. As the narrator tells us, business is scarce for Gurdelia because she does not fit conventional standards of feminine beauty, leaving her with a slim client base comprised of town fools, old greedy men, and rookie fifteen years whose measly patronage can barely make ends meet (20-21). The narrator also suggests that the only physical charm that rounds out Gurdelia’s lack of beauty is the “good pair of metaphors...perched on her corset breastwork and which made a succulent antecedent” [el

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<sup>106</sup> The *güichara*, or *güiro*, is a percussive instrument associated with Afro-Caribbean music and dance forms, such as *bomba* and *plena*, which are linked with historically black areas in coastal cities such as Ponce and Loíza.

buen par de un metáforas...que encaramaba en el antepecho y que le hacían un succulento antecedente (22)]. Here the linguistic play on the word “antecedente” implies that Gurdelia’s oversized charms both precede her otherwise homely appearance and hark back to her black ancestral inheritance as an “unruly black woman” [negrita bullanguera]. Sánchez comments on Gurdelia’s “metaphors” with a reflexive awareness that such sexual tropes are commonly used to depict black women as the erotic other in Puerto Rican literature. To contest the limitations of prevailing literary discourses, the remainder of “Tiene la noche una raíz” centers on the unexpected arrival of a young boy at Gurdelia’s doorsteps and humorous incident that unfolds as he naïvely attempts to solicit her services. After several rounds of declaring that he wants to “purchase the love that they say [she] sell[s]” [gana del amor que dicen usted vende], Gurdelia quickly realizes that the child doesn’t fully grasp the nature of her profession (23); rather, he only knows that it involves a bed. To satisfy his request and avoid creating a public scene, Gurdelia abandons her usual nightly activities and, instead, soothes the child to sleep with a lullaby. Rather than a repressive and stigmatized space of otherness, Gurdelia’s brothel emerges at the end of the story as an unlikely place of refuge from the social ills that are emblematic of the larger national community.

Santos-Febres praises “Tiene la noche una raíz” for the way it humanizes Gurdelia by presenting her a character who, unlike her “respectable” female counterparts, is able to exercise communal forms of self-sacrifice and care that call into question the archetypal representations of women in prostitution. As she suggests, Sánchez’s narrative spin on this trope complicates and transcends the Madonna/whore opposition by introducing to the various kinds of sexual and gendered labor that black women perform:

Ella es tan sólo una trabajadora más que le ofrece al pueblo sus servicios, no es la amenaza de un cuerpo desbordante y embrutecedor. Además, es capaz de otros amores, del amor maternal que...diversifica los tipos de amores que es capaz de ofrecer el cuerpo (socialmente sexualizado) de la mujer negra. La confiere así una dimension más compleja. (*Sobre piel y papel* 150)

[She is just another worker that offers her services to the people, rather than a threatening body that is unruly and brutalized. Moreover, she is capable of other kinds of love, of a maternal love that...diversifies the types of love offered by the overtly sexualized woman of color, and gives her a more complex dimension.] (my translation)

Ultimately, as Santos-Febres' analysis reveals, Sánchez's introduction of a brothel mother figure who functions outside the usual *mulata* imagery of erotic—or, in the case of *Los ángeles*, neurotic—nationalism unravels the dominant racial and sexual metaphors that have historically placed Afro-Puerto Rican women outside of *la gran familia*.

Santos-Febres employs a similar, if not more nuanced, strategy in *Nuestra Señora de la noche* through its fictional re-telling of Isabel la Negra's life story in order to cast doubt upon the popular myths of “the promiscuous black woman” [la negra promiscua], which, as she argues, relies largely on the historical construction of a social inferiority imposed by slavery and reinforced by poverty (*Sobre piel y papel* 118-119).

### **3.4 The Enchantment of San Antón in *Nuestra Señora de la noche***

Forty years after “Tiene la noche una raíz,” Mayra Santos-Febres adapts Sánchez's revisionist framework of the brothel mother and her female-centered “asylum”

space in *Nuestra Señora de la noche*. While most critics tend to focus on *Nuestra Señora*'s more obvious influences taken from the Isabel la Negra-inspired works of Rosario Ferré and Manuel Ramos Otero, they have neglected to address the ways in which her novel is actively in dialogue with Sánchez's short story—especially, as it concerns her allegorical model of *la puta fundadora*. Like Sánchez, Santos-Febres' work has been largely concerned with issues pertaining to the intersections of race, sexuality, and urban space from a black-centered perspective. Born in 1966, Santos-Febres received her PhD from Cornell University in 1992 just after launching her literary career in poetry with two standout collections, *Anamú y manigua* (1991) and *El orden escapade* (1991) and has continued to publish as multi-genre fiction writer and scholar of Caribbean literatures. As part of the second generation of post-Commonwealth writers, Santos-Febres has established herself as a Puerto Rican writer whose key objectives are not rooted in political *independentismo* or an Anti-Americanist bend of postcolonial national literature. Rather she writes about an expanded urban Caribbean, where peripheral circuits of empowerment are rooted in translocal<sup>107</sup> – rather than global – relations that speak to the Puerto Rican experience of circular migration between the US and the island, as well as to a discursive movement between categories of geography and identity. These themes are central to *Nuestra Señora*, which offers a dynamic reinterpretation of *la gran*

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<sup>107</sup> In her doctoral dissertation, *The Translocal Papers: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Puerto Rican Literature* (1993), Santos-Febres defines translocality as a representational practice in local writing that speaks to Puerto Ricans unique experiences of circular migration between the U.S. and the island, as well as to a discursive movement between categories of geography and identity: “Translocality does not seek an underlying structure of thought and intention between languages, cultures, races, nations, etc. to transcend difference of ‘translate’ it into sameness. On the contrary, translocality takes advantage of the tensions between intentions of differentiation and unity and thus between language, nations, classes and people, to propose a model that strives on continuous circular movement between these polarities...a theorist of translocality argues that no ‘underlying structure’ can erase the existing tensions between and within races, cultures, genders, classes, nations. Therefore it is necessary to find ways of constructing alliances and defining identities that do not reproduce essentialist discourses but that uses [sic] them advantageously for fighting all kinds of oppression” (28).

*familia* through its multiperspectival take on the female historical figure, Isabel Luberza Oppenheimer, who owned and operated world-renowned chain of brothels in Ponce between the 1930s and the 1960s. Popularly known as Isabel la Negra, Oppenheimer was born in the city's black, working-class barrio of San Antón in 1901 and died in 1974 after she was mysteriously shot inside Elizabeth's Dancing Place. While little else is known about the historical details of her life, she became canonized in late twentieth century Puerto Rican literature for leading a "double life" as a brothel madam and devout member of the Catholic Church.<sup>108</sup> *Nuestra Señora* is the first major literary contribution to expand the mythical and biographical scope of Isabel la Negra's popular persona through the genre of the historical novel—allowing Santos-Febres to reimagine the foundational myth of *la gran familia* from the narrative perspective of its founding whore.

In her exploration of this figure, Santos-Febres intimates that the dominant image of a unified Puerto Rico – and across the Americas – relies on a "suffering" mother whose allegorical relationship to the "birth" of a "sovereign, legitimate people" has historically gone hand-in-hand with the popular dictum of *adelantar la raza*—that is, whitening or improving the race.<sup>109</sup> In Puerto Rican literature," she clarifies elsewhere,

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<sup>108</sup> While I limit my discussion to Santos-Febres' two key textual points of reference with respect to Isabel la Negra, other notable and more recent depictions in Puerto Rican literary and cultural production include Efraín López Neris' film *Life of Sin* (1979), Iris M. Zavala's screenplay *Boleros* (2000), José Luís Escobar's play *Isabel, la santa del burdel* [Isabel, the Brothel Saint] (2003), and Luis Antonio Rodríguez Vázquez's biographical essays and recent novel *Cuadernos de Una Prostituta Del Bar de Juana la India* [The Diaries of a Prostitute from the Bar of Juana the Indian] (2009).

<sup>109</sup> According to Santos-Febres, in every nation there is a puta fundadora, or founding whore: "Pienso en Evita Perón, en las madres fundadoras de la nación norteamericana, la mayoría putas. Pienso en La Malinche, mujer vendida como cosa a Cortés. Me gusta pensar en la historia desde esta perspectiva, no desde la del 'padre' legítimo de la Patria, o desde la Madre sufrida que pare al pueblo legítimo ysoberano; sino desde este rincón oculto de la Puta escondida que puja a la nación bastarda." [I think of Evita Perón, of the founding mothers of North America, mostly whores. I think of La Malinche, a woman sold like an object to Cortés. I like to think about history from this point of view; not from the perspective of the lawful



“the black body has always represented the irrational, the sexual, the primordial” (my translation) [En la literatura puertorriqueña... lo negro siempre ha representado lo irracional. Es el cuerpo, es lo sexual, es el origen antes de la palabra (“Raza en la cultura puertorriqueña” 58-59)].<sup>110</sup> For this reason, she continues, the major task for Afro-Puerto Rican writers is to create a literary tradition that evokes the cultural ties between black culture and Puerto Rican identity:

This [Puerto Rican] identity can never consolidate without putting at the center what belongs at the center: the Antillean culture. Yes, the dreaded, the disfigured black culture... And, of course, we can all agree that such identities are invented, in that race, nationality, gender, and sexuality are heterogenous constructs and in struggle, sometimes in the same body. But with its imperfections also come good tools for political mobilization. The trick is to deny these fictions and assume them at the same time. (my translation)

[Esta identidad jamás podrá consolidarse sin poner en el centro lo que va en el centro: la cultura antillana. Sí, al temido, a la desfigurada cultura negra... Y, claro, todos estamos de acuerdo en que las identidades son inventadas, en que la raza, la nacionalidad, el género, la preferencia sexual son identidades heterogéneas y en lucha, a veces en un mismo cuerpo.

Pero con sus errores las identidades también son buenos instrumentos de

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father or the suffering mother who births a sovereign, legitimate people, but from the occult position of the whore who pushes out the bastardized nation]. See Formwalt (2007) for an interview with the author.

<sup>110</sup> Another version of this essay appears in *Sobre piel y papel*.

movilización política. El truco está en negarlos y asumirlos al mismo tiempo. (65)

Read in these terms, Santos-Febres' *Nuestra Señora de la noche* engages in a practice of critical memory that mobilizes what she calls crossed identities for those on the periphery of cultural nationalist discourse—one that particularly resonates with “the occult position of the whore who pushes out the bastardized nation” (Formwalt 130). Interestingly, despite a shared interest in breaking down nationalist norms related to gender and sexuality, both Rosario Ferré's “Cuando las mujeres quieren a los hombres” and Manuel Ramos Otero's “La última plena que Luberza bailó” [Luberza's Last Plena Dance] reinforce problematic features of black female eroticism. These two stories were originally published as a collaborative effort in the year following Isabel Luberza Oppenheimer's unsolved murder in 1974; and share a basic plotline around the facts of the case that circulated in popular discourse and newspapers at the time.<sup>111</sup> While some critics initially put forth the notion that Ferré and Ramos Otero short stories strategically present “the image of the black woman as a liberating force in a repressive society,” others have more recently gestured towards the shortcomings of such representations, especially in the case of Ferré's story (Mullen 95).<sup>112</sup> In rescripting the historic Isabel into the figurative *puta fundadora*, Santos-Febres underscores the various uses of the erotic in the Caribbean, ranging from oppressive inscriptions of race and class to emancipatory

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<sup>111</sup> Ferré and Ramos Otero's stories appeared in the seventh issue of the student-run literary magazine, *Zona de carga y descarga* [Loading and Firing Zone], which Ferré founded with her cousin Olga Nolla at the University of Puerto Rico in 1972. The content and language used by Ferré and Ramos Otero in the seventh issue, which Ferré describes as a tribute was considered extremely obscene and controversial at the time. Consequently, the stories generated a strong conservative backlash that included protestors burning copies of magazine, as well as the loss of its major patrons (García Pinto 92-93; Tomkins and Foster 100).

<sup>112</sup> Whereas Mullen (1989) and Balseiro (1997) offer more positive readings of the sociopolitical themes promoted by Ferré and Ramos Otero, Aparicio (2010), Rangelova (2009), and Ramos Rosado (1999) together investigate the epistemic violence entailed in Isabel la Negra's symbolic status in their stories.

processes of self-knowledge and self-definition (*Sobre piel y papel* 83). As I will explain, this epistemology of the erotic both elaborates on *the puta madre* featured in Sánchez's revised model and recreates a new intertextual relation between urban space and national identity that expresses a tendency towards the Afro-Latin influences – especially, folkloric – of Puerto Rican identity that are displaced from the Hispanic basis of both *la gran familia* and *la isla del entanto*.

Before turning to the plot of the novel, I would first like to point out that its main geographical setting in San Antón reflects a different set of cultural connotations in the Puerto Rican imagination than Old San Juan. Although Ponce represents the island's second most frequented tourist destination, it is important to note, as Isar P. Godreau (2015) reminds us, that being one of the largest post-slave settlements of the city and the birthplace of *bomba* and *plena*, “San Antón an Antón is still not included in the twenty-nine tourist sites marked in Ponce's official tourist map” (49). As Godreau further notes, “the unresolved problem and anxiety over the question of black inclusion/exclusion always troubles Hispanophilia as an ideal constantly challenged in its Caribbean applications” (49). Santos-Febres draws our attention to this unresolved problem by mapping the two sides of the city that are split by the Portuguese River: the aristocratic, Spanish cultural spaces of the Fornarís household in La Alhambra and the working-class, black cultural spaces of Isabel's brothel in San Antón. More than this, Santos-Febres not only represents how this urban politics of exclusion particularly impacts Afro-Puerto Rican women, but she also imagines past Sánchez's earlier treatment of the brothel as a metaphorical space of repressive insularity. This is particularly evident in the circular patterns of migration among various local characters who are in the “habit of going from

port to port”—especially, in the movement of labor in and out Ponce or in the service of militarism across Caribbean and Pacific territories, such as Panama and the Philippines (322); moreover, Ponce’s physical and symbolic distance from the “Americanized” terrain of Old San Juan set forth in *Los ángeles* and other canonical texts provides Santos-Febres an opportunity to look to other cross-cultural connections that have been disciplined out of Puerto Rican nationalism.

In ways similar to Kerry Young’s *Gloria* (studied in Chapter 1), Santos-Febres introduces an intertextual frame that augments the microhistorical lens of the novel towards a pan-Caribbean perspective. Importantly, the novel juxtaposes Isabel’s individual coming-of-age story with interspersed chapters dedicated to the Puerto Rican cult of the Black Madonna and other Afro-Creole forms of Marian devotion found throughout the Hispanic Caribbean. In fact, the very title of *Nuestra Señora de la noche* alerts us to the way in which Santos-Febres revisits Sánchez’s *puta madre* figure as an alternative to the binary categories of “lady” and “whore” since it invokes a double entendre. That is to say, the formal honorific of “Nuestra Señora” places Isabel simultaneously within the iconography of the Black Madonna<sup>113</sup> that structures the novel and the “ladies of the night” that were historically regulated by the intertwined codes of decency and democracy during the early twentieth century. This titular enjambment acts as a prism through which to reflect and fuse Isabel’s *patrona* identity in its incongruous manifestations: a patron saint-like woman of charity, on the one hand, and a hardened proprietor of prostitution, on the other. By bringing together these conflicting identities into the body of the text and its central protagonist, Santos-Febres helps us to consider how the polarization of these gendered identities runs against metaphysical and political

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<sup>113</sup> See Appendix D, for an example of the Black Madonna from Regla, Havana.

claims associated with Caribbean cultural syncretism. The representation of Isabel as a *puta fundadora* of the highest order, however, should not be read as attempt to vindicate the historical women as feminist prototype as much as one that negotiates between the complexity of black women's survival strategies as a vital tool for decolonizing the racial, gender, and class hierarchies built into the limited national conception of unity based on *la gran familia*.

In her 2007 interview with Jennifer Formwalt, Santos-Febres clarifies that she does not believe in an essentialist and homogenizing Puerto Rican "identity" as it has been articulated in nationalist discourse and this is largely why *Nuestra Señora* relies on the crossed-identities of Madonna/whore to reimagine the national family from the perspective of *la puta fundadora*. According to Santos-Febres, the novel utilizes a genealogical lens of popular asceticism, where family is "composed of mothers and grandmothers and comadres and neighbors and people who are not blood but who become so when confronting the vicissitudes of life together"[*familia compuesta por madres y abuelas y comadres y vecinos y gente que no es de sangre pero que llega a serlo al afrontar vicisitudes juntos* ("Resisting Tradition" 129).] These crossed maternal ascetic identities are shot through the novel principally through symbolically united its major and minor female characters with syncretic patron saints of Cuba and Puerto Rico. For example, Santos-Febres invokes the former by closely identifying Isabel with the image and cult of Ochún, the Yoruba deity linked to *Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre* [Our Lady of Charity]<sup>114</sup> in Cuban Santería and Puerto Rican Spiritualism. As is

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<sup>114</sup> In 1916, the Vatican officially declared *La Caridad* (also called *La Cachita* or *La Virgen Mambisa*) the patron saint of Cuba; though the legend of her apparition of her sighting by the "three Juans" in the Bay of Nipe, located in the former Oriente Province, dates back to the early 1600s. According to Jalane D. Schmidt, in *Cachita's Streets: The Virgin of Charity, Race, and Revolution in Cuba* (2015), while the cult

common knowledge among her devotees, Ochún is also associated with rivers and fresh waters, love, fertility, and prosperity, as well as loss and death. In *The Repeating Island*, Antonio Benítez Rojo offers the following description of her various identities:

Oshun Yeye Moro, the perfumed whore; Oshun Kayode, the gay dancer; Oshun Aña, the lover of the drum; Oshun Akuara, she who mixed love potions; Oshun Ede, the *grande dame*; Oshun Fumike, she who gives children to fertile women; Oshun Funke, the wise one; Oshun Kole-Kole, the wicked sorceress...dizzying as her honeyed dance and yellow bananas ...Sometimes she shows herself to be gentle and ministering, above all in women's matters and those of love; at other times she shows herself to be insensitive, capricious, and voluble, and she can even become nasty and treacherous. (15)

The evocation of Ochún and her many *caminos* (paths) is integral to Santos-Febres' reinterpretation of *la gran familia* since it centralizes black women's erotic power and refuses a singular origin narrative and relies instead on a "continual flow of paradoxes" that are co-constitutive rather than contradictory of one another (Benítez Rojo 11).

Santos-Febres locates a similar ambiguity in Isabel: "she who is now the Divided One, Isabel of a Thousand Names, La Negra, La Patrona, Protector and Tempter of the Wanderer. She who saves and she who leads astray" (348). [Ella que la ahora es La Escindida, la del mil nombres Isabel, La Negra, La Madama, la Patrona, Protetora y

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of *la Caridad* reflects various historically-specific claims to political, religious, and racial formations of nationhood, it first emerged primarily among the island's enslaved and free black eastern populations during both emancipation and independence struggles. She also notes that Ochún represents the most studied of many local syncretic devotions to the Virgin in Afro-Cuban religious beliefs and practices. Leading scholarship includes Lydia Cabrera's *Yemayá y Ochún: Kariocha, Iyalorichas y Olorichas* (1980) and Olga Portuondo Zúñiga's *La virgen de la caridad del cobre: Simbolo De Cubania* (1995).

Tentación del Caminante] (332). Rather than perpetuate a split view of “woman” in the whore/madonna complex, Santos-Febres uses this ambiguity (or, in her words, translocality) to move back and forth between feminine polarities of identity; and, in doing so, reimagines the way in which the figure of the prostitute represents the nation.<sup>115</sup>

One way *Nuestra Señora de la noche* situates Isabel within the *puta fundadora* tradition of Ochún is through her metaphysical connection with the both waterways and tropical storms. Near the beginning of the novel we learn that the “untamed territory” of Elizabeth’s Dancing Place is located on the banks of the Portuguese River, a navigation device that also sets the course for Isabel’s tale of racial, familial, and political origins. The daughter of migrant workers, Isabel was orphaned by her parents and raised adoptive godmothers, Maruca and Teté Casiana, who, in the act of telling Isabel her birth story, blur the line between personal and national memory:

You were born on the exact day of the storm. So, *negrita*, that means you have to be respected. When you were born, the Portuguese overflowed. It flooded houses and harvests. Even the Americans had to seek refuge. . . . Forty days and forty nights passed and on the following morning, very early, I awoke to carve my balata...And then, Isabel, my fingers took on a life of their own and began to carve a figure of the Virgin. I started to pray, “Holy Mother of God, wath over me in my hour of need.” When I

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<sup>115</sup> Another way that Santos-Febres symbolically unites Isabel with the ancestral female power of the *orishas* is through the stories of Doña Montse, the reclusive old woman in Hormigueros, who serves as an incarnation of the black madonna, the Virgin of Montserrat (syncretized with Yeguá), and Minerva, the young “honey-skinned” *mulata*, who, like Isabel, resembles Ochún. These women also share a common narrative with Isabel: they are the abandoned mistresses of the most powerful men in town.

was finished carving, on that very road that you see there, your mother appeared with a little bundle of flesh in her arms. (42)<sup>116</sup>

[Tú naciste el mismísimo día de la tormenta. Por so, negrita, es que a ti hay tenerte respeto. Cuando naciste, se desbordó el Portugués. Tumbo cosechas y casas. Hasta los Americanos tuvieron que refugiarse en los zaguanes del ladrillo del pueblo. . . .Pasaron cuarenta días enteritis con sus noches y a la mañana siguiente, bien por la mañana, yo me levanté a tallar mi ausubo...Entonces, Isabel, los dedos se me fueron solos y empezaron a taller la figura de una Virgen. Yo me puse rezar. ‘Virgen Santa de la Providencia, ampárame en mis horas de necesidad. Cuando estuvo complete la talla, pore se camino que tú ves ahí, apareció tu mamá con un bultito de carne entre las manos.] (40)

This passage shifts the focus from the historical to the mythical since, as the narrator reminds us, Isabel knows this story by heart, in all its adaptations, which include slight variations each time Teté Casiana recites it. The individual account of Isabel’s birth also transforms into a collective national narrative since her birth in 1901 dovetails with a major event that dramatically altered many aspects of Puerto Rican life: the U.S. Supreme Court’s creation of the unincorporated territory doctrine that made the island an official colony. Here the significance of the “storm” is metaphorical, standing in for both the island’s political turbulence as well as the disruptive power of Isabel to series of crises wrought by colonialism. It also connects us back to Sánchez’s “Tiene la noche una raíz,” where a storm also signifies the onset of Gurdelia’s struggles and the racial and gender-based asylum she seeks out in the brothel. By assigning Ochún’s natural sources

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<sup>116</sup> All English translations are from Ernesto Mestre-Reed’s 2009 edition, unless otherwise noted.



(and forces) to Isabel at birth and tracing their evolving presence throughout her lifetime, Santos-Febres centers a shape-shifting, nonlinear narrative that proposes, in her words, a “proteic” conception of identity where the categories of nation and womanhood are inclusive, mutable, and ever-changing (“Más allá...” 148).

Santos-Febres also defines the composite *patrona* in Isabel through the young protagonist’s developing consciousness as a workingwoman. The interspersed chapters recalling her life from childhood to young adulthood contain numerous details specific to the early labor movement, including Isabel’s first encounter with another kind of “Nuestra Señora”: Luisa Capetillo (1879–1922), Puerto Rico’s founding feminist writer, gender nonconformist, and labor organizer.<sup>117</sup> Capetillo differs significantly from Santos-Febres’ racial and religious points of reference to *orisha* and Marian images in that this *patrona* openly denounced the dogma of the Catholic Church; and sought, instead, to unite spiritualism with anarchy (*A Nation of Women* xlii). As a young girl, Isabel is given a copy of Capetillo’s worker-oriented play, “Free and Sovereign Love”<sup>118</sup> from Don Demetrio, one of the local union activists in San Antón. The play reflects Capetillo’s political vision that marriage is a form of prostitution, “a contract of buying and selling where often the woman ends up losing” (91) [el matrimonio es un contrato de compraventa donde muchas veces la mujer sale perdiendo (85)]. In it, Isabel discovers the protagonist is a “woman of means, independent and free” [mujer de medois, independiente y libre (86)] who not only reflects her beliefs and ambitions but also shares

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<sup>117</sup> In addition to her writing and organizing efforts, Capetillo is often cited as the first Puerto Rican woman to pants in public and was arrested in Havana for doing so. See Norma Valle Ferrer’s *Luisa Capetillo, Pioneer Puerto Rican Feminist* (1991).

<sup>118</sup> To the best of my knowledge, “Free and Sovereign Love” is not a title used by Capetillo, but a reference to her core philosophy of “free love,” a theme that emerges throughout her writings.

her first name. This identification with a namesake at the literary level and a (white) working-class feminist at the historical level equips Isabel with additional—and perhaps unexpected—sources of female empowerment. With these guides in tow, Isabel is able to approach her individual rights in terms of working-class women’s collective labor and social relations.

In addition to infusing Isabel’s storyline with these spiritual and historical female figures, what sets *Nuestra Señora de la noche* apart from earlier representations of Isabel la Negra is that it sheds light on concrete experiences of antiprostitution violence during the initial period of US occupation. Just before Isabel establishes Elizabeth’s Dancing Place as a viable alternative to the other forms of exploited or underpaid labor, she attends a *bomba* dance<sup>119</sup> in San Antón with a group of fellow domestic workers from town. The inclusion of the *bomba* in this scene functions as more than a casual allusion to the politicized elements of performance that are absented from the representational practices of writers such as Rosario Ferré and Manuel Ramos Otero; the *bomba* carries significance not only because it becomes a dance associated with prostitution through its public displays of female sexuality but also because of the musical tradition’s historical ties to political protest movements.<sup>120</sup> The scene manifests into both a festive and political occasion, as evidenced by a special appearance of the legendary *plena* performer Joselino “Bumbúm” Oppenheimer (1884-1929), and the numerous male and female

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<sup>119</sup> Aurora Levins Morales also documents the significance of policing *bomba* during the anti-prostitution campaigns at the turn of the century in her short story, “Bombazo”(2013).

<sup>120</sup> The *bomba* refers to a variety of percussion-driven Puerto Rican rhythms and dance styles that have their roots in Afro-Creole cultures. As Suárez Findlay (1999) notes, both the *bomba* and the *plena* were colloquially labeled *bailes de prostitutas* [prostitute dances] at the turn of the twentieth century, and heavily policed as such (96). For a more detailed history of these dances, refer to María Herrera-Sobek’s edited volume *Celebrating Latino Folklore* (2012) and Peter Manuel’s *Caribbean Currents: Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae* (2006).

union leaders circulating pamphlets amidst the dancing. Isabel's participation in this predominantly female social gathering, as the following passage illustrates, alerts her to towards the invasive regulation and policing of poor and working-class women, especially those involved in (or suspected of) prostitution:

Here and there a man walked on the streets toward the dance, but in front of her, all around and behind Isabel, a mob of women....Wandering alone at night in those times was motive enough for the police to accuse anyone of 'dishonest solicitude'...That night, the women told the stories to each other and Isabel overheard. (172)

[Alguno que otro hombre caminaba por la calle hacia el baile, pero enfrente, alrededor, detrás de Isabel, un enjambre de mujeres ocupaba el panorama...Andar sola de noche en aquellos días era motiva suficiente para que la policía acusara a cualquiera de 'solicitud deshonesta'...Se lo contaban esa noche las fulanas, Isabel la oía.] (162)

The stories that the women tell detail the civic and sexual abuses disproportionately directed against them by the legal and medical systems—providing Isabel with a larger context through to which move from her personal narrative of labor exploitation and social exclusion to those of other women and back. To this extent, the novel's plotline is very similar to *Gloria* (discussed in Chapter 1), as it is the economic and sexual harassment that economic and sexual harassment that Isabel experiences in domestic and other service work, as well as her lower social status as a mistress, that propels her to create and maintain alliances with these women. The *bomba* scene inscribes the space of prostitution within the expressive “movement” of women's rights, situating Isabel within

a female community in which she can “beg[i]n to spell out the rhythm of her recently discovered strength” (176).

If we juxtapose the scenes that take place in Elizabeth’s Dancing Place, Isabel’s alternative familial community becomes especially visible. Located in San Antón, a neighborhood made famous by prostitutes, *bomba* dancers and *plena* musicians, Elizabeth’s Dancing Hall becomes a place of asylum for many of the characters in the novel. Upon his first visit, Luis Arsenio – the son of Fernando Fornarís, Ponce’s wealthy white lawyer – perceives the brothel as follows:

It was clear that this place had emboldened him. It was also clear, Arsenio thought, that Elizabeth’s followed different rules than the rest of the town, that there the distance between servants and masters was altered, that the body and its humors dared to be more familiar with each other...if one wanted to survive the untamed territory of Elizabeth’s. (23)

[Era evidente que el territorio lo tenía envalentonado. Era evidente además, pensó Arsenio, que el Elizabeth’s se regía por reglas distintas a las del resto pueblo. Que allí no era igual humores se atrevían a proponerse más cercancos...si quería sobrevivir al territorio agreste del Elizabeth’s.] (21)

What sets Isabel’s brothel apart from the other gentlemen’s clubs in town is not only its state-of-the-art accommodations – equipped with stately columns, swept floors, a well-stocked bar, and spacious dance floor – but also that its “rules” appear in stark contrast to the authoritarian home of the Fornarís family, where the patriarch Don Fernando staunchly reinforces the “bindings of their decency” (26) [las amarras de su decencia

(24)]. Beyond its typical function of being a taboo but nonetheless patriarchal cultural space where women are “responsible” for releasing men’s sexual tensions, Santos-Febres carefully draws our attention to the social codes that it breaks, such as the intermingling of men and women from various ethnic, racial, and class standings which, as the narrator expresses, creates “another dimension, different and joyous...an overflowing joy that was yet aware of its almost impossible state” (25) [Era otra dimension, distinta y alegre...Una alegria derramada pero consciente de su existencia casi imposible (23)]. In addition to stressing its “very diverse” atmosphere, Santos-Febres also suggests the extent to which such houses of ill-repute could also be considered safe havens to the women who sought more lucrative forms of work within their bounds. Significantly, the ladies of Elizabeth’s Dancing Hall are explicitly called Isabel’s “goddaughters” [ahijadas] and the “protected ones” [protegidas] (25; 23). In later scenes, we also see them practice communal forms of care that are akin to the maternal love Gurdelia extends in “Tiene la noche una raíz.” For example, in one telling scene, we learn that after one of the women secretly gives birth to an “illegitimate” child and subsequently abandons him soon after, Isabel assembles the women into an adoptive community of mothers for the child: “Isabel got all the girls from Elizabeth’s together. Between all of them they had taken care of the boy” (305) [Isabel reunió a todas las muchachas del Elizabeth’s. Entre todas se había ocupado del muchachito (293)]. We see another example of this adoptive maternal narrative when Isabel goes abroad to Panama and brings back a “chinita” who witnesses being abused by a local vendor.

In addition to prioritizing an unconventional maternal kinship network, Santos-Febres uses the trope of the *puta fundadora* to revise the national *gran familia* into an

intertextual regional one. In the same interview in which she explains her use of the *puta fundadora* figure, she shares that her decision write Isabel la Negra into an alternative chain of affiliation has much to do with her desire to trace and uphold genealogical networks that are specific to her ancestral and cultural heritage as an Afro-Puerto Rican writer. Drawing on Glissant's relational poetics, which for Santos-Febres, enables her to trace an imaginary line through figures like Isabel, Ochún, and other legendary women in order to rearticulate a collective subjectivity that is rooted in the maternal ("Resisting Tradition" 128-129). Reflecting back onto the novel's Marian ascetic form, we can see that Santos-Febres utilizes the figure of Ochún/La Caridad to reincorporate her titular brothel mother into a revised national allegory of *la gran familia*. In one of the chapters "devoted" to Marian worship, Santos-Febres includes the legend of the three Juans, the popular national origin myth associated with La Caridad. As the legend goes, the three Juans, who stand in for the three symbolic races of Cuba (and the Hispanic Caribbean more broadly), are saved at sea by the Virgin. Santos-Febres places this chapter in the first half of the novel in order to prepare her reader for the emergent narrative of Isabel's own complicated family ties. In the novel, the three Juans are refigured into Luis Fornarís, the "white" son of Don Fernando, who we later find out is Isabel's long-term client; Roberto, the "bastard" mixed-race son of Isabel and Don Fernando; and Manolito, the adopted son that Isabel and the other women raise at Elizabeth's. Through much of the novel, these three characters and their individual storylines are structurally distanced from one another, mirroring their social distance across Puerto Rico's racial and class divisions; but, as the major plotline develops and their stories begin to intersect, it becomes more and more clear that Isabel "saved" all three in some way. It is Isabel's

funeral that unites the Luis, Roberto, and Manolito for the first time in a scene that also constitutes a clear reference to (and revision of) *la gran familia*:

There were people from every walk of life there. Girl prostitutes and matrons, old clients who still owed Isabel some favor, representatives from all the political parties, old men and washerwomen, small-time singers, and artists with international reputations. All of them came to say their last goodbyes to La Negra. (352)

Eran personas de todos los caminos de la vida. Putats niñas y matronas, antiguos clientes que se quedaron debiéndole a Isabel algún favor, representantes de todos los partidos políticos, ancianos y lavanderas, cantantes de poca monta y artistas de renombre internacionál. Todos fueron a darle el ultimo a La Negra. (341)

The final scenes in the novel should not be understood as a wholesale vindication of Isabel's character or some kind of romanticized, post-racial unity as her three sons march together—especially since, the author deliberately chooses to also include various rumors and hearsay that affirm Isabel's contradictory moral qualities. Instead, Santos-Febres uses Isabel's funeral to construct a composite of Puerto Rican society, in all its tensions and contradictions.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have explored how both Sánchez and Santos-Febres deploy the figure of *la puta madre* and her associated cultural spaces in San Juan and Ponce to grapple with the polarizations of Puerto Rican identity. In the case of Sanchez's work, the illusory nature of Old San Juan serves as an expression of the paradoxes built into the

master narrative of *la isla del encanto* and the attendant myth of *la gran familia puertorriqueña*. To varying extents, in both *Los ángeles se han fatigado* and “Tiene la noche una raíz,” the literary representation of the (dis)enchanted city serves to articulate the limitations of these discourses that underlie Puerto Rican nationalism, and Sánchez’s greater aim to disrupt the picturesque city of the tourist imagination. Moreover, his particular spotlight on the rapidly modernization of San Juan and its “free” association with US empire reveals that a national departure from repressive models of community and cultural belonging seems virtually impossible in Commonwealth Puerto Rico. While his experimental revisionist strategies around *la puta madre* introduced an important intervention into existing literary representations of *la gran familia*, Santos-Febres takes this representational strategy to the next level by attributing the trope of enchantment to the female figure as well as to Ponce’s black, working-class neighborhood of San Antón in order to mediate tendency towards the Hispanic basis of Puerto Rican cultural identity. This urban dynamic between disenchantment and re-enchantment, as I will explain in the next chapter, can also be detected in the palimpsestic city of Havana and its central figure of the *rumbera*.



## CHAPTER 4

### The Palimpsestic City Rewriting the *Rumbera's* Performative Space in Havana

“Look at this view, this harbor, this gorgeous curve of coast. Men from all over the world tell me that Havana is the most beautiful city they’ve ever seen. So when will we get it back? When will it truly be ours again?”

—Cristina Garcia, *The Agüero Sisters*

Near the beginning of Cristina García’s *The Agüero Sisters* (1998), Dulce Fuerte painfully mutters these words as she strolls down the Havana Malecón, the scenic waterfront drive that stretches from the harbor in Old Havana to her deteriorating house in the city’s once fashionable Vedado district. As one of several narrators in the novel, Dulce offers a quasi-documentary style account of the urban landscape that directly invites the reader to tag along on her tour of the city’s famous thoroughfare and its seedier sides of the tourist industry. As we quickly learn, although once built to protect the city from imperial invasion by sea, the Malecón and its adjacent neighborhoods have together become the city’s main arena for prostitution at the onset of the 1990s. In this decade of economic and political instability, Dulce is among the growing number of young *jineteras* who line the seawall’s sidewalks to hustle for a variety of goods in exchange for sex.<sup>121</sup> For the foreign men who solicit her services, Dulce’s appeal lies in her mixed-racial heritage as a Cuban *mulata*—alluding to her ability to both pass as an *extranjera* [foreigner] in public while placating to the exotic allure of islander identity just long enough to suspend disbelief about the resulting crisis of the times. And yet, for

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<sup>121</sup> Though this chapter focuses on the context of *jineterismo* as it relates to female sex work, the term *jinetera/jinetero* more accurately translates to hustler (literally, a jockey) in Cuban slang and represents a range of tourist-oriented services in addition to transactional sex. These activities can include selling black market merchandise; *santería* rites and ceremonies; and platonic escorting and companionship, to name a few.

García's fictional guide, sex work provides quick access to "dollars and tourist-shop gifts"—making *jineteras* the "perfect go-betweens for ordinary Cuban citizens" (51). More than this, for Dulce, this particular system of transnational exchange also functions as a "much more democratic" form of currency during the so-called Special Period that followed the Cold War's end, especially, since sex appears to be "the only thing they can't ration in Havana" (52, 51).

As representative of this chapter's broader aims, García's novel adapts a central trope that has proliferated in Cuban literature since the turn of the twentieth century: the national symbolic place of prostitution in Havana. Feminist scholars like Vera Kutzinski, Claudette Williams, and Coco Fusco, among others, have done much to deepen our understanding of the long and varied significance of the *mulata* within what Kutzinski calls the "erotics of Cuban nationalism." As they argue, this iconic figure has attained a "high symbolic and cultural invisibility...for all the tricky questions about how race, gender, and sexuality inflect the power relations that contain in colonial and postcolonial Cuba" (Kutzinski 7). The visual signifier of this racialized sexuality in the epigraph, however, is not the *jinetera* narrator but the city itself, whose "gorgeous curve of coast" invokes the *mulata* woman's fraught position as a boundary-marker for narrating both neocolonial and nationalist desires for Cuba. Presented as a kind of narrativized *rumba*, an Afro-Cuban dance, the urban intimacy between Havana and the *mulata* is especially significant when we consider the underlying problem that Dulce poses in the rhetorical question quoted above—that is, her sense of being located firmly in Havana with no real claims of belonging to it.

#### 4.1 Havana as Palimpsest

Published at the tail end of a heightened era of mass migration and political fracture in the post-Soviet state, García's novel represents a useful starting point for exploring how Cuban writers of the post-revolutionary period have relied upon the city as a rhetorical device for narrating the postcolonial desires for Cuban citizenship both "on" and "off" the island. Before mapping this creative alliance around Havana—and the figurative uses of *mujer de rumbo/rumba*<sup>122</sup> therein—I would first like to turn to José Quiroga's *Cuban Palimpsests* (2005) because his observations provide a more grounded discussion on what Havana means to the story of Cuban postcolonial identity, in all its complexity.

The scene in Havana...has been radically altered in so many ways that there is no dearth of books, documentaries, and travel accounts that seek to understand these shifts. In spite of the very clear temporal narrative deployed by the revolution, with its insistence on a vanquished political and economic system, and then on a forward march toward economic equality and prosperity for all, the new moment in time left Cubans with a sense of a life that could not be easily understood within the revolution's own temporal frameworks. (10)

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<sup>122</sup> According to José Piedra (1997) and Alison Fraunhar (2016), the terms *rumba/rumbo* together encompass the widespread identification of Cuban women's sexuality within both tourist entertainment and prostitution. *Rumbo*, as they remind us, refers more generally to spatial movement or a course of direction and colloquially to the city's disreputable streets, while *rumba* is a popular dance and musical form that first developed in the urban slums of Havana and Matanzas in the mid-nineteenth century and, as a result, continues to carry overt racial and class connotations.

Quiroga uses the metaphorical logic of the palimpsest to describe the city's "historical layers of memory" found in fictional works.<sup>123</sup> In doing so, he highlights the generational divide of island and diasporic writers whose texts respectively have come to represent the "official" and "dissident" discourses of post-revolutionary Cuba (11). His analysis suggests that Havana emerged as a "lettered city"<sup>124</sup> that "appealed to a cohesive set of symbols geared toward a future" in the first decade of the revolution, whereas the uncertainty and stagnation that characterized the city's transition at the millennial turn offered more recent writers both a literal and literary foundation for dismantling the unified, utopian narrative of nation associated with socialist Cuba. The material remains and memories of the palimpsestic city—figured in the motif of Havana's ruins—provide an attractive framework for these writers to play into voyeuristic, touristic desires for an authentic Cuba. Yet, Quiroga's interpretive paradigm of the palimpsestic city does not succeed at revealing how themes of prostitution have long been part of both past and present representations of the urban terrain. Instead, he restricts his focus to texts that were part of the new Cuban "boom" of the 1990s and argues that many of the most well-known writers of this generation "appeal to a very masculine sense of sexual—as

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<sup>123</sup> Numerous scholars have traced how the cultural reinvention and physical transformation of Havana has functioned ideologically in Cuban literature across various historical eras of postcolonial identity. Some of the most notable examples in twentieth century prose and poetry include the works of Miguel de Carrión, Alejo Carpentier, Nancy Morejón, Guillermo Cabrera Infante, Reinaldo Arenas, Antonio José Ponte, and Zoé Valdes. More recently, island and diasporic women writers such as Ena Lucía Portela, Wendy Guerra, and Achy Obejas have amplified issues of gender and sexuality within the literary memory of Havana's pre- and post-revolutionary past.

<sup>124</sup> Quiroga borrows the term from Uruguayan critic Ángel Rama, whose posthumous title *La Ciudad Letrada* [The Lettered City] (1984) introduces the framework to explore the relationship between the writer, urban space, and the state across colonial and modern Latin America. Picking up where Rama's study leaves off in the twentieth century, Quiroga argues that not only did the prospect of a revolutionary book and reading public appeal to Castro's literacy campaign, but Havana also served as an important site of cultural and political influence for the writers of the Latin American Boom (123). Yet, by the end of the century, material shortages and lack of publishing options led to the "migrations of the book" (and its writers) overseas and the "exile from Havana that manifests itself *within* Havana" (23).

opposed to political—empowerment in their treatment of women” (138). While I agree with Quiroga’s general assessment that the explicit portrayal of prostitution in these works amplify aspects of social reality previously considered taboo or unrepresentable in the aftermath of the Revolution, my goal in this chapter is to bring to light a broader metaphorical schema of prostitution that informs the ways in which the city figures as a repository of multiple histories, identities, and narratives.

Building upon the work of Quiroga, I examine the palimpsestic city of Havana represented in Barnet’s *Canción de Rachel* [Rachel’s Song, 1969] and Fernando Velázquez Medina’s *Última rumba en La Habana* [Last Rumba in Havana, 2001] can also help us to generate alternate understandings of Cuban literary and cultural citizenship. These novels present us with two competing visions of prostitution via the *rumbera* that, although disparate in their chronological context and political ideologies, are thematically linked through the physical and symbolic spaces of the city. Written a decade following the 1959 Revolution, Barnet’s *Canción de Rachel* is widely known for its testimonial aesthetics and pro-revolutionary critique of the vice and corruption that characterized the first three decades after Cuban independence, when Havana built up its reputation as the “Paris of the Caribbean” to tourists. Jumping forward to the end of the twentieth century, Velázquez Medina’s *Última rumba en La Habana* also takes a retrospective glance through his nameless jinetera narrator-protagonist, who seeks refuge from the physical and metaphorical ruins of the 1990s by transforming the city through its imaginary landscapes. Barnet and Velázquez Medina’s texts not only reveals different layers of the national project over time, but also illuminates the urban intimacies between race, space, and prostitution within the longer history of post-revolutionary Cuban fiction.

I focus on this nexus particularly because the literary archive that Quiroga cites tends to draw on the revolutionary state's repressive agendas for citizenship while problematically overlooking comparative literary contexts that have politicized Cuban literary trope of prostitution. By studying Quiroga's palimpsestic city alongside Miguel Barnet's *Canción de Rachel* (1969) and Fernando Velázquez Medina's *Última rumba en La Habana* (2001), I argue that the recurring figure of the *rumbera* in these novels present the public woman of the streets as vital for revealing the state's contemporary agendas for revolutionary respectability in the literary and cultural landscape of Havana.

#### **4.2 Barnet and the prostitution of *la novela-testimonio***

Miguel Barnet Lanza was born in Havana on January 28, 1940 and completed his early education in the United States before studying with Fernando Ortiz at the University of Havana's *Institute of Ethnology and Folklore*.<sup>125</sup> He also worked at the Editorial Nacional under the direction of *Afrocubanismo* novelist, Alejo Carpentier and regularly published poetry as a member of the controversial literary group, *El Puente* [The Bridge] (Smith 96-97). Despite receiving little recognition for his creative works during the early years of the Cuban Revolution, Barnet went on to become one of the most influential writers of the Latin American post-boom era through his experimental, interdisciplinary approach to the testimonial form. Shadowing Ortiz and Carpentier, Barnet combined novelistic elements and ethnographic methods to present original historical interpretations of Cuba's popular traditions and anticolonial movements.<sup>126</sup> His

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<sup>125</sup> On Barnet's biography and political relationship to the Revolution, see Lamrani (2014) and Smith (1997).

<sup>126</sup> Ortiz's *Contrapunto cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* (1940) and Carpentier's "La ciudad de las columnas" (1964) exemplify Mary Louise Pratt (2007) concept of autoethnographic expression precisely because they

literary success began in 1966 with *Biografía de un cimarrón* [Biography of a Runaway Slave], which emerged from a planned monograph on Yoruba funeral rituals and Afro-Cuban life under slavery.<sup>127</sup> In this first *novela-testimonio*, Barnet documents the island's shifts from the Spanish colonial era to its republican and revolutionary periods from the personal recollections of an ex-slave centenarian, Esteban Montejo. As numerous critics have observed, it is also a book that firmly integrates black history within the Cuban nationalist narrative of postcolonial resistance and, in doing so, positions the runaway slave turned independence war fighter as a heroic symbol of Che Guevara's "hombre nuevo" [new man] ideology.<sup>128</sup> In his critical introduction, "Memory and Politics in Writing *Biography of a Runaway*," William Luis makes the plausible connection that *Biografía* can be read as a direct response to Castro's 1961 speech "Palabras a los Intelectuales" [A Word to Intellectuals], as well as his concurrent call for community education through the national literacy campaign: "Castro identified a need for new

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both engage with "the idioms of travel and exploration writing, merging them to varying degrees with indigenous modes" and constitute Cuba's "point of entry into metropolitan lettered culture" (8). Moreover, though Carpentier was not an anthropologist by training, his first novel *Écue-Yamba-Ó* (1933) employs ethnographic storytelling and even borrows documentary evidence from Ortiz's *Los negros brujos* (1906). For a more in-depth discussion on this connection between Ortiz and Carpentier, see Amy Fass Emery's *The Anthropological Imagination in Latin American Literature* (1996).

<sup>127</sup> For detailed summaries of Barnet's background and contributions, see also William Luis' 2016 critical introduction to the *Biografía*, "Memory and Politics in Writing *Biography of a Runaway*" and Vera Kutzinski's "The Cult of Caliban: Collaboration and Revision in Contemporary Caribbean Narrative" (1997).

<sup>128</sup> Among Latin Americanists, there has been a long-time trend towards treating the *Biografía* as a regional expression of subaltern consciousness, on the one hand, and the ambiguous nature of authorship, on the other. See, for example, Roberto González Echevarría's "Biografía de un cimarrón" and the Novel of the Cuban Revolution" (1980); Elzbieta Skłodowska's "Spanish American Testimonial Novel: Some Afterthoughts" (1996); Michael Aronna's "Testimonial Intent and Narrative Dissonance: The Marginal Heroes of Miguel Barnet" (2008); Julia Cuervo Hewitt's "*Cimarrón*: The Runaway Slave as Arch-Text" (2009); and José David Saldívar's "Looking Awry at the War of 1898: Theodore Roosevelt versus Miguel Barnet and Esteban Montejo" (2012). Raphael Dalleo, instead, has argued in *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere* (2011) that "postcolonial studies needs to acknowledge its Caribbean influences by seeing *testimonio* as a precursor, rather than inheritor, of subaltern studies" and "as a way of recuperating, or even manufacturing, a pure, indigenous Caribbean culture free from the dictates of international capitalism" (177).

voices to recount experiences unknown to many members of Cuba's educated population...especially since the revolution was also engaged in rewriting its own history."<sup>129</sup> As Castro stressed the importance of new models of historiography, Barnet, in turn, saw the imaginative possibilities of a literary alternative to traditional archival materials, which he finds "the least trustworthy because they are almost always permeated by an official viewpoint that is neocolonial when not patently colonialist, republican, or influenced by some other outlook" ("Documentary Novel" 29) [son la fuente menos confiable porque...casi todos los fondos están envenenados por una visión oficial—cuando no colonista, republican, es decir, influida por el criterio—neocolonial, están también los periódicos, los epistolarios, y las fuentes vivas] ("Novela testimonio" 147).

While Barnet's involvement in the early political and literary activities of the time may have spurred his interests toward becoming a documentary novelist, he insists that his "incursion into this terrain was purely by chance" [incursión en este terreno fue puramente casual] and took shape through a pressing need to understand Cuba's "strange, mysterious past" [pasado extraño y misterioso]:

I always loved adventure stories, biographies and autobiographies, true stories like the epic of the African warrior, Sundiata; the travels of Emperor Hadrian to Bithynia; the sinking of the Titanic or the Boston Tea Party. And the memoirs of the Cuban slave Manzano or those of Isadora Duncan. (my translation)

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<sup>129</sup> See also Luis' earlier essay, "The Politics of Memory and Miguel Barnet's *The Autobiography of a Run Away Slave*" (1989).



[Siempre amé las novelas de aventuras, las biografías y autobiografías, los relatos verídicos como aquellos que narraban la epopeya de Soundyate, the guerrero africano, los viajes del Emperador Adriano a Bitinia, el hundimiento del Titanic or el Boston Tea Party. Y las memorias del esclavo Manzano o las de Isadora Duncan.] (“La novela testimonio: socio-literature” 132)

While the long list of references that Barnet compiles may appear to be somewhat random—spanning from African epic poems to trans-Atlantic maritime histories to Caribbean slave narratives—it should not be lost on the reader that, among these various “true” stories, Barnet names Cuba’s canonical novel *Cecilia Valdés o la Loma del Angel* [Cecilia Valdes or Angel’s Hill; 1839, 1882] as one of his strongest influences.

According to Barnet, *Cecilia Valdés* exposed him a world much more fascinating than any adventure story from abroad, and he spent years re-tracing the titular *mulata* protagonist’s footsteps through Old Havana: “I spent years navigating Inquisador Street, the Havana dock; I would stop on Angel’s Hill fixed in a puerile desire to reconstruct the last chapter of Villaverde’s novel...It was this quest that led me to ethnographic and folkloric research” (my translation) [Pasé años recorriendo la calle del Inquisador, el Muelle de la Machina; me detuve en la loma del Ángel en un afán pueril de reconstruir el último capítulo de la novela de Villaverde...Esa búsqueda me proyectó hacia las investigaciones etnográficas y folklóricas] (“La novela testimonio: socio-literatura 132-133)]. It is important to call attention to this reference point for several reasons; first, in terms of narrative technique and within an emerging nationalist tradition, *Cecilia Valdés* not only transformed the parameters for Cuban social realism but its metonymic

“evolving history of the nation” has been continuously adapted by novelists, musicians, and filmmakers into twentieth and twenty-first centuries (Guevara 112; Fischer xi);<sup>130</sup> second, feminist literary critics such as Kutzinski and Sommer have pointed out that *Cecilia Valdés* is a foundational novel for its construction of the *mulata* as a symbol of the more intimate (and taboo) aspects of Cuban race and sexual relations. That Barnet garners inspiration from this canonical text for his documentary novels is especially pertinent given that *Canción* directly targets Havana’s fin-de-siècle ambience as a highly racialized and feminized space equally marked by decadence and depravity. In its self-conscious and ironic engagement with the city’s past, Barnet’s second novel offers a cautionary tale about the potential pitfalls of postcolonial progress in a dual effort to insure compliance with official ideology and peel back the rigid strictures on sexuality embedded in new notions of revolutionary respectability.

#### 4.3 “This city traps you”: *Canción de Rachel*

Written one decade after the 1959 Revolution, *Canción* exposes and explores what many critical studies view to be a strategic oversight within *Biografía*’s longer narrative of revolutionary memory: the local corruption and vice that operated in the service of empire during the republican period. Following the established aesthetic constructs of Havana from this era, Barnet enlists the figure of the public woman through the fictionalized narrative of Rachel, an aging *rumbera* who worked as a premier cabaret

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<sup>130</sup> Some of the more notable examples include Martín Morúa Delgado’s 1891 novel *Sofía*, Gonzalo Roig’s 1932 *zarzuela* adaptation, Humberto Solas’s 1981 film *Cecilia*, and Reinaldo Arenas’ 1987 novel, *La loma de angel*; of particular interest for this study is the more contemporary rewritings of *Cecilia Valdés* in post-Special Period literature. For an insightful study of this narrative trajectory, see David Lisenby’s “Frustrated Mulata Aspirations: Reiterations of ‘Cecilia Valdés’ in Post-Soviet Cuba” (2012).

showgirl at the once-booming Alhambra Theater.<sup>131</sup> Despite sharing a generational timeline in Cuban history (late 1800s–mid 1900s) with Esteban Montejo, it is apparent from the outset that the testimonial expression in *Canción* is meant to evoke a different form of readerly engagement. This subtle shift can be detected in the titles of the works and the symbolic disparities that they imbue. Whereas *Biografía de un cimarron* establishes its authority through explicit allusions to autobiographical “truth” and the folkloric “monte,”<sup>132</sup> *Canción de Rachel* accentuates a proliferation of realities through a formal narrative style that draws from both the Cuban lyric theater tradition<sup>133</sup> and a postmodern heteroglossic structure. As Barnet himself elucidates in the prologue to *Canción*, unlike the real life Montejo, Rachel can more accurately be described as a “sui generis witness” [testigo sui géneris] to the “frustrated atmosphere of republican life” [frustración de la vida republicana] in that she is “somewhat of a synthesis of all the show girls who appeared at the defunct Alhambra Theater, a true gauge of the country’s social and political activities” (5) [un poco la síntesis de todas las coristas que conoció el ya desaparecido Teatro Alhambra, verdadero filtro del quehacer social y político del país]

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<sup>131</sup> In addition to the early example of the public woman presented in *Cecilia Valdés*, Miguel de Carrión’s *Las impuras* (1919) is another national novel that draws explicit connections between deviant forms of female sexuality and the city.

<sup>132</sup> Monte literally translates to “mountain” or “forest,” connecting the Barnet’s thematic focus on the writing the history of runaway slave not only aligns with the goals of the Cuban Revolution’s literary campaign and its emphasis on the rural proletariat, but it also reiterates a regionally-specific romanticization of maroon hinterlands (*palenques*) in Cuban and Hispanic Caribbean literature. Through Montejo (a habitational surname meaning ‘little mountain’), Barnet mobilizes the traditional space and subjectivity of Afro-Cuban *palenques* into as a recognizable metonymic space for national sovereignty. For other examples and studies related to allegorical *cimarronaje* and *el monte/palenque* in Cuban and Hispanic Caribbean Literatures, refer to Christabelle Peters’s “One Caribbean Sun” in *Cuban Identity and the Angolan Experience* (2012); Andrea E. Morris’ *Afro-Cuban Identity in Post-revolutionary Novel and Film: Inclusion, Loss, and Cultural Resistance* (2012); Julia Cuervo Hewitt’s *Voices Out of Africa in Twentieth-century Spanish Caribbean Literature* (2009); and Linda S. Howe and Marilyn Miller’s respective essays on Nancy Morejón’s cimarron aesthetics.

<sup>133</sup> This tradition includes *teatro bufo* and the *zarzuela*, which refers to a Cuban musical theater style that was adapted the island’s white *criollo* class in the late eighteenth century and reached its golden era between the 1920s and 1930s.

(3).<sup>134</sup> Barnet thus takes the creative license of testimonial fiction a step further not only by introducing a composite character, but also by characterizing Rachel's reverse coming-of-age story with entirely different set of culturally-specific political connotations. For example, Rachel's Anglicized name and eastern European (possibly Jewish) heritage work actively to displace her from traditional notions of *cubanidad* [Cubanness] derived from African and Spanish influences. Moreover, while Montejo's frankness about his sexual prowess are used to elevate his status as a national figure, Rachel's inferred promiscuity and provocative blend of references to the past can be—and usually has been—read as an overtly ironic celebration of old, regressive political structures.

In his analysis of Cuban literary market aesthetics, Raphael Dalleo reads this particular “stage” of pre-revolutionary Havana and its popular culture of cabaret nightlife as an apt symbol for the increasing commercialization of the Caribbean public sphere. According to Dalleo, Rachel's allegorical identification with this form of cultural prostitution makes her a virtual stand-in for the postcolonial artist and publishing industry under global capitalism (184-185). I agree with Dalleo's assessment that Barnet uses a post-boom aesthetics of prostitution to represent “the social, economic, and cultural forces of postcoloniality that threaten...Cuban independence” (186); however, his suggestion that the novel's public woman character “is clearly meant to evoke the Batista period of the 1950s” misses an important distinction between the early and late republican nationalist discourses of prostitution—especially, when considered alongside the sexually-repressive landscape that characterized the lettered city of Havana at the

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<sup>134</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all renderings of *Canción* in English are borrowed from W.Nick Hills' 1991 translation.

time that Barnet wrote and published *Canción* in the late 1960s. In this chapter I have chosen instead to highlight how the novel invokes the palimpsest paradigm to expose and explore the dominant forms of sexual and cultural identity inscribed onto the urban space. More than metaphor for merely a colonial regime or commodified literary sphere, Barnet's thematic engagement with prostitution in early republican Havana also serves to pinpoint other postcolonial spaces and patterns of exclusion. Consequently, what Barnet calls the testimonial novel's counterpoint technique—defined by a “language of sharp contrasts” [fuertes contrastes con el lenguaje]—is used in *Canción* to establish a series of dialogues between past and present that, according to its author, “should serve as milestones for a new and different future” (“Documentary Novel” 24, 31) [deben servir como hitos para un futuro distinto y nuevo] (“La novela testimonio” 139, 149).

Critical studies of Barnet's work have largely focused on *Canción* as a corrective to the *Biografía's* oversight of republican racism and collusion with US imperialism. Andrea E. Morris, Elzbieta Sklodowska, and Anibel Gonzalez have been among the most prominent scholars to push past the more simplistic reading of the *Canción* as simply prerevolutionary parody by turning our attention respectively toward the novel's thematic and formal engagements with *mulata* performance, Foucault's principles of panoptic and heterotopic space, and new sentimental discourses of disillusionment. Building upon their insights, I argue that Barnet's desire to rewrite history also provides a veiled critique of the broader landscape of sexual repression that surfaced in the mid- to late-1960s. Though Barnet's works and public political stance are consistently characterized as pro-revolutionary, his own marginalized status as a gay writer throughout the early decades of the new Cuban government invites a re-reading of *Canción* within the context of

revolutionary sexual politics. As a cabaret performer, Rachel's association with *rumba* is instructive in this respect.

Before 1959, the “unofficial” national dance, rumba, carried more disreputable connotations with *baja cultura* [low culture] among the Cuban elites—especially, because of its origins in black working-class communities on the rural plantations and slums near the urban ports. It is precisely for these reasons that the Castro government made a concerted effort to promote rumba within revolutionary national culture.

According to Yvonne Daniel, a leading researcher in the genre, this popular Afro-Cuban social dance provided a creative outlet through which to foster racial and class-based solidarities and minimize foreign cultural and economic influences. More than any other Cuban dance tradition, she argues, the Ministry of Culture appealed to the culturally-rehabilitative and unifying possibilities of *rumba* as a way to embrace the island's black diasporic elements while mobilizing the interests of workers and artists (*Rumba* 16).

While these institutional efforts worked to take back control over local cultural forms that had been increasingly commercialized and staged for tourist interests in the Caribbean exotic, they were not without their problems. As Daniel's studies highlight, *rumba* remained a popular medium for reinforcing the underlying *machista* attitude that continued to pervade Cuban society after the Revolution: “In aesthetically rendering a playful dance of flirtation, the *rumba* couple reinforced the seductive *mulata* and the cool *macho* as profound etchings in the Cuban mind” (2011, 100).<sup>135</sup> With this in mind

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<sup>135</sup> This is most apparent in the subgenre performance style of *rumba guaguancó*, which simulates male gestures of pursuit and possession over women through the *vacunao*, a Cuban neologism used to describe man's sexually symbolic capture (literally, “vaccination”) of his female dance partner. Daniel's *Caribbean and Atlantic Diaspora Dance: Igniting Citizenship* (2011) and *Rumba: Dance and Social Change in Contemporary Cuba* (1995) provide historical overviews of *rumba*'s choreographic details and its cultural development as a national dance form.

Barnet's novel seems to wield a critique that cuts both ways—displaying both a public silence around institutionalized racism and sexism before 1959 and an ongoing celebration of heteromasculine bravado in the aftermath of the Revolution.

Despite the Revolution's relatively progressive agenda, it is well known that the new government administration created an aggressively patriarchal and homophobic atmosphere in the aftermath of 1959. Among the most cited events that evidence the widespread efforts to cleanse the capital of its immoral sexual values and practices are the “Night of the Three Ps” [la noche de las tres Pes] in 1961<sup>136</sup> and the installation of the UMAP camps in 1965. According to novelist Guillermo Cabrera Infante, the former, which were a series of police raids in Havana's Colón neighborhood, was “a marxist-morality operation waged against pederasts, prostitutes, and pimps” (my translation) [“una operación marxista-moral, dirigida contra pederastas, prostitutas y proxenatas”] (“Vidas” 10); while the latter refers to forced labor camps in the Cuban countryside that doubled as ideological rehabilitation centers and agricultural production hubs during a period of waning economic and political support.<sup>137</sup> In addition to the heightened policing and confinement of those labeled sexual and political deviants, openly gay and dissident writers such as Reinaldo Arenas, José Lezama Lima, Virgilio Piñera, and Heberto Padilla were censored for their explicit engagement with homoerotic or other controversial

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<sup>136</sup> See Chapter 1 of this dissertation for a discussion of the subsequent reeducation programs that targeted prostitution in Cuba.

<sup>137</sup> The UMAPs, also known as the Military Units to Aid Production [Unidades Militares de Ayuda a la Producción], were set up in the Camagüey province and predominantly targeted men labeled as “antisocial” counterrevolutionaries because of their religious beliefs, artistic practices, or sexual orientation. Gay men in the camps represented the most visible population in human rights responses to Cuban political imprisonment and other forms of political repression that followed the 1959 Revolution. Though details of the UMAPs are scarce and the exact dates of operations are unclear (the camps have been estimated to exist anywhere from 1963 up until 1969), there are several works of testimonial fiction and film that attempt to recreate their social conditions and cultural practices, including Jorge Luis Romeu's *Los unos, los otros...y el seibo* (1971), Reinaldo Arenas' *Arturo, la estrella más brillante* (1984), and Néstor Almendros and Orlando Jiménez Leal's documentary *Conducta Impropria* (1984).

themes, and others such as Severo Sarduy defected to Europe.<sup>138</sup> In his summary of these and other deployments of institutionalized homophobia between 1965-1970, Emilio Bejel explains that strong association between prostitution and homosexuality—with their attendant links to crime, disease, gender inversion, and urban vice—became apart of the new nationalist discourse against the “distortions of capitalism” that needed to be eradicated from the revolutionary landscape (93-100).

Despite the now widespread recognition of his contributions to the “revolutionary book,” Barnet himself was among the emerging and established authors targeted for censorship during the first decade of Castro’s leadership. In her summary of Barnet’s ambiguous relationship to the state, Linda Howe explains that close affiliations with the literary group, *El Puente* and dissident writers like Arenas may have influenced Barnet’s relative absence from public literary existence between 1968 and 1978. Moreover, while black empowerment became a central tenet of revolutionary ideology domestically and internationally, this period was also characterized by “inclusionary discrimination,” which may make clear why some officials saw Barnet’s writing on Afro-Cuban issues as potentially divisive to the development of a cohesive nationalist project (Sawyer 19; Howe 150). Interestingly, Barnet has never expressed direct opposition to, or criticism of, the revolution, and continues to publicly express staunch support of the island’s socialist economic, political, and cultural institutions—even going so far as to suggest that his celibacy is the result of being “married to Cuba” (Lamrani “Conversation”). Yet, in the

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<sup>138</sup> The Padilla Affair [el caso Padilla] was especially emblematic of the increasing intolerance by official cultural policy in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Padilla was placed under house arrest and later imprisoned for his collection of poems, *Fuera del Juego* [Out of the Game], which was awarded and later disqualified from the prestigious Julian de Casal national literary prize in 1968. See Lourdes Casal’s renowned study *El Caso Padilla: Literatura y Revolución en Cuba* (1971) and Lillian Guerra’s more recent work, *Visions of Power* (2012) for summaries of this event’s impact on Cuban literary and artistic production.



context of Barnet's early writing, it is possible to the author's own sense of unease towards the new mandates for heteronormative nationalism. This internal schism is especially evident in key passages from the *Biografía* where Barnet juxtaposes Montejo's descriptions of pre-Castro Havana as a kind of promiscuous carnival scene against the protagonist's more open-minded discussion of homosexuality in the rural slave barracks. Interestingly, there has been a lack of critical interest in Barnet's allusions towards constructing a more inclusive terrain of revolutionary sexual citizenship in his landmark text—let alone those found in its more stylistically innovative successor.<sup>139</sup> For this reason, I suggest that *Canción*'s imaginative return to the Havana of the early republic period reflects much more than a simple indictment of the past from the “official” perspective of revolutionary nationalism.

While it might be tempting and even possible to read the figure of Rachel and her memories of the decadent city as tropes for the vice and corruption that permeated pre-revolutionary Cuba across racial and gendered lines, I would like to emphasize the distinction between the early- and late-republican nationalist discourses of prostitution. First, it is important to consider why Barnet might have chosen to set this testimonial novel at the turn of the century, as opposed to the decades immediately before the Revolution (as is the case for other texts from post-independence period explored in this dissertation). Since Havana under Batista's reign became known euphemistically as “the brothel of the Caribbean” and the “Latin Las Vegas” for North American tourists, the

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<sup>139</sup> Vera Kutzinski has been among the most vocal to point out the relative scholarly silence in addressing the homoerotic subtext of Barnet's fictional work. In her essay “The Cult of Caliban,” Kutzinski argues that a focus on the larger narrative of racially-inclusive nationalist framework in *Biografía* has elided the ways in which the novel uses a queer discourse of “rhetorical miscegenation” that both exposes and critiques the tenets of revolutionary ideology: “For what Barnet and Montejo unequally produce between them is also a textual manifestation of *mestizaje* that seeks to preempt the question of authorship and with it questions of racial, class, and sexual differences, not to mention the sociopolitical hierarchies constructed on the basis of those differences” (295).

first Cuban republic (1902-1933) embraced a social reform attitude towards prostitution as part of an effort to move away from US patterns of intervention and secure the island's international standing among progressive modern nations. In her study, *Prostitution, Modernity, and the Making of the Cuban Republic, 1840-1920* (2013), Tiffany A. Sippial illuminates that, though still largely under state surveillance during this time, prostitution was a matter of national pride in newly independent Cuba. According to Sippial, the official policy move towards decriminalization went hand in hand with advancing decolonization while under US intervention since “the regulatory system became the ultimate anachronistic vestige of colonial corruption and immorality” (149). As such, she argues, republican authorities understood the deregulation of prostitution would bring a modernizing force to bear upon the island's post-independence development.<sup>140</sup> As both Sippial's analysis and *Canción* make clear, this national conversation about women's sexual labor was also linked to the restructuring of the urban landscape—especially, in relation to the boundaries of the city's original colonial grid and its prostitution tolerance zones.

Although *Canción* expresses an obvious disdain for broader issues of state repression and foreign intervention during the republican era, it also weaves together oral histories and archival documents in a way that expresses a nostalgic longing for the more liberated sense of Cuban sexuality and artistic license that epitomized the times. Rachel's specific location in the San Isidro quarter highlights the ways in which prostitution serves as the novel's epistemological foundation, even if the narrator denies her well-known reputation as a *mujer pública*. For instance, Barnet's decision to include Calle San

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<sup>140</sup> Sippial alludes to the punitive measures of anti-prostitution reform taken by the US across the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as the social purity campaigns at home and the colonial health and social welfare policies established in Puerto Rico.

Isidro's most infamous icon of the era, Alberto Yarini, (1882-1910), discursively reformulates the prostituted nation paradigm that critics are quick to invoke in their readings of the novel. In the Yarini scene, Rachel is careful to remind us that, although branded the pimp of the city's red-light district, this Cuban-born man about town "was a horse of different color" [fue harina de otro costal] compared to the pimps from France or Spain "because he was a refined young man, elegant, from a good family. Not a savage" (35) [porque fue un muchacho fino, elegante y muy buena familia. No un apache] (37). As a gentleman pimp and local hero, Yarini is indicative of both a civility and fervor that, according to Rachel, has been lost to Cuban citizens in the 1960s. To further this sentiment, she recounts:

I've heard many comments about him. Conceited people who talk just to talk. A young person's life in those years wasn't like it is today. There was [a] different way of doings. Today what you call a pimp is a sad imbecile, with no place to hang his hat, with no authority. . . . That's due to the lack of real news...You start to hear people say the silliest things and it makes you laugh...All of that is a product of the Cuban imagination. (35-36)

[Yo he oído muchos comentarios sobre él; gente fatua que habla por hablar. La vida de un joven de aquellos años no era como hoy. Había otro proceder. Hoy lo que se llama un chulo es un triste imbecil, sin percha, sin autoridad. . . . Eso es debido a las pocas noticias reales...Uno se pone a oír las tonterías de la gente y le da risa...Todo eso es product de la imaginación del cubano.] (38-39)

While Rachel downplays Yarini's "underhanded dealings" in order to substantiate her fond memories of San Isidro, the male-voiced intertext that accompanies this scene does more to validate the narrator's oral history than any other masculine narrations presented in the novel. This is where, I believe, *Canción* demands a rereading in terms of its frequent references and allusions to prostitution. Despite being vilified in post-revolutionary collective memory, Yarini's mythic stature was well established in the Cuban popular imagination by the time Barnet published *Canción*. Carlos Felipe's play *Réquiem por Yarini* [Requiem for Yarini; 1960]<sup>141</sup> recreates this familiar story through the transcultural lens of classical Greek drama and Afro-Cuban *santería*, which also had strong communal influence in the mixed-ethnic enclaves of San Isidro. In reframing Yarini's murder in 1910 as a tragic love story, Felipe's play makes an effort to destigmatize pimping and prostitution by mapping its sacred social order within the cordoned-off tolerance zone. The inversion of respectable nationalism in *Réquiem* has been discussed by Mayra Beers in her essay, "Crime and Culture during the Second Cuban Republic" (2003). She writes that Felipe's play builds on an existing national ethos surrounding Yarini in which San Isidro's tolerance zone translated into a symbolic refuge from the general political disorder and scandals that epitomized the early 1900s: "It is these, and not prostitution, that are regarded as the truly demoralizing forces of Cuban society...where the only honor and order are to be found among the pimps and prostitutes" (118).<sup>142</sup> As an explicit "antitype" to the Cuban neocolonial nation-state, to borrow Beers' term, Yarini invokes a logic of "proper" postcolonial citizenship that

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<sup>141</sup> Felipe's play also serves as an embedded story in Orlando Rojas' 1989 film *Papeles Secundarios* [Secondary Roles].

<sup>142</sup> In addition to the Beers' works (2003 and 2011), see Sippial (2013) and Cluster and Hernández (2003) for biographical and historical studies related to Yarini.

hinges on prostitution's sexual and spatial difference, which makes the cultural lore of San Isidro an appealing place for Barnet's multilayered narrative.

Interestingly, Barnet draws upon this "other" type of space by tracing Rachel's origins back to San Isidro, suggesting a similar thematic concern with the neighborhood's metaphorical tolerance zone. I emphasize this aspect of the novel because most studies tend to focus on Rachel's visible whiteness to problematize her blackface performance of the *mulata rumbera* and sense of cultural distance from Havana's slums; but, I would argue, that Rachel's stock character of the *mulata* is perhaps one of the more unremarkable features of the text—especially, considering how commonplace both the state *mulata* and Afro-Cuban cultural appropriations were at this time. My intention is not to completely dismiss racial and gendered interventions embedded in this line of analysis, but rather to extend the broader questions it raises about "the dynamic of silencing the Other" that informs Barnet's vision of the decadent city.<sup>143</sup> Rather than conflating Rachel's whiteness wholly with republican racism, we need to think carefully about why Barnet chose to another layer to this urban palimpsest: his protagonist not only represents Old Havana's well-established prostitution zone but also its contiguous Jewish quarters. For example, early in the novel, Rachel makes it clear to the reader that she represents her particular brand of Cubanness that is very much outside the standard ethnic and racial markers of the island. With this subtle detail in mind, how Rachel's discourse of displacement change the ways in which we read the *rumbera* and her performative placement in Barnet's text?

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<sup>143</sup> Andrea E. Morris' works (2003 and 2012) are among the most comprehensive assessments of *Cancion*'s spatial dynamics of race and gender in terms of Barnet's own interest in Afro-Cuban culture. In the latter study, entitled "Performing the *Mulata Rumbera*," she writes: "While the dynamic of silencing the other is implicitly critiqued through Rachel's renditions of the *mulata*, a character type that displaces and denies the importance of real Afro-Cubans' identities" (67).

As a white *criolla* of Eastern European descent, Barnet's protagonist never openly discloses that she is of Jewish ancestry; however, the novel provides us with numerous verbal and narrative cues, such as the Hebrew roots of her name, her stereotypical Jewish features<sup>144</sup>, and the exilic consciousness she has gained not only from her ghettoized existence in San Isidro but through her extended Hungarian and German families who she describes as "globe trotters" and "[g]ypsies by nature...sprinkled all over the world" (30) ["gitanos por naturaleza...Les gusta andar trotando...que tuvo regados por el mundo"] (30). If we extend the metaphorical tolerance zone to explore the broader racial landscape of *Canción*, it becomes possible to locate an urban intimacy between black and Jewish place-making in Old Havana.<sup>145</sup> Rachel's adoption of the *rumbera-mulata* identity, then, can be read not just as mocking caricature but the extent to which Cuban prostitution manifested as a form of both racial and sexual deviance.<sup>146</sup> According to Margalit Bejarano (1991), a leading scholar of Cuban Jewish history, restrictive US immigration policies of the early twentieth century steered many Ashkenazi Jews to Havana, the majority of whom belonged to the working class. Unlike the more assimilated Sephardic population on the island, these communities encountered more

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<sup>144</sup> As narrated by one of Barnet's fictional male informants, Rachel not only looks "Jewish" but she also has an odd relationship with the Catholic church: "her face wasn't marvelous: little Jewish parrot beak of a nose and jumpy eyes, quite expressive, black, long eyebrows. Jet black hair and. . . well, it's said that she used to go to church...to confess her sins...and that she had Ofelia talk as if she were her" (65) [Bueno, la cara no era una maravilla: nariz de cotorrita judía y ojos saltones, negros y de cejas largas. De pelo negro como el azabache y...Dice, bueno, dicen, que iba a la iglesia, al confesionario a confesar sus peccados...y que ponía a Ofelia a hablar como si fuera ella](71).

<sup>145</sup> In addition to San Isidro, some of the other areas settled by Jews in Old Havana include the barrios of Jesús María, Picota, Inquisidor, and Paula Streets, all of which were located near the waterfront. See Garland (2014); Levine in Ruggiero (2010); and Bejarano (2002).

<sup>146</sup> According to Sippial, despite the strong association working women in prostitution as racial and class minorities, the demographics of most registered prostitutes in turn-of-the century Havana was much more complex, making the term a "highly flexible signifier for many different kinds of women engaged in many different kinds of labor" (3).

barriers to cultural integration given the unfamiliar climate, language, and lack of employment opportunities due to the economic crisis of the early 1920s (Berjano 121-124). This might help explain why Rachel is constantly reassuring us that, despite learning how to play many different Cuban types and traveling the world over, she does, indeed, occupy a “native sense” of place (11). Thus, when Rachel speaks of studying the way black women talk, move, and dance in the tenements, she is also suggesting that her performance of the iconic *mulata* figure stems from her own desire to inhabit a recognizable space of Cuban cultural identity. It is for this reason that, rather than emphasize her own diasporic sense of displacement, Rachel strategically imagines Havana, in particular, and the island, more broadly, as a more tolerant contact zone of postcolonial relations:

Things don't happen here like in other places where loads of people are all born the same, behave the same, and live and die anonymously...I've seen other countries, all very beautiful, very modern and very courteous, with very cordial people, but with the warmth of my homeland, not one. (9-10)  
[Aquí no pasa como en otros países que nacen gentes por toneladas y todos son iguales, se comportan igual, y viven y mueren en el anonimato...He visto otros países muy bellos, muy modernos, muy gentiles; pueblos de gran *cordialidad*, pero como el *calor* de mi patria, nada.] (5-6, my emphasis)

Here it is important Barnett's use of the noun “calor” (literally, the feeling of heat) to emphasize Cuba's welcoming and serene “nature” rather than the Spanish cognates “amabilidad” or “cordialidad,” suggesting that Rachel prefers her tropical modernity to

the colder physical and social climates that she is subjected to abroad. More than this, by employing a localized framework of cross-cultural difference, Barnet's narrator surreptitiously voices the concerns of the pro-revolutionary gay writer driven into internal exile. Thus, rather than naturalize the political rhetoric of an imagined sameness, *Canción* uses the very trope of exoticism to bring forth a queer critique to bear on the norms of sameness in revolutionary respectability. In remapping the whole island through the diverse and democratic character of creole citizenship, *Canción* expands the zone of tolerance trope into a new postcolonial formation whereby transcultural interactions can facilitate the dismantling of regulated social boundaries.

Within the space of *Canción*'s dramatic imaginary, it is also important to keep in mind that the text self-consciously adopts the post-independence experimental genres of the Cuban musical theater as a central form and forum through which to redeem the political value of artistic expression in the decade following the Revolution. Drawing inspiration from comic and vernacular theatrical traditions, *Canción* invokes the Cuban *bufa* form of lyric drama through Rachel's principal roles at Havana's Teatro Alhambra.<sup>147</sup> Like San Isidro's tolerance zone, the theater provides Rachel refuge from her outsider position in the city. Unlike her initial stints at "cheap" theaters such as the Tivoli, Rachel's extended residency at the Alhambra is the means by which Barnet develops a post-revolutionary counternarrative to Cuba's political past and present. Far from empty or simply exaggerated exoticism, the performative elements of the *rumbera* must be recognized as genre-specific tools that *Canción* utilizes to establish the narrator's subjectivity. In fact, the integration of political satire and parody were key to the

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<sup>147</sup> The theater was originally located at the intersection of Virtudes and Consulado in Old Havana (the nearby Gran Teatro on Pasado del Prado is the most iconic theater building in the area today).



development of the *bufo* drama, and Barnet seems to appreciate that the figure of the *mulata*—who represents the most recognizable local type of the tradition—employs a self-reflexive mode of Cuban humor as a strategy for political commentary. As scholars of this golden-age for popular musical theater have noted, this rhetorical and stylistic novelty was so strongly associated with the Alhambra during the first three decades of the twentieth century that it became known as *genero alhambresco* [Alhambra style]. While the theater originally presented Spanish *zarzuelas* [operettas] when it opened in 1890, it soon after switched its artistic mission to developing a new direction for lyric theater on the island.<sup>148</sup>

The majority of scholarship describes the Alhambra-style *bufo* in terms of its vaudeville and burlesque repertoire, where caricatures of the *mulata*, along with the *negrito* [mischievous black man] and the *gallego* [Spaniard], were employed as post-independence symbols of national identity against colonial and imperial hegemony. In his study on the historical development of Cuban *zarzuela*, Henry MacCarthy describes the ways in which the Alhambra functioned as a radical revisionist space via its uses of parody. For instance, the parodies not only frequently inverted the racial and gendered characters that populated the canonical works of American and Spanish playwrights, but they also would, at times, deride the neocolonial governments for their complicity with the expansionist agenda of the US. (73). Rachel embraces these improvisational and modification practices of the theater, admitting to the reader that she and the other actresses at the Alhambra were responsible for transforming mediocre scripts into top quality works: “we made the plays, we enriched them. We were the yeast and thanks to

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<sup>148</sup> For further details related to Cuban *teatro bufó* and its antecedent forms, refer to Thomas (2009); MacCarthy (2007); Luis (2001); Rivero (2005); and Lightfoot (2001).

us the authors triumphed” (83) [hacíamos las obras, las enriquecíamos. Nosotros éramos la levadura y gracias a eso triunfaron los autores] (92). In addition to improvisational wit and humor, Barnet’s novel also deliberately lifts material from the melodramatic narrative of the tragic *mulata* to steer the plot of Rachel’s own story. This becomes especially evident in the scenes where Rachel evokes a mix of the comic and the tragic within the romance tradition. For instance, both her unrequited love for the well-to-do Eusebio, which she describes a Greek tragedy, and the confusing affairs she enters with various other men appear remarkably similar to the stage adaptations of *mulata* narrative trope—recalling Barnet’s nostalgic longing for the city of Cecilia Valdés; in this context, parody is used to evoke not so much the blatant racism implied within Havana’s *bufo* minstrel shows but to highlight the liberating potential of the theater’s artistic license and creative adaptation as part of its performative restaging of national politics.

Through Barnet’s formal use of self-conscious parody and the burlesque aesthetic, *Canción* exemplifies what Antonio Benítez Rojo has described as the polyrhythmic performance structure of the Caribbean novel. According to Benítez Rojo, since Caribbean literature is also doubly spectacular it would be “an error to take the Caribbean text as just the rhythmic, flowery gesture of a rumba dancer” (220) [Sería un error tomar el texto caribeño sólo como el gesto rítmico y florido de una rumbera] (262). He suggests that this double performance always contains another, less visible representation that returns toward the Caribbean self, one that intends to simultaneously mythify and surpass its “Calibanesque” marginality: “an Otherness deriving from the violence of conquest, colonization...occupation, dependence, misery, prostitution, and even tourism” (210) [su Otredad calibanesca, Otredad derivada de la violencia de la conquista, la colonización,

la esclavitud, la piratería, la guerra lucrativa, la ocupación, la dependencia, la humillación, la miseria, la prostitución e incluso el turismo] (25). When read in terms of this polyrhythmic paradigm, the narcissism and lofty views of the past can be seen as both revealing the less glamorous aspects of the decadent city and providing a projecting a self-reflexive gaze back onto its post-revolutionary phase. This multidirectional mirroring literalizes the text's embedded concepts of reflection and contemplation through Rachel's visual encounters with mirror. As we learn later on, Rachel buys a standing mirror—notably, one that resembles a Greek design in form—not only to practice “all the gestures and expressions an entertainer ought to know” but also to ensure that she can see herself at all times (63) [todos los gestos y las expresiones que debe conocer una artista] (68). More than a reproduction of Rachel's vanity, the mirror functions as a medium for the theater's mimetic activities as well as a less overt form of surveillance—suggesting the ways in which imaginative role-playing can prompt self-consciousness through the reflected Other.<sup>149</sup>

In *Canción*, the social and physical spaces of the Alhambra theater also appear to be significant to the narrative subtext. Perhaps most importantly for Barnet's purposes, the Alhambra was considered an institutional anomaly in the sense that it functioned exclusively as a male homosocial space. *Canción* illuminates this particular gendering of the theater's viewing public through the various male informants who supplement Rachel's narrative. More than this, it specifically invokes a gay sensibility through Rachel's memories of Adolfo, her “right hand man” (76) [mano derecha] (82). Even though Adolfo “knew all the tactics and the inner workings of the theater world” he is

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<sup>149</sup> In analyzing *Canción* within the Latin American revival of sentimental fiction, Aníbal González (2010) argues that, while the visual trope of the mirror has been linked to an imitation of reality since Classical antiquity, the recurrent use of the metaphor in Barnet's novel signifies its structural opposition to realism.

essentially banned from practicing his craft because “the boy had his ‘little air of independence’ and that doesn’t look good” (44-45) [conocía todas las tácticas y los trasfondos del mundo artístico. . . . tenía su ‘aircito de independencia y eso se veía mal] (47-28). As an openly gay artist, Adolfo acts as a foil to Rachel in regard to the novel’s concerns with those on the margins of the respectable state. While Rachel is able to make a living by performing her sexual deviance to the Alhambra’s male public, Adolfo’s professionally displaced status demonstrates the extent to which the theater also serves a microcosm of the state. Despite helping Rachel master the gendered scripts of *rumbera* sexuality, Adolfo is perceived by the theater’s “decent” men to be a stain on her reputation and, incidentally, a threat to the existing patriarchal order of the theater. For this reason, according to Rachel, he refused to accompany her to auditions “so they wouldn’t think [she] went around with his kind” (45) [para que no pensaran que yo andaba con ese elemento] (48). Barnett takes the theater’s attempt to erase gay identity a step further by ultimately killing off the gay character.<sup>150</sup> Within the allegorical mode of the novel, the death of Adolfo is closely linked to the self-conscious metaphor of the mirror image: just before his assassination, Rachel accidentally knocks over her antique Greek mirror and it breaks into pieces (85). Within the frame of reference to popular superstition, this scene returns us to Rachel’s opening comments about the strange and tragic things that propel Cuba’s mysterious destiny at the beginning of the novel. Read in this way, Adolfo’s death represents a kind of symbolic rupture—one that quite clearly serves to shatter the dominant discourses of the postcolonial nation as a unified whole.

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<sup>150</sup> Interestingly, Barnett’s cousin, Enrique Pineda Barnett, picks up on this detail in his 1989 film adaptation of novel, *La bella de Alhambra*. For analysis of the film’s queer spaces of representation, see Juana Suárez’s essay in the 1999 collection *Chicano/Latino Homoerotic Identities*.

Significantly, the novel concludes with an amplified depiction of these ghostly fragments of the past, expressed in the physical ruins of the old theater. According to Rachel, shortly before the building collapsed in 1935, the Alhambra began to show other signs of decay:

[T]he Alhambra was already being invaded by termites. Between the Machado regime and the nudity, the theater was crumbling away. The plays had lost their humor. The government imposed a controlled theater—a gag in the mouth—something that didn't fit there. The doors were being eaten away, the curtains were falling down rotted, plagues of roaches and rats entered the dressing rooms and, to finish killing it off, the marquee came down bringing with it a piece of the facade. (122)

[Y ya Alhambra estaba invalido de comején. Entre el machadato y los encuerismos, el teatro se fue desmoronando. Las obras habían perdido su gracia. El gobierno imponía un teatro amaestrado – la mordaza en la boca – cosa que allí no cabía. Las puertas se fueron carcomiendo, los telones se caían podridos, a los camerinos les entraban plagas de cucarachas y ratones y, para acabar de rematar, la marquesina se vino abajo llevándose un trozo de la fachada.] (138)

In this penultimate scene of the novel, Rachel's recollective gaze over the ruins of the Alhambra registers both nostalgic and critical modes of memory. While mourning the literal collapse of the theater, Barnet's narrator figuratively collapses the distinction between the various parasitic and political vermin that led to its demise. It is here that the public woman's commonly misunderstood role as a cipher for republican tyranny most

clearly breaks down. The conflation of the theater's infestation by rodents and roaches with its ideological reconstruction under the US-backed Machado regime emphasizes the rift between the artist and the post-independence state. In this way, *Canción* provides a powerful example of what Ann Stoler has described as the ongoing effects of imperial ruination. In examining the pervasive language of ruins and debris in Caribbean writing, Stoler (2008) finds that the trope offers not so much a critical view of the colonial past but a productive means to reexamine "the material refuse of imperial projects" and "the uneven pace with which people can extricate themselves from the colonial order of things" (193).<sup>151</sup> With this in mind, the ruins of the Alhambra signal not just the remnants of republican repression and decadence but also an urban intimacy between past and present structures of domination. Through the performative space of Havana's ruins, the *rumbera* invites a critical stance toward authoritarian cultural policies that attempt to impose limitations on artistic—and more implicitly sexual—expression. While Barnet's novel never directly traces this development to the revolutionary present, Velázquez Medina's *Última rumba en La Habana* reconfigures the temporal map of the palimpsestic city to address more contemporary problems of censorship and citizenship in the postrevolutionary era.

#### 4.4 Velázquez Medina and *realismo sucio*

To better understand how Fernando Velázquez Medina's *Última rumba en La Habana* reimagines the recurring and interconnected tropes of the *rumbera* and Havana's

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<sup>151</sup> A revised version of this essay appears in the 2013 anthology, *Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination* in which Stoler's critical framework spans "rot that remains" in Derek Walcott's poem, "Ruins of a Great House" (1962); the "tinge of decay" that Franz Fanon discusses in *Wretched of the Earth* (1961); Jamaica's "ruinated" landscapes popularized by Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987); and the overgrown ruins of Haiti's historic citadel described in Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past* (1995). While literary representations of Havana's ruins have proliferated since the 1960s, the importance of the trope to Cuban literary and intellectual traditions is absent from Stoler's discussion.

*ruins*, it is necessary to place his novel in conversation within a broader range of late twentieth century post-revolutionary fiction. Beginning in the early 1990s, Cuban fiction underwent major narrative and stylistic innovations to represent the increasingly political disenchantment and economic difficulties that characterized the island's post-Soviet Special Period. As Anke Birkenmaier and Esther Whitfield (2011) have explained, the degraded images of the urban landscape presented in the works of local and diasporic writers such as Zoé Valdes, Pedro Juan Gutiérrez, Antonio José Ponte, and Abilio Estévez, among others, overlay the more elevated representations of Havana presented by canonical authors of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, as Whitfield (2008) has clarified elsewhere, the grouping of such diverse literary output under the common moniker of "Special Period" fiction is not to obscure or confuse their distinctive contributions, but rather highlight their "broader engagement with the troublesome commodifications of Cuban identity, with the tourist and publishing industries' roles in the paradoxical transformation of the Cuban Revolution into commercial capital...It addresses the fascinations, nostalgias, and hopes that these images incite and how they translate into markets for literature" (2-3). *Última rumba* is representative of Special Period writing that figures these "troublesome commodifications" via the resurgence and widespread practices of prostitution in Havana during this time. This literary *jineterismo* and its associated notions of destitution spans a variety of genre fiction but is most recognizable (and successfully marketed) to Cuba's international readership in its more sordid and sexually-overt strain of "dirty realism," or *realismo sucio*.<sup>152</sup> Birkenmaier (2006) further

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<sup>152</sup> In *Cuban Currency: The Dollar and Special Period Fiction* (2008), Whitfield includes a brief summary of foreign publishing markets interests and demands for a socialist-realist variety of Cuban literature that "is less interested in Cuban' fictions literary merits than in the lived experiences of its writers" and in writing "that is, or read as, testimonial" (89). She argues that, consequently, literary critics have looked

reveals that, in this trajectory of regionalist writing, “dirty” not only figures in the physically and morally destitute conditions of the urban environment but it also signifies “a counteraesthetic that incorporates a vision of history that is unofficial or unheard of, ‘dirty’ in its focus on the illicit and on underground cultures” (491). In this way, the genre “defiantly individualistic bearing act of bearing witness” panders to foreign publishing demands for a “socialist-realist” fiction while distancing itself ideologically from the moral and political implications of the *novela testimonio* canon (Whitfield 2008, 100).

Although the dirty realist city presented in *Última rumba* has not gained the kind of scholarly attention allotted to that of Valdés and Gutiérrez, it is hardly lesser known: the novel was a finalist for the Mario Lacruz Prize for best first novel; has been published and reprinted in the US and Spain; and was also translated into Italian. Not surprisingly, much of its critical acclaim hails from writers and scholars in the Latin American and Cuban exile blogospheres.<sup>153</sup> Published at the millennial turn, *Última rumba* echoes the “sex, filth, and deadpan realism” popularized by earlier Special Period writers (Quiroga 138); however, it does so from a considerably different perspective. Velázquez Medina draws on his training as a journalist and arts critic to capture a Cuban cultural geography

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toward the explicit depiction of *jineterismo* in these works as “merely a response to demand” rather than a “deployment of a cross-cultural sexual and economic relationship” that “mounts a challenge to the special period and the demands in brought to fiction. Through a study 1990s short fiction, she evidences how the figure of the *jinetera* provide different conceptions of the nation vis-à-vis the foreign. Other examples of the *jineterismo* theme that are not covered in Whitfield’s book or in this dissertation can be found in Leonard Pedura’s *Pasado Perfecto* [Past Perfect] (1991); Daina Chaviano’s *El hombre, la hembra y el hambre* [Man, Woman, and Hungar] (1998); Karla Suárez’s “Anniversario” (1999); Abilio Estéves’ *Los palacios distantes* [Distant Palaces] (2002); Ena Lucía Portela’s *Cien botellas en una pared* [One Hundred Bottles] (2002); and Marilyn Bobes’ *Fiebre de invierno* [Winter Fever] (2005).

<sup>153</sup> For an index related to the novel’s critical reception, see Velázquez Medina’s blog page on Creatividad Nacional: <<http://www.creatividadinternacional.net/profile/FernandoVelazquezMedina>> Accessed August 2016.



that is less traversed by writers and readers of the dirty realist city.<sup>154</sup> Set amid the mass boat exodus in the summer of 1994, *Última rumba* peels back the layers of the recent past to tap into a sector of the city that often goes unnoticed: the extramural barrio of Jesús María, a key place of Afro-Cuban cultural and political significance within Old Havana's working class. In terms of its historical backdrop, the text also offers one of the few literary representations of the *Maleconazo* uprising, when hundreds spontaneously protested against Special Period policies along the Havana seawall in the summer of 1994. Like *Canción*, Velázquez Medina's novel is largely based on the author's own experiences of state censorship and policing and it similarly retools these experiences through the figure of the *rumbera/jinetera* as a repeating island sign for the Cuban (male) writer relegated to the social margins. But, whereas Barnet draws upon the distant republican past to dissociate himself from Castro's political crackdown on respectable nationalism, Velázquez Medina effectively uses his geopolitical distance in exile to quite literally write himself into his text. In a key scene, his narrator-protagonist bumps into the author at a nearby café while wandering the "dangerous streets of Mantilla" [me llevó a deambular por las peligrosas calles de Mantilla] (85). The narrator is not just a cipher for the persecuted writer-citizen, but—in this case—she is represented as deeply involved in Havana's underground literary community and its commitment to protecting the intellectual freedoms of the post-revolutionary lettered city. After meeting the fictional persona of Velázquez Medina, the narrator discovers that the author has left a copy of his article, *Réquiem por el Caimán* [Réquiem for the 'Bearded Alligator'] in her purse, which she had read many years in a foreign newspaper. Seemingly a minute detail, the emphasis

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<sup>154</sup> During his time in Havana, he also wrote for various literary journals and magazines, including *El Caiman Barbudo*, *Revolution and Culture*, *Bohemia*, *Letras Cubanas* and *Juventud Rebelde*. In exile, he continued his journalism work as an editor for the Spanish-language newspaper, *Hoy Nueva York*.

on foreign publication is significant here. Founded in 1966, *Caimán Barbudo* is a state-sponsored literary magazine that provided a significant platform for intellectual debate and literary criticism during the first decade of the Revolution; however, during the onset of economic scarcity and rising political tensions that characterized the Special Period, it ceased production—leading many writers to seek out literary (if not political) asylum abroad (Balderston and Gonzalez 249). By inserting this article into a subsequent chapter, the author provides us an opportunity to glean the wider impact of the Special Period on the textual and material migrations of Cuban literature during this time.<sup>155</sup> As we quickly learn, the literary magazine’s dissolution in the 1990s was the result of heightened conditions of exile and *insilio* [inner exile].<sup>156</sup> According to the article, the group’s disintegration meant that once-dissident writers quickly turned into staunch revolutionaries, while supposed diplomats leveraged their privileged status for discreet migration out of the country: “Unfortunately not only did the ‘bad’ citizens turn ‘good,’ but the ‘good’ also turned ‘bad’” [Lamentablemente no sólo los malos se pasaron a los

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<sup>155</sup> Ultimately, his involvement with the human rights group, Criterio Alternativo [Alternative Criterion] and its reform demands and indictments against the Castro government led to Velázquez Medina’s increased condemnation by the Castro government. Headed by the poet María Elena Cruz Varela, Criterio Alternativo published a manifesto in 1991 entitled, “Declaración de los intelectuales cubanos” [Declaration of Cuban Intellectuals] also known as “La Carta de los Diez” [The Letter of Ten]. Along with Varela, Velázquez and several others were arrested on charges of “defamation” and “enemy propaganda.” He served a two-year prison sentence for his affiliation with group before immigrating to the US in 1995. See Amir Valle’s *Gagged: Censorship in Cuba* (1999) and Judy Maloof’s *Voices of Resistance: Testimonies of Cuban and Chilean Women* (2015). Additional information related to the group’s protest and arrest is also available online via Amnesty International, PEN International, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

<sup>156</sup> In her introduction to Reina María Rodríguez’s *Other Letters to Milena/Otras cartas a Milena* (2014) provides the following definition of *insilio* as it has emerged in relationship to post-revolutionary Cuban literary production: “In the late twentieth century, a preliminary variation on imagery of exile appeared in Cuba: an inversion of exile that is applied to experiences of life on the island itself. *Insilio*, or the exile within, is a general term that has been used in criticism about works from Cuba and other nations in Latin America where exile has been a significant phenomenon. The physical imprisonment of gay writer Reinaldo Arenas (1943-1990), for example, accompanied his social and political castigation while he was living in Cuba...*Insilio* can also refer to works expressing a sort of social death in life, an interior entrapment that need not involve the literal imprisonment suffered by Arenas” (xiii).

Buenos, sino también a la inversa] (95). Juxtaposing the various conditions of exile experienced by predominantly male writers at home and abroad to that of the *jinetera*, this scene also prompts us to consider the racial and gendered politics of Cuban cultural migrancy that characterized the 1990s; thus, highlighting the novel's co-constitutive polemic against the policing of dissident textual and sexual forms of citizenship.

With this in mind, my rationale for selecting *Última rumba* alongside Barnet's *Canción* goes beyond the more obvious textual and spatial poetics of the rumba that these texts share. Instead, I argue that despite their disparate political and geographical affiliations with the island, both Barnet and Velázquez Medina (re)write the palimpsestic city in order to imaginatively distance their writings from heightened nationalist discourses of revolutionary respectability that overwrites or underwrites other stories of citizenship. With this in mind, *Última rumba*, too, can be read like a swan song of sorts—but one that speaks more poignantly not only to the plight of Afro-Cuban *jineteras* in Post-Soviet Cuba but also to that of dissident and exiled writers during this heightened period of political and economic crisis. Moreover, unlike the standard narratives of the *jinetera* that appears across most Special Period fiction (the majority of which, like their authors, present as white), *Última rumba* re-animates the *mulata*'s centrality to Cuban fiction without reducing the figure to familiar forms of textual objectification and cultural consumption.<sup>157</sup> Rather than an emptied or absent sign, as in the case of *Canción*, the *rumbera/jinetera* in Velázquez Medina's novel represents the possibility of a different

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<sup>157</sup> When black and mixed-race women do appear in dirty realist fiction, they are typically presented as secondary characters that serve the sexual fantasies of local and foreign men. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the fiction of Pedro Juan Gutiérrez. For discussions of the *mulata/jinetera* representation in Gutiérrez's fiction, see Miguel Gonzalez Abellas' "La figura de la mulata cubana en el fin del milenio: 'Trilogía sucia de La Habana'" (2001) and Rosalía Cornejo-Parriego's "Miradas coloniales en el mercado global: Los negros en 'Trilogía sucia de ha Habana'" (2009).

mode of reading the *mulata*. The *jinetera* narrator of *Última rumba* is not merely a marketable product of Havana but instead a key producer of its lettered city. In collecting and repurposing content from music, movies, and books, she engages in an imaginative remaking of urban space as a way to express her rights to write against prevailing notions of Cuba cultural belonging that reinforce the diplomatic isolation of the island. To a certain extent, Velázquez Medina's revision to the Cuban palimpsest paradigm and its *rumbera* figure may be read as another male-authored projection of postcolonial political desires through the prostitute's body; however, *Última rumba* is also one of few Special Period texts to use the autobiographical and intertextual voice of the *mulata* as a strategy that replaces revolutionary respectability with a narrative space for a more dynamic and inclusive Cuban discourse of citizenship. It is in this way that the palimpsestic city allows us to consider not only the historical and political layers of Havana's development but also its global literacies and transnational proportions.

#### 4.5 “Ruins on every corner”: *Última rumba en La Habana*

Recalling the titular characters and documentary style of Octavio Cortazar's 1992 film *La última rumba de Papá Montero*,<sup>158</sup> *Última rumba en La Habana* combines formal elements of celebration and mourning to tell the story of Havana's *pueblo rumbero* [rumba people]. However, in this text, the narrator uses a series of flashback sequences to reposition the figure of the *rumbera* within the narrative time-space of the Special Period.

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<sup>158</sup> Papá Montero was a legendary Afro-Cuban *rumba* dancer and hustler from the 1930s who was killed during a Havana carnival. Like Yarini before him, Montero has become strongly associated with the city's criminalized underworld of the port district that harbored prostitutes, pimps, and former black slaves. In addition to Cortazar's more recent film, Cuban poets, artists, playwrights, and composers of the republican era—such as Nicolás Guillén, Archimedes Pous, Mario Carreño, and Eliseo Grenet—immortalized Montero in their works. He is also referenced in Pineda Barnet's *La bella del Alhambra* (the director is a cousin of Miguel Barnet). For brief summaries of Papá Montero's significance to the Cuban cultural imaginary, see web articles from Fuentes (2015) and *CubaNow* (2011, 2014).

Told from the perspective of a *mulata jinetera*, *Última rumba* troubles the folklorized conceptions of Afro-Cuban knowledge and culture that have been established in the service of post-revolutionary nationalism by peeling back the historical layers and connotations of *rumba* that are not always visible in its commercial spaces. Distinct from token images of the cabaret *rumbera*, Velázquez Medina's nameless narrator casts light on the physical and social periphery of Old Havana's tourist geography. In this way, *Última rumba* moves away from Cortázar's national myth of the *rumbera* to reflect a narrative similar to that of Dulce Fuerte in *The Agüero Sisters*, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Like García's narrator, the *mulata jinetera* in Velázquez Medina's novel reflects a semantic struggle between Havana's interlocking signs of desirable and undesirable citizenship in the post-Soviet period—allowing us to recognize the uneasy relationship between the postcolonial state and those who inhabit its most ambiguous and paradoxical spaces of national belonging.

The opening chapter plunges the reader *in medias res*, as the novel's young nameless narrator recounts the night she killed her first "john," who she menacingly dubs "Juan el Muerto" [The Dead John]. She attributes the end of this "operetta" with Juan el Muerto not to any sort of "deplorable moral dilemma" [un deplorable dilema moral] but rather to her latent bibliophilic tendencies that prompted long overdue readings of Marx and Dumas, as well as a new life mantra adopted from a Buddhist-inspired radio show: "I am immortal and I can't be ruined" [soy inmortal y no puedo ser dañada] (10).<sup>159</sup> Seemingly a matter of no consequence, this initial act of transgression sets the mood and course for the remainder of the novel, which continues in stream-of-consciousness

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<sup>159</sup> Since *Última rumba* has yet to be published in English, all translations rendered in this chapter are invariably my own.

fashion to fill in the details of her life leading up that moment. In beginning with the literal death of Juan, the first chapter constructs itself as a frame story for addressing broader issues of civic death and social marginalization that define the *mulata jinetera*'s conditions of *insilio* in the palimpsestic city. With this dynamic in mind, we might gain a better understanding as to why Velázquez Medina elects not to give his female protagonist a formal name. Far from being a marker of sexual objectification or empty exoticism, the trope of anonymity epitomizes her ambivalent status of being at once culturally hypervisible and socio-politically invisible in the Cuban imaginary. In this way, *Última rumba* appears to destabilize – rather than reinforce – colonial metaphors of the island as *tabula rasa* or *terra nullius* in that the figure of the nameless *mulata* bears traces of the multiple ideological centers and tensions within the palimpsestic city.

Furthermore, by frequently lifting content not only from local source texts but also the world over as a way to alter her existing reality, Velázquez Medina's narrator creates a very different impression of the abject spaces and characters that typify Cuban dirty realism; thus, making it possible to interpret the very literal character assassination of Juan el Muerto as more than a prime example of the mundane violence and amorality emanating from the slums. Read analogically, her decision to murder the man who made her a prostitute and subsequently justify it as an act of "Buddhist fatalism" [fatalismo budista] registers as a symbolic killing of archetypal male power. It is tempting to bracket the murder scene as evidence of the Velázquez Medina's counter-revolutionary discourse, especially since the narrator uses the phrase "the great patriarch" as a euphemism for Castro throughout the novel; however, through the use of the "Buddhist litany," Velázquez Medina appears to be channeling a different ideological template for

his *rumbera/jinetera*, one that definitively cautions against putting all one's faith in conventional and absolute political authority but does not do away with national identification completely.<sup>160</sup> Through its discursive erasure of the authoritarian male figure, *Última rumba* opens up the narrative possibilities for other kinds of representations of Cuban cultural identity that do not necessarily adhere to the restrictive boundaries of the postcolonial island state.

By analyzing subsequent and related scenes in the novel that elucidate the narrator's creative rethinking of Cuban citizenship via the textual and sexual spaces of the palimpsestic city, my exploration of *Última rumba* builds upon the recent scholarly turn towards the concept of literary citizenship in world and postcolonial literatures. As notable critics such as Jahan Ramazani and Françoise Lionnet have argued, a greater attention to the terms of nation and national unity as imaginative constructs can help us articulate alternative models of community formation that are distinct from statist configurations of place. In dialogue with Glissant's influential theory of Relation, Ramazani and Lionnet's works highlight the crucial role of literary citizenship in activating transnational and transcolonial forms of solidarity. In his study of global anglophone poetry (2011), Ramazani notes that, despite the proliferation of diaspora studies and theories of transnationalism in recent years, "single-nation genealogies remain surprisingly entrenched...in the shape of footnotes, literary histories, and anthologies that claim [writers] as 'American' or 'British'" (23-24). According to Ramazani, mononationalist paradigms such as these fail to capture the complexities of transnational citizenship embedded in the works of poets who "forg[e] alliances of style

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<sup>160</sup> The particular logic of Buddhist fatalism can be gleaned in the Zen saying, "If you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him. If you meet the patriarch, kill him." While Velázquez Medina doesn't directly employ the phrase, his narrator takes a strikingly similar attitude in the opening scene of the novel.

and sensibility across vast distances of geography, history, and culture” (24).<sup>161</sup> Similarly, Lionnet (2008) comments on the cosmopolitan origins of Creole languages and cultures to explore how island literary traditions might help alter continental civic frameworks that “are not (yet) equipped to facilitate a fully shared identification of citizens of all races with the primary symbols of the nation” (1115). Elsewhere she suggests that the representation of such multiplicities in Afro-Caribbean writing also emphasizes “a thoroughly transcolonial (as opposed to transnational or postcolonial) historical circuit” and among its “many sites of colonial conflicts” (“Transnationalism...” 26-27). Together, their studies stress the significance of “mixed textuality” and “cross-cultural poetics” that articulate unexpected models of affinities and alliances that are distinct from concept and borders of nation-based literary and political histories.

While there is a predominant tendency to promote oppositional nationalist paradigms between Cuban writers living in and away from the island, recent anthologies such as *Cuba: Idea of a Nation Displaced* (2007) and *The Portable Island: Cubans at Home in the World* (2008) have attempted to push past statist affiliations and configurations of place in order to focus on more inclusionary strategies for reading Cuban literature within transnational/transcolonial models of imaginative citizenship that are, to paraphrase Ramazani, “mobile, ambivalent, and multifaceted” (*Transnational Poetics* 48). The necessity of placing Cuba within this more expansive and inclusionary framework becomes clearer when we consider the influence of postrevolutionary exodus on new visions and practices of citizenship—especially, in the context of US-Cuban relations. Despite long-standing foreign and local isolationist policies since the mid-twentieth century, Cuba continues to be among the top migration-sending countries to the

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<sup>161</sup> An earlier essay version of these ideas appears in *American Literary History* (2006).



United States.<sup>162</sup> According to Jorge Duany (2011), transnational migration between the island and the US tends to be bound up with a language of exceptionalism in terms of open door policy for refugees as well as the well-known antagonisms between Cuban revolutionary state and its diaspora populations (135-138); but, as he points out, these predominant narratives on Cuban transnationalism tend to overlook the extent to which “Cubans, like other Hispanic Caribbean migrants, have spun a dense web of social, economic, political, cultural, and even religious ties with their homeland” (152). Despite Velázquez Medina’s politically dissident status as a black Cuban writer-citizen, I argue rather than catalogue *Última rumba* as counter-revolutionary discourse we should read it within the dense web of cross-cultural relations and transcolonial critiques of power that Duany, Ramazani, and Lionnet collectively discuss. Although the figure of the *rumbera/jinetera* in the novel expresses a growing animosity towards the revolutionary state (as the opening chapter makes clear), her literary and aesthetic codes for remapping the city suggest an alternative to the series of binaries—such as past/present, local/global, and patriot/dissident—that continue to restrict the ways we think about Cuban literary citizenship.

Velázquez Medina’s choice of the Maleconazo uprising and the ensuing *balseo* [rafter] exodus for the historical backdrop of his novel is important for several reasons. First, unlike Barnet’s novel, it uses the recent rather than distant past to critically interrogate the political and social boundaries of revolutionary respectability. Whereas the first two waves of post-revolutionary migration (1959-1962 and 1965-1973) drew relatively privileged asylum seekers across US borders, the 1980 Mariel boatlift and the

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<sup>162</sup> In 2008, Cuba was ranked fifth among the leading source countries for legal permanent residency to the United States (with a total of 49,000), trailing behind Mexico, China, India, and the Philippines. See Wasem (2009).

1994 rafter crisis have been categorically more diverse along racial, class, sexual, and political lines of Cuban identity.<sup>163</sup> This narrator makes us acutely aware of this distinction through the visible policing of working-class black bodies in the days leading up to the uprising. As she walks the streets of the Malecón with her friend Fermín, they are accosted by a police officer (who, significantly, is also black) and the incident “attracts the attention of various other officers, who come slowly like herding dogs, observing Fermín, evaluating how many kicks his teenage body can endure” [el movimiento atrae la atención de varios otros policías, que vienen despacio, como los perros, en manada, observando Fermín, evaluando cuantas patadas podrá soportar en su cuerpo adolescente] (118). Heightened moments like this one, which capture the state violence exacerbated by both the collapse of the Soviet Union and continuance of the U.S. embargo, are central to the narrator’s growing claims to an imaginative and decidedly literary citizenship. As she wanders the streets of Old Havana, the narrator intently calls upon the ruins of the city’s most popular neighborhoods to uncover and imagine past both the real and metaphorical scars left by the Revolution’s war against the world [muestran las cicatrices de la Guerra del gobierno contra el mundo] (127).<sup>164</sup> For instance, in an earlier scene set on Calle San Rafael in Old Havana, she gazes upon the urban ruins to momentarily contemplate what led to the city’s present state of disarray:

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<sup>163</sup> See Duany’s 1999 essay, “Cuban communities in the United States: migration waves, settlement patterns and socioeconomic diversity,” which includes critical summaries related to Cuba’s four major migratory waves during and after Revolution.

<sup>164</sup> In the 2006 documentary, *Habana—Arte Nuevo de hacer ruinas* [Havana: The New Art of Making Ruins], Cuban writer and self-proclaimed “ruinologist” Antonio José Ponte expresses a similar sentiment when he states that the Cuban government has relied on the image of Havana in ruins to build its anti-imperialist narrative, especially in the aftermath of the 1990s economic crisis. Havana’s ruins, to paraphrase Ponte, are thus meant to serve as a visual reminder of the destruction wrought by U.S. embargo.

Nothing is left of the Parisian city but a faint Trojan echo in the Caribbean. The Havana *that my elders narrate* always had a port full of besieged vessels, eager to enter the bay like a woman. Maybe the city was a prostitute, *as they say*, but it was paid very well for its favors and pleasures...it seems as if the fundamentalists won the colonial war: the country ruled like a babe in arms by a foreign soldier. (30)

[Nada queda de la ciudad parisina, leve eco troyano en el Caribe, La Habana que *contaban mis mayores*, con el puerto siempre asediado de bajeles, naos veleras impacientes por entrar en la bahía como una mujer: tal vez la ciudad era una meretriz, *como dicen ahora*, pero hacía pagar muy bien sus favors y placers... tal parece como si los integristas hubiesen ganado la guerra colonial: el país está gobernado de un pichón soldado extranjero.]

In this passage, the narrator's explicit evocation of the city-as-prostitute should not be taken lightly. Here she considers how this particular image of Havana, perpetuated by its older generations, bears a strong resemblance to a *guaracha* popularized by Afro-Cuban singer and composer, Rogelio Martínez Furé in the 1960s.<sup>165</sup> But rather than highlight the city's female-gendered and sexualized connotations, she turns our attention towards the body-text of US imperial masculinity that forms the basis of this narrative. As she describes it, the foreign "father" whose "vessel" penetrated the port "like a woman" appears to be an "exact copy" of the main character from Furé's song: "He came to Cuba in canvas sandals / and corduroys. . . .when the pot-bellied man spoke, the whole world

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<sup>165</sup> Furé's song, "Cómo cambia la gente" [How people change], is adapted from the work of the nineteenth-century writer, Luis Felipe Roca, and was composed for the radio version of the novel, *Mi tío el empleado* in 1965. See González (2005) and online biography on AfroCubaweb.com for reference.

laughed! / How people change!” [Vino a Cuba en alpargatas / y pantalones de pana. . . . cuando el barrigón hablaba todo el mundo se reía / ¡Y cómo cambia la gente!] (30). To which she retorts, “[a]nd it turns out, stealing lands made him and some dumb European economists rich. Jesus-fucking-Christ!” [Y resulta que, robando tierras, se hizo rico y algunos tontos economistas europeos. ¡Me cago en diez!] (30). The titular song’s refrain, “how people change!” [¡cómo cambia la gente!] is used not only to reference the rags-to-riches transformation of an imperialist masculine power but also the ways in which the children of the Revolution—that is, the older generations referenced in the passage—have begun to change their tune about global capitalism now that, as the song alludes, their stomachs are “wrung out” [estrujado] and their eyes are “glazed over” [casi vidriados] from all the hunger induced by the crisis of the times (30).

Elsewhere Velázquez Medina’s narrator tackles the feminized metaphor of the city as a sexually-available and bountiful woman, suggesting that foreign male visitors’ desires to encounter the city are always couched in the erotic terms of “seductive *mulatas*” who are “coveted trophies in this country of blacks, of almost blacks, half-blacks, and semi-blacks” [Mulatas rijosas...codiciado trofeo en este país de negros, casi negros, medio negros y seminegros] (22-23). In scenes such as these, the reader comes across long meandering sentences and lists that together map the Cuban woman and island through the imagined bodily spectacle of the Venus Hottentot:

[T]ight butts, small curvaceous hips, and memorable breasts, delicacies appreciated in these lands where the diet imposed on a man is forbidden legs, alleged steatopygia (yes, the butt), and hips of fertile appearance with

provocative moment: a meat blender, a centrifugal in bed, a Neanderthal-like statuette. (23)

[nalgas breves, caderas poco sinuosas y busto memorable, elegancias apreciadas en estas tierras donde la dieta impuesta al hombre son las piernas formidables, la esteatopigia acusada, por supuesto, culo y caderas de paridora aderezadas con un acusado movimiento incitante: una batidora de carne, una centrifuga en la cama, una estatuilla Neandertal.]

Rather than remain wholly complicit with the overt racism and sexism that underlies the seductive *mulata* fantasy in the above passage, the narrator uses her literary and historical savvy to revise the monstrous projection of the Caribbean as a “porno-tropical” space in the foreign tourist imagination.<sup>166</sup> Despite her formal training as an architect, the narrator painfully recognizes that, as a *mulata rijosa*, it is her destiny to become a *jinetera* and take money from men rather than write poems, or give lectures or build palaces for the “white skunks” [las blanquísimas mofetas] (101); however, she continues to read the works of literary writers, architects, filmmakers, and philosophers to craft her own version of self and reality (101). As she tells us, she likes to “rewrite all history, making it as farfetched as possible, full of resounding words as they come to [her]” in order to blunt the fantasies she’s forced to act out in hotel beachfront rooms [Rescribo toda la historia, descabellada como suelen gustarme, llena de las palabras que resuenan mientras las grabo...aquí en este cuarto player](110). One way she combats the prostituted metaphors of the *mulata* and Havana is by aligning herself closely with the mythical *aché*, or energy, of the rebellious *rumba* spirit. For instance, near the beginning of the novel, the

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<sup>166</sup> McClintock (1995) and M.L. Pratt (1992) are among the most cited feminist scholars who address these concerns in the context of European conquest and travel writing.

narrator tells us that, although wearing a “blazing red dress and red shoes” and a “touch of carmine power” might make her look like Sara Montiel, Rocío Jurado, and Lolita Flores<sup>167</sup> rolled into one, these sexy Venus-validating props also convey other symbolic meanings. As she tells us, her color-coded palette also resonates with the *aché* associated with the Santería *orisha*, Changó (Shangó)<sup>168</sup>. Interestingly, unlike the strictly female-gendered *orisha* identification presented to us via the Puerto Rican figure of Isabel la Negra (discussed in Chapter 3), the *mulata* prostitute in this text qualifies herself through a transgendered conglomeration of male and female energies through the Changó-Santa Bárbara syncretic system. By imaginatively placing herself in Chango’s path [camino], the narrator revises the figure of the *mulata de rumbo* into a kind of *rumbera* warrior, declaring that time and again that the *orisha* equips her with a “fighting spirit” [con ánimo de pelear] (111): “Shangó is loose, my daddy is loose, put on red and we will win the wars: *Shangó guemeyi kosikamilaye, on baba mi*” [Shangó está suelto, mi papi anda suelto, vístete de rojo y ganarás las guerras. *Shangó guemeyi kosikamilaye, on baba mi*<sup>169</sup>] (169). As the representative god of war, Changó exemplifies the macho brashness associated with the *rumbero* and, as such, provides the *mulata jinetera* with a distinctive authoritative through which to counter the images of the ruined city associated with the ruined *mulata*.

In returning to the significance of the Maleconazo, we could likewise take note of the instances in the text where the narrator invokes more complex historical accounts

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<sup>167</sup> Montiel, Jurado, and Flores were Spanish entertainers from the Franco era who – according to Marvin D’Lugo – were frequently imitated by drag queens. See D’lugo’s 2009 essay for a detailed analysis of what he calls the contemporary cinematic “postnostalgia” for glamorized body of the Spanish diva figure.

<sup>168</sup> Velázquez Medina vacillates between both spellings of the *orisha* name.

<sup>169</sup> The last line in italics is an Afro-Cuban chant related to the cult of Changó.

through the emblematic space of the palimpsestic city. Throughout the novel, she frequently imagines the city as deeply-textured surface for narrating the nation's existing political tensions that have been aggravated by the Special Period. Both the Malecón and its adjacent slums in Old Havana, consequently, come to represent contentious sites of convergences that help us to grapple with the multiple and conflicting social voices that contribute to post-Soviet Cuban identity. For instance, while wandering the streets after the night of Juan's murder, the narrator provides the following description of her local barrio, Jesús María:

That evening, I return to daydreaming about the vermin, daydreaming about the lyrics Benny Moré: "Beautiful and tasty / Mexican women dancing the mambo." In Tin Tan's films, the Mexican women dance the mambo very well but nothing like the black women of Jesús María, with their big behinds. "Enjoy 'em!," shouts Benny, "Enjoy 'em!" (8)

[Regreso esa tarde de muerte, pues, a pensar en *las musarañas*, vuelvo a pensar en el Benny; *Bonito y sabroso* bailan el mambo las mejicanas. En las películas de Tin Tan salen las mejicanas bailando el mambo bastante bien pero nunca como las negras de Jesús María, esas culonas: ¡a gozaaá!, grita el Benny, ¡a gozaaá!.] (my emphasis)

As one of Old Havana's most notorious black slums, Jesús María forms part of the "extramuros" that lie beyond the original fortress walls—a term used by planners to characterize the dense and informal settlements concentrated in the urban periphery. Located near the southwestern tip of Havana bay, this extramural district has been historically associated with what Fernando Ortiz called *la hampa afrocubana* [the black

underworld]<sup>170</sup> that represented the general criminality of Abakuá<sup>171</sup> secret societies. But rather than reinforce the image of Jesús María as place of poverty, violence, and delinquency, the narrator chooses to revel in its unique contribution to Cuban and Latin cultural identity through *rumba*. While, in Barnet’s novel, Rachel only tangentially identifies the connection between *rumba* and the Afro-Cuban barrios of extramuro Havana, the narrator of *Última rumba* clearly uses the lyrical expressions of various *rumberos* to map her more globalized vision of the city. The use of the word *musarañas* [vermin] in her description is significant in this case, since it denotes the racialized space of Havana’s *mala vida* that Ortiz famously depicted; however, Velázquez Medina uses the term in a figurative sense whereby the barrio’s “vermin” becomes subtly absorbed into a colloquial expression for daydreaming. This strategic use of language enables the narrator to imagine past the destructive patterns that have produced the ruins of Jesús María and, instead, focus on its pan-Latin influence through its popular dance and music forms. By invoking the *rumberas* of Jesús María alongside classic Cuban and Mexican cabaret stars such as Benny Moré and Germán “Tin Tan” Valdes, the narrator invites us to reread the representational forms of excess [“tipo de ampanga”] that have been mapped onto the city’s alleged surplus populations.

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<sup>170</sup> In his 1906 study *La hampa afrocubana: los negros brujos* [The Black Underworld: Abakua], Ortiz describes the area as home to “the parasites of the bad life” [los parasitos de la mala vida], as well as a place where “various sewers discharge their material detritus and pathogens” [as varias cloacas que en ella vierten sus patógenos detritus] (18-19).

<sup>171</sup> Although black fraternal societies had been established on the island since the sixteenth century, they became a target of state repression and policing at the turn of the twentieth century due to their conservation of pan-African religious and social practices. After independence, Afro-Creole religious traditions such as Santería, Abakuá, and Palo Monte were perceived as dangerous to the white *criollo* population because of the challenges they presented to institutionalized Catholicism—especially, the temptation of conversion such practices induced across racial and class lines. See Andrews (2004).



In addition to mapping the city's black cultural roots, *Última rumba* also represents a significant departure from earlier dirty realist novels with respect to its politicization of Havana's urban landscape. The city's picturesque seaside drive doesn't just retain the exotic features of the sex tourist industry or the island's most significant scale of public protest and mass exodus in the post-revolutionary period; it also maps a specific urban inheritance of Cuba's black diaspora: "I walk for pleasure because the Malecón is mine by putative heritage; my grandfather worked here for some time, in some corner of this long wall his name is engraved in the concrete: Domingo Chacón" [Camino por placer, porque el malecón es mío por herencia putative; mi abueló trabajó hace tiempo, en algún recoveco de este largo muro aparece su nombre grabado en el concreto: Domingo Chacón] (14). It is important to note that the name of the narrator's grandfather, Domingo Chacón, references an important Afro-Cuban historical figure, Domingo Lázaro Chacón Coello (1945-1976), who served as a political military officer for the revolutionary government. In attributing the memorialized inscription on the seawall as part of her "puta-tive" legacy, the narrator employs her own family history to bring revolutionary respectability and *jineterismo* into closer proximity. This intergenerational conflict can also be gleaned in the discursive struggle represented in both the official and protest signs that mark up the city. For example, during one of her "pleasure" walks down the streets of Old Havana, she encounters a billboard that "yells" [grita]: "Socialism or Death!" [¡Socialismo o Muerte!], which she believes is an "obvious reduncancy" [una evidente redundancia] of "yes or yes," giving one no choice but to comply with its demands (84). But, in Antonio Maceo park, which was once the site of a military fortress near the Malecón, there is a graffitied fence which reads: "THE YOUTH

MARCH TOWARD THE YEAR 2000. THE REPLACEMENT IS GUARANTEED” [LA JUVENTUDE EN MARCHA HACIA EL 2000. EL RELEVO ESTÁ SEGURO] (15). Here, the younger generation appropriates the language and heritage sites of revolutionary national movement to carve out its own version of a utopian future. By juxtaposing these opposing perspectives, Velázquez Medina creates a public textual space in which both positions can represent narratives of postcolonial nation-building. In several important scenes, the narrator likewise participates in this specific urban dialogue. The first scene occurs shortly after she walks past the “official” sign of the Revolution towards Maceo park. Gazing upon the robust statue of the revered freedom fighter, she cannot help but wonder what led Cuba’s labyrinth-like revolutionary history in which the city now resembles a “wild” political landscape: “it looks like jungle of Borneo<sup>172</sup>; maybe that’s what Monette meant when he spoke of forests full of monkeys and monkeys in the streets” [parece la jungle de Borneo; tal vez por eso Monette habla de selvas llenas de guerrilleros y en los árboles, monos] (85). To further this incipient reading of Cuba as a geopolitically divided island, she later contemplates another nearby banner of political propaganda that claims, “Cuba will be an eternal Baragúa!” [¡Cuba será un eterno Baraguá!], a historical reference to the protest Maceo led against the terms of the peace treaty with Spain in 1878.<sup>173</sup> Rather than take the political message embedded in this sign

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<sup>172</sup> Like Hispaniola and Saint Martin in the Caribbean, the Southeast Asian island of Borneo is one of several in the region that has been divided into separate nation states.

<sup>173</sup> The Protest of Baragúa was the political prelude to Cuban independence in which Maceo and a small group of rebel officers protested Cuba’s decision to comply with the Spanish-sponsored Zanjón Pact at the end of the Ten Years’ War. According to Cuban historians, Maceo—and, particularly, his role as a mambí leader in fighting for abolition and racial equality in the independence movement—continues to serve as a discursive figure of the Revolution’s fight against foreign dominance. See Abendroth (2009) and Brenner et al (2007).

as a given, the narrator qualifies our reading of it by reminding the reader that Maceo was also one of the island's most celebrated political exiles:

Although Maceo used the Protest of Baragúa to separate himself from the independent leaders that had surrendered to Spain...He nevertheless accepted a letter of safe passage from Spain, to be able to leave Cuba without surrendering, something that was very symbolic. (127)

[Como si Maceo no hubiera utilizado la Protesta de Baraguá sólo para desmarcarse de todos los jefes independentistas que se habían rendido...Sin embargo, aceptó un salvoconducto español para salir de Cuba sin rendirse, lo cual era algo simbólico.]

For the narrator, Maceo resonates as an important symbol both within and against the Cuban socialist state, signifying the extent to which diasporic nationalism has also been deeply rooted in the island's prolonged revolutionary imaginary. This scene echoes the earlier moment in the park when she recalls the topsy-turvy logic of liberation within the postcolonial island history, which significantly takes inspiration from the pages of José Martí's diary. In reflecting on Martí's more disparaging writings on Maceo, she suggests that Cuban revolution and post-revolutionary period best exemplify the internal political frictions that have continued to impede a cohesive decolonization movement: "we have liberated ourselves from the oppressors," she remarks matter-of-factly, but "now the fucked up thing is that we have to liberate ourselves from the liberators!" [ya nos libramos de los opresores, ahora lo jodido es liberarse de los libertadores] (85). Like Barnet's novel, Velázquez Medina consciously employs the palimpsestic city to expand spatial and temporal boundaries of the revolutionary imaginary by connecting present-

day concerns of the realist novel to past intertextual trajectories of Cuban cultural migrancy and national liberation movements.

*Última rumba*'s experimental engagement with the form of realism is made apparent in its closing chapter, where we come to realize the full metaphorical significance of the novel's opening scene. At the end of the uprising on the Malecón, the reader and the narrator together are led to believe that she has been hospitalized as a result of her involvement in the protests. Yet the author quickly shifts this narrative perspective to reveal that his protagonist has been imprisoned not for her activism but rather for the initial crime she committed against her unidentified John. Here Velázquez Medina relies on another well-established theme in Cuban literature: the insular trope of physical and metaphorical confinement.<sup>174</sup> Through the twist-ending plot device, the author provocatively redefines his narrator's relationship to reality in that she learns in this moment that she has been "cured" of the delusions that she experienced behind prison walls—opening up more questions about the disturbing truths embedded in her fictional world of Havana (184). Because of the violent nature of her crime and sexually deviant status as a *jinetera*, the narrator is grouped among the general population that openly defied the Castro government and, as a result, is given permission to leave as an exile. While this scene strongly invokes Velázquez Medina's personal experience as a political prisoner and his eventual expatriation, it also provides us another opportunity to study the relationship between Cuba and its diaspora differently. As the final lines of the novel reveal, the narrator prefers her "delirio" to this new state of exile not because it is divorced from the existing political reality but because it gives her an alternative way to

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<sup>174</sup> Goldman (2008), Marturano (2010), and Benítez (2011), have all explored the recurring tropes of geographic confinement in their studies of Cuban and Hispanic Caribbean literatures.

understand her sense of belonging to island. After reciting countless number of famous *rumbas* throughout the narrative, the narrator's last words repeat the [acerada] lyrics of Ignacio Piñeiro's 1930s hit, "Rumba on a Tomb" [Sobre una tumba una rumba]: "Don't weep for her, no don't weep for / her, the great bandit. Gravedigger, don't mourn for her...her tongue killed her...don't weep for her [...no la llores, no la llores/que fue la gran bandolera, enterrador, no la llores...su lengua la mató...no la llores] (185). Piñeiro's "immortal" song, to paraphrase the Cuban writer Guillermo Cabrera Infante, tells the story of "a rejected lover who seeks revenge by composing this epitaph on his sweetheart's tomb" (*Three Trapped Tigers* 87); however, for the narrator, this particular excerpt is not to be read in the masculine spirit of vengeance that Piñeiro might have imagined. Importantly, in this "ultimate rumba" the narrators chooses instead to exalt the more upbeat voice of Celeste Mendoza<sup>175</sup>, one of the few—if not only—female *rumba* vocalists mentioned in the text. While the original musical text chastises the promiscuous woman for leading her suitor astray, Velázquez Medina's narrator appropriates Mendoza's specific expression of this "rumba beat" ["latidos de una rumba"] because it is especially apt for describing her deeply complicated sense of loss and love towards the city she leaves behind.

#### 4.6 Conclusion

In returning to the question that Dulce Fuerte posed in the epigraph to this chapter, one could say that both *Canción de Rachel* and *Última rumba en La Habana*

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<sup>175</sup> Also known as the "Reina de Guanguancó" [Queen of Guanguancó-style Rumba], Mendoza rose to fame in the 1950s as a *mulata rumbera* at Havana's world-renowned Tropicana Nightclub. While she began her career as a dancer, Mendoza soon after took up performing in films and on radio as a *rumba* singer. She and other Afro-Cuban female artists such as Celia Cruz led the trend of mixing conventional *ranchera* style melodies with popular *rumba* sounds. On Mendoza, see Poey (2014) and Candelaria (2004).

offer tentative answers with respect to how it might be possible to imagine a Havana that truly belongs to *all* Cubans. Through their strategic narrations of the *rumbera*, these novels bring together a quintessentially Cuban discourse with a figurative freedom of movement, enabling their narrators to speak to an ideology of exile in its various manifestation. But more impressive still is their collective capacity to challenge the state's aggressive treatment of sexual and textual politics while reanimating the urban landscape with an expanded vision of Cubanness. In reading the urban intimacies between these public women figures, this chapter – and this project – has served to demonstrate how the arbitrary divisions between the Caribbean local and the Caribbean global might be reconfigured for writing more inclusive forms of rights to and through its cityspaces—both real and imagined.

APPENDIX A

Patterson's *Dinah* (1968)

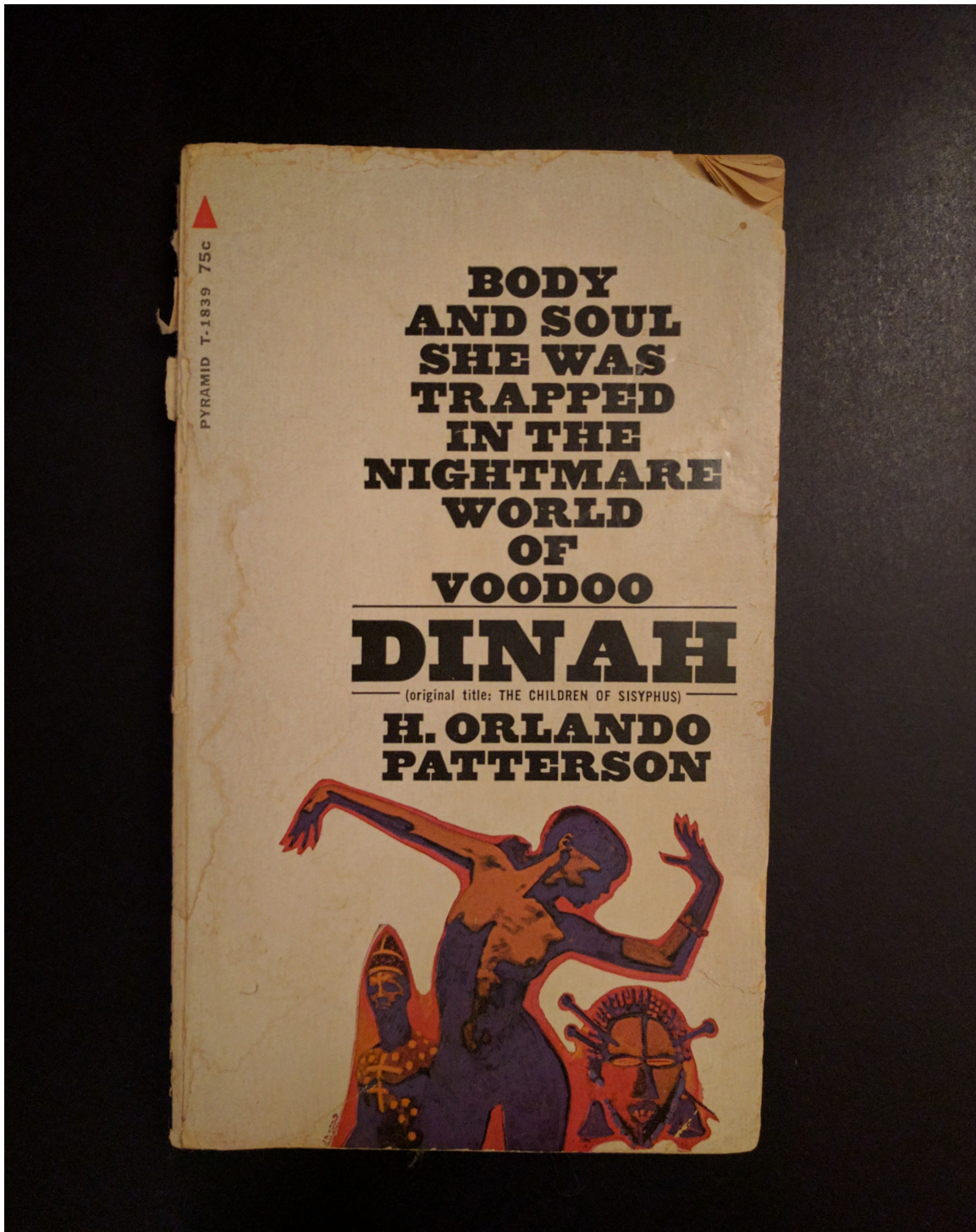
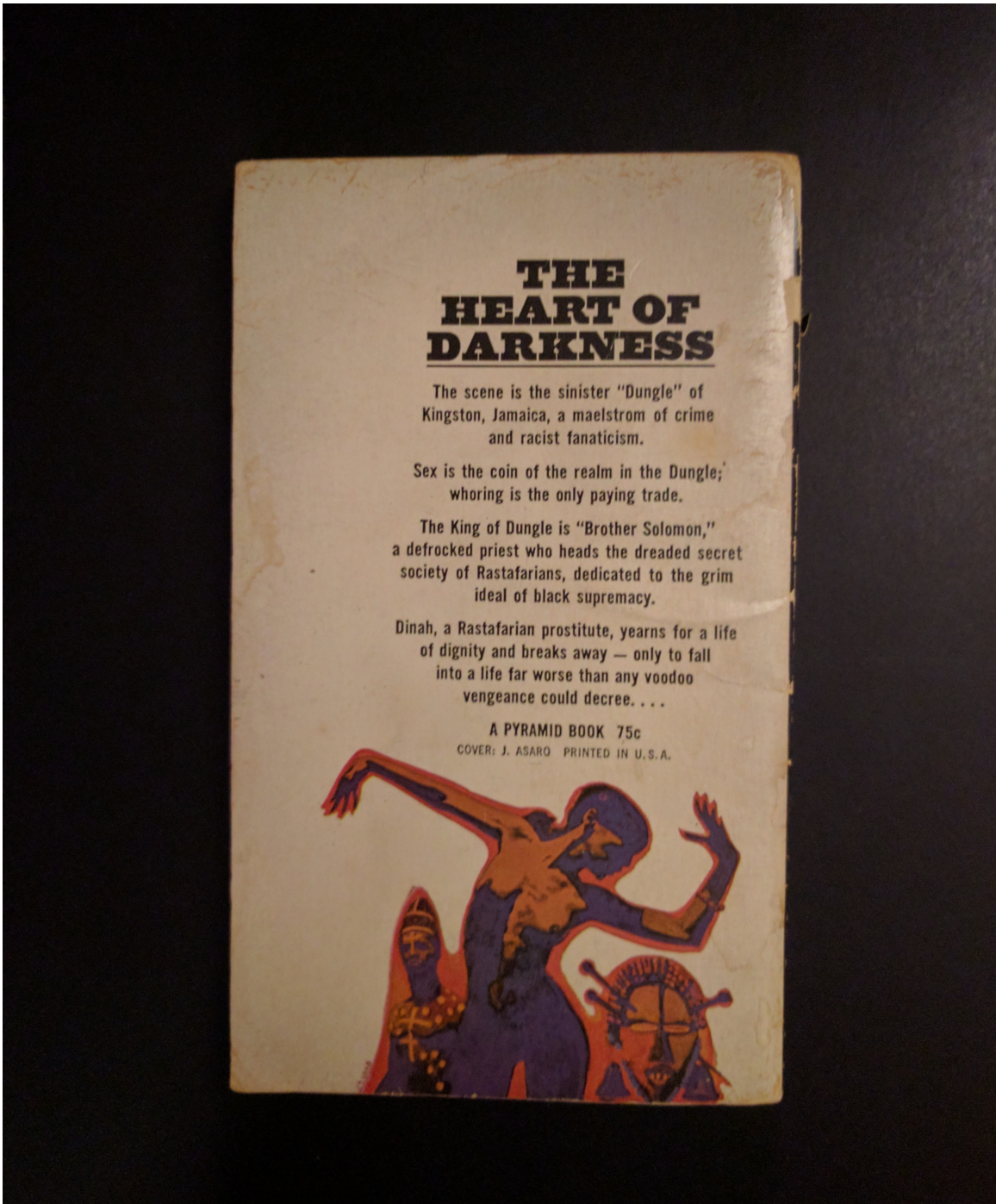


Figure 1. Front cover of the 1968 US reprint.



*Figure 2.* Back cover of the 1968 US reprint



APPENDIX B

*Jean and Dinah* and Trinidad Carnival



*Figure 1.* “Jean and Dinah” image taken on St. Vincent Street in 1983 from University of the West Indies, St. Augustine’s West Indian Postcard Collection

EXTRA EXTRA

# JEAN & DINAH

WHO HAVE BEEN LOCKED AWAY IN A WORLD FAMOUS CALYPSO SINCE 1956 SPEAK THEIR MINDS PUBLICLY

NO.001 SHOW

NOW PLAYING!

JUNE 24 - 28 1998

## SPENCER AND COMPANY

in conjunction with  
THE LORD STREET  
THEATRE COMPANY

A PLAY BY:  
TONY HALL

MUSIC BY:  
TAMBA GWINDI

FEATURING:  
RHOMA SPENCER  
&  
PENELOPE SPENCER

### Trinidad's culture and history crystallize at Trinity

By Kathy O'Connell

When people who aren't familiar with the Caribbean hear the word carnival, they usually think of a big, long party just before lent, a colourful spectacle put on largely for tourists. That, however is as far from the truth as Jamaica is from say, Trinidad.

Especially in Trinidad, where carnival is an extension of ordinary life as well as a commentary on it.

Long before Trinidad and its sister island won independence from Great Britain in 1962, the culture of the jamenttes- originally those who made up the the majority of the population- was what defined Trinidad. Their skin was mostly dark, their language its own lyrical version of English spiked liberally with French, and though many if not most of them were poor, they were proud.

One particularly sharp example of this is Tony Hall's 1994 play *Jean and Dinah Who Have Been Locked Away In A World Famous Calypso Since 1956 Speak Their Minds Publicly*, which will be presented April 3 and 4 at Trinity College.

It is a story of two women on the day of carnival, and cuts deep into the roots of Trinidadian culture and the forces that shape it

The Hartford Advocate- April 2, 1998

Jean & Dinah culminates Inaugural Caribbean Theatre Week



By Nelson A King

Jean and Dinah- who arrived here on March 27 in "full work regalia" and were greeted by a frenzied press at John F Kennedy International Airport- will tell it, or ask it, like it is to a spellbound audience.

"Long time nah see" "Dinah" told Sparrow in local parlance as the Caribbean paparazzi jostled for close-up shots. "Ah ready fuh meh punch. Yo' wh-ing. Yo' live in

America so long yo' never eat a white meat yet?" a reference to one of Sparrow's classics in which he expresses lamentations over such futility.

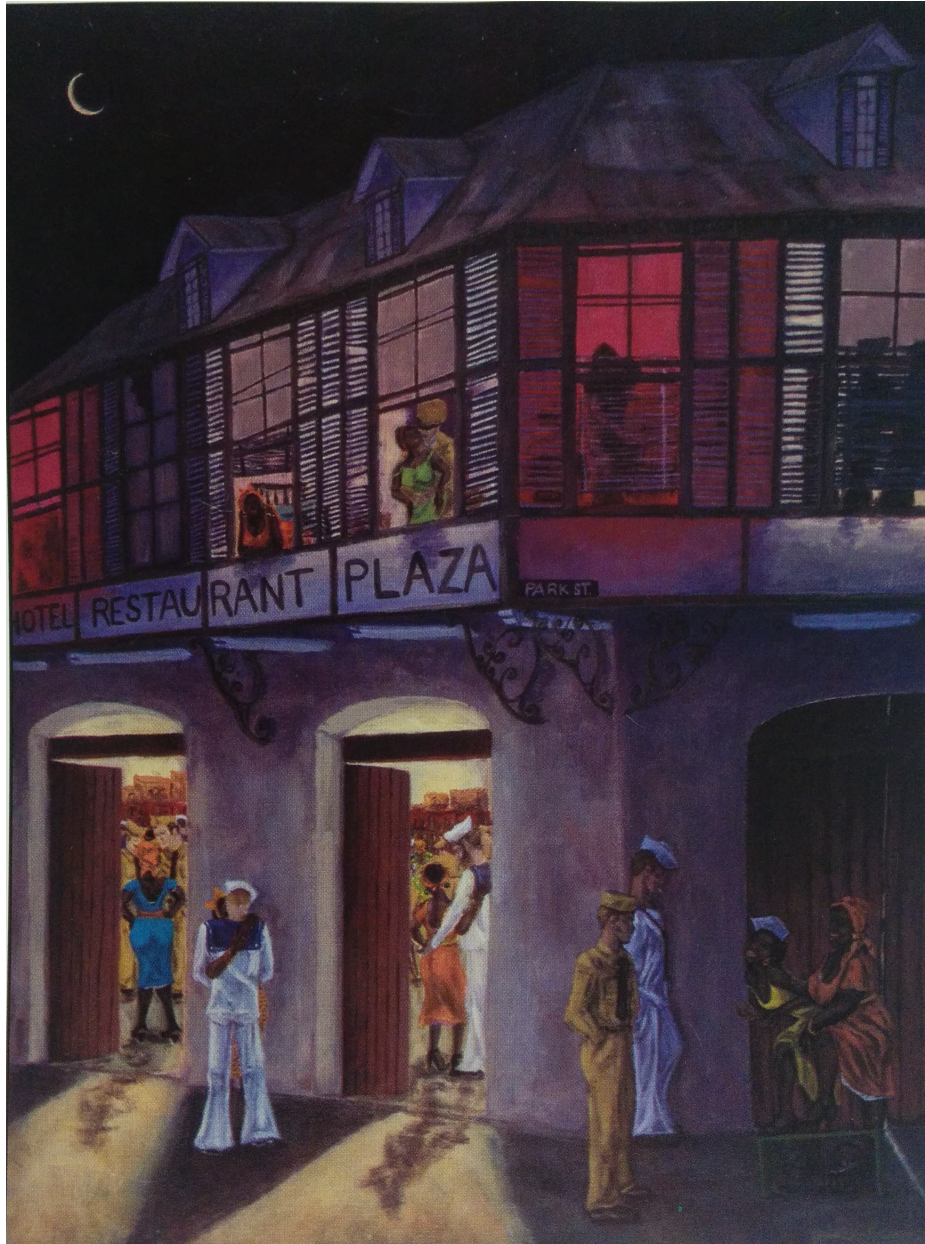
Daily Challenge' - April 8, 1998.

**They should honour me not Sparrow -slams "Dinah".**

I make a contribution to this place. "I was a flagwoman, no band ever go without a flagwoman". So says Dinah...

Gary Cardinez -  
Sunday Punch- Nov 20, 1994.

Figure 2. 1998 Production Review from University of the West Indies, St. Augustine's Jean and Dinah Collection



*Figure 3.* Images from a postcard titled “Jean and Dinah, Plaza Hotel, Green Corner. VE Night – 8 May 1945,” from the Camps-Campins Greeting Card collection held at University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

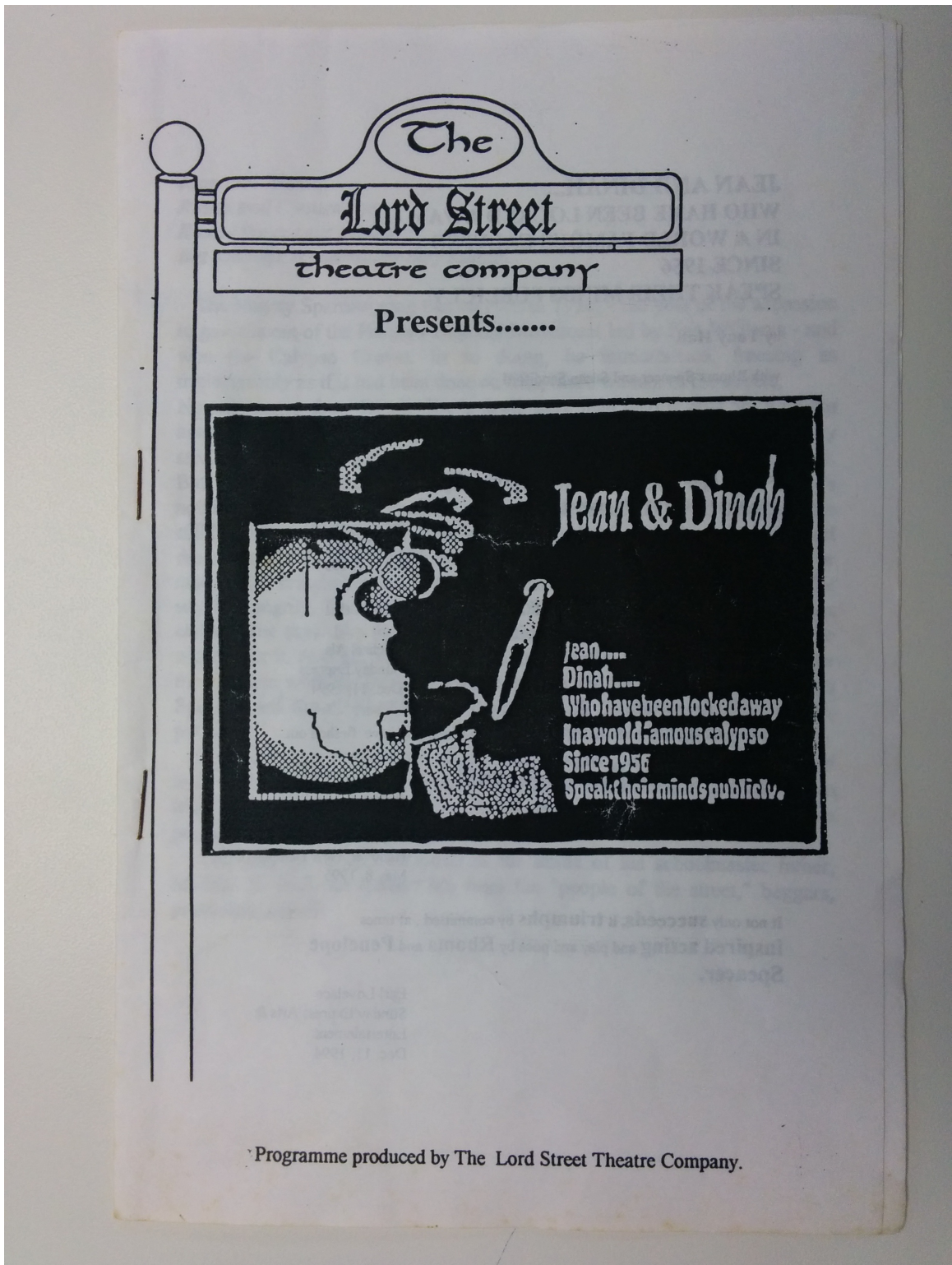
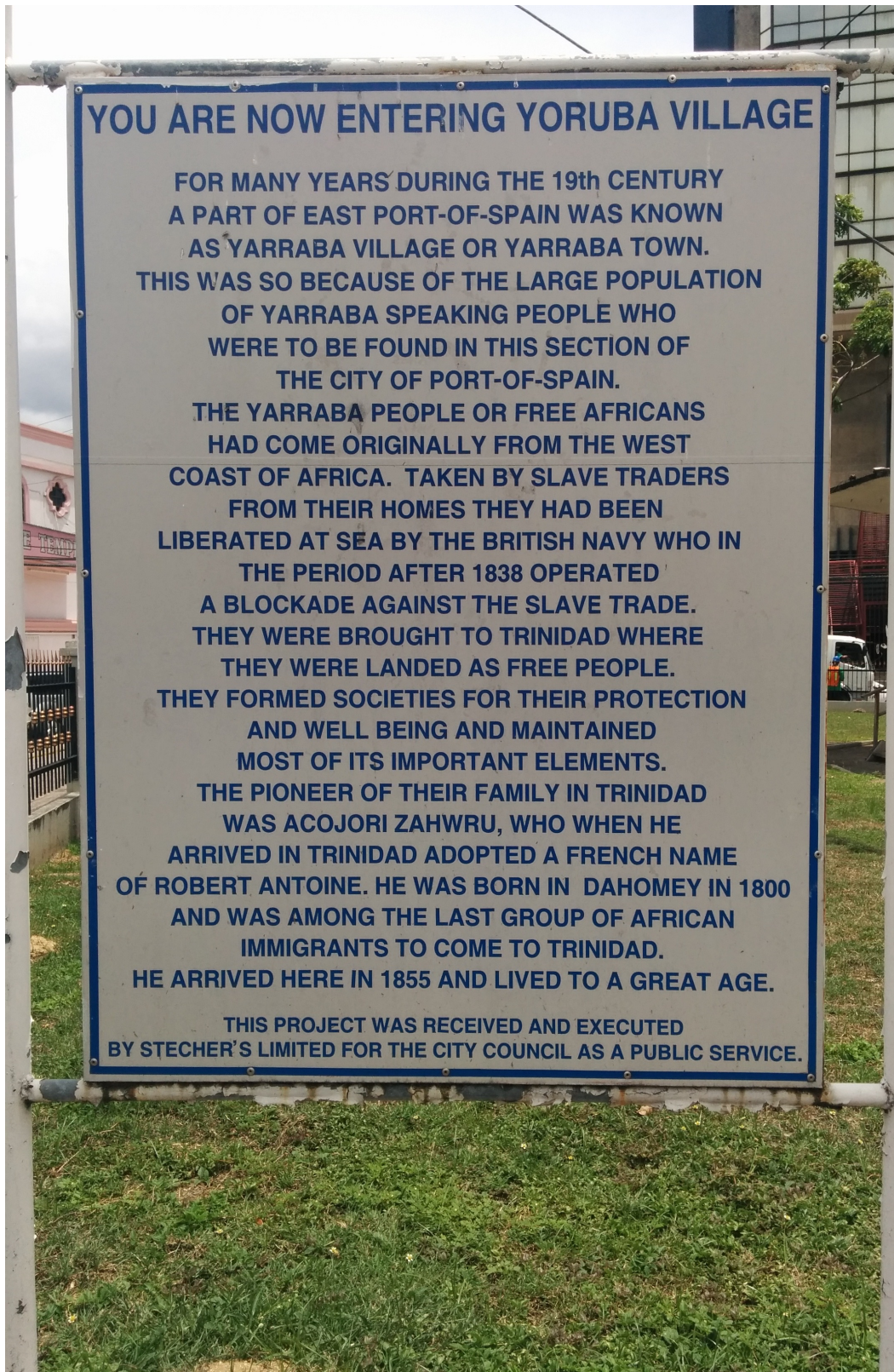


Figure 4. Copy from the original 1994 production program, courtesy of the Caribbean Performing Arts collection at UWI St. Augustine.



**YOU ARE NOW ENTERING YORUBA VILLAGE**

**FOR MANY YEARS DURING THE 19th CENTURY  
A PART OF EAST PORT-OF-SPAIN WAS KNOWN  
AS YARRABA VILLAGE OR YARRABA TOWN.  
THIS WAS SO BECAUSE OF THE LARGE POPULATION  
OF YARRABA SPEAKING PEOPLE WHO  
WERE TO BE FOUND IN THIS SECTION OF  
THE CITY OF PORT-OF-SPAIN.**

**THE YARRABA PEOPLE OR FREE AFRICANS  
HAD COME ORIGINALLY FROM THE WEST  
COAST OF AFRICA. TAKEN BY SLAVE TRADERS  
FROM THEIR HOMES THEY HAD BEEN  
LIBERATED AT SEA BY THE BRITISH NAVY WHO IN  
THE PERIOD AFTER 1838 OPERATED  
A BLOCKADE AGAINST THE SLAVE TRADE.  
THEY WERE BROUGHT TO TRINIDAD WHERE  
THEY WERE LANDED AS FREE PEOPLE.  
THEY FORMED SOCIETIES FOR THEIR PROTECTION  
AND WELL BEING AND MAINTAINED  
MOST OF ITS IMPORTANT ELEMENTS.  
THE PIONEER OF THEIR FAMILY IN TRINIDAD  
WAS ACOJORI ZAHWRU, WHO WHEN HE  
ARRIVED IN TRINIDAD ADOPTED A FRENCH NAME  
OF ROBERT ANTOINE. HE WAS BORN IN DAHOMEY IN 1800  
AND WAS AMONG THE LAST GROUP OF AFRICAN  
IMMIGRANTS TO COME TO TRINIDAD.  
HE ARRIVED HERE IN 1855 AND LIVED TO A GREAT AGE.**

**THIS PROJECT WAS RECEIVED AND EXECUTED  
BY STECHER'S LIMITED FOR THE CITY COUNCIL AS A PUBLIC SERVICE.**

*Figure 5. Yoruba Village Square dedication in East Port of Spain.  
Photograph taken from 2015 research trip sponsored by the UCLA International Institute.*

## APPENDIX C

### *The Angels Are Fatigued*

#### A working translation of Luis Rafael Sánchez's *Los ángeles se han fatigado*

This play documents a sequence of events in the life of a Puerto Rican woman, on any given day, between eleven o'clock in the morning and noon. Like any piece of self-conscious theater, it experiments with the art of illusion; but does not follow the logic of a traditional comedy.

The set design should be minimal: upstage center is a white archway framed by bare walls; downstage left, a tall double door; upstage right, a large window that looks out onto the street, which, in this case, would be the public square in Old San Juan. The physical layout of the room includes a chair, a bed, a vanity table, a small gas stove, a coat hanger, and a birdcage. Hanging from a nail you can see a wedding dress, yellowed by the passage of time. Beside the bed there lies cheap and worn out suitcase.

A spotlight is used to create a penumbra effect, a nostalgic touch that enhances the setting's poetic essence.

### ACT ONE

The very faint note of a violin can be heard at the curtain's rise.

As the crescendo intensifies, the spotlight on Angela's bed should gradually grow brighter until we can see her tossing and turning during a loud fit of insomnia. The violin music is diluted by a volatile mix of American mambo and tropical melodies that play at breakneck speed, establishing a disharmony between the sensuous and the tragic. Angela's voice cries out from beneath the covers.

### ANGELA

Petra...Petra...If that music doesn't stop, I'm going to wake up without having dreamt about anything.

*The music gets louder.*

Petra, to listen to that music! I'm sleeping. Turn it off, turn it off.

*Angela lifts the covers and takes position at the edge of the bed. At thirty-five years, she is a woman who wears a pink nightie and little pigtails in her hair. She's on slimmer side, but heavy in the hips, and her small, bony hands are in constant motion. Her big eyes are filled with sadness and, every now and then, they reflect the fear of delusions of her mind.*

Petra, you should be more considerate and remember that others need their beauty rest. That music is going to wake that damn parrot of mine!

*She takes a lazy stretch and yawns, covering her mouth.*

I got into bed around seven. *(She hesitates for a moment)*. No, six. It was six o'clock, they were delivering milk.

*The music gets louder. Angela stands up in anger and goes to the window upstage.*

Petra, are you deaf? That radio is roaring like crazy and some people like to sleep at this hour...

*Music stops and cuts to an announcer introducing a soap opera.*

It's eleven! The eleven o'clock show is on already? Eleven o'clock and look at me, I'm a mess. *(She runs across the room.)* How fast time has gone by! Eleven and I'm still wearing this rag that I sleep in. *(She looks at herself in the mirror.)* Unbelievable! Look at these big dark circles. If they saw me like in Corsica, they'd run and hide. *(She remembers something and goes looking for it.)* Now, where did I put that...where is it?

*Angela lifts up a pillow and pulls out a crumpled piece of paper. Looking fascinated as she reads it.*

Thursday, noon. I will return to Corsica. *(She repeats the line, smiling softly.)* Corsica, our gateway to Yauco. Papá and Mamá climbing up the balcony to take in the Puerto Rican landscape. My sister Encarnación would gaze over the valley of Quebrada Guayabo from her wheelchair. *(She moves from one topic or another, very naturally.)* Petra, who's in the bathroom? I want to wash away my homesickness. *(She takes a few steps around the room.)* Where are my slippers? Petra, you don't have my slippers, do you? Where are those slippers ... Whe—... ? *(She stops.)* Here they are. I thought I was going to have to jump from the bed to the chair and from the chair to the floor. Petra, don't worry, I've found them. If you have a headache, wrap a bandage with menthol around your head. It works better than those shitty pills that don't do nothin'. Mamá suffered from migraines and would lather herself from head to toe with menthol. Papá, we would dress him with bandages that we soaked in black coffee. And Encarnación used rose water. In my house everyone had head problems... everyone, everyone. All these people from Corisca. *(As if dreaming.)* To us, the narrow peninsula at the mouth of Yauco was the smile of the earth, but time has strangled that smile. As if the world has been shrinking over the years. Encarnación was strong at first, tough as nails, feisty. Until we reached Yauco—the land where dreams die. When we left Corsica, we left behind the world's most beautiful European laces...like those from Brussels. It was the end of Mamá and Papá.

*Angela then sighs deeply. She approaches the empty birdcage.*

Now, Hitler. What have you done? Your beak is broken. You've been pecking the wire again, haven't you? As punishment, you cannot fly back to Germany... And don't you

sass me. You're getting very mouthy. Even the birds are telling me what to do. This is a shit world. Nobody's satisfied, nobody lives in peace and quiet. Not those named Hitler, nor the dead in their graves. Not the women who want to be decent and good like me. Decent women have to deal daily with injustice. The milkman takes advantage of me, the baker...even the laundryman. One day they will probably charge me for breathing. And I'm a decent woman with children! Holy Mary, Mother of God! I forgot all about the baby!

*She runs to the bed and pulls at the blankets.*

Mamita must be half mad, forgetting to bundle her precious jewel. It looks to me like he's caught a cold. I have to buy honey and sugar cubes and take him to the doctor for a vaccination.

*She takes the imaginary baby in her arms and sings to her.*

Tortita,  
Tortita,  
Tortita de manteca.<sup>176</sup>

*Nuzzling the child with her nose, she switches to a merrier ditty.*

Pon, pon, pon  
el dedito en el tapón.<sup>177</sup>

Ay, baby, no more tears! Between you and Hitler, I'm going to go crazy.

*She walks over to the stove and checks the imaginary bottle of milk.*

Come to me, pretty thing, come to me. Mamita is going to fetch your milk. (*A giggle.*) Milk from happy cows. Tortita, tortita, tortita de manteca. So cute and those rosy cheeks. So cute, just like your papito.

*Angela runs her hand through the baby's hair and then takes him to bed.*

The same smile as Santiago. (*She stops for a minute.*) Santiago! Every word was a caress. I loved him very much. When I started living with Santiago all was well. I gave him all the money I earned. I gave him everything, absolutely everything, until my last cent. But he treated me well. "Angela, comb your hair and go to the bar. Angela, that American wants your business. Angela, now this other American." He sold me to men, but he never wiped away that smile. But later, he began to make demands. Four men per night, four. (*She raises her voice hysterically.*) Four men. One white, another black, another yellow, and another red, and then came more men, music and lights and night and the voices of

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<sup>176</sup> A children's clapping song. For full lyrics and musical score, see *Juegos infantiles de Puerto Rico* (1991). For a rough English equivalent, refer to "Mama's little baby likes shortnin' bread."

<sup>177</sup> Another children's song. Full lyrics available in *Juegos infantiles de Puerto Rico*.



the night; the dark of the night. (*Changing her tone.*) Santiago was just another a pimp. But he was mine. It's so beautiful to feel that something belongs to you. Any old thing. Even a dog.

*She staggers to the bed and gathers the sheets.*

How many times have I shaken out these sheets so that the next client felt that it was clean! Without knowing that my son sleeps in this bed. (*In secret.*) Nobody knows ... about my child. A single mother, no man to help me. At night, I hide him under the bed. Petra doesn't want us to get pregnant. The clients don't like it. Bad for business. I don't cause problems... They know that... I'm good with the men. They arrive tired of hearing women chattering about their problems. And I make life easy. Yes dear, I like you... The gentleman wants a Tom Collins, dear... yes, yes... a little barrel of cognac... (*A mambo starts up, Angela smiles with delight.*) "Yes dear, yes my love, yeah, yeah, whatever you want.

*Angela is now dancing to the rhythm of the music.*

Ah... yes, if you want me to, I'll tell you, you are the man I like or the man who knows how to make me happy. (*Passionately.*) Or the man who kisses me the best. Yeah... yeah... whatever you say ... for ten sad dollars. You see ... a dollar for every finger of my hand. Kisses are on the house ... The rest. (*Maliciously.*) The rest of it has to be paid for. (*She lets out a hearty laugh.*) Another Tom Collins... another shot... hit me... come baby... I'll kiss you baby... come... come... come!...

*The last word sounds almost like a howl. She looks around with contempt.*

White men, black men, colored men, men of all colors. Sick old men, marines who stink like mustard and hot dogs. Marines who spit in my face when they need someone to spite. The tycoons who trample island life but bring us our daily bread. My son's shoes are generals' boot, soldiers' boots, marine boots, officers boots, boots of all men from the land that has rented my body. The Lost Princess of Yauco. (*Bitter.*) The Whore of Old San Juan!

*She stumbles across the room.*

My room is always filled with grotesque laughter. (*Intensely.*) Sometimes I was afraid of the vigil they held over my bed, hungry for sex. I laughed and laughed, desperately, laughing before each and every drunken imbecile, laughed at every man who came to rent my body. (*Starts to laugh with desperation.*) I laughed as I closed the door, laughing as I opened my legs, laughed at the soldier who wanted to tattoo the American flag on my thigh, no matter how sick I was of their disgusting breath and drunkenness, I would laugh with them, any man who had paid a lot of money.

*She leans on the bed. Sighs deeply from overexertion.*

My head... my head hurts. *(She begins to look for a wrap.)* A menthol wrap...like in France. *(She corrects herself.)* In France, no, in Corsica.

*She places a bandage on her head and crosses upstage.*

Petra, if anyone asks, tell them I'm not here.

*Angela crosses to the front window. She looks out and believes she recognizes people.*

My name is Angela, but they call me Illusion. I'm thirty-five years old. I live here in this room. It's a small place for making a life of sin. Nothing like Corsica. Excuse me, I should say Yauco. Corsica is the capital of France... no...no. Paris is the capital of France. Corsica...

*She stops mid-action, like her mind has gone blank. She brings her hand to her mouth and makes an effort to speak.*

Corsica was the farm we had in Yauco. A huge piece of land without beginning or end. The workers broke their backs tilling the plots, but it was impossible. Our land never ended. *(In total discouragement.)* This is not the same. This place ends across the street.

*Angela smiles, trying to indulge the people on the street.*

This is the fifth house from the corner, the one with a red roof and the big balcony. The men have seen it before. Count from Carmelo's bar over there. First the bar on the corner, then Felo's little market, then Cyril's pool hall, no ... First Tom's Bar and Grill and then Cyril's pool hall and then here. *(She turns to the cage.)* Do not sing now, Hitler. Your squawking went 'til five in the morning. *(Back to the window.)* You enter through a long, dark hallway, where you run into Petra, climb up the stairs, and I open the door. You come in, sit down, I give you good service and until we meet again. Those who come leave very pleased. Maybe someone has arrived. Let's see... let's see...

*She looks out into the audience, stopping her gaze at a gentleman in the third row and then continues looking around.*

No, no familiar faces. Although this señor reminds me of a man who comes on Wednesdays. That Don Alejandro. He is a stocky old man that doesn't get off of me, not even to sleep. *(Mimicking his voice.)* Put the suit on a hook, its linen; put the shirt on the chair, its an Oxford; put the tie on the hanger, its a John David, fifth avenue. Very smooth, very fragrant, very conceited, and as big of a pig as the others. He leaves behind the smell of alcohol. Don Alejandro gave me a fake pearl necklace. *(Changes very naturally.)* But señor, you have a full head of hair and Don Alejandro is bald. Also, Don Alejandro's nose is straight, no bumps, ... are ... are ... are you upset? This señor hates comparisons. Just like me. I hate to be compared to other people... Of course ... of course ... Don Alejandro is nothing like Santiago... He's more like Hitler or the president of the

United States... No... Nothing like Santiago. Santiago was ... how do you say it? ... He was good in his own way... He loved me... his way ... Some days he'd kiss me here. *(Pointing to her neck.)* And whisper in my ear: "This week you have to make money ... lots of money..." I looked at him with anger, "Why do I have to give myself to the another if you love me?" And he answered me so honestly: "It's my way of loving." It was true ... It was his way of loving. At first Santiago was sweet. He'd take me to the movies when it was that time of the month and buy me sweet bread from the bakery. But he caused me pain. He tried to hurt me here. *(Shows her shoulder.)* Then he started dating other girls. Santiago went with Betty... *(Angrily.)* Santiago went with Maria Santísima! And we all gave him money *(Spits.)* That Santiago was clever, but I got the last the laugh. *(She crosses to the vanity and returns with a hair brush.)* My name is Angela, but they call me Illusion. I live here. *(She begins to comb her hair.)* My great-grandfather came from France and settled in the plains of Barinas. Yauco was ours. Yauco became a new Corsica. At home only he spoke of Europe, of royalty, of Eugenia de Montijo, of all the King Luises, of Napoleon. Now I'm a whore, but it wasn't always this way. Before I was a young lady who rocked in chairs and sat on the balcony... Life is bad... life is ugly ... Life has always betrayed me. First the escape from Corsica... the Corsica of Napoleon... After Yauco... Then my sister's paralysis. *(She recovers.)* Encarnación was strong. She never cried. If she could see where I have fallen, she'd die of grief and shame. But she wouldn't cry. With eyes wide open she would challenge this filthy world without a tear. *(Very quiet.)* Encarnación never sold herself to anyone. She died at daybreak, before the sun could shine. Her face was turned to the sky, as if looking for God so she could scratch his face. Not giving a damn. Life is fleeting, that is certain.

*She then goes over to the wedding dress and starts caressing it as she hums "Here Comes the Bride."*

Mamá copied my dress from a photo of the Marquesa of Visoalegre. Above the oval-shaped frame, it read: "To my friends in America." And the dot on the "i" ended inside the pearl of her collar. The pearls were brought from Italy. Mamá embroidered the dress by the light of giant candles. Papá made a list of the bottles. Pedro Domecq, Blazquez brandy, Rhine wines, William and Humber wines and sherry manufactured in Jerez de la Frontera. Old wines from Spain. German beer for those from the North. The wedding day dawned very early. Then the church pews were packed. First, there were the guests from the capital. After them, relatives from Yauco. Then the servants... and all the people of Corsica. It was too beautiful. Papá agreed immediately, "The son of a landowner may have the hand of my daughter if he has studied at La Sorbonne and has walked through the Champs-Élysées." But the enchanted prince never arrived. Something must have happened. Suddenly, Papá's chest swelled with anger. But my prince did not appear. A month later I received a letter with only these words: Not meant to be. The Corsican people began to mourn. It was the death of a dream. *(Very sad.)* A beautiful illusion. I thought that was the end. But it was only the beginning. Mamá and Papá fled to hills of San German to hide their immense sorrow. And they sent me to San Juan to rest and forget. *(Embittered.)* Rest and forget.

*A church bell chimes.*

Twelve! Whoever has my boyfriend, better not enjoy him. *(She laughs and scratches her stomach.)* In the Name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, amen. *(She crosses herself.)* My God, Maria Eugenia, you're pregnant. Hopefully he'll come out white like the father. *(Laughs.)* His señora also would laugh if she knew. Maria Eugenia's affair is a scandal and the baby didn't help at all. Well, it happens. She is more of a whore than the hens. I take care of men, but I have my hours. In the afternoon, I answer to no one—not even the Bishop of Rome. Birdseed for Hitler and milk for the baby...the little money I earn, they suck me dry. You have to pay for everything. When I arrived in San Juan, I earned fifteen, twenty... Once an officer paid me twenty-five. *(Dazzled.)* Five times five. Then the prices dropped. Fifteen, twelve, ten, eight, five... Sell your body for five dollars ... and selling the body wears out the soul. If I had never come to this desperate world, this world of dirty bars and empty caresses and eyes in eternal vigil. This trivial world with its knowing streets. Calle Sol, Sun Street *(Bitter.)* No sunshine here. Calle Luna, Moon Street, the only moon I see is drunk and haggard. Old streets given a facelift by strange signs. Melody Inn, Peter Bar and Grill, Two Dice Club, Boy's. *(At a high pitch.)* Melody Inn, Melody Inn, Peter Bar and Grill, Peter Bar and Grill and the desperate, frantic, mad, bitter, dirty music. Oh! Papa Loves Mambo. *(Starts to dance.)* Mama Loves Mambo... and I'm stumbling... Where does Teresa live?... Teresa ... and only a laugh answered... Over here, over there, over here, over there! ... And that hairy hand that pulled me gently, come here, come on, and the guy smiling, "I have what you are looking for." And finally the guy smiling repeats his sentence: "Looking for someone." Maybe it's you, Petra. *(She runs upstage as if speaking to someone.)* Why did you bring me here, Santiago? ... Five ... eight ... three ... five ... eight ... three ... five ... eight ... three ... and a client ... and another ... and another ... more music ... no, Santiago, is not here ... I'm from another world ... another ... The other women laughed with their twisted mouths, their lily white mouths, diseased mouths ... drunken mouths! Stop the music ... stop those voices ... Your hand pushed me to this horrible world and your smile froze my blood. Your smile that was not real ... or you ... or your words or anything ... not even your kisses .. Dirty, stolen kisses from those mouths! ... *(Defeated.)* You stole my life, Santiago ... destroyed my love and gave me nothing in return ... not even a soothing word. Nothing. Lies, lies, lies ... You never were like Maximilian. Emperor Maximilian. Maximilian the Noble. Maximilian the Saint. You and me, we could build our empire over Yauco. *(Very natural.)* Santiago spoke English. "Hello guys. Yes, this is real woman. And just for fifteen, common babies." And those babies were six-foot tall giants with bulging eyes and desire pulsing through their bodies. Men of all colors, blue, black, yellow. During those days, it was a new man every night! And finally ... Santiago's smile. His dead, cold smile. Santiago could be my Emperor Maximilian of Mexico because I loved him. I loved him despite his smile, despite his hands, despite his eyes *(Starts walking to the door. She opens it wide and let's out a savage cry to the outside world.)* Santiago!

*She turns to face the audience.*

No, not again.

*The light fades to a spotlight on Angela. We hear her speak until the stage goes dark.*

Petra, do not let anyone into the bathroom

*She heads to the vanity and puts on some makeup.*

Rose water and rubbing alcohol and menthol to kill the headache. Cologne, perfume, Castile soap and lemon ... lemon to make the tongue sour. I stick my tongue out at time... My Brussels lace robe, towel, and slippers. *(She looks all around.)* No, nothing more, nothing more.

*She walks out with a towel around her neck. Another mix of sensual and aggressive music begins to rise. Lights fade to dark. Curtain.*

## ACT TWO

*As the curtains open, we hear a somewhat distorted music playing in the background; it is as violent as the opening music from Act One. Downstage the lights begin to glow. Angela's voice is heard offstage.*

### ANGELA

Holy Mary, Mother of God! Petra, that cement floor in the bathroom is colder than a dead foot! And that moisture is going to produce fungus. And fungus causes itchy feet.

*Angela pushes open the door and enters. She's drying her hair. After the bath, she looks refreshed and reinvigorated.*

Castile soap works best for hair and does not remove the blonde. Did you hear, Petra? Queen Isabel was from Castile. *(Laughs.)* Under the flag of Castile and Leon, Columbus discovered the New World. Hey, Petra, if Columbus had not come, you and I would be Indians. *(To the parrot.)* Hitler, what happened to make you so quiet? If you want, I'll open the cage so that you can return to Germany ... No? ... Well. *(Applauds.)* All right. Of course the climate is healthier. This is the tropics ... Yes, yes, Hitler, the land of eternal spring. The sun shines all year.

*She crosses to the mirror. She separates her hair and smiles to herself.*

Luckily the water washed away my ugly face.

*Merrily humming a song.*

If Santiago... No... he will never return again. What a big word: Never. *(Combs her hair. Calls out.)* Petra, when's my client arriving? *(With a loud voice.)* Petra... Petra... She can't hear me. Petra must be taking customers. The señores aren't friendly with her. Petra

is the owner of this house, in charge of this floor... In other words, the madame... Yes ... don't be scandalized ... with an m like Maximilian (*Recalling.*) Maximilian should have never abandoned the empire... Austria could've flourished ... My abuelo repeated every night: Maximilian's wife, Carlota is an ambitious woman and beat all odds ... But Carlota was noble and wore a wig of white curls. Petra, at what time are they coming for me? The gentlemen should be nice to Petra. She was the only one who did not turn her back on me when things got ugly. She tended to me and gave me work. She taught me the tricks of the trade. I was beautiful then and could make demands. I liked the American officials who said yes, señorita, yes. (*Coquettishly.*) I was a lady with the officers with white shirts and their chests lined with medals, the officers with money jammed in their hands, the tall, white officers whose open arms were like huge wings, inviting me to hide in them. Big wings, large enough to protect the girl from Yauco. Big wings, blue eyes, whispering in my ear: yes, señorita, yes... Officers with medals on their chests like wings. Angels with wings for me. Angels dancing deliriously, angels with wet lips, angels in the buff, angels with fevered bodies, angels with small nipples, angels with pockets full of money. (*Changing.*) Shameless angels urinating on top of me. Angels with arms covered by very narrow sleeves ready to empty their delirium into my body. And the angels with long, red faces, offering deep looks of endless illusions. That's how it was at first. Then they transformed into beasts. And those angels who were holy and peaceful and good in the beginning became crazed vultures who madly bit me with kisses that felt like a venomous snake. And those angels who in the beginning were holy and peaceful and good spit in my face to show their their dirty hatred for this life. The angels' shouts mingled with the horror of music... (*Imitating voices of officers.*) Dirty, dirty, dirty, whore, whore, whore. And the music climbing up ... Oh papa loves mambo, whore, dirty, mama loves mambo. And the angels singing... Whore, whore, whore.... And the lights in the room dim until all that remained was the whites of their eyes. Oh papa loves mambo, whore, dirty, mama loves mambo. The desperate voices of tired angels, sick angels, angels who despise, who hate, who destroy... Fatigued angels! At first I found it difficult to sell my body or feign ecstasy each time. Then ... I got used it. Santiago said that rolling on the floor comes easily... and I'd have it down in week. One week was enough for mamá who died from shame and papá aged with sorrow. One week was enough for my cousin Teresa, so strict, educated in French boarding schools; she found out my whereabouts and was shocked "You should stick to a decent life," she told me. As if life were a wheel whose course you could change at will! One week was enough for the suffering to take over my heart.

*She pulls out a simple white nightgown decorated with long-stemmed flowers and begins to undress. When she notices that the window is open, she covers herself with both hands and pulls down the imaginary curtain. Next, she walks past the mirror and make a gesture of disgust. Then she goes to the window and pulls up the curtain again, greeting the public with a forced smile.*

My name is Angela, but they call me Illusion. I go to church every Sunday. It is a mass with lots of fuss. I hide behind a pillar because I love to hear the dominus vobiscum, "Et cum spiritu tuo. Laudamus te. Adoramus te." The priest looks like a grasshopper. "Kyrie Eleison," and the blessed reply solemnly: "Amen!!" It's as if they're being pinched

because they shout like they're condemned. I don't leave until the blessings are over when I can imbibe in the holy water and run like a soul possessed by the devil. Santiago did not go to church. He hated it when I donated money. The señores never knew Santiago. Santiago was a slacker at this profession. He was all talk and lived the easy life. Santiago had an account at the National Bank. The bank pays four percent interest. And Santiago, that pimp – so lazy, so bloodsucking – had a regular checking account to make a payment in Clubman's, in Sport Shop, in Padín. A fox! A rascal! A thief. That quick little rascal, that thief; he was my lover, my manager, my master, my husband, my owner. He took all my money, all of it ... Just his smile was enough. That cold but beautiful smile. *(With courage.)* When Santiago arrived at the bar, all the women primped up. He'd stand in the doorframe, a cigar to one end of his mouth, with the poise of a man from Corsica. Then he'd walk slowly, smiling, always smiling, walking around like he owns the place. *(With resignation.)* Santiago's embrace was my downfall. When he hugged me it was like a small fire had opened my flesh. Those strong arms were capable of destroying, those big arms, his arms. Santiago knew it. Women don't know how to hide their feelings. Santiago knew his appeal and he took advantage it. One look, one look from Santiago, and we'd all swoon, practically lose our breath *(Recalling.)* The first time Santiago kissed me, he left a very sweet taste in my mouth... and I had to be his. I just knew it. *(Convinced, very natural.)* Wars are a mess. Santiago did not go to war. A secretary from selective service who was in love with him made sure his draft card was lost in the archives. Papá was a veteran of the civil war. He fought against Napoleon of France. *(With hostility.)* The sailors who come on weekends do not go to war, even those in the military. They only know how to buy caresses and get eagles tattooed on their chests. The officers are different. Wearing long-sleeved shirts and arms open like wings... *(Dreaming.)* Officers and their medals with wings, angels with wings for me. Angels pay ten, marines pay seven. The islanders pay less, but they're no better. *(Smiles and taps rhythmically on the window.)* From Monday to Thursday, the islanders. The week-end Americans. In Corsica, they wouldn't even be able to get in *(Proudly.)* Papá did not allow it. Corsica is not for conquerors. So life was different in those days, we had smiling faces, days that were full of love. *(She turns suddenly as if an outside noise bothered her.)* No, no, Hitler. No you don't, I'm not going to allow it. If you insist on interrupting me, you will have to return to Germany. And it will be more painful. Americans have mixed with your pure race. *(To a man outside.)* You do not know what it is to mix a race. So dangerous *(Haughty.)* Papá repeated to us. "The world follows a logical order. These with these and those with those." It seemed to be right. Hitler also understood this. But nobody paid any attention. Not even the Germans themselves, with their aristocratic flair. Just enough whiteness to forge ahead. *(Angela is amazed to have discovered a neat explanation for her decadent system of ideas, and begins to smile. With sincerity she calls Petra with great force.)* Petra, Petra, Petra! Cat got your tongue? Unless she's pretending she didn't hear me. Hey, Petra, don't tell me your little lies. You know, there is class system. And that system is to be respected. I'm not the class of person you think I am. I come from Yauco. Accustomed to the best. Courtesy and refinement. Miss Angela Santoni Vincent. *(Proud.)* My dance card was always full. Waltz with Obdulio Bibiloni, mazurka with Paul Thillet, dance with José Miguel Bobonis. They were gentlemen. *(Forcefully.)* They never cared about being shameful. And they'd go out with me, the one that nobody would speak to. But you think that you're a big deal. With your cheap

perfume and reading Corin Tellado. *(In secret.)* You don't know Petra. Petra runs the major part of the business that's why she dresses well. With elegance. With distinction. With charm. And she hides the money under the mattress. All of us know it! But the bitch sleeps with one eye open. Whore. Old woman. Ugly. Witch. *(Screaming.)* Petra. *(Muttering.)* Answer me, you think you're some French governess, you're just maid. *(Singing a French children's son.)*

*Frère Jacques,  
Frère Jacques,  
dormez-vous?  
dormez-vous?  
Sonnez les matines,  
sonnez les matines,  
ding, din don  
ding, din don.*

*(To Petra.)* You've never heard Chopin! You don't even know that Oslo is the capital of Norway, or that Paris is in France. Stupid bitch. *(Turns toward the audience and clarifies.)* That Petra. *(With contempt.)* Madame Counterfeit. My name is Angela, but they call me Illusion. *(Recalling.)* Illusion. It was the brainchild of Pierre. When I asked why he called me that, he responded with his hoarse voice: "You take up my dream time." *(Bitter.)* But those hours were reduced to a moment. *(Painfully.)* Illusion! And that letter with those words: Not meant to be. Love didn't matter. Nor the dream. Not even that waste of dream time. It took only those words to lock me into oblivion. Those words that brought loneliness. And with the awful loneliness of being alone came the constant loneliness of life without faith. Angela Santoni Vincent, Princess of Yauco! *(Forcefully.)* Indecent drunk; old, dirty, sow, filthy thing. *(Spits.)*

*She begins to move from side to side in an almost hysterical delirium. The violent mambo music grows in intensity almost to paroxysm.*

Hey you, guy...come here...Kiss me. I want somebody to kiss me. Anyone. Any man. Just for twelve dollars, twelve...twelve dollars. For twelve dollars you can get me from head to toe. Sure! *(She laughs flippantly)* Sure I'm a lady. Sure!...Sure! Well... okay... If you don't believe it I will say the truth. *(Whispering.)* No, I'm not. But I am the most beautiful lady from old San Juan.

*When talking to the troops, Angela pronounces English with very poor diction. Yet she expresses herself with a style of sweetness that forms a duet with the scandalous music.*

A bargain: for an angel from the States, a whore from Puerto Rico. *(She comes to a dead stop.)* Whom told you that? I'm not dirty. I'm not. Do you know where I'm from? *(Raises her head as if to bare her soul.)* My mother was a lady. We were rich people. *(She slaps her sides, nervously.)* Don't laugh at me. You bastard, son of a bitch, Let me... *(Addressing a different character in her head.)* He didn't want to pay twelve dollars. Will



you pay ten? No less. What? Is nobody going to give ten dollars for me? Eight? Okay, six. That is a bargain!

*She walks between imaginary tables. Extends her arms as if offering merchandise in different storefronts.*

Not even six dollars? Not even six? *Whom* do you think I am? My parents came from Europe. You know, Europe. The old Europe, the Europe of the ladies! (*She laughs with desperation and hums.*) Oh papa loves mambo.

*Her laughter turns into a strong cry.*

Three dollars! Tres pesos for the soul of a woman. What is going on? *Por que se burlan?* Why do they tease me! Why do they turn their backs on me? What has become of these angels? Not one of them has told me, “*si señorita, si.*” What’s going on! No...no, don’t go. I won’t bother you. *No soy pegajosa.* I’m no leach! Wait. I’ll leave, you all can stay. No...no, I’ll leave you alone. I’ll leave you alone.

*She runs upstage to the wall.*

Petra... Petra... nobody wants me, nobody wants to pay. I have tried, but they only respond with laughter and jeers. Not even the angels, Petra. I have offered. I had to lower my price. I had to solicit myself for three dollars! And all they do is laugh. They teased me, called me names, all of them, stinky sailors, bawdy marines, marines who buy caresses. (*Destroyed.*) And if you saw the angels. They don’t laugh, don’t talk, don’t move. They’re like statues. As if they didn’t know me. I might as well be hidden in their wings. The angels act as if they don’t know me, Petra! No, they didn’t recognize me because they were tired. The angels have tired of me! I cannot give myself to anyone. Because nobody would say, “yes, señorita, yes.” Only those, only the angels. Petra, Petra... (*Distraught.*) Go fetch them, tell them they can spank me and spit, they can grind me into dust with their fingers. But they must come back. The lady from Yauco awaits them. What...? What do you say? ... You’re lying! ... You’re lying! Who said it... who ...? Santiago! Okay, Petra. Forgive me this time. (*She walks downstage, totally destroyed; running her hands over her face.*) I’m no good, they say, because I’m old... but I’m only thirty-five years old. I have no charms to offer. That’s what Santiago said. Damn, him! Yauco woman no good here! The lady with the Brussels lace.

*She starts laughing. At first the laugh is only a slight murmur; then it develops into a grotesque guffaw. When it has reached hysteria, Angela seems frozen and then we hear someone enter. She completely contorts her face so as to appear expressionless.*

(*With a distant voice.*) Santiago ... What did you come to do? (*With steadfastness.*) Do you know that the angels are tired of me? They seem fatigued. They won’t have me for so much as three dollars. Can you imagine that? Not even three dollars! What garbage, right? Three dollars. I must be garbage, shit in the flesh. (*Interrupting someone who*

*seems to speak.*) No, don't feel sorry for me. In Corsica no one pitied anyone. Not even Encarnación who was stuck in her wheelchair. It's a question of getting to the end. It's time, time controls everything. And time has no compassion, you see? *Now* you pity me. But you could have done so before. That afternoon when your hairy hand turned me away (*As if the scene were repeating before her eyes.*) No, don't leave me, be charitable ... Have compassion. You have none. And worse. There was no answer. Not a voice. Only at the end of that sentence of yours: "I have what you are looking for." And that first pain gave me eternal sorrow. To you, it didn't matter. All you had to do was flash that big, cold smile. No...shut up. Even today, learn to shut up. Silence is so beautiful. So for years... Until the day I noticed that I was no good. Too old ... Ugly, washed up, or worse, crazy. And you told Petra that I ruined the business with my old whore nonsense. A fairy tale, really! But, no hard feelings. None. Because you are always right. Come ... it's a perplexing desire. (*Provocatively.*) My kisses are waiting for you. Take them!

*She puckers her lips and hugs an imaginary man.*

Smile, smile for the last time so I can see the death of your smile! Smile, more, more, more. And my hand squeezing, squeezing to make a hideous grin, smile... squeezing, squeezing to surrender yourself to death ..., squeezing, squeezing until you feel free from your smile. Free from men, free from Petra, from Don Alejandro, from the marines in their fatigues, free from the fatigued angels, free (*through gritted teeth*), free!

*Angela falls to the floor, clutching an imaginary man by the neck. She lifts up her face, transformed by the struggle, and with very clear voice says:*

I killed him. (*Shows hands.*) With my hands. With only these hands! I killed Santiago. I killed the pain. With only these hands! I broke the moorings. I broke the knot. With these hands! If Maximilian had not surrendered he would still have his kingdom. Everyone already knows. I killed him. The lady had done it. I killed him. Then came the investigations. My picture was on the front page of newspapers. I became famous. They took me to a room with a man who asked me many things, questions I didn't know how to answer. He was a smooth talker and promised to take me back to Corsica. But he told me something I did not understand. I think ... (*hesitates*) yes ... that Corsica had changed ... it was full of white beds ... people dressed in white. It's weird ... but he said it with such certainty that I only thought of my old Corsica, my ancient Corsica. (*With great joy.*) When I arrive, I open the ports. I'll be sleeping in the large bedroom, third to the right, down the hall. A bed with round pillars, a handwoven quilt, blue damask curtains, a braided doormat, wicker chair, a chest decorated with laurel wreaths. I'll call the maids. One to brush my hair and another to tell me stories about the chicken with the long tail or the one about daughter of the king of France. And I'll asleep to the cooing of beloved voices, voices of the earth, good voices.

*A knock on the door.*

I'm coming, I'm coming.

*She runs to the clothing rack and yanks out all the garments. She grabs the suitcase off the floor and packs her clothes in complete disorder. She fixes her hair and looks around.*

Hitler, you cannot stay here alone. I grant you your freedom.

*She opens the door to the cage that has been empty this whole time and smiles from ear to ear.*

¡Buen viaje! Safe Travels!

*She starts to walk. Almost out the door, she remembers the child.*

Oh no! I've forgotten the baby.

*With her left hand, she takes the child in her arms. She gives the audience one last look.*

I find it impossible to leave everything. It's as if time has repented and turned back. That's it! The repentant time obliterates what never should have occurred, time is ashamed for devouring everything in its path. Corsica, the gateway to Yauco, the proper life! Everything that hurts begins to disappear. There will be nothing ugly. Neither tears nor drunkenness, no strange people wandering around San Juan. There will be no pain this time because time will not hurry this time. Free! Free!

*She lets out her last word almost like a hallelujah. Angela walks out with the elegance of a queen, leaving the door open. The scene darkens and only a spotlight remains, like a light coming from outside. Mambo music rises to a climax. The curtain falls on the world that has been shaped by shadows.*

*End.*

## APPENDIX D

### The Cult of the Black Madonna



*Figure 1.* The Black Madonna known formally as Nuestra Señora de Regla [Our Lady of Regla] in Havana. Photograph taken from a 2013 research trip sponsored by the UC-CUBA Academic Initiative

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