Languages of Exile and Diaspora:
A De-Colonial Approach to Equatoguinean and Afro-Latin@ Literature

By

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Abstract

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This project undertakes a comparative analysis of literatures written by Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Hispanic diasporic and exilic writers in the post-1960's/post-independence period. Through decolonial analyses this project examines how these texts create new discursive spaces for engaging critical concepts found in Afro-diasporic and exilic global literatures. I propose that these literatures produced in exile and diaspora show how postcolonial literature engages in a (re)telling of history, interrogates foundational narratives of the nation(s), and articulates critical positions that elucidate decolonial discourses.

I examine the decolonial possibilities of global Afro-diasporic and exilic literature and as such, I propose the use of the theory of the decolonial attitude as a way to read these texts as literary palimpsests. The chapters engage critical topics in decolonial thought including: faithful witnessing and theories of representation, the reimagining of reparations and futurities through decolonial love, and the impossibilities of home and exile.

The goal of this project is to aid in the mapping of the diasporic and exilic global Afro-Latin@ Caribbean and Equatoguinean archipelago. This dissertation re-conceptualizes the fields of Latin@ Studies, Afro-diaspora Studies, and the study of literature in light of theories of decoloniality. Thinking about these nations -- Equatorial Guinea, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic -- and literatures in the context of the long-durée of colonial and postcolonial histories and migrations makes it possible to begin mapping the dialogue between Equatoguinean and Afro-Latin@ diasporic and exilic populations.

To my parents Marcelino and Santa,

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INTRODUCTION

Mapping the Decolonial in Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Hispanic Literature

This project undertakes a comparative analysis of literatures written by Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Hispanic diasporic and exilic writers in the post-1960's/post-independence period. Through decolonial analyses this project examines how these literary productions create new discursive spaces for engaging critical concepts found in the literatures of Afro-Latin@s and Afro-Hispanic writers. Key concepts and theories that I use here include faithful witnessing and theories of representation, the reimagining of reparations and futurities, and the impossibilities of home and exile. Through this approach, I argue that these texts function as alternative historical narratives and center the perspectives, histories, and stories of peoples who are usually silenced or marginalized.

This project is the first to pose a comparative approach between Afro-Hispanic, by which I mean Equatoguinean, and Afro-Latin@, by which I narrow to Dominican and Puerto Rican. The nation of Equatorial Guinea has a long history of colonialism under Spain, which it shares with much of Latin America and the Caribbean. This comparative analysis is becoming increasingly important light of current global immigration crises, ethnic conflict, and the increased interest in global African diasporas.

Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Hispanic literatures are often marginalized within their respective canons. For example, Latin@ literature, thrust into the United States mainstream just a few decades ago, is usually considered a monolithic category with few distinctions between Caribbean, Latin American, and U.S. Latino texts. Within each of these regions, however, Afro-Latin@s are a doubly racialized and oppressed group. Recent studies have shown that Afro-Latin@s have the lowest education, employment, and mortality rates in comparison with other groups in the Americas.[1] These facts have only recently garnered wider attention with most of the interest stirred in academic settings and through campaigns urging Latin@s to consider self-identifying as Afro-Latin@ or black for broader political representation. I am interested in how Afro-Latin@ authors, such as Inés Martiatu Terry, Evilio Grillo, Josefina Baez, Piri Thomas, Junot Díaz, Loida Maritza Perez, and Nelly Santiago, write from the subjective position of blackness and speak to and about particular experiences within the U.S. and Latin@ communities. This subjective disposition is critical but often exceedingly underrepresented in much of the Latin@ literary canon and literary criticism.

[1] Clare Ribando, "Afro-Latinos in Latin America and Considerations for U.S. Policy," (Congressional Research Services: Library of Congress, 2005), http://idbdocs.iadb.org/wsdocs/getdocument.aspx?docnum=460484.

Similarly, Equatoguinean literature is often left outside of common African and European literary categories. As the only Hispanophone nation and literature in the continent of Africa, it is often absent from the primarily Anglophone and Francophone literature. Though largely produced and published in Spain, due to despotic rule in Equatorial Guinea, the body of literature is not habitually considered to be part of the Spanish canon. This exclusion occurs despite the fact that the texts are almost entirely written in Castilian. These two bodies of literature are an example of what Ramona Hernández and Silvio Torres-Saillant have called the "periphery of the margins"[2] or work that is twice marginalized and/or underrepresented. Hernández and Saillant speak with specificity about the Dominican American experience when deploying that phrase, but its validity in this context cannot be refuted.

As a transdisciplinary ethnic studies scholar, I seek to work with great depth and breadth across multiple fields of study. With this training, my analysis of the literature engages postcolonial and decolonial theories, feminist philosophy, decolonial and indigenous feminisms, and literary criticism. In this way I am able to produce a project that focuses on literary productions while adding to the work in other critical fields of inquiry. I hope that a decolonial study of Afro-diasporic and exilic literatures can enhance the exciting work in ethnic studies, Afro-diasporic studies, Latin@ studies, and decolonial theory.

In the following sections I describe the origins of this project, elucidate some of the key terms used in the chapters, historicize the Equatoguinean and Latin@-Caribbean connection, and briefly outline each chapter. Understanding how the project was formulated is key to understanding the stakes of the project and the transdisciplinary approach. Terms such as decolonial attitude, palimpsest literature, diaspora, and exile, are at the center of many of the arguments. I sketch an overview of these terms and the particular ways that I will deploy them in each chapter. I offer a brief summary of how the histories of these regions overlap, the importance of the current state of socioeconomic and political conditions, and the significance of a post 1960's approach in the study of this literature. I also examine the validity of a comparative approach with Afro-diasporic literatures by Dominican and Puerto Rican authors. Finally, I provide a synopsis of each of the three chapters and highlight how they are enhanced by transdisciplinary scholarship and contribute to the broader project of decolonization.

HISTORICZING THE PROJECT

In 2008 I encountered the work of philosopher Emmanuel Eze in a graduate seminar entitled "Theorizing the Human." It was around this seminar table and through critical discussions of decolonial and philosophical thought that my project took root. I had initially imagined a project that focused on the work of diasporic Caribbean Latin@s in the U.S. My work up to that point concentrated on analyzing how authors documented alternative histories,

[2] Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández, *The Dominican Americans: The New Americans*, (Westport: Greenwood Press 2001), 120.

community stories, and cultural knowledge in their texts. This imagined project however, lacked a few critical components: a strong theoretical anchoring and a distinctive nuanced approach. It was an engagement with Emmanuel Eze's last book, *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (2007), along with knowledge about the language debates in African literature that catapulted this project in a fruitful and original direction.

In his meditation, "Languages of Time in Postcolonial Memory," Eze discusses the language and history of colonialism and postcolonialism as they relate to the language and history of Africans as de-historicized subjects. He utilizes critical theory, postcolonial critiques, and a short study of African literature to argue that there is a need for historical accounts to hold "modernity and the European-inspired Enlightenment accountable for [the] false conceptual frameworks." Eze states that these "false conceptual frameworks" assigned a-historical and inferior positions to the colonized for the sake of producing a colonial master narrative.[3] Eze's argument considered the long-standing debate about African literatures and colonial languages. He argued that within the study of African literature both the kind of language used in the writing and the "language of writing" is significant. His foray into the linguistic debate highlighted the work of scholar and political activist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who famously noted that the *act* of writing is as important as the actual language of the written text and what kinds of cosmologies are reflected in those writings.

Through Eze's discussion of Ngũgĩ's work I was introduced to the heated debates beginning in the 1960's, which asked questions such as: What is African Literature? In what language is African literature written? This debate, incited by the success of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), was furthered by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's 1986 text *Decolonising the Mind: Politics of Language in African Literature.* In *Decolonising the Mind*. Ngũgĩ describes why postcolonial African writers should stop writing in colonial languages and begin writing in indigenous African languages. According to Ngũgĩ, the only method to satisfy the call for decolonization is through a reconnection with the oppressed – in language and in praxis.[4]

Ngũgĩ explains that the European colonial project perpetuated a systematic eradication of native language usage through education, and highlighted the West as a beacon of civility and development. According to Ngũgĩ, colonialism's success lay in a multi-pronged attack of African humanity,

> [The] destruction or deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religion, history, geography, education, orature, and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized.[5]

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[3] Emmanuel Eze, *On Reason: Rationality in a World of Cultural Conflict and Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007) 83.

[4] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature (*Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997), 29.

[5] Ibid.

The "conscious elevation" that Ngũgĩ refers to is the colonial imposition of the epistemic framework of the colonizers through a systematic erasure of African histories and languages.

Since language and the ability to communicate translates into "power," Ngũgĩ believes that African languages should be used in order to uplift "African philosophy, African folklore," and literature.[6] In response to writers that suggest that African writers imbue English and French with the nuances of African oral culture Ngũgĩ asks,

> Why, should an African writer, or any writer become so obsessed by taking from his mother-tongue to enrich other tongues? […] How can we enrich our languages? Why not create literary monuments in our own languages? What [is] our responsibility to the struggles of the African people?[7]

Ngũgĩ argues that African writers who call for decolonization in colonial languages, are actually re-asserting processes of neo-colonization. For Ngũgĩ, writing in English and other colonial languages represents "paying homage" to colonialist powers and continuing what he calls the "[the] neo-colonial slavish […] spirit."[8] Finally, Ngũgĩ claims that African languages become "enem[ies] of a neo-colonial state" only when they address themselves, and not the colonizer.[9]

Ngũgĩ's call for indigenous-only literature for Africans and Afro-diasporic peoples becomes increasingly complex when he extends his recommendation to the peoples of Latin America and the U.S.[10] "Most of these comments," he states after enumerating the connections between African and Caribbean literature, "would apply equally well to the literature of the third world *especially* [emphasis

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[6] Ibid., 27.

[7] Ibid., 8.

[8] Ngũgĩ contends that the colonial overseers and Christian missionaries believed in their colonizing mission so deeply that they learned and translated essential texts in even the "tiniest African language." Ibid., 8. Furthermore, Ngũgĩ admonishes African writers for their reluctance to write in what they believe to be the "ethnic, divisive and underdeveloped languages of the peasantry!" Ibid. He points to two forms of colonial alienation for African writers; the first, a conscious or unconscious distancing from the reality of colonial oppression, and the second, an identification with an external reality – that is, believing the self to be one with the colonizer – a reality that Ngũgĩ claims does not exist within the realm of African reality. Ibid., 28.

[9] Ngũgĩ's call for indigenous writing is contingent on the willingness of African writers to learn and translate works into indigenous languages, to find resources for the publishing of such literature, and to find a readership for the work produced. Ibid., 85. With these exigencies and these recommendations Ngũgĩ calls for a return to indigenous languages for reclamation of humanity through a process of decolonization.

[10] Ibid., 96-98.

added] that of Asia and Latin America."[11] To be clear, Ngũgĩ's decolonial position is not only valid but also essential in the perpetuation, preservation, and progression of indigenous languages worldwide. Taking seriously these languages, no matter how small, is representative of an attitude that does not rely on linguistic hierarchies.

Though Ngũgĩ makes a strong case for indigenous-language-only literature and scholarship, the debate has its opposing views, which were represented by scholars such as Leopold Sedar Senghor, Chinua Achebe, Abdul JanMohamed, Anthony Appiah, and Solomon Iyasere. These writers use the same literary examples that Ngũgĩ employs in order to prove the counter-point: African literature, when written with an oppositional framework, in any language, can become decolonial tools for the reassertion of humanity.

These scholars have called the use of colonial languages in postcolonial African literatures a deterritorialization of colonial languages. Chinua Achebe's first novel *Things Fall Apart,* was widely acclaimed since its first publishing in 1958. Scholars such as Ngũgĩ, however, have contested Achebe's use of English. Solomon Iyasere's, *Understanding Things Fall Apart: Selected Essays and Criticisms,* illustrates how Achebe mastery of the English language created a uniquely African text in English. Abdul JanMohamed's "Sophisticated Primitivism: The Syncretism of Oral and Literate Modes in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,"* illustrates how Achebe bends and contorts the English language to create the nuances of Ibo oral culture. This practice makes the colonial English language turn against its root in order to create a poetry or folk orality out of prose.[12] JanMohamed notes, "In addition to this innovative deterritorialization Achebe is able to expand the English language through the transfusion of Igbo material."[13]

For example, in *Things Fall Apart* Achebe refers to the extensive oral tradition of the Ibo. This is understood within the context of the Ibo characters' interpersonal conversations, which include a host of proverbs and allegories. Their linguistic practices are witnessed through the gaze of the local colonial overseer who warily states, "one of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words."[14] Here, Achebe documents the commissioner's critical views of the Ibo oral tradition while highlighting that the Ibo people, far from being savage, animalistic, or underdeveloped, have a grasp of orature and knowledge that lies outside the comprehension of the colonizer.

When discussing the use of English, Achebe explains that African writers who chose to write in English do not do so out of a deep-seated rejection of their African roots, but rather out of "inheritance" and a desire to reach a wider readership. Achebe states,

> Those of us who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to appreciate the value of the inheritance, or we may go on resenting it because it came as a part of a package deal which

[11] Ibid., 98.
[12] Abdul JanMohamed, "Sophisticated Primitivism: The Syncretism of Oral and Literature Modes in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart," Ariel* 50, no. 4 (1984): 19-39.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1958), 177.

> included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire. But let us not in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it.[15]

The good of the language that Achebe refers to is the ability to use it with peoples who are outside of the specific native language readerships due to territorial divisions prior to colonization:

> […] there are areas of Africa where colonialism divided a single ethnic group among two or even three powers. But on the whole it did bring together many people that have hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another, if it failed to give them a song, it at least gives them a tongue, for sighing.[16]

Achebe argues that national languages create the possibility of fluidity and communication through a single language where there once existed no such option. Furthermore, Achebe ardently defends the use of English by African writers as a product of the colonial project that created the contemporary postcolonial Africa. For Achebe, writing in colonial languages is a reflection of the contemporary political and sociocultural shift in Africa. For these scholars writing in English does not hinder decolonial practices, but rather, allows for a larger readership. This would be especially exciting for writers and thinkers vested in the ideals of decolonization as an emancipatory project. Achebe explains that,

> African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecs with an eye on the main chance – outside their own countries. They are by-products of the same processes that made the new nation states of Africa.[17]

According to Achebe, African writers who produce literature in English, French, and other colonial languages do so because it is the language in which they have been taught as a byproduct of colonization. This is noted with critical acknowledgement to the processes of demarcation and colonial intervention. In a similar yet more radical vein, Ngũgĩ decries the imposition of English on African nations. Achebe however, explains how he conceives of the functions of colonial and ethnic languages in postcolonial literatures,

> […] national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province, and has a realized or potential audience throughout it s territory. In other words a literature that is written in the national language. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one

[15] Chinua Achebe, "English and the African Writer," *Transition* 75/76 (1997): 28.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 28.

> ethnic group within the nation. If you take Nigeria as an example, the national literature as I see it, is the literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Effik, Edo, Ijaw, etc., etc.[18]

Akin to Ngũgĩ's argument, Achebe also underscores the seizure of language and memory in the European colonial project. The literal and symbolic erasure of African linguistic languages and language traditions was part and parcel of the colonial project. Yet, Achebe underscores that rather than a nod to these painful histories of erasure and disenfranchisement, colonial languages are a medium for communication, not as a political position but rather as a "practical matter where so many of such diverse background are bound together."[19]

Senghor's argument for the use of colonial languages in postcolonial African literature is also significant to this debate, especially in the context of culture and audience. Senghor explains in his essay "Modern African Poets": "We write firstly, although I will not say only, for the French of Africa and if the French of France find it picturesque, we are sorry."[20] Senghor reveals that he writes for French speaking Africans rather than writing as a native informant for the French of France. He argues that African writers create texts that embody postcolonial African literature, and they also take into account the experiences of Africans who have come of age during the colonial and postcolonial era – experiences that would otherwise go unaddressed. Their work is not only significant, but also timely.

An example of this could be seen in Achebe's historicizing of the emergence of colonialism for the Ibo people in *Things Fall Apart.* At the end of the novel, the reader finds out that the colonial overseer is writing a book entitled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.* He notes that the story of Okonkwo, the protagonist who he does not call by name, would make an "interesting read," for the length of a "reasonable paragraph."[21] The reader, who has just completed an entire novel based on the life of Okonkwo is left distraught by this outright dismissal. Thus, Achebe narrativizes how people like Okonkwo are and were written out of history. Achebe's remarkable portrayal of Okonkwo contextualizes the urgency of these characters, and implicates colonialism in the destruction of a peoples' cosmology.

Achebe and Senghor would agree that many postcolonial African authors producing texts in colonial languages help ensure that alternative historical accounts exist in accessible formats and engage in the deterritorialization of dominant languages and histories. This alternative history provided in literature is an important concept, especially in ethnic studies. Historian Prasenjit Duara highlights the importance of literature to the creation of alternative historical narratives for colonized peoples. He explains that history was stripped from the

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[18] Ibid., 27.
[19] David Westly, "Choice of Language and African Literature: A Bibliographic Essay," *Research in African Literature* 23, 1 (1992): 164.
[20] Léopold Sédar Senghor, *Prose and Poetry*, translated by John Reed & Clive Wake, (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1965), 91.
[21] Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 178.

colonized because a claim to history is a claim to "sovereignty in the emerging system of nations states." Therefore, an a-historical subject has no claim to self-determination and "the historical subject not only had the right to a national sovereignty but also the right to conquer and colonize those who were not so organized into nations."[22] In writing literature African writers destabilize the very foundation of colonialism, which cast them as ahistorical and illiterate subjects.[23] Steve Feierman echoes this sentiment in his essay, "Africa in History: The End of Universal Narratives." Here Feierman explains that "because African history breaks the bounds of historical language it undermines general historical thought [of Africans as ahistorical] and, in the end, cuts beneath its own foundation."[24] Historical and literary narratives serve to challenge the very same foundational histories that serve to dehistoricize and delegitimize the humanity of previously colonized and oppressed peoples.

Lewis R. Gordon and Jane Ana Gordon's edited text *Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice,* considers the possibilities of a subaltern studies that does not necessarily call for a dismantling of the "masters house." They argue that there is an endeavor, "more provocative with such tools than attempt to dismantle the Big House," it is possible to, "transcend rather than dismantle Western ideas through building our own houses of thought."[25] Traversing of the hegemony of Western ideas can be accomplished through literal, theoretical, generic, and practical shifts towards decolonization as project.

It was in researching these long standing debates that I began to conceive of a comparative project. Many of the themes that emerged within the African literary context were pertinent to the language and literary productions of Latin@ Literature. In addition to Ngũgĩ's call for Latin American and U.S. writers to begin producing literature in indigenous languages, the complicated sociolinguistic and political history begged the question: in what language should Latin@ Caribbean writers produce literature? Latin@ Caribbean peoples and the Latin@ diaspora have histories of colonial intervention and imposed hierarchies. Linguistic researchers have discussed the contention between

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[22] Prasenjit Duara, "Transnationalism and the Challenge to National Histories," in *Rethinking American History in a Global Age,* ed. Thomas Bender (Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, 2002).

[23] Steve Feierman, "African Histories and the Dissolution of World History," In *Africa and the Disciplines: The Contributions of Research in Africa to the Social Sciences and Humanities,* editors Robert H. Bates, V. Y. Mudimbe, and Jean O'Barr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 167-212.

[24] Steve Feierman, "Africa in History: The End of Universal Narratives," In *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 40-45.

[25] Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon, *Not Only the Master's Tools:African Aemerican Studies in Theory and Practice,* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2005), ix.

English, Spanish, and Spanglish and linguistic hierarchies in the Latin@ Caribbean diasporic contexts.[26]

These theories made me consider questions such as: could Latin@ Caribbean writers, and specifically Afro-Caribbean diasporic and exilic writers partake in decolonial politics while producing work in languages like English and Spanish? If so, what kinds of decolonial strategies, theories, and topics were being deployed in the texts? How could I bring African literature into conversation with Afro-Caribbean literature? The fact that Equatoguinean literature was being produced in exile and diaspora and that it shared the Latin@ Caribbean history of Spanish colonization was a significant link that begged further comparative analysis. That I was interested in exile and diaspora Afro-Latino@ Caribbean literature made the comparative project take shape in very clear ways. What I aimed to do was engage in close literary, theoretical, and historical readings that would utilize these two bodies of literature: Afro-Hispanic and Afro-Latin@ works written in diaspora and exile.

The following sub-sections clarify some of the major terms that I use throughout the dissertation project. Terms such as decolonial attitude, palimpsest literature, and diaspora and exile are central to the project's framework and are contextualized as follows.

CONTEXTUALIZING TERMS & THEORIES

The Decolonial Attitude

Looking at literature as a way to engage forms of decolonization is one approach that destabilizes processes of dehumanization. In his article, "Reconciliation as a Contested Future: Decolonization as Project or Beyond the Paradigm of War," Nelson Maldonado-Torres states that, "The goal of searching for truth is […] healing nations that have long been besieged by the evils of systematic murder and state sponsored terrorism."[27] This emphasizes that the importance of searching for "truths" lies in uncovering and making available alternative theoretical and historical accounts for decolonial projects in whatever forms they become available. This is what Maldonado-Torres refers to as the *decolonial attitude,* a mode of thinking that "demands the promotion of a shift in thought as massive and influential" as the colonial project on the modern world.[28]

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[26] This linguistic research is exemplified by the critical work of Ana Celia Zentella author of *Growing Up Bilingual: Puerto Rican Children in New York,* (Malden Massachusetts, 1997).

[27] Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "Reconciliation as a Contested Future: Decolonization as Project or Beyond the Paradigm of War," in *Reconciliation, Nations and Churches in Latin America*, ed. by Iain Maclean, 225-246 (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2006).

[28] Ibid.

In *Against War: Views From the Underside of Modernity*, Maldonado-Torres, theorizes the turn toward the decolonial (decolonial turn) as, "highlight[ing] the epistemic relevance of the enslaved and colonized search for humanity. It seeks to open up the sources for thinking and to break up the apartheid of theoretical domains through renewed forms of critique and epistemic creolization."[29] In order to make the decolonial turn, one must employ the decolonial attitude, which Maldonado-Torres argues is a "shift in the attitude of the knower," which, "demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as dispensable and insignificant."[30] Thus, the decolonial attitude is an essential component to processes of decolonization and can aid in decolonial readings of post-1960's/post-independence literatures.

The goal of this project is to understand the decolonial possibilities of global Afro-diasporic and exilic literature. Though the aforementioned arguments about the role of language in literature are centered on African writers and literature, Ngũgĩ's recommendation for the African diaspora opens a space for inquiry. What are the possibilities for decolonization in those spaces of production? How can a comparative framework help us to read the literatures of diasporic and exiled populations?

I propose the use of the theory of the *decolonial attitude* as a way to read the literatures produced in exile and diaspora as literary palimpsests. These literary palimpsests reflect the multiplicity of languages, colonial and postcolonial experiences, as well as multiple narratives of being that allow for the creation of alternative histories.[31] These alternative histories rupture foundational meta-histories of the nation(s) and become instrumental parts in the epistemic shift called for by decolonization.[32]

Palimpsest (Literature)

The question of language, as we have seen it in the debates that were examined above, is a polemical one no doubt, however, not all scholars are participating in the dualism of this linguistic debate. Chantal Zabus poses a constructive argument that looks at the politics of language in relation to one another. This is where my theorization of the literary palimpsest takes shape. Zabus, author of *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel*, opposes the perpetuation of the dualism between English and indigenous languages. She argues that this dualistic debate

[29] Ibid.
[30] Nelson Maldonado-Torres. *Against War: Theories from the Underside of Humanity*, (Duke University Press, 2008), 8.
[31] Ibid., 2008.
[32] Feierman, 1993. "African Histories and the Dissolution of World History," 167-212.

"overdetermines post-colonial writing and criticism."[33] Zabus explains that no indigenous African language is free of influences from other indigenous or European languages.

It is precisely here that the palimpsest of creolization is evident. A palimpsest is a manuscript or piece of writing material on which the original writing has been effaced to make room for later writing but of which traces remain.[34] Zabus offers the idea of the *linguistic palimpsest,* where languages interact with one another, where, "behind the scriptural authority of the European language, the earlier imperfectly erased remnants of the African language can still be perceived."[35] What emerges here is the idea that both colonial and indigenous languages are in contact with one another and that this contact creates a space where new languages or ways of expressions can emerge. Zabus' scholarship shows how both the major colonial languages and the minor indigenous languages are constantly interacting and in many cases are creating new languages."[36]

Also important in this framework is M. Jacqui Alexander's conceptions of the "palimpsest(time)" that is a refusal to erase the past – seeing it very much situated in the present. As such, Alexander understands a continual meeting of times for example: colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial OR pre-modern, modern, postmodern, as unfixed time – or palimpsest time.[37] Theories of decoloniality are useful frameworks due to their temporal scope, which understands modernity since 1492 and emerge in the Cold War period. Furthermore, these theories of decoloniality are enriched by a sustained engagement with postcolonial studies. Through this theoretical approach I read the work of Aníbal Quijano, Gloria Anzaldúa, Walter Mignolo, Emma Perez, Ramon Grosfoguel, María Lugones, and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

An example of this new language creation can be seen in post 1960's Nuyorican poetry. This phenomenon is echoed in Anzaldúa's discussion of the development of the Spanish language in Latin America and the Caribbean and in Walter Mignolo's discussion of language and border thinking. The border language that Anzaldúa refers to in her text, *Borderlands/La Frontera,* develops organically: "change, evolution, enriquecimiento de palabras nuevas por invención o adopción have created – un Nuevo lenguaje. Un language que corresponde a un modo de vivir."[38] Anzaldúa speaks of living languages that emerge out of necessity. These languages do not belong to any one people or nation. Instead, Anzaldúa states, "We speak a patois, a forked tongue, a variation of two languages."[39] The "synergy of two cultures" that Anzaldúa speaks of is

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[33] Chantal Zabus, *The African Palimpsest: Indigenization of Language in the West African Europhone Novel,* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 1991).
[34] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "Palimpsest," accessed July 11, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/136319?rskey=2keCI4&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid.
[35] Zabus, *The African Palimpsest*, 118.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Also see Shohat and Stam, 2004.
[38] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza,* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books 1987).
[39] Ibid., 256.

unseen in Ngũgĩ's call for Afro-diasporic and Latin American writers to create Indigenous language-only texts. Furthermore, Anzaldúa speaks to the difficulty of extracting a pure or indigenous language from contact languages spoken as Spanish or English, "es dificil differentiating between lo heredado, lo adquirido, lo impuesto," (inherited, acquired, imposed).[40]

Anzaldúa maintains that border thinking fractures dominant languages through emerging language practices: the creolization, patois, and developments of living languages.[41] This would be an apt way of describing how the palimpsest of creolization is part-and-parcel of the Latino@ Caribbean and diasporic living languages and is reflected in the literatures produced by its writers. For example, the work of Ana Celia Zentella is important in contextualizing the linguistic use of Puerto Ricans in New York. Her book, *Growing Up Bilingual*, was the first longitudinal study of English, Spanish, and Spanglish use in New York City's Puerto Rican enclave. Her approach, which she coins as "Anthropolitical Linguistics," de-pathologizes Latin@ communities language practices; an approach whose main components are, "placing language in its social context and acknowledging that there is no language without power."[42] In this project, Anthropolitical Linguistics is an important element to understanding and placing inherent value in the language and the literatures that I read as decolonial.[43]

Anzaldúa argues that these new creolized languages correspond to a new way of living while Zentella's linguistic fieldwork documents the dynamics of this language usage. In the visual field the photography work of Frank Espada, particularly the photo project "The Puerto Rican Diaspora," documents Puerto Rican diasporic living in the continental U.S. and Hawaii.[44] The decolonial attitude would allow for an analysis of the literatures and aesthetic productions of global Afro-diasporas not solely as colonial appendages but rather as texts that explore and document alternative histories. These are literary palimpsests, texts whose writing show the remnants of colonialism, postcolonialism, and imagine decolonial futures.

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[40] Ibid., 252.

[41] According to Walter Mignolo, "border thinking –is within the imaginary of the modern world-system but repressed by the coloniality of power, which is the dominance of hermeneutics and epistemology that control the conceptualization of knowledge." *Local Histories/Global Designs*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16-23.

[42] Yomaira Figueroa. Forthcoming interview with Ana Celia Zentella.

[43] Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual,* 1997.

[44] Frank Espada's work is rare to find in bound form, but a portion of his personal website also houses a large collection of photos of the Puerto Rican diaspora from all across the U.S. (http://www.frankespada.com/). Espada's personal papers have been made available in the archives at Duke University: (http://library.duke.edu/news/main/2011/article87.html).

Diaspora & Exile

One point of departure for this project will be examining the conceptual use of exile and diaspora by Third World intellectuals. Specifically, I draw upon the work of VéVé Clark, Edward Said, Gloria Anzaldúa, W.E.B. Du Bois, Kim Butler, and Brent Hayes Edwards in order to articulate 'diaspora' and 'exile' as spaces counter-narratives and histories of arrival, self, and nation are formed.

In "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," Kim D. Butler grapples with defining diaspora as a theoretical framework that takes into account multiple and comparative diasporas. Butler notes that popular conceptions and uses of diaspora include six major points: "1) dispersal to two or more locations 2) collective mythology of homeland 3) alienation from hostland 4) idealization of return to homeland 5) and 6) ongoing relationship with homeland."[45] Butler acknowledges that comparative analyses of diasporas would be useful for "comprehensive study" of diasporas because diasporan studies are inherently comparative.[46] "[R]ather than being viewed as an ethnicity," she explains, "diaspora may be alternatively considered a framework for the study of a specific process of community formation."[47] This shifts the study of diaspora phenomenon from one that looks at specific groups, to a method and theoretical approach that looks at, "human history," in diaspora.

Butler pays special attention to the "interrelationships within various communities of a diaspora." [48] These interrelationships in diaspora are often overlooked in studies that do not use a diaspora studies conceptual framework. Furthermore, VéVé Clark's theorization of diaspora pushes for a revised definition of diaspora in light of comparative and intertextual relationship. For Clark, the literature of the African diaspora is a "rhetorically redefined unity in transnational terms."[49] Clark develops a critical conceptual approach that she calls "diaspora literacy," which is defined as,

> the reader's ability to comprehend the literatures of Africa, Afro-America, and the Caribbean from an informed indigenous perspective. The field is multicultural and multilingual, encompassing writing in European and ethnic languages. It is a skill for both narrator and reader which demands a knowledge of historical, social, cultural, and political development generated by lived and textural experience. […] Diaspora literacy has implied an ease and intimacy with more than one language, with

[45] Kim D. Butler, "Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse," *Diaspora 10; No 2, (*2001), 191.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid., 194.
[48] Ibid., 191.
[49] VéVé Clark, "Developing Diaspora Literature and *Marasa* Consciousness" in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text,* ed. Hortense J. Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 41.

> interdisciplinary relations among history, ethnology and folklore of regional expression.[50]

Diaspora literacy is multilingual, transdisciplinary, and does not exhaust a binary of "us vs. them." Instead, diaspora literacy traverses the oppositional framework and creates a "reformation of the form," a third principle that pushes the narrator/reader to imagine beyond the binary.[51]

Here is where Clark's Diaspora literacy ties in closely with Maldonado-Torres' decolonial attitude in that it takes seriously the texts and literatures of the "underside of humanity" and seeks to understand these texts in "indigenous and cultural perspectives beyond the field of Western or westernized signification."[52] The suggestion for comparative studies of diaspora is an important aspect of my project, since I aim to compare literatures of two diasporas: the Equatorial Guinean diaspora to Spain and the Latin@ Caribbean diaspora to the United States. Each one of my chapters will juxtapose two texts – one from the Afro-Latin@ literary tradition and one from the Afro-Hispanic literary tradition – through a series of thematic approaches and a decolonial framework.

In their collaborative text, *The Dominican Americans (The New Americans)*, Ramona Hernández and Silvio Torres-Saillant propose that the study of diasporic Dominicans in the United States can be conceived of as constituting the "periphery of the margins."[53] This is to signify that the diasporic and exilic Dominican experience in the U.S. is twice overlooked and/or underrepresented within the academy. As I have noted above, I find this language to be evocative of, and particularly useful to, understanding the ways in which the literature of the Latin@ Caribbean diaspora is often underrepresented. I am committed to a project that sees human value in the periphery of the margins and as such I am invested in reading how diasporic and exilic Afro-Latin@s and Afro-Hispanics imagine, document, and articulate their lived histories, conceptions of home, and possible futures.

CENTERING RACE, GENDER & SUBJECTIVITY

That this is a feminist project cannot be overstated. This dissertation does not include a chapter on the politics of sex, gender, and subjectivity but instead, each chapter meditates on these dynamics as part of its approach. Focusing on the works of Afro-Latinas and Afro-Hispanic writers, as well as analyzing texts through a feminist lens elucidates the contributions of women to the politics of the nation, domestic life, education, and to the history of migrations and exile. In *Caribbean Poetics* Silvio Torres-Saillant notes that given how women's voices have been "historically silenced in the various 'master discourses' of the region, it follows that female writers should assume an existential stance that may differ

[50] Ibid., 42.
[51] Ibid., 42-43.
[52] Ibid., 42.
[53] Torres-Saillant and Hernández, *The Dominican Americans*, 120.

from that of their male colleagues."[54] Here Torres-Saillant points to the dichotomous associations often made when the work of women intellectuals and writers are evaluated. Torres-Saillant goes on to say, "the oppression of women in the Caribbean, then, exhibits more layers of complexity that the oppression endured by men, and female writers cannot help but to reflect wit in their particular kind of utterance."[55] The analysis of Afro-Latina Caribbean and Afro-Hispanic women's writing then, becomes a key component to understanding these bodies of literature. In fact, Torres-Saillant insists, "a holistic approach to the regional corpus must remain acutely aware of the dialogue between women's and men's texts."[56] The literature produced by and/or about women's experiences does not only preoccupy itself with feminist politics, but also addresses the world, and their communities in local and transnational scopes.

In fact much of these Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Hispanic literary works reflect similar themes of identity, sociopolitical inquiry, social protest, and critiques of postcolonial conditions in homelands (real and imagined) and hostlands (current and past). To this end, Torres-Saillant notes, "The fact that writers in the region so consistently experience the need to address their world, their people, and their legacy in this specific part of the globe is at the core of the socioaesthetic kinship exhibited by Caribbean texts."[57] I am particularly interested in how these Afro-diasporic writers address themselves, their communities, and the world in their writing.

HISTORICIZING THE EQUATOGUIENAN/LATINO@ CARIBBEAN CONNECTION

Through an analysis of post-colonial and decolonial scholars I will complicate Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's[58] famous call for indigenous language only literature and highlight literary palimpsests as tools for the destabilization of foundational meta-histories. This dissertation also seeks to elucidate the efficacy of two methodological tools: the concept of the decolonial attitude and the literary palimpsest. Both have been underutilized in Comparative Ethnic Studies and for larger projects of epistemic decolonization.

In the project I examine the historical trajectories and cultural productions of two distinct locations and populations: diasporic and exilic Equatorial Guinean and Afro-Latin@ Caribbean writers. I have chosen to focus on these two groups because of the ways in which their histories and languages overlap. Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Puerto Rico, and Equatorial Guinea were under Spanish colonial rule and have Spanish as an official language. Within each of these nations large portions of the population were forcibly or voluntarily exiled

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[54] Silvio Torres-Saillant, *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 72.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid., 73.
[58] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind,* 1997.

and/or were part of a diaspora to a colonial power. For example, today we see a U.S. with more Puerto Ricans on the mainland than living on the islands.[59] Similar patterns of migrations from the Dominican Republic mirror this history, and Cubans have a long-standing history in the U.S. going back the 1700's and rapidly increasing during and after the Cold War period.[60]

Equatorial Guinea has a population comprised of over six ethnic groups largely of Bantu origin including: Fang, Bubi, Bujebas, Ndowe, Combes, Balengues, and Bengas – with the Fang being the more politically powerful group. Although many of these ethnic languages are still spoken, due to the (post)colonial legacy of Equatorial Guinea, the majority of post-1960's writing and literature of Equatorial Guineans is written and produced in exile in Spanish. Though the colonial and migrational histories of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans overlap and diverge throughout history, the linguistic (and cultural) connection between these nations allows for a study that juxtaposes their orthographies, literatures, and cultural expressions.[61]

Within the study of these literatures we see an understudied category: Caribbean Afro-Latino Anglophone literature. As you will read in the next few pages, Equatorial Guinea, a Sub-Saharan African country across the Atlantic shares many of these realities. Within the Afro-Hispanic context, we also see an understudied body of literature: African literature written in Spanish. These bodies of literature represent a mapping of the long-durée of the colonial project, a representation of postcolonial social and political realities, and a radical imagining of the possibilities for a decolonial future.

Equatorial Guinea is a country on the central west coast of Africa and is comprised of several islands: Bioko, Annobon, Corsico, and Elobay Grande and Elobay Chico and a continental mainland territory called Rio Muni.

Courtesy of geology.com

[59] Please see: Gonzalez, Juan, 2011; Flores, Juan 2007.
[60] Please see: Greenbaum, Susan D., 2010; Garcia, Maria Christina, 2004; Levitt, Peggy, 2004; Duany, Jorge, 1998.
[61] Though African, Indigenous, and European métissage is often highlighted, countless other groups are part of the Caribbean make-up (including but not limited to: Middle Eastern, Asian, and Mediterranean groups).

Some of the lands that now constitute Equatorial Guinea – such as the island Fernando Poo, which is now Bioko where the capital Malabo is located – were colonized by Portugal in 1474. Many of its territories were passed through British and then Spanish rule and during most of the 19th and 20th centuries the nation was called Spanish Guinea. Upon its decolonization from Spain in 1968, the elected president Francisco Macias Nguema created a single party state and declared himself president for life. He committed mass genocide of the Bubi ethnic group, renounced ties with Spain, and jailed Guineans who had been educated under Spanish Colonial rule (all of this lead to a mass exodus of those who had the means to flee).

Macias was overthrown in 1979 by his nephew Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo. Obiang reinstated ties with Spain, but continues to rule the country with similar repressive political tactics. In the 1990's the discovery of oil in the country's offshore territory led to an economic boom that makes it the third richest country in Sub-Saharan Africa. The number one consumer of Equatoguinean oil is the U.S. with the petrol company Hess at the forefront of that consumption. Since the U.S. consumes over one-third of Equatoguinean oil, U.S. presence, particularly Texas oil corporations, on the island is prevalent. These corporate transactions should be of interest to the global community as Equatorial Guinea has been cited for human rights violations.[62]

This complex history in addition to the fact that Equatorial Guinea is the only Spanish-speaking country in Sub-Saharan African made it a rich space for me to ask critical questions about the relationship between comparative ethnic studies and global African diasporas. For the most part, the work on Equatorial Guinea has centered on its dynamic contact linguistics.[63] In Equatorial Guinea, Spanish, French, and Portuguese are the official languages.[64] Fang, Bubi, Ndowe, and other indigenous languages are used colloquially and most island Guineans also speak a pidgin English, called *Pichi,* that originated from the colonial era migrations of Nigerian contract laborers.[65]

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[62] The connection of the U.S. and Equatorial Guinea is pertinent to this project and even more so to future scholarship in these areas of study. The establishment multinational corporations on the island of Bioko despite the nation's violation of human rights and the vast inequality in wealth distribution contribute to the destabilization of Equatoguinean citizens. This destabilization and disenfranchisement coupled with dictatorial rule has propelled over one-third of the nation into exile. This geopolitical dimension is crucial for the context of this project. For detailed information on Equatorial Guinean Human Rights records please see the longitudinal study produced by the CIRI Human Rights Data Project: http://www.humanrightsdata.com/. The database has complete data sets from 1981-2011.

[63] This is evidenced by the extensive work of John Lipski on the Spanish language of Equatorial Guinea.

[64] This *Pichi* emerged due to the fact that Equatorial Guinea is situated within a largely Afro-Francophone region and also because Portugal had a long-standing colonial intervention on the island of Annóbon.

[65] John M. Lipski, "The Spanish of Equatorial Guinea: research on la hispanidad's best-kept secret" *Afro-Hispanic Review* 21, no. 1/2 (2002): 70-97.

In recent years there has been a flurry of research on Equatoguinean literature.[66] Most recently, there has been work on recovering the history of 19th century deportees - mostly Cuban and a few Puerto Rican - that were exiled to Equatorial Guinea and had greatly influenced both the linguistic practices as well as some cultural aesthetics.[67] In contemporary Equatorial Guinea there are Cuban professionals including doctors, engineers, and professors working on the island through official government exchange programs.[68]

Cuban deportee memorial in Malabo, Bioko, Equatorial Guinea.
(photo courtesy of author: 2013)

The focus on post-1960's work correlates to an important era in the social and literary histories of both Latin@ Caribbean and Equatoguinean literature. With the emergence of radical political and social movements, bodies of literature by Puerto Rican, and Dominican writers that reflected these realities also emerged. Similarly, with the fall of the Franco regime in Spain and the subsequent independence of Equatorial Guinea, we see an explosion of literary, poetic, and journalistic writings that are preoccupied with documenting the changing realities. Though the migratory, socioeconomic, and political historical trajectories of Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, and Equatoguineans are undoubtedly different - as reflected in the work of Edna Acosta-Belen, Juan Flores, Ramon Grosfoguel, Silvio Torres Saillant, Benita Sampedro Vizcaya, Michael Ugarte, Marvin Lewis, and Remei Sipi Mayo, amongst others - their Spanish colonial histories and their (post)colonial political trajectories allow for comparative studies. Through the juxtaposition of these three diverse bodies of literature we can piece together narratives of migration, exile, rural and urban labor, and politics of gender and sexuality.

Another compelling reason for this comparative project is that these are

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John M. Lipski, "The Spanish Language of Equatorial Guinea" *Arizona Journal of Hispanic Cultural Studies* 8, (2004): 115-130.

[66] Namely the work of Marvin Lewis (2007), and Benita Sampedro Vizcaya (2011), Elisa Rizo (2011), Michael Ugarte (2013).

[67] Forthcoming work by Sampedro Viscaya.

[68] During my field work I was able to meet and interview some of the Cuban scholars, professors, and doctors that comprised the latest fleet to arrive to the capital city of Equatorial Guinea, Malabo.

two Third World literatures being written from the First World (the United States in the case of most of the Latin@ Caribbean writers and Spain for most of the Equatorial Guinean writers). I am investigating the lineaments of a south-south dialogue as articulated from the First World. Finally, in both post-colonial studies and decolonial studies there is a lack of attention to these particular former Afro-Latin@/Afro-Hispanic colonies and I would argue, to their intimate ties to contemporary U.S. political economy. This is the first time these two bodies of work are being studied together. Conducted in this way, my project offers important methodological insights into how we engage comparative diasporic literary production.

CONTEXTULAIZING THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1:

"Faithful Witnessing" as Trope in Decolonial Readings of *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Chapter one entitled, "'Faithful Witnessing' as Trope in Decolonial Readings of *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,"* compares two texts published twenty years apart: Donato Ndongo Bidyogo's *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987) and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Through a close reading of these two novels, I engage theories of "faithful witnessing" and the decolonial attitude. Maria Lugones' *Peregrinajaes/Pilgrimages: Theorizing Coalitions Against Multiple Oppressions* (2003) develops the concept of faithful witnessing which is a method of collaborating with those who are oppressed. Though sustained conversation with feminist philosophy, theories of recognition, and decolonial methodology, chapter one considers how Ndongo Bidyogo and Díaz's novels center moments of witnessing as decolonial practices.

In *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (*Shadows of Your Black Memory* translated text published in 2007), the protagonist is an unnamed boy who narrates the double consciousness that delineates his life in Equatorial Guinea. Paying critical attention to the acts of resistance by his uncle, Tío Abeso, the boy narrates his vacillation between his allegiance to his community and the increasing influence of the Catholic priest, Father Ortiz. The novel is written from an adult retrospective is a useful example of how literature can act as a counter-history to foundational histories of colonialism while challenging the notion that colonized peoples are ahistorical subjects.

In my reading of Díaz's text, I argue that the novel's multiple narrators faithfully witness the founding violence of colonization via the traveling curse *fukú*. We encounter a postcolonial world that legitimates violence as practice. The narrators, including Oscar and Lola, faithfully witness the violence and struggles encountered by the characters in the text. From Oscar's battle with being loveless and overweight, to Belicia's tragic life story and Lola's rebellion, the narrative

validates each character's experiences while following their transnational migrations.

Chapter 2:

Reparation as Transformation:
Radical Re-imagining Futurities Through Decolonial Love

Chapter two entitled, "Reparation as Transformation: Radical Re-imagining Futurities Through Decolonial Love," examines three Afro-diasporic and exilic works in an effort to examine how the writers engage theories of reparations and futurities through practices of decolonial love. I provide a long reading of Ernesto Quinonz's *Bodega Dreams* (2000) and Joaquin Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: sangre en la selva* (2013), and a short reading of Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Through these readings I map a series of methods that Afro-diasporic and exilic writers use to imagine and reimagine the future possibilities of reparations. Through a dialogue with Robin Kelley and Linda Tuhiwai Smith's work on reparations I theorize the possibilities of reparations as decolonial love. My understanding of decolonial love draws from the work of Chela Sandoval in conversation with Donna Haraway, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Junot Díaz. Instead of positivistic definitions of reparations I theorize a view beyond monetary measure.

Ernesto Quiñonez's text, *Bodega Dreams*, is a novel where power, gender, and bodies are re-imagined as part of the project of community liberation. The narrative is about one man's attempt to incite grand scale reparations in New York City's Puerto Rican/Latin@ ethnic enclave El Barrio. These reparations are tied to notions of liberation, primarily a plan to foster an elite class of born and bred Nuyoricans that will have enough political clout to liberate Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial possession. The chapter examines the birth and the limits of Willie Bodega's plans and more importantly how the ethics of the protagonist, Chino, are fundamentally changed despite the failure of the grand scale welfare state of Willie Bodega. This deep change, I argue, is a form of decolonial love.

Though Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* features prominently in chapter one, I also treat the novel in Chapter 2. Its focus on fantastic futures and its emphasis on both science fiction and the possibilities imagined in writing, proved to be a fertile space through which to engage in theories of reparations and futurities. In this context I examine reparations in the novel in relation to the psychological and psychosocial legacy of slavery and the coloniality-of-power.

Aníbal Quijano defines the coloniality of power in terms of the structures that dictate the order of knowledge, power, and bodies after the process of colonialism has ceased to exist in full.[69] I argue that Díaz poses the

[69] Aníbal Quijano. "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America" *Neplanta: Views from the South*, 1.3, (2000): 533-580.

question of love and repair, as central to the possibilities of reparation of the broken self and the broken other. Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, while excavating the past and legitimizing untold histories of violence, is also deeply preoccupied with the future and the possibilities of a "stronger loving world."[70] Díaz's interview with Paula Moya, and his own venture into decolonial theories, help to anchor this reading of the novel and propels the reader to consider the long-durée of colonialism while simultaneously imagining and working toward a reparative future.[71]

My reading of Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: Sangre en la selva* is particularly exciting because it is one of the most recently published novels of the Equatoguinean tradition. Mbomio Bacheng tells the story of Matinga, a woman made nymph, sent from the world of the dead to save the peoples of Equatorial Guinea with her menstrual blood. The analysis of *Matinga: sangre en la selva* is enhanced by theories of Indigenous Feminisms provided by Shari Hundorf and Cheryl Suzack.[72] The novel, links the future of the nation to past political and activist struggles while making Matinga's blood a crucial part of the reparations that would lead to a more loving future. I argue that *Matinga: sangre en la selva*, destabilizes notions of fixed or immobile histories while critiquing colonialism and postcolonialism. The struggle for decolonization is shown as the backdrop for imagining a different kind of future, one that centers communal love and collective work. This chapter highlights three distinct ways that these global Afro-diasporic and exilic writers conceive of reparations beyond the material and toward a philosophy of decolonial love.

Chapter 3:

Exile and Impossibilities of Home/lands
Geographies of Home* and *El Dictador de Corsico

In the final chapter of the dissertation entitled, "Exile and Impossibilities of Home/lands: *Geographies of Home* and *El Dictador de Corsico*," I analyze two novels that center on themes of home and exile. Loida Maritza Perez's *Geographies of Home* and Juan Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *El dictator de Corsico* engage ideological concepts of home and homelands through radically different conceptions of exile. Both novels speak from the position of difference/outsidedness. In the case of *Geographies of Home*, the rejection of

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[70] Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2007), 322.

[71] Paula M.L. Moya, "The Search for Decolonial Love: An Interview with Junot Díaz." *Boston Review*, June 26, 2012, http://www.bostonreview.net/books-ideas/paula-ml-moya-decolonial-love-interview-junot-d%C3%ADaz.

[72] Shari Hundorf and Cheryl Suzack, "Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing the Issues," in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, eds. Cheryl Suzac, et al. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

blackness and Afro-syncretism for the Afro-Dominican family is the root their isolation and feelings of inadequacy and exile. In *El dictador de Corsico*, the protagonist's position as an ethnic minority island dweller in Equatorial Guinea put them in a perilous position. Their exile is propelled by dictatorial rule, ecological destruction, and the onset of painful memories.

By addressing various embodiments of exile, Ávila Laurel and Perez speak about, near, and from positions of blackness and otherness. Both of these authors write from the perspective of those who underside of power. Their novels pose relevant questions about the viability of home and exile for racialized and othered subjects. The chapter considers how each of the authors conceive of home in uninhabitable circumstances.

Geographies of Home disrupts the idea of home as a spatial location. Through her mostly female characters, Perez rejects linear narratives of immigration and sexual subjectivity. In my analysis I examine how novel demonstrates multiple kinds of exile and troubles simplistic and Eurocentric conceptions of home and family. Finally, the rejection of Afro-Dominicanness and familial Afro-syncretic beliefs is shown to be the lynchpin in the family's struggles with self-identity, spiritual belief systems, and feelings of physical, mental and metaphysical exile.

Ávila Laurel's *El dictator de Corsico* introduces us to an Ndowe family on the island of Corsico, Equatorial Guinea. We meet the family as an unexpected visitor reaches the island, Anika. Her foreign presence conjures memories of the colonial and post-independence period for the protagonist Malela. These memories exacerbate the familial and political strife for Malela and her two sons Primero and Segundo. Ávila Laurel's novel shows a different dimension of exile, one of perpetual fear of displacement and violence. Malela and her two sons each experience traumatic events that lead them to choose exile as the only (im)possible option, and this in turn brings tragic results. The novel highlights the fear in remembering and the tenuous relationship between postcolonial peoples and dangerous memories. In *El dictator de Corsico,* Ávila Laurel narrativizes the many ways that exile can be felt by peoples on the periphery of despotic and arbitrary power.

Conclusion

The final chapter of the dissertation reviews the body chapters in order to reconceptualize thematically and theoretically the ways that they speak to themes of decoloniality. The framing of the dissertation as a comparative global Afro-diasporic project makes a synthesis of arguments necessary. The conclusion will not only succinctly review the goals of each chapter but will also highlight what other theories could further elucidate the project's goals. I will also outline concepts and theoretical approaches that represent an agenda for future work. Finally, the conclusion makes a case for transdisciplinary projects and comparative ethnic studies approaches in literary and social scientific scholarship. My hope is that this project can be a small step toward

"undermin(ing) the foundation of the wall," of boundaries, borders, and frontiers that only serve to delimit access to liberty, equality, and decolonization.[73]

[73] Trinh T. Minh-ha, "Miles of Strangeness." Filmed 10/14/11. Center for Teaching and Learning, Universitat Wien. Posted October 2011. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADtmeCFcBFk.

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CHAPTER 1

"Faithful Witnessing" as Trope in Decolonial Readings of *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

> With the priest I asked myself if all those dirty smelly blacks, no matter that they were dressed in their Sunday best, if those poor folks devoured by mosquitos, reduced to a hypnotic, irreversible state by dysentery and malaria, always looking lethargic, dazed, submissive, if only those men, women, and children, so dimwitted, so attached to the savage nature surrounding them, were worthy of the immense goodness I was trying to bring them as I offered the possibility of a new life, eternal life, amen, *per omnia secula seculorem*, trying to rid them of their idolatry and elevating them to the supreme category of civilized beings.[1]

> Those stories fascinated you – the only one who tried to preserve the collective memory of your people was Tío Abeso. His mission was to revive the essence of your caste, to shape your young and still tender spirit with what remained of your fallen culture. He saw no advantage at all in making friends with the white occupiers; he preferred keeping in tact the magical powers, mysterious and dangerous, powers that had been bestowed on him as chief. And that was the origin of his contempt of those who were ignorant of your people, a contempt you thought was spite.[2]

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[1] Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*. Trans. Michael Ugarte.
"Con el padre, me preguntaba si esos negros de llagas supurantes y hediondas a pesar de ir endomingados, si esos pobres seres carcomidos a picotazos de anofeles y a los que el paludismo y la disentería amebiana habían reducido a un estado hipnótico irreversible, dándoles una sepiterna mirada lánguida de locos sumisos, si esos hombres, mujeres y niños tan embrutecidos como la naturaleza indomable que les rodeaba eran dignos del inmenso bien que les estaba haciendo al brindarles la posibilidad de una nueva vida, la vida eterna, amén, per omnia secula seculorem, apartándoles de sus creencias idólatras y elevándoles a la suprema categoría de seres civilizados." Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (Madrid: Editorial Bronce, 1987), 66.

[2] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 84-85.
Y esas historias te embelesaban, y el único que intentaba salvaguardar la memoria colectiva de tu pueblo era el tío Abeso. Revivir la esencia de vuestra casta, hollar tu espíritu aún tierno con las huellas de la cultura truncada era su misión. No encontraba ventaja alguna en la Amistad con los ocupantes blancos, prefería seguir conservando intacta la fuerza mágica, misteriosa y peligrosa que

> And now we arrive at the strangest part of our tale. Whether what follows was a figment of Beli's wrecked imagination or something else altogether I cannot say. Even your Watcher has his silences, his páginas en blanco.[3]
>
> Success, after all, loves a witness, but failure can't exist without one.[4]

The quotations above are excerpts from Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (1987) [*Shadows of Your Black Memory* (2007)] and Junot Díaz 's, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). The first novel, a groundbreaking text of the Equatorial Guinean literary canon, was written in Spanish and published in 1987.[5] The story centers on a community on the verge of a major and violent transition—the Spanish missionaries have arrived to the Equatorial Guinean countryside and colonization has begun in earnest. Throughout the novel, we see the Catholic ministry laying the groundwork for the Spanish colonial project in Equatorial Guinea. The nameless narrator, a young boy, is the only character that is privy to the ongoing(s) of each world: his Fang community and the local leaders of the church.

In the second quoted novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* we encounter the story of a hopelessly overweight Dominican-American man named Oscar. His story is primarily narrated by his only friend Yunior, with additional narratives provided by a nameless footnote narrator, who adds, edits, and poses alternative accounts of the story, and his fiercely loyal sister Lola. *Oscar Wao* is at once an account of the Cabral and De León Family as well as an accounting for the enduring legacies of colonialism in the Caribbean. The novel illustrates how diasporic populations live intimately with over five hundred years of history, the legacy of a murderous 20th century dictatorship, and an almost absolute normalization of violence.

In this chapter I pose that both of these novels, products of distinct literary traditions and published twenty years apart, engage in what Latina feminist philosopher María Lugones calls "faithful witnessing." By faithful witnessing Lugones means an act of solidarity against power allied with those oppressed. This kind of faithful witnessing is then a political act, which aligns itself with feminist and decolonial epistemologies. The act of faithful witnessing, as demonstrated by the novels' narrators, leads the reader to understand the shifts in the structure of power that changes the lives of these families and

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le había sido conferida por el pueblo como jefe, y ahí estaba el origen del majestuoso desdén que los desconocedores de la tradición de vuestro pueblo llamáis despecho.
Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*., 91.

[3] Junot Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (New York: Penguin 2007), 149.

[4] Ibid., 136.

[5] The English translation of the novel was published in 2007. Translation by Michael Ugarte.

communities. Witnessing as concept, has a long history of use in multiple contexts, including philosophy, feminist thought, literary criticism, and cultural anthropology, to name a few. My conceptualization of faithful witnessing through lenses of philosophy, feminism, and decolonial thought, is used as a framework through which to study these literatures.

Through these readings, I argue that the novels by Ndongo-Bidyogo and Díaz are examples of what Nelson Maldonado-Torres refers to as "decolonial attitude."[6] By decolonial attitude, Maldonado Torres means a "shift in the attitude of the knower," which, sees the, "perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as dispensable and insignificant."[7] This essay theorizes faithful witnessing and the decolonial attitude through a juxtaposition of Donato Ndongo's *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* In this way, I makes a case for the use of faithful witnessing as trope and the decolonial attitude as writing approach in two distinct yet related literary traditions.

FAITHFUL WITNESSING AS FRAMEWORK

In María Lugones' *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* she describes the act of "faithful witnessing" as a method of collaborating with those who are silenced. To faithfully witness is to serve as a witness against oppressions on the side of resistance.[8] Lugones deploys the concept of faithful witnessing as a strategy through which oppressed peoples, and specifically women of color form coalitions in order to combat multiple kinds of oppressions. Witnessing as concept has a long history within feminist, philosophical, decolonial, religious, and juridical debates, to name a few. For example, in *Witnessing Beyond Recognition* Kelly Oliver develops a theory of subjectivity whose cornerstone is the very act of witnessing. Oliver contends that the Hegelian "Master-Slave dialectic" can leave the oppressed unrecognized, needing or desiring what only their dominators can provide.[9] The act of witnessing allows for the unrecognized subject to demand their oppression be seen beyond the dynamics of agonistic recognition.

Oliver argues that victims of unthinkable oppressions, such as the Holocaust or chattel slavery, "do not merely articulate a demand to be

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[6] Maldonaldo-Torres, *Against War*, 8.
[7] Ibid.
[8] María Lugones. *Peregrinajes/Pilgrimages: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2003).
[9] Kelly Oliver. *Witnessing Beyond Recognition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004),* 80. Oliver is not without critics; Michael Monahan argues that there is another path through which to understand Hegelian concepts of recognition, one that is not the eternally agonistic "Master-Slave dialectic" – that is the concept of Pure Recognition. Michael Monahan, "Recognition Beyond Struggle: On Liberatory Account of Hegelian Recognition," *Social Theory and Practice* 32, no3 (2006): 389-414.

recognized or to be seen. Rather, they witness to pathos beyond recognition."[10] Maldonado-Torres writes, "the demand for liberation is also a demand for recognition" and this is a two-fold ethical act of giving and demanding.[11] For indigenous, aboriginal, and other oppressed peoples, the concept of witnessing can be engaged through both theory and practice. In *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,* Linda Tuhiwai Smith meditates on the challenges and histories of researching indigenous populations. Smith highlights importance of "witnessing," "claiming," and "testimonio" as ways in which indigenous, aboriginal, and colonized peoples can, "make claims and assertions about [our] rights and dues."[12] In the chapter "Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects" Smith names *claiming* and *testimony* as central to the act of witnessing; she states, "testimonies intersect with claiming because they are a means through which oral evidence is presented to a particular type of audience," furthermore, testimonies are a vehicle through which, "the voice of a 'witness' is accorded space and protection."[13] I am captivated by this articulation of the witnesses' protected space and am attentive to the ways in which witnessing, as read in fiction could provide a safe space to reflect on violence, in particular the violence of religious and political colonization.

Popular conceptions of witnessing define the act as a kind of bearing witness to types of truth, as in, "eye-witnesses to historical facts or accuracy."[14] Yet, witnessing as concept also has strong religious undertones, as Oliver articulates: "witnessing has both the juridical connotations of seeing with ones own eyes and the religious or now political connotations of testifying to that which cannot be seen, or *bearing witness*."[15] It is this dual meaning that makes the concept of witnessing, and for this chapter in particular, the concept of faithful witnessing, such an interesting choice. The juridical and religious meanings of witnessing provide a space through which to analyze *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, and the particular aspects of the religious and political colonization of a Fang community in (Spanish) Equatorial Guinea.

If Oliver's concept of witnessing goes beyond agonistic Hegelian recognition, I pose that Lugones' concept of faithful witnessing, as decolonial practice, goes beyond colonial epistemologies. This critique of imposed colonial epistemologies harkens back to Ngũgĩ and his assertion that centering indigenous languages could provide for a decolonial practice that goes beyond "hegemonic colonization."[16] Faithful witnessing, as a decolonial feminist tool, takes colonialism and the coloniality of power and gender as central factors in understanding how larger sociopolitical structures are imbricated in the understanding of bodies and their functions.[17]

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[10] Ibid., 79.
[11] Maldonado-Torres, *Against War,* 151-153.
[12] Linda Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (New York: Palgrave, 1999), 143.
[13] Ibid., 144.
[14] Oliver, *Witnessing Beyond Recognition*, 81.
[15] Ibid., 83.
[16] Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind,* 6.
[17] Lugones, *Peregrinajes/Pilgrimages*, 4.

Lugones theorizes witnessing by centering the struggles of women of color, including Chicana and decolonial feminisms. She understands witnessing as a praxis of epistemic pilgrimaging against physical and metaphysical domination. This no doubt is dangerous in a real world sense since witnessing threatens dominant powers and established scripts:

> To witness faithfully is difficult, given the manyness of worlds of sense related through power so that oppressive and fragmented meaning saturate many worlds of sense in hard to detect ways. […] To witness faithfully, one must be able to sense resistance, to interpret behavior as resistant even when it is dangerous, when that interpretation places one psychologically against common sense, or when one is moved to act in collision with common sense, with oppression.[18]

Lugones acknowledges that although faithful witnessing challenges singular or dominant narratives, it opens up the possibility of having many and competing narratives. One way that these multiple narratives are conveyed in the literature is through the use of multiple narrators or multiple perspectives on the same moment. A literary example of this can be seen in the way that Díaz provides multiple and competing narratives in *Oscar Wao*. Faithful witnessing takes one away from singular interpretations of "truth", "knowledge", and "rights" and toward a "polysensical" approach: one that sees/reads many perspectives.

In order to frame her argument, Lugones refers to two distinct perspectives that can be had: a view from above and a view from below. For Lugones,

> There is the bird's-eye view – the perspective from up high, the planning the town, the takeover, or the analysis of life and history. There is the pedestrian view – the perspective from inside the midst of people, from inside the layers of relations and institutions and practices.[19]

Here we understand that the view from above is the assumptive view, invested in vestiges of history and the mechanisms of oppression. Whereas the view from below, the "pedestrian" view, negotiates oppression through (inter)relational practices. Lugones poses that these two perspectives are distinct methods of narrating moments, history, or events: the bird's eye view that is all encompassing (much alike a meta-history), and the pedestrian view that is, "inside the midst of people," a view from below. The pedestrian view is one that understands internal and external meaning, one that because it sees relations from close, can provide ways of seeing and resisting erasure and indifference to oppression.

Lugones provides examples of women's testimony, as a way to present an(other)side of a particular story and examines how women of color can form coalitions against "intermeshed" and "interlocked" oppressions. This

[18] Ibid., 7.
[19] Ibid., 5.

summoning of "intermeshed" and "interlocked" oppressions are evocative of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory, an approach to mapping multiple and interlocked concepts and realities which criticizes teleological explanations and rejects collusions with proponents of the birds-eye-view.

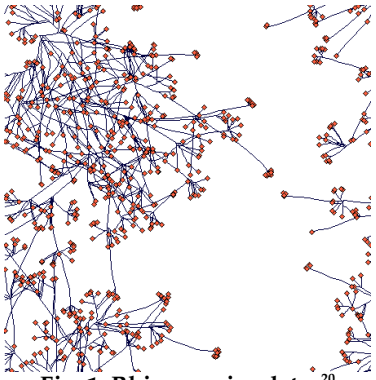

Fig. 1: Rhizome simulator[20]

In Afro-Caribbean and Francophone philosophy, Édouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* becomes another avenue through which to investigate both interlocked/intermeshed oppressions and rhizome theory. *Poetics* is Glissant's meditation on Caribbean history and culture where he analyzes the sets of complex histories and circumstances that have led to its current state. Glissant's rhizome theory is informed by Caribbean and postcolonial realities as well as experiences of the Afro-diasporic subject. Glissant uses rhizome theory as a way to rethink the history foisted onto the Caribbean and in doing so, uncovers complex relationships between history, memory, and political realities. For the purposes of this essay, my articulation of Lugones' theory of "faithful witnessing" combines both Glissant's mediation of rhizome theory and Lugones' understanding of intermeshed and interlocked relationships. Faithful witnessing in this context is recognizing that the long intermeshed and interlocked histories are also bound in rhizomatic form to personal and political relations between peoples.

Ian Baucom's "Specters of the Atlantic" notes that, "to "witness" […] is to regard something that appears both in the guise of the event and in the form of the series, to see what we see as if we are seeing it again what we are seeing for the first time, to encounter history as déjà vu."[21] Faithful witnessing is that which happens when a person is not complicit with the powers that dehumanize others. It is a witnessing of the moments of resistance, of failures, deceptions, triumphs, moments of love, bonds, and small histories. Faithful witnessing is actively participating in the affirmation of other voices – the substantiation of other truths. Without affirmation histories are erased, silenced, or not validated as human experiences.

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[20] "Rhizome clonal growth simulator," accessed August 1, 2013, http://web.natur.cuni.cz/~herben/rhizome/rhizome.html.

[21] Ian Baucom, "Specters of the Atlantic," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 100; No 1, (2001), 614-82.

I reach this reading of faithful witnessing through employing the decolonial attitude – a critical philosophical and practical attitude that makes readable these intermeshed or rhizomatic relationships.[22] From this point of view, I take seriously the work of fiction produced by postcolonial peoples and examine it against the grain of, toward a decolonial praxis. I argue that Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra,* and Díaz 's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* exemplify the practice of faithful witnessing rendering readable the view from *below* – "the pedestrian view." The decolonial attitude is a characteristic of faithful witnessing and acknowledging the view from below. Here the decolonial attitude and the theory of faithful witnessing dovetail: the decolonial attitude helps us to read the moments of faithful witnessing in Afro-diasporic and Afro-exilic literary productions. As such, the theory of faithful witnessing as decolonial practice can become a useful tool through which to discuss how narrators or protagonists "witness" or "see" moments or fragments of (counter)histories, in works of fiction – especially postcolonial literature. The following section engages in a close reading of both *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in order to analyze how the unnamed and named narrators engage in moments of faithful witnessing.

FAITHFUL WITNESSING AS PRACTICE: APPROACHING THE LITERATURE

Witnessing Cosmologies Collide: *Las Tinieblas de Tu Memoria Negra*

Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo's novel, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra,* is the most well known literary text in the Equatorial Guinean canon. One reason for this notoriety is because Ndongo-Bidyogo is of Fang descent and this particular ethnic group is statistically and politically dominant in Equatorial Guinea. Thus, his literature has wider appeal and circulation (versus other writers who are part of ethnic minorities in Equatorial Guinea). Yet, even though Ndongo-Bidyogo is a member of this powerful group he is a writer, activist, and intellectual in political exile living in Spain. As a former colony of Spain, Spanish Guinea (now Equatorial Guinea) did not gain independence until 1968. Before Spain united the islands and mainland block that now is Equatorial Guinea, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and France each had colonized parts of the island dating back to 1474. In the fall of 1968, Francisco Macias Nguema was elected president and by 1972 he had created a single-party state and quickly became one of the 20th century's most fearsome dictators.

[22] The de-colonial attitude that I am discussing makes reference to a subjective disposition toward knowledge. It is part of an intellectual conversation related to Husserl's conception of the phenomenological attitude, Heidegger and Sartre's work on authenticity, and Habermas' philosophical meditation on the post-conventional attitude. The decolonial attitude, coined by Maldonado-Torres, is one that adds to this dialogue by identifying and describing subjective disposition that takes seriously the knowledge of those who have historically been silenced, been cast as ahistorical subjects, or considered insignificant.

According to Michael Ugarte, Nguema executed almost 100,000 Equatorial Guineans with a large part of those being of Bubi ethnic decent.[23] What is considered to be the twentieth century's African Holocaust saw the death of thousands of citizens and the exit of almost one-third of the nation's population. Those who survived and remained in Equatorial Guinea suffered from malnutrition, state-sponsored terror, and what Achille Mbembe coined, "private indirect government."[24] Equatorial Guineans suffered coercion, larceny, and instances of public and private violence. The ethnic and ideological cleansing was in part to rid the country of Spanish influence but also purge any political opposition. Nguema went as far as to outlaw the word "intellectual" and as such, many writers (amongst others) fled the country. Many of these exiled peoples escaped to Spain and other neighboring countries (such as Gabon and Cameroon). The years of his reign have been called the "years of silence" both for the silencing of writers and intellectuals but also because the political and social silencing of the people of Equatorial Guinea was extensive and demoralizing.[25]

In 1979 his nephew the minister of defense, Teodoro Obiang Nguema Mbasogo, overthrew Macias and though Obiang reformulated relations with Spain and pardoned some of the political prisoners, his rule was and still is considered an oppressive regime.[26] Obiang's dictatorship (1979-present) has continually propelled many Equatorial Guinean citizens into exile. The oil boom in Equatorial Guinea during the 1980's and 1990's further complicate the nation's human rights violations in light of their relationships with international oil corporations and countries including the United States.[27]

However, though most of Equatorial Guinea's literature is written abroad and in the nation's official language of Spanish, not all of the authors are in exile (or ever were in exile). The particular ethnic and locational politics of the authors provide strategic lenses through which to examine the texts. Donato Ndongo-Bidyogo left Equatorial Guinea in 1965 to study in Spain and witnessed, from abroad, the political changes that swept the nation in 1968. Ndongo-Bidyogo spent the next two decades documenting the transition of Equatorial Guinea from colony, to independent nation, to dictatorship, and likewise documenting Spain's transition from Franco's dictatorship to democracy. Ndongo-Bidyogo was an outspoken critic of the Macias regime and as a journalist he wrote scathingly and often about the conditions in Equatorial Guinea and also about the condition of African emigrants/exiles in Spain.[28]

Ndongo-Bidyogo returned to Equatorial Guinea in 1985 but due to political persecution from the Obiang regime, fled Equatorial Guinea in 1994. His work and particularly this novel, occupies a very important role in Spanish Literature and Equatorial Guinean Literature. *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* is at once fictional account of Spanish colonization in Equatorial Guinea, and it is

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[23] Michael Ugarte, *Africans in Europe: The Culture of Exile and Emigration from Equatorial Guinea to Spain (Chicago: University of Illinois Press,* 2013), 25.
[24] Achille Mbembe, *On the Post-colony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).
[25] Ugarte, *Africans in Europe*, 25.
[26] Ibid.
[27] I draw this history from Ugarte's *Africans in Europe,* 2013.
[28] Ibid., 59-60.

the writing of a particular subject: an African in exile witnessing the real time political transitions of his "home" country and his "host" country. Ugarte articulates Ndongo-Bidyogo's unique position as a Spanish writer and journalist (amongst fellow writers and friends of that 1970's epoch):

> Ndongo was exceptional in that circle in the seventies because he was strange: a colonial subject of flesh and bone - we needn't forget his skin. His writing manifests subjectivity on virtually every page. Writing from the subject position of a black man is uncommon, if not completely absent, in the annals of Spanish literature. Ndongo's text manifests postcolonial otherness: he is at once in conflict with the political and social surroundings emanating from Francoism and he is black.

Since *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* is a product of the Afro-exilic condition, the themes of colonial encounters and the power structures that support colonialism post-independence are important in this body of work.[29]

Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra is a story of a boy being raised within two cultures: his Fang community of which his uncle is the leader and the Spanish Catholic missionaries of which he is a student. The text, written as a retrospective account from the vantage point of adulthood, articulates the contact between two worlds, each fighting to survive the other. The narrator's uncle, Tío Abeso, is the leader of the tribe, while his father seems to embrace Catholicism and the sweeping changes being made in the country. Throughout the text, Tío Abeso and Father Ortiz battle for the young narrator's loyalty. They each see him as a vessel through which their respective world-views will survive within the tribal structure and withstand the imposed new order by the colonizers. The boy witnesses these arguments at various points in the novel. He begins to understand that Tío Abeso is not only fighting Father Ortiz but also what Ngũgĩ deftly describes as a cultural bomb:

> The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism against that collective defiance is the cultural bomb. The effect of the cultural bomb is to annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their language, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves. It makes them see their past as one wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland.[30]

And as we saw in the opening passage quoted in this chapter, there are moments where the boy reject and disidentifies with his own extended family and community, seeing them as "dirty smelly blacks […] dimwitted, […] and

[29] Here I am focusing my argument on Spanish colonization since most of the literature is produced post 1968 and almost all of it is written in Spanish.
[30] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, 3.

savage."[31] Ngũgĩ states that this too is the effect of the cultural bomb, "It makes them want to identify with that which is furthest removed from themselves […] It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams."[32] In fact, as the second quoted passage in the epigraph notes, the boy thinks that Tío Abeso's rejection of Father Ortiz and the Spanish occupiers is a contempt born out of ignorance and "spite."[33]

As readers of the novel, we are spectators to the indoctrination of the narrator into two competing world-views. One example of this dualism can be seen in the preparation the narrator receives for his future as a leader of his community and the rites he undergoes in order to further his place in the Catholic Church. Throughout the text, the nameless narrator witnesses the traditional rituals and ceremonial rights of both his Fang tribe and the Catholic Church and narrates each of these to the reader in depth. The narrator's position forces him to be a witness to, and to be loaded with, a bevy of contradictions. On one hand, the narrator is an excellent student of Latin and recites biblical passages literally *ad nauseum*;[34] on the other hand, he is in awe of, and undergoes the "rites of passage" of his Fang tribe, and is entrusted with the oral histories and collective memory of his community.

The novel begins in Spain with the narrator, a grown man now, approaching an old and decrepit Reverend Father, telling him that he is leaving his priestly studies and returning to Equatorial Guinea. He quickly finds himself in a battle of wits, debating on whether Africa needs more priests or if perhaps the narrator is loosing faith in becoming an apostle due to fear and loneliness. He confesses that he had known for a very long time that it was not his call to be to be a priest: "I had this feeling some time ago, but I doubted, I fought with myself, I asked for guidance. And because my soul can no longer endure such a conflict, it's time to put an end to it […]."[35] The narrator acknowledges his doubts yet, fearlessly tells the Father his true feelings on the matter.

Internally he feels a sense of strength, what he refers to as an ancestral power that drives him and speak through him, "It wasn't difficult for me to say this; the fear was no longer in me, and it was as if ancestral power were speaking for me. The moon had become radiant […]."[36] The moon's radiance signals his

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[31] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 59.
[32] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, 3.
[33] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 84-85.
[34] When taking part in the rituals of his Sacred Communion in the Church he becomes so agitated at the thoughts of his sins (real and imagined) that he urinates and vomits at the pulpit. "I had died in mortal sin," he thought, as he collapsed onto ground. Ibid., 80.
[35] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 11.
"Lo intuía desde hacía mucho tiempo, pero he dudado, he luchado, he pedido la luz. Y porque mi alma ya no puede soportar tanta aflicción, llega el momento de dirimir el conflicto […]."Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 18.
[36] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 11.
"No me costó demasiado decir todo esto, ésa es la verdad, pues el miedo había desaparecido, y era como si las fuerzas ancestrales hablaran por mi boca; la luna

relief in this scene – a sign of the strength of his ancestors, his familial history. This reference to the moon foreshadows a later part of the novel wherein he is led to a ceremony, in resplendent moonlight, to the place where he will be confirmed as heir of the tradition of his people. Of this moment he writes, "[…] the moon glowed above, a big moon, round, smiling, and guiding you to the dwelling of the dead, the center of your beginnings and your power."[37] The moon in that scene was leading him to the resting place of his ancestors and was guiding the way to his ceremonial rites of passage. As an adult, his resolve to leave Spain and return to Equatorial Guinea had waned, but at the moment he decides to return home he feels the "ancestral" strengths are renewed within him. This becomes the first sign of what is to come in the novel, a consistent battle between the promises and mystic rituals of Catholicism and the beliefs and ceremonies of his community.

Early on in the novel the boy is chosen to be the companion of the local priest Father Ortiz, to assist him as he preached to different members of the tribe (many of whom are his own extended family members),

> Yes, you assisted him and in all the villages you instructed the black savages to rid themselves of totemic symbols, lances, arrows dipped in poison, masks, wood figurines, bronze effigies, and rums while you spoke of the wrath of God against those who kept the devil inside, and Father Ortiz took all those things away to burn them, or so he said.[38]

The boy, is proud of his status as an alter boy and assistant to the Father, and takes seriously his job to convey the damnation that his people were sure to earn by rejecting the word and advice of Father Ortiz. His training both in the church and at the Catholic school with his pedantic teacher, Don Ramón, create a dichotomous reality with life at home as the nephew of the tribe leader. His school experiences read like pages from 's *Decolonizing the Mind*, where they are inculcated to speak in the Spanish language, taught Spanish history, and punished for any sign of practicing native languages or cultures:

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se había llenado de resplendor […]."Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 19.

[37] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 11.
"la luna refulgía en el cielo, una luna grande y clara, redonda y sonriente, que guiaba vuestros pasos hacia la morada de los idos, centro de vuestra fortaleza y origen de vuestro poder." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 145.

[38] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 23.
"[…] sí, tú le ayudabas, y en todas las aldeas obligabais a los salvajes negros a sacar de sus cabañas los signos totémicos y las lanzas y las flechas emponzoñadas con estrofanto y las mascaras y las tallas de madera y las efiges en bronce y los tambores, mientras anunciabas la ira de Dios contra quien conservara al demonio con él, y el padre Ortiz se llevaba todas esas coasa para quemarlas, según decía el." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 31.

> […] you never had to kneel down on the mound of gravel that Don Ramón kept for the ones who spoke Fang in school in his presence, or even if he merely heard they had done so. […] when Don Ramón asked you what you were your little voice stood out clearly: all of us together are Spaniards by the grace of God! And why are we Spanish? Intoned Don Ramón, and your clear voice again stood out: we are Spaniards blessed for having been born in a country called Spain. And with Don Ramón facile explanations you accepted the inexorable and inextricable absurdity of successive centuries: Spaniards had come to save you from anarchy because your ancestors were heathens, barbarians, cannibals, idolaters, who kept cadavers in their dwellings, vestiges of savagery that you censored along with Father Ortiz.[39]

In the presence of Don Ramón and under the influence of Father Ortiz, the boy takes on the attitude and perspective of the Spanish colonizers. He sees his own people and his family as fetishistic and uncivilized. He questions the intelligence of his Tío Abeso, the tribal leader, because of his rejection of the Spaniards and their laws.

The boy is impressionable and is constantly negotiating his beliefs and practices. He keeps away from his Fang peers, because he believes they have not been touched by the grace of God as he had.[40] However, when he learns that he will be undergoing the tribal ceremony that will make him a man he begins to daydream about his place as an adult man in the tribe,

> I'd be able to go hunting with Tío Abeso; I'd kill elephants like him and toucans and a crocodile, and I'd see the jungle with its mysterious light and strong winds, and I'd sit down with the elders in the meeting house and no one would be able to say, hey you kid, don't bother your elders.[41]

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[39] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 22-23.
"[…] jamás te arrodillaron en le Montecito de gravilla que tenía preparado don Ramón para los niños que hablaran el fang en la escuela, o en su precensia aun fuera de ella. […] cuando don Ramón os preguntaba qué sois, tu vocecita se destacaba nítida de entre el ¡todos a una, somos españoles por la gracia de Dios! Y por qué somos españoles, entonaba don Ramón, y tu voz se destacaba nítida del coro: somos españoles por haber tenido la dicha de nacer en un país llamado España. A través de las exiguas e ingenuas explicaciones de don Ramón, aceptabas con la fatuidad de lo inextricable el inexorable reviver de los siglos: los españoles os habían venido a salvar de la anarquía, porque vuestros antepasados eran infieles y barbaros y caníbales e idólatras y conservaban cadaveres en sus casas, vestigios de salvajismo que censurabas junto con el padre Ortiz." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 30-31.
[40] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 27.
[41] Ibid., 32-33.
"[…] y ya podría salir de caza con el tío Abeso; matarías elefantes como él,y tucanes, y un cocodrilo, y vería la selva con su luz misteriosa y sus bravos vientos, y podría sentarme entre los mayores en la casa de la palabra y nadie

These musings of hunting and sitting with the elders go on until his ceremony begins. The boy's ecstasy culminates when his Tío Abeso falls into a trance and recites the names of the familial ancestors, their nomadic history to the point of settlement, and finally acknowledges the boy as "a legitimate descendant of the ancestors and a bona fide member of the tribe."[42] He soon realizes that he is no ordinary member but rather one that is consecrated to carry on the traditions and collective memory of the tribe.[43] The continuing ceremony takes place for over five weeks and the boy witnesses and retells each ritual for over ten pages of the novel. He undergoes moonlit walks with his uncle, the cutting of his foreskin, and encounters the spirit of his grandfather standing on a crocodile on the riverbanks.

These sacred moments he experiences at the age of six are bookended by earlier religious incidents. This chapter is literally situated between his cursing of the tribe at the side of Father Ortiz, and later, his memories of internalizing the catechism and reenacting the ceremonies he witnesses in church at the age of eight. The boy, straddling two worlds, never wavers from faithfully witnessing and speaks honestly, even matter-of-factly, about the competing realities. He witnesses the shifts within his family and community, and the Church's assault on the Fang cosmology. He does so retrospectively, acknowledging that these changes are interlocked and intermeshed with one another. Though he admires the Church officials he does not hide or underemphasize their disdain for his people. Similarly, when he reflects on tribal life he deliberates on whether he could ever live the life of a peasant farmer like his father, going on "day after day, always, back and forth."[44]

In one of the most riveting moments of the novel, the boy witnesses a debate between his Tío Abeso and the Father Ortiz. Father Ortiz, never loses hope of converting Tío Abeso to Christianity, while Tío Abeso never loses hope of getting rid of Father Ortiz and the missionaries:

> All traditions have things that are true and things that are false or at least exaggerated, and no single one of them could be considered the one true religion. My uncle would say this as he brushed away flies with a small broom – he had nerves of steel. The priest would become uncontrollably angry: How dare you compare the Revealed Truth with your fetishes and your idol worship! He would call my uncle a blasphemer and tell him he would go to hell. And with infinite patience Tío Abeso answered that at the moment they were not in a territory of the white man's tribe, that *he* hadn't gone to the other man's tribe trying to convert everyone to his belief, and he

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volvería a decirme oye tú niño deja de molestar a los mayors." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 40.

[42] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 35-36.
"[…] como legítimo descendiente de los antepasados y miembro efectivo de la tribu." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 42-43.

[43] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 46.

[44] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 96.
"día a día, siempre." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 102.

> told the priest there was no reason for him to be angry, and he asked him whether he could give me any idea how to find that place where I will burn, and whether he has been there.[45]

This moment between Tío Abeso, Father Ortiz, and the boy goes on for over ten pages as they discuss matters of polygamy, medicine, law, land, and the worship of tribal and religious figures. In this debate Tío Abeso argues that Father Ortiz's traditions and beliefs are no stranger than the Fang cosmological beliefs. He questions Father Ortiz on whether he has seen heaven, hell, or any of the transcendental planes that he preaches to the tribe. Father Ortiz, whose definitive mission was to convert Tío Abeso, retorts by calling him a blasphemer, an idol worshiper, and a licentious adulterer.[46]

The boy is translating between Father Abeso, who does not speak Fang, and Tío Abeso, who does not speak Spanish. Through this act of translation the boy then witnesses the base truth of what each of these men believes to be factual. When Father Ortiz realizes that Tío Abeso is besting him he regrets that his prodigy, the boy, is there to hear the unashamed answers: "The priest kept looking at me because I should not have heard such things, but he couldn't have communicated with my uncle if I hadn't been there. I was indispensible, a necessary drive to accomplish his apostolic mission."[47] When asked about the fact that the tribe has no books with which to record their history, Tío Abeso states:

> We don't read books. We know our tradition because the eldest member passes to on to the young so that when he too is old, he will in turn impart the tradition to his young. This is how we have always lived. You say you have brought medicine, but you found medicine here too. You say you have brought peace, but you were the ones who incited war. And tell me, don't the tribes of white

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[45] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 86-87.
"Todas las tradiciones tienen elementos verdaderos y elementos falsos o al menos exagerados y ninguna puede adoptarse como verdad única, decía el tío mientras con una escobilla (nervios de hoja de palmera en haz) espantaba las moscas a nuestro alrededor. El padre se ponía colérico, cómo te atreves a comparar la Verdad Revelada con vuestras prácticas fetichistas, le llamaba al tío blasfemo y le amenazaba con el infierno. El tío, con infinita paciencia, le replicaba que no estaban sentados en el patio de la tribu de los blanos en ese momento, él no había ido a su tribu a intentar convertirles a su creencia, así que dile que no tiene por qué enfadarse, y pregúntale si puede darme noticia exacta sobre el lugar donde está ese sitio donde me quemaré y si él ha estado allí." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 93.
[46] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 85-93.
[47] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 92.
"El padre se me quedaba mirando a mí, y seguramente estaba pensando que había hecho mal en traerme porque no debería escuchar esas cosas, pero no podia comunicarse con mi tío si no estaba yo. Yo era una pieza insustituible por entones de su misión apostólica." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 93.

> people fight among themselves? The only problem I see with you is that you want us to give up our customs and trust your ancestors. And that can't be. I can't tell the member of another tribe to honor the figure of Motulu Mbenga, because it means nothing to him.[48]

The boy recants the debate between these two men that he admires, and he also clues in the reader to the unspoken sentiments in the room. While his uncle was angry and saddened by having to fight for the survival of their ancient traditions, the priest was conflicted, feeling that Tío Abeso was on the one hand an exceptional man, and on the other frustrated at his inability to convert him.

The boy is reminded that at his young age he could not takes sides, "[…] I was observing the last splendors of a world that was disappearing forever, and another very different one was arriving; I couldn't embrace either one."[49] The boy, admiring of each of these men, is made witness to the ways in which Catholicism seeks to save the savages and his uncle seeks to sustain his tribal and familial traditions. He recognizes that the future of his community is dimming and his uncle was the only forceful resistance in the tribe:

> Your uncle was the resister, the one who refused to capitulate, the one who wanted to keep the torch burning; he was the light that your generation was diming little by little. And your uncle told you that he had fought against the Spanish troops who arrived years ago, who knows when, maybe an eternity, and you heard furtive rumors about the embarrassing dismissal of the chief, who had been chosen by consensus, and the rumors confirmed: he had opposed civilization. But you saw Tío Abeso still held on to his halo of dignity, perhaps the rumors about him came from his contempt of the white man [...].[50]

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[48] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 92.
"Nosotros no leemos en los libros. Nosotros conocemos nuestra tradición porque el más Viejo se la entrega al joven para que cuando sea viejo también él se la dé a los jóvenes. Así hemos vivido siempre. Dices que habéis traído medicinas, pero también encontrasteis medicinas. Dices que habéis traído paz, y la guerra la provocasteis vosotros. Y dime, ¿no pelean entre sí las tribus de los blancos? El único problema que yo os veo a vosotros es que queréis que dejemos nuestras costumbres y confiemos en vuestros antepasados. Y eso no puede ser. Yo no puedo decir a uno de otra tribu tú ven a rendir honores a Motulu me Mbenga, porque para él no significa nada." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 99.

[49] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 93.
"[…]estaba contemplando el ultimo splendor de un mundo que se alejaba para siempre y veía llegar otro muy distinto sin poder abrazarme a ninguno." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 93.

[50] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 24. "Tu tío era la Resistencia, quien se niega a capitular, quien deseaba mantener flameante una torcha que las nuevas generaciones íbais apagando poquito a poco. Y de tu tío se decia que había luchado contra las tropas españolas que llegaron nadie sabía cuánto tiempo antes, quizá dese hacía una eternidad, habías oído furtivos murmullos

The boy sees the vestiges of Fang traditions fading, and this is the source of his inner conflict. He is preparing to go abroad to Spain, with the support of his mother, father, and Father Ortiz, yet part of him is hollow.

A few days before leaving to Spain, the boy is awoken and under the guidance of the moonlight (a beckoning of the ancestors) he is confirmed as the heir of the tradition of his tribe. This transformative experience continues until sunrise and he realizes that there was never a choice to lose the collective memory of the tribe, that though he was to leave to become a priest, his family and tribe would instill in him their beliefs as well,

> [A]nd despite your brief thirteen years you were convinced that although you would one day cross the ocean and go beyond, you would always have the spirit of the tribe within you, the blood of the tribe, you would always hear the tribe whispering to you.[51]

He confronts his own fears of being torn between the Fang culture, which the Catholic Church openly condemns, and his own future as a Catholic priest. At this moment in the text, he acknowledges the humanity of his tribe, understanding that colonial religiosity could not eradicate familial ties nor could his Tío Abeso's resistance erase the reality of colonial devastation within Equatorial Guinea.

At the beginning of the novel, the narrator, an adult living in Spain, is preparing to divulge that he no longer wants to be a priest. It is discovered throughout the course of the text that his father, who was seen throughout the novel as a supporter of Catholicism and of the occupiers, was actually ensuring that his son was well versed in the two cultures (Fang and Spanish) in order to better protect his tribe as its future leader:

> And my father too was looking at me lovingly, and then I understood his role. He had never been on their side, he was the link between the tribe and the occupiers, someone has to negotiate, someone has to talk to them to figure out how they should be treated, what foods they like and what bothers, them, how this fornicate and how many cigarettes the smoke a day; someone should be with them to spy on them from the inside; the tribe must store information on their movements and their ideas.[52]

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sobre su vergonzante destitución de la jefatura de la tribu que por derecho consuetudinario le correspondia, y los murmullos sentenciaban en tono aprobatorio porque se había opuesto a la civilizacion." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 31-32.

[51] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 143.
"y a pesar de tus cortísimos trece años tuviste la convicción de que, aunque te fueras para siempre mucho más allá del mar, siempre tendrías dentro de ti el espitiru de la tribu, la sangre de la tribu, siempre oirías la llamada susurrante de la tribu." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 150-151.

[52] Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Shadows of Your Black Memory*, 126.

After this incredible moment between father, son, and Tío Abeso, the boy asks permission to be a priest. His idea of saving the tribe is to become a missionary; return to the tribe, and save their souls. In this way the novel rejects a teleological story, one in which the boy is enlightened and at once joins the elders in their plans.

The story is multifarious and the feelings and choices the boy makes are conflicted with guilt, shame, and confusion. This is evocative of what Ngũgĩ explains as a type of contemporary post-colonial struggle (and he specifies of "Africa today"), "an imperialist tradition on one hand, and a resistance tradition on the other."[53] And though the boy does waiver which world-view he favors -- a constant battle for his young mind -- he does not waiver in his faithful witnessing of these internal and external battles. The boy is engaging and narrating the double consciousness that has shaped his worldview. With special attention to the vocal resistance of Tío Abeso and the subtle resistance of his father, the boy attests to the cosmological shifts and retrospectively indicts himself and the Church in the hegemonic colonial process.

His adult retrospective can serve as a challenge to the occupier's history of the colonizing process (by going beyond colonial epistemologies) while it also challenges the misguided ideology that casts his familial Fang tribe as an ahistorical community. The trope of faithful witnessing allows the narrator to tell fragments of this story while referencing the national occupation of Equatorial Guinea, and providing the context for his choice to leave and eventual choice to return.

Witnessing in Diaspora: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

Being that *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is a particularly Caribbean, U.S., and diasporic novel, a transnational and decolonial reading of this text is fitting. The novel begins in 1492, what many scholars point to as the birth of modernity.[54] In the novel, we see that particular post-colonial structures of oppression operate on the island of the Dominican Republic and in diaspora. Violence, private indirect government, and heteropatriarchal structures all make appearances in the novel and most of the their powers are wielded over human bodies.[55] None of the characters in the novel are safe from the effects of

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"Y mi padre me miraba también amoroso, yo comprendí entonces su papel, mi padre jamás había pactado con ellos, era el enlace de la tribu con los ocupantes, alguien debe negociar, alguien debe charlar con ellos para saber cómo deben ser tratados, qué comida les gusta y qué cosas les irritan, cómo fornican y cuántos cigarillos fuman cada día, alguien debe estar con ellos para vigilarles de cerca, la tribu necesita almacenar información sobre sus movimientos y sus ideas." Ndongo-Bidyogo, *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra*, 134.

[53] Ngũgĩ, *Decolonising the Mind*, 2.

[54] Sidney Mintz, "The Caribbean Region," Daedalus 103 no. 2, (1974): 45-71.

[55] Here I evoke Claire Johnston's piece "Women's Cinema as Counter Cinema" (1973) a groundbreaking piece on film, cinema, and feminist theory.

coloniality, in fact, the narrators and even we, the reader, witness how the power structures of coloniality reach across spatial and generic bounds.

Though some argue that Díaz's work replicates and venerates heteropatriarchal normativity and violence against women, I pose that Díaz's work allows the reader to witness the "bare bones" of the postcolonial structure, how deeply imbricated these structures are with the coloniality of power, and how women's bodied are policed and trafficked.[56] In his text, *On the Postcolony,* Achille Mbembe argues that "commandment" is part of the imaginary of the power state/colonial sovereignty.[57] One of the features of commandment are three sorts of violence: founding violence, legitimation of violence, and finally "war" which refers not only to our contemporary articulations of war, but also to the violence that maintains, spreads, and ensures permanence.[58] I argue that Díaz's text allows the reader to faithfully witness the founding violence of colonization via the traveling curse *fukú*, Trujillo's dictatorial rule that frames and legitimates violence as practice, and finally, the inner workings of the postcolonial power structure (commandments) and the ways in which those are interpreted by the characters.

I argue that the text has multiple "faithful witnesses" in the form of its narrators: one narrator that is Yunior, two sections narrated by Oscar's sister Lola, the ever-present footnote narrator that contradicts and enhances the story arc, and Oscar's narration which is presented through his final letter. Yunior's adult retrospective narrative, however, is the mainline through which we hear the stories of Oscar and his family. Like the nameless narrator in *Las tieneblas de tu memoria negra*, Yunior's adult retrospective is key to hearing the polysensical truths and relations within the De León family. However, unlike the narrator in *Las tinieblas*, Yunior is in a seemingly peripheral position as he is not a member of the immediate family, but rather is a witness to their stories as a best friend of Oscar and a sometimes, mostly unfaithful, lover of Lola.

In many ways Yunor is both within and outside the story. Yet Yunior refers to himself the "faithful watcher" - a phrase that conjures both the fantastic and the philosophical. Díaz 's text has arguably been written in English, Spanglish, Dominican-York, U.S. urban, and geek-speak languages. That is, the language of the story unfolds for many people in different ways. And yet, it is this very ability of the text to provide many readings, a multiplicity of narratives, and a troubling of familial, colonial, and postcolonial histories, that I believe makes it a decolonial text (or at least allows for a decolonial reading). The undermining of singular narratives and the position of faithfully watching -- no matter the pain, gore, or humiliation -- is a form of faithful witnessing; against

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[56] Another example would be Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* as he has received similar critiques. For an example of a text that argues that Thomas desires to rid himself of his blackness (rooted in psychoanalytic theory) Lyn Di Iorio Sandin's *Killing Spanish: Literary Essays on Ambivalent U.S. Latino/a Identity* (2004). Also, here I am calling attention to Achille Mbembe's critique of Hegel's tenants of the "traditional society" in *On the Post-Colony.*

[57] Also, here I am calling attention to Achille Mbembe's critique of Hegel's tenants of the "traditional society" in *On the Post-Colony* (2001). In the book-length manuscript I will elaborate more on this context.

[58] Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 25.

the grain of oppression on the side of truth for the oppressed. I argue that a decolonial approach to reading *The Brief Wondrous Life of Osar Wao* highlights how the text undermines popular tropes of masculinity and serves as witness and critique to a 30-year long dictatorship and to state-sponsored terror on women's and men's bodies.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao tells the story of Oscar de León, a hopeless anti-hero that does not fit into the mold of Dominican masculinity. Throughout the text, Yunior explains how Oscar's masculinity is constantly called into question,

> He had none of the Higher Powers of your typical Dominican male, couldn't have pulled a girl if his life depended on it. Couldn't play sports for shit, or dominoes, was beyond uncoordinated, threw a ball like a girl. Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle no rap, no G. And most damning of all: no looks.[59]

The paragraph goes on to list his interest in genres and science fiction, placing him further from the masculine threshold. Though the title of the novel makes us think we will be focus on Oscar's life, his supreme nerddom and failures in all things romantic, the structure of the text undermines the popular form of the *bildungsroman,* where the stories focus mostly on the coming of age of a male protagonist.

Instead, Oscar's life is narrated through an analysis of his familial history of dictatorship under Trujillo and diaspora: a curse called *fukú*. The narrator explains:

> They say it came from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. Fukú americanus, or more colloquially, fukú - generally a curse or doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World.[60]

This Fukú is tied to the European imperial expansion and as such the colonial project is indicted as its accelerant. Díaz explains that "[n]o matter what its name or provenance, it is believed that the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed fukú on the world, and we've all been in the shit ever since."[61] The narrators follow the thread of this curse as understood through the De León family history, though they make it clear that "every" Dominican family has their own version of the fukú. For Yunior the De León fukú, and the entire process of Diaspora for that matter, is tied directly to Trujillo.

Early in the novel we are introduced to El General, Rafael Trujillo, the Dominican Republic's thirty-year dictator. Díaz describes Trujillo as,

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[59] Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 19-20.
[60] Ibid., 1.
[61] Ibid.

> One of the twentieth century's most infamous dictators ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961 with an impeccable ruthless brutality. A portly, sadistic, pig-eyed mulatto who bleached his skin, wore platform shoes, and had a fondness for Napoleon-era haberdashery, Trujillo came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social, and economic life through a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror; treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master.[62]

Trujillo and his rule, the Trujillato, are all powerful. The violence inflicted by Trujillo directly and indirectly, affected the daily lives of Dominicans on the island in diaspora. Diaspora, Díaz says, is Trujillo's curse to the pueblo that betrayed him, and yet, there is more than one curse in this novel. The narratives of Oscar's mother Belicia thrust into diaspora, and his sister Lola shuffled back and forth from the U.S. to the island, are essential to understanding the curse "*fukú*" that Oscar falls victim to, but also essential to the critique of the violence inflicted by dictatorship: singular authority.

The multiple narrators, which are: Yunior, Lola, the footnote reader, and Oscar – resist the structure of the novel and of popular history: there is no single authority. It takes more than one voice to narrate national and familial history. The text is both framed by and resists the singular authority of political and historical narratives. I argue that by documenting sites of state-sponsored and familial violence, the "faithful witnessing" by the narrators challenge heteropatriarchal and Eurocentric histories of the postcolonial nation. The narrators witness what is understood to be secretive, deadly, and silenced. What is secretive is the family curse and its history. What is deadly is any kind of resistance to Trujillo's dictatorship. What remains silenced is the indefinite amount of gendered violence. These are "faithfully witnessed" by each of the narrators.

Since Oscar is the protagonist of the novel, much of the current critical literary analysis focuses on his apparent masculine deficiencies and his "queer Otherness" as a point of departure.[63] For this chapter I want to shift the focus from Oscar's queer masculinity and lack of a hyper-sexual prowess and use his position to shift the focus from what he "loses" (sex and romantic relationships) to what he gains from being on the sidelines: witnessing the sexual and physical violence enacted on the bodies of women.

Oscar's position as a romantic "ne'er do well" allows him to gain proximity to "potential" love interests that are involved in particularly grisly situations. In short, this analysis allows the women's stories to emerge from around Oscar in the text. I want to focus on gender violence as witnessed by the narrators: first, in the stories of Oscar's initial love interests, second, in the story of Belicia, Oscar's mother, who was orphaned, enslaved, and subjected to

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[62] Ibid., 2.

[63] Elena Machado Saez, "Dictating Desire, Dictating Diaspora: Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* as Foundational Romance," *Contemporary Literature* 52; no. 3, (2011): 522-555.

racialization and sexual degradation in the Dominican Republic; and lastly in the narrative of Oscar and Ybón -- who are both subjected to life-threatening violence and in Oscar's case, an untimely death.

Throughout the text most of the women and all of Oscar's love interests are steadily subjected to physical, sexual, and emotional abuse. Maritza was one of Oscar's friends early on in the novel. Yunior, the narrator, recounts Oscar's witnessing the ups and downs of her relationship with her boyfriend. In one part of this telling he notes, "Maritza was girl who seemed to delight in getting slapped around by her boyfriends [...] being pushed down onto the sidewalk."[64] I am interested here in how the narrator thinks that Martiza "seemed to delight" in these seemingly violent acts. What becomes clear in the book is that Martiza is not alone, but rather one of many women in the novel (along with Oscar's own feminized body) that are subjected to threats, violence, and torture. The novel whose story is about diaspora and the intimate ties with terror and the enduring legacy of colonialism is simultaneously an account on how these terrors become part and parcel of everyday lives of human beings; a normalization of gender violence, a normalization of body terror.

These off-handed details of violence continue throughout the text and I argue that their purpose is twofold: on the one hand their candid discussion of abuse is unnerving to the reader, and on the other hand, they serve as moments in which the reader can witness how violence against female (and feminine bodies) is pervasive and commonplace. When we read about Ana, Oscar's teenage love interest, we see that he acts as her confidant. She confides in him that her boyfriend, "Manny smacked her, Manny kicked her, Manny called her a fat twat, Manny cheated on her."[65] This is Oscar's introduction to the dating world of his peers. His queer otherness allows him a purview of intimate violence that would otherwise go unseen or unmarked.

Oscar is not new to the realities of violence against women, his mothers massive back scar is an oft reminder of past violence. His series of "girlfriends'" abusive relationships fill Oscar with hope for a "stronger loving world." Oscar faithfully witnesses these abuses and documents them in his perpetual writings and perhaps even confides in Yunior.

> Poor Oscar. Without even realizing it he'd fallen into one of those Let's Be Friends Vortexes, the bane of nerdboys everywhere. These relationships were love's version of a stay in the stocks, in you go, plenty of misery guaranteed and what you got out of it besides bitterness and heartbreak nobody knows. Perhaps some knowledge of self and women.[66]

It is Yunior's access to Oscar's archive that allows him to narrate this story retrospectively. And here Yunior too acts as a faithful witness, loyally conveying Oscar's experience even though he himself features as one of the abusive men in Oscar's accounts.

Oscar's early experience with domestic abuse and relationship violence set

[64] Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 18.
[65] Ibid., 44.
[66] Ibid., 41.

the stage for his disastrous relationship with Ybón and mirrors his own mother, Belicia's, personal history with the Gangster, the Trujillato, and violence that propelled them all into diaspora. As a preface to the introduction of the Gangster, who Belicia meets at a nightclub in the Dominican Republic called El Hollywood, Yunior states: "Santo Domingo was to popola what Switzerland was to chocolate. And there was something about the binding, selling, and degradation of women that brought out the best in the Gangster."[67] This Gangster is actually the one who goes on to deceive and cause Belicia's nearly fatal beating in the cane field.

Perhaps the most brutal of violence(s) we read in the text is committed against Belicia. Unbeknownst to sixteen-year-old Belicia, her boyfriend, the Gangster, is married to Trujillo's sister: "The capitan...one of those tall, arrogant, acerbically handsome niggers that most of the planet feels inferior to. Also one of those very bad men that not even postmodernism can explain away." Belicia is kidnapped and beaten in a cane field -- the backdrop of Óscar's murder at the end of the novel.

The reader is told multiple variations of the events that a pregnant Belicia endured. She is viciously attacked, causing her a miscarriage and extensive bodily damage. Díaz briefly recaps the beating and her wounds:

> They'd been punching her and her right eye had puffed into a malignant slit, her right breast so preposterously swollen that it looked like it would burst, her lip was split and something was wrong with her jaw [...] they parked the car on the edge of the road and marched her into the cane. [...] How she survived I'll never know. They beat her like she was a slave, like she was a dog. [...] damage inflicted: her clavicle, chicken boned; her right humerus, a triple facture (she would never again have much strength in that arm); five ribs, broken; left kidney, bruised; liver, bruised; right lung, collapsed; front teeth blown out. About 167 points in damage [...] I suspect there was [a rape or two].[68]

Belicia's beating in the cane field is a recurring image in the novel that multiple narrators retell. Each of these narrators or "witnesses" include different details of the attack. This retelling of Belicia's near death beating becomes a reminder to the reader that violence against women is not scaled down, but rather, exacerbated; it does not stay on the island but rather travels repeatedly with and within diasporic movements.[69]

Belicia's scar is a constant reminder of this violence and her seemingly unloving treatment of her daughter Lola highlight the very intimate ways that this foundational violence has imbued her relationships across time and space. Lola laments about her painfully strained relationship with her mother:

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[67] Ibid., 121.
[68] Ibid.
[69] We see Oscar's love interests, Ana and Martiza's, tragic romantic relationships in New Jersey as well as Lola's verbally abusive relationship with her first boyfriend.

> You don't know what it's like to grow up with a mother who never said a positive thing in her life, not about her children or the world, who was always suspicious, always tearing you down and splitting your dreams straight down the seams. When my first pen pal, Tomoko, stopped writing me after three letters she was the one who laughed: You think someone's going to lose life writing to you? Of course I cried; I was eight and I had already planned that Tomoko and her family would adopt me. My mother of course saw clean into the marrow of those dreams, and laughed. I wouldn't write to you either, she said. She was that kind of mother: who makes you doubt yourself, who would wipe you out if you let her. But I'm not going to pretend either. For a long time I let her say what she wanted about me, and what was worse, for a long time I believed her.[70]

The fact that Oscar's sister and his peers are victims of physical and emotional partner abuse and that he is to attune to comforting, listening, and being witness to these, are also markers of this traveling curse.

In a transnational twist of fate, Oscar finds himself as the victim of physical violence at the hands of "Third World Cops" in the Dominican Republic. Oscar's later love interest Ybón, like Belicia's Gangster, is the girlfriend of a high-ranking police officer in the Dominican Republic and the beating scene was all too familiar for the reader. While the violence against Oscar is front and center, the violence and brutality against Ybón's is taken behind reader's gaze.

In a brief retrospective, the narrator informs us that, "Of course the captain had beaten the shit out of [Ybón] too, of course she had two black eyes (he'd also put his .44 Magnum in her vagina and asked her who she *really* loved)." At the end of the novel, after Oscar and Ybón are caught together and after Oscar is murdered, we hear that Ybón, who was a retired sex-worker, is now "dancing" at another nightclub in the city. Echoing in the reader's mind is the nature of the Gangster's true desires, "something about the binding, selling, and degradation of women brought out the best in the Gangster."[71] With Oscar dead, Ybón dancing, and the Gangster's need for power and sexual dominance satisfied, Yunior's faithful witnessing of these rumors and his posthumous reading of Oscar's journals, papers, and letters are the only documentation of the love and tragedy that have transpired. The act of writing then, is an expression of faithful witnessing by each of the narrators in the novel. The "faithful witnesses," spare no details about the violence and struggles encountered by the characters and families in the text. From Oscar's battle with weight loss, to Lola's shitty relationships, to their mother Belicia's enduring trauma with the scars to match, the faithful witnessing by the narrators validate the lived experiences of these characters, following them from the Caribbean to the U.S. and back.

The decolonial attitude exemplified by the author, in this case Díaz, allows the reader see how this fictional narrative is imbued with historical facts, places, and long familial and personal histories that are part and parcel of (and reflect) histories of the colonial and postcolonial nation. The writing and reading of literature then, is one way in which new historical, present, and future

[70] Ibid., 56.
[71] Ibid., 121.

possibilities can be imagined. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is an example of a narrative that resides in the interstices of history while at the same time viewing it from afar. Oscar, the great anti-hero, is intimately tied to the history of the Dominican Republic, the stories of his mother and sister, and the Forces of diaspora. This type of history is difficult to write as such, without the power of imagination of the novel. The decolonial attitude allows for a "faithful witnessing" of the coloniality of power, gender, and knowledge. Thus, this reading examines the how the decolonial attitude and the act of "faithful witnessing" can be used to push further the moments of historical encounters in literature.

CONCLUSION

The coloniality of power produces and reproduces foundational dehumanizing kinds of violence and much of the historical violence, colonization and gender violence, is an exercise of power that is often shrouded in the hubbub of the everyday. These power structures are assemblages that we see or experience or choose not to see or experience. What these two novels have done in the depiction of 1) colonial violence and its bloody aftermath, 2) gender violence, its connection to power and colonization and its multigenerational effects, 3) knowledge violence, and the ways in which it attempts to nullify subaltern knowledge and realities, is to provide an imagining and a documentation of that which the decolonial reader knows exists. It allows the narrators to bear witness to stories, histories, and truths that may have gone untold, unnoticed, and unanalyzed. Literature read and written with a decolonial attitude can open a discursive space for critical questioning. Equatoguinean poet, novelist, and essayist Juan Tomas Ávila Laurel noted, "I only want my work to incite questions and interest in the topic. So much is unheard."[72]

Like *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, I argue that *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* exemplifies the decolonial attitude of Equatoguinean literature. Historian and novelist Joaquín Mbomio Bacheg describes this body of literature as, "an expression of the fight to deconstruct colonial hierarchy [...] formed by new cultural realities bearing the mark of a new cultural identity."[73] As such, these texts can be read as literary palimpsest that profoundly trust the oral histories of the Fang community, pays homage to indigenous cultures, and yet, bearing the mark of a new Afro-Hispanic identity. My application of Lugones' faithful witnessing to the reading of these literary texts relies on the use of the decolonial attitude. Literature, as bodies of work that incorporate and traverse boundaries of fiction and history, are a rich narrative plane through which to develop decolonial strategies. Reading postcolonial and post-independence literatures with a decolonial attitude can challenge the boundaries of fiction and history, and create spaces for decolonial theorizing.

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[72] Author's interview with Ávila Laurel, January 2014, Barcelona, Spain.
[73] Lewis, Marvin, *An Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), ix.

In both *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* faithful witnessing does not function as an act of observing, but rather is often a seconding and thirding of unrecognized stories or collective memories. Faithful witnessing then, is not only useful to reading Ndongo-Bidyogo's novel, but can also be helpful in decolonial readings of other Equatoguinean and other postcolonial post-independence novels. Some examples in a comparative ethnic studies scope could be María Nsué Angüe's *Ekomo* (Equatoguinean), Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (African American), Lê Thị Diễm Thúy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* (Vietnamese American), and Patrick Chamoiseau's *Texaco* (French Martiniquan) to name a few.

History as it needs to be done after 1492 needs faithful witnesses, because the present and the past demand redemption from the imperial colonial project of the past five centuries. We are fixed in an ethical relationship in the present that requires faithful witnessing; this becomes ever more complex because as Glissant has indicated, our past leads in rhizomatic formation to our present. If we are looking to the "past" it is our job not to collude with those who have stripped others of their humanity by denying their voices, intellects, histories, stories, or freedoms. The nameless narrator in *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* and the multiple narrators in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* exemplify a turn away from the dominant form of chronicling – beyond colonial epistemologies – these choices to faithfully witness are a kind of decolonial attitude that destabilize foundational and singular narratives.

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CHAPTER 2

Reparation as Transformation:
Radical Re-imaginings of Futurities Through Decolonial Love

As the previous chapter has shown, this project has a critical interest in the complex character of the global African diaspora that warrant comparative analysis.[74] This chapter will examine how diasporic Puerto Rican and Dominican literature speak with and to Equatoguinean literature on the topic of reparations and decolonial love. As elaborated in the introduction, this comparative approach to Afro-diasporic literature seeks to make a fresh contribution to African diaspora studies and to comparative ethnic studies generally. Most often, comparative projects that discuss the Latin@ diaspora focus on the Spanish-speaking Caribbean without much thought to the Afro-Hispanic literary tradition. However, the Caribbean-Equatoguinean connection is multi-pronged including historical, linguistic, and cultural factors that connect these territories across spatial and temporal landscapes.[75] This relation can be exemplified by Equatoguinean poet Carlos Nsue Otong's ode to Nicolas Guillén, one of the foremost Black Cuban poets and political activists of the late twentieth century. Nsue Otong's poem entitled, "Salud" asks:

> Quisiera tejer mi palabra /Con esta emoción que me embarga/ Y hacerla volar presurosa /A Cuba, mitad Africana. /Guillén Nicolás, compañero: / Labré con mi canto corona, /Maestro, Cantor y Poeta / Salud a tu egregia persona.
>
> Robé el acento africano, /Poeta soñé en la noche / Y era canto pregonero /Al ritmo sonoro del bronce. /Recibe mis versos, Guillén, /mi ritmo, mi metro, mi rima/ nativos del Africa madre / en viaje allá por Antillas.[76]

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[74] Here I evoke the work of Kim D. Butler and VéVé Clark, which urge for comparative analyses of diasporas and argue for diaspora literacy as a multilingual transdisciplinary project that pushes the narrator and/or the reader to imagine beyond binaries.

[75] This temporal and spatial connection is also evidenced by the work of other writers of the Equatoguinean literary tradition. The close-reading work of Marvin Lewis in *Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea* (2007) is a superb example.

[76] Marvin Lewis, *Introduction to the Literature of Equatorial Guinea,* (University of Missouri Press, 2007), 16.

> I wish to weave my word /With the emotion that overcomes me /And make it fly swiftly /To Cuba, half African.
> Guillén Nicolás, comrade: / I crafted with my highest song,
> Teacher, singer and poet, / A greeting to your eminent persona. /
>
> I stole the African accent, /I dreamed of a poet in the night
> And he was a public singer /To the sonorous rhythm of bronze. Receive my verses Guillén /my rhythm, my meter, my rhyme natives of Mother Africa /en route over there through the Antilles.

Nsue Otong's poem, a salute to Guillén, traverses space and time in order to connect Iberian Africa, as conceptual homeland, to Cuba, an Afro-diasporic place. His text sutures these disparate locations and histories with a political urgency "And make it fly swiftly/To Cuba, half African."[77]

In this chapter I meditate on the ways that both literary cannons (Equatoguinean and Afro-Latino diasporic writings) engage with ideas of reparations, and decolonial love.[78] I look at these richly complex theories and frameworks as points of departure in order to examine how the literature of Equatoguinean and Afro-Latin@ Caribbean writers contend with reparations and decolonial love. I analyze how Ernesto Quinonez's B*odega Dreams*, Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and Joaquin Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga; Sangre en la selva*, imagine and reimagine the future for their homelands and adopted homelands. Often meditations on futurities emphasize a self-change that would radically transformation the way the protagonist views the world and engages in a decolonial love politic. These authors' story arcs pose decolonial love as a method through which to foster hope in future struggles for liberation.[79]

DECOLONIAL LOVE

My interpretation of decolonial love draws from the work of Chela Sandoval, Nelson Maldonado-Torres, and Junot Díaz in conversation with Paula Moya. In theorizing decolonial love Sandoval engages the work of Donna Haraway. According to Sandoval, Haraway, believes differences should be seen as instances of the "elaborate specificity" and the "loving care people might take

[77] Ibid.
[78] The framework of this chapter understands the extensive work and influence of Afro-futurism as a way of imagining Blackness, Afro-futurities, fictive futures, reparations, and imaginative spaces for liberation that are part of the literary, musical, comic, and aesthetic traditions of Afro-futurist and Black-Futurist canon.
[79] What makes this reading different is that the authors I examine do not imagine said futurities as *utopian* imaginings of fantastical futures.

to learn how to see faithfully from another point of view."[80] In other words, decolonial love demands a faithful witnessing of humanity and affinity across difference. This involves learning to see faithfully from multiple points of view which in turn requires a decolonial attitude and imagining radical repair and reparation to the modern/colonial world.

Decolonial love, as Chela Sandoval argues, is a technology for social transformation. This struggle is in turn fueled by the "decolonial praxis of love" what Sandoval defines as an "attraction […] and relation carved out of and in spite of difference."[81] Sandoval is careful to point out that far from being an "example" of new academic theories, U.S. third world feminism represents the creation of a theoretical/methodological approach "that clears the way for new modes of conceptualizing social movement, identity, and difference."[82] In turn, Maldonado-Torres conceives that the oppressed or subaltern is best understood as *damné* or condemned who, under the weight of the coloniality of power, has the potential to "advance the unfinished project of decolonization."[83] Maldonado-Torres contends that this political subject,

> "cries out in horror" in the face of the […] modern/colonial "death-world" and aspires – through the decolonial praxis of love, […], through an ethic of the liberation of life […], and through a decolonizing and liberatory politics inspired by the "decolonial attitude" – to create a transmodern world "in which many worlds fit" and where the global dictatorship of capital, property, and coloniality no longer reign.

This decolonial perspective enters to the heart of the matter, as the decolonial attitude enables the condemned political subject, to struggle for liberation outside of the modern/colonial system. Maldonado-Torres poses that this attraction, kinship or affinity,

> […] goes together here with non-indifference and responsibility, both of which presuppose listening to the cry of the condemned. […] Action is in the sense no longer defined by the hand-that-takes but rather by receptive generosity and what Sandoval has aptly rendered as de-colonial love.[84]

This radical and complex understanding of kinship and love recognizes "alliance[s] and affection across lines of difference," be they of the body or outside the body.[85]

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[80] Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed,* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 167-168.
[81] Ibid., 187.
[82] This position, as Mohanty notes, replicates relations of power, which constitute "third world women" as being objects of knowledge, not as subjects and agents. Ibid., 414.
[83] Maldonado-Torres. *Against War,* 244.
[84] Ibid., 244.
[85] Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed*, 187.

As I will be using the concept in this chapter, decolonial love is part of what fuels the work of decolonization as a political and social project. Maldonado-Torres considers decolonial love as

> […] the search for truth and knowledge, the accomplishment of liberty and equality, and the satisfaction of demands for the recognition of identity respond to something greater than themselves: to the humanizing task of building a world in which genuine ethical relations become the norm and not the exception […].[86]

I propose that decolonial love is a practice that bears witness to a past while looking towards a transformative future by unraveling the matrix of power that is manifested in our contemporary conceptions of power, gender, and bodies. This matrix of power is a product of the coloniality of power. The remaining structures and the order of knowledge set-up by colonialism delineates contemporary Western ideologies of how power, gender, and bodies should and do function. My contribution to the praxis of decolonial love, recognizes the importance of past and suppressed histories, while working towards imagining new possibilities beyond those posed by the coloniality of power. In fact, Díaz speaks about witnessing or "bearing witness" as an integral part of decolonial love. For him, "bearing witness" to violence, to the past, and even to the present, is part of the process of achieving decolonial love.[87]

DECOLONIAL REPARATIONS

Authors of contemporary Afro-Diasporic literatures construct spaces that (re)imagine foundational concepts such as power, gender, and bodies. This work is primarily accomplished through attention to the changes in apparatus and ideologies of power that mark the shift between the colonial and the post-colonial moment. These authors' re-imagining of well-worn themes and tropes also includes a commitment to a notion of reparation. I argue that these narratives challenge popular notions of reparations as simple acts of government policy. Instead, the texts explore the possibilities of reparations as the result of acts of self-determination and transnational community activism. Finally, these imaginings of reparations in the texts also act as an analysis of the limitations of independence and constraints of the national state.

How should we conceive of the term reparations? What are the ways in which it his been deployed historically? The term "reparation" from the Old French *reparacion* deriving from the Late Latin word *reparationem* (*reparatio*), is a reference to acts of repair or restoration, first appears in the late 14th century as "reconciliation."[88] The term stems from *reparare* (Latin), which is to restore or

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[86] Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 244.
[87] Moya, "The Search for Decolonial Love," 2012.
[88] Etym Online, s.v. "Reparation," accessed April 1, 2014, http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=reparation.

repair, yet the meaning of reparations as "compensation for war damaged owed by the aggressor" is attested to be from 1921, with reference to Germany from the French *reparations* dated 1919.[89] The Oxford English Dictionary defines Reparation as:

> c. Healing, esp. of an injury; an instance of this.[90]
>
> a. The action of making amends for a wrong or harm done by providing payment or other assistance to the wronged party; an instance of this. Also: payment or assistance given in compensation for such a wrong; an example of this.[91]

The latter definition is often the first that comes to mind when discussing reparations, especially within communities of color.

In thinking about definitions and examples of historical and contemporary reparations, it is possible to discuss an area that could be called Reparation Studies. Let us consider some histories of reparations given: the United States' reparation to Japanese Americans interred during World War II, the Canadian Apology for the Chinese Head Tax, the multiple apologies to aboriginal and indigenous populations (including Australia, Canada, and the United States), the German Holocaust Reparations, and more recently the fourteen Caribbean nations suing the United Kingdom, France, and Netherlands for reparations for slavery and colonialism.[92] Reparations Studies as a comparative field of research, would offer a discursive space for a historical approach to reparations as well as how writers and thinkers imagine the future of reparations. This is especially true since writers and scholars – particularly those of color – continually engage the ideas and practice of reparations in a multiplicity of ways.[93]

In his book *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination,* Robin Kelley provides a historical overview of reparations for U.S. black communities. Kelley surveys movements for reparations from their inception at the beginning at the end of the civil war with the promise of "no less than forty-acres," to the political organizing of radical groups such as National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations

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[89] Ibid.

[90] Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. "Reparation," accessed February 1, 2014, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/162653?redirectedFrom=reparation#eid. The full entry from the OED online reads as follows: "a. An act of replacing or fixing parts of an object or structure in order to keep it in repair, or of restoring an object or structure to good condition by making repairs." Ibid.
a. Restoration of something to good or proper condition, position, or level, compensating for deterioration or decline; an instance of this.

[91] Ibid.

[92] These include: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Montserrat, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Trinidad and Tobago. These most recent developments and demands for reparations are going to be very important to flesh out in this work as it develops into a book-length project.

[93] See: Tuhiwai Smith (1999); Brooks (1999); Davis (2001); Harrington (1969); also, Boxill (2011).

in America, the Black Radical Congress, Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, the Black Panther Party, the Black Economic Development Conference and a plethora of other radical groups. Kelley poses that if we think of, "reparations as part of a broad strategy to radically transform society, then the ongoing struggle for reparations holds enormous promise for revitalizing movements for social justice including redistributing wealth, creating a democratic and caring public culture, exposing the ways capitalism and slavery produced massive inequality."[94] These movements for social justice start with a radical vision of justice and social reorganization. One that must begin with radical imaginings of what 'could be' after one recognizes what has been.

Afro-diasporic and Afro-exilic writers imagine reparations as part of future transformations. However, their work is not bound by the idea of reparations as something monetary or a formal apology, an official policy, or solemn promise.[95] Instead of economic definitions of reparation I explore a different view, one beyond monetary measure. These literatures reimagine the possibilities of reparations as: a decolonial attitude, non-material and community based compensations, a reparation of the imagination and of being, and finally as decolonial love. These conceptions of reparations are forms of decolonization because they traverse the oft-used positivistic calculation of debts or apologies owed, they engage in intergenerational and collective acts of love, and demand an understanding of (and an accounting for) the long-durée of colonialism.

IMAGINING DECOLONIAL REPARATIONS: QUIÑONEZ, DÍAZ & BACHENG

Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams,* Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: Sangre en la Selva* are novels that stage opportunities to envision reparations within and beyond the material. While each text speaks to notions of reparations and Afro-futurities, they do so in dynamically different ways. The ways these writers imagine the future of their communities is through radical (re)definitions of social and political concepts. These texts provide a discursive space for the continued critical study of reparations as project and an opportunity for trans-disciplinary scholarship. Through theories of decoloniality, I show how these novels reimagine reparations as a radical transformation of diasporic communities and as an attempt to repair broken societies, histories, and identities destroyed by colonialism and the coloniality of power. This commitment to notions of reparations can be seen in other texts of the Afro-Latin@ and Equatoguinean literary traditions including Ed Vega Yunque's *No Matter How much You Promise to Cook or Pay the Rent You Blew it Cause Bill Bailey Ain't Ever Coming Home,* Juan Tomas Avila Laurel's *Arde el monte de noche,* and Donato Ndongo's *El metro* and *El reencuentro: el retorno del exiliado.*

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[94] Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Duke University Press, 2003), 110.

[95] See both the essay and documentary entitled "A Sorry State" by Mitch Miyagawa (2012) where he examines his familial history and the multiple apologies they have received from the Canadian government.

The three novels I have chosen for this chapter *Bodega Dreams, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* and *Matinga: sangre en la selva***,** undertake a decolonial approach to reparations, by thinking beyond capitalist definitions of amounts owed and focusing on the reparation of communities, of the imagination, and of bodies. I argue that they are committed to investigating and culling ways in which to practice decolonial love.

The Limited Imagination of Willie Bodega*:* Ernesto Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*

Ernesto Quiñonez's text, *Bodega Dreams* (2000), is just such a meditation where power, gender, and bodies are re-imagined as part of the project of community liberation. The crux of the narrative is one man's attempt to foment community-wide reparation in New York's El Barrio and ultimately to liberate Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial possession. *Bodega Dreams,* focuses on Spanish Harlem and the dreams of activist-turned-hustler Willie Bodega. Bodega's covert hustle seeks to fund and create a Barrio born and raised educated class that will return to live and own properties in their community – a way of circumventing the neoliberal politics that gentrify Spanish Harlem. These imaginative renderings correspond with historical experiences of displacement and gentrification, which in turn encourages readers to envision an alternative future. I argue that the protagonist, Chino, develops a decolonial love, which helps him reimagine Spanish Harlem beyond the dualistic paradigms that circumscribe his existence at the beginning of the novel. Though initially on opposing sides, Bodega's grand vision helps Chino find beauty in his neighborhood and his community.

In order to provide pertinent context for the analysis of this novel, I turn to Arlene Davila's anthropological study of East Harlem's rapid gentrification during the early years of 21st century. In *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos and the Neoliberal City* (2004), Davila delves into the sociopolitical, cultural, spatial, and economic politics of neoliberalism as it manifests itself in El Barrio (Spanish Harlem/East Harlem). Davila's focus on Latinos is purposeful as many urban studies focus on the black/white divide as paradigm for the study of residential segregation and gentrification. Davila shows how neoliberalism, characterized as gentrification, consumption, and marketing in ethnic enclaves, intersects with New York City's Latino population, which comprise over 27% of the population. By neoliberalism Davila refers to,

> [T]he rubric of economic and urban development policies that favor state deregulations, that is, a decrease on state involvement accompanied by a privatization and free market approaches, all in the guise of fostering more efficient technologies of government.[96]

[96] Arlene Davila, *Barrio Dreams: Puerto Ricans, Latinos and the Neoliberal City,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 9.

Spanish Harlem, like many other urban centers, faces rapid commercialization of urban spaces, the rampant corruption of real estate corporations, and the pitting of cultural discourse as defiant to "progress" vis-à-vis the development and eventual displacement associated with gentrification.

Davila uncovers that neoliberal policies in New York City serve to displace renters who comprise 93.6%[97] of East Harlem and are largely Latino and Black. Furthermore, *Barrio Dreams* highlights how Puerto Rican residents of Spanish Harlem are cast as, "a passing group and the growing Mexican and Latino population [is] just a backdrop to current housing development rather than being a possible target of affordable housing."[98] This constant threat of displacement, erasure of rent controlled apartments, and the continual double-talk of real estate developers and district representatives are the backdrop of Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams*; a novel which takes place in the same spatial location and temporal scope as Davila's anthropological study.

In the novel *Bodega Dreams*, the reader is introduced to Willie Bodega and his grand visions of liberating his island(s) – Manhattan and Puerto Rico. This vision of a Great Society and grand scale welfare state echo the sociopolitical activism of the Young Lords Party in the 1960's and 1970's. In fact, Quiñonez ensures the reader knows Bodega's past as a member of the Young Lords Party and that this particular experience sets the pace for his ideations. Bodega's dreams of reparations include providing basic needs for Spanish Harlem community members, nurturing a middle class of mainland Puerto Ricans, and eventually using these empowered elites to liberate Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial possession. Some of his ideas are arguably problematic – for example, using drug money to fund the purchase and restoration of Spanish Harlem tenements). Bodega's laundering of drug money to purchase real estate is the crux of his imagined reparations, which works within, while attempting to subvert, the capitalist system.

And perhaps this is where Bodega's dream fails. Bodegas's radical imagining, to use the words of Anthony Bogues, – is not *Heretical*.[99] Bogues' *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals*, provides an intellectual history of black radical scholars which he categorizes into two streams: heretical thinkers and redemptive prophetic thinkers. His text includes an analysis of the work of intellectuals such as W.E.B. Dubois, Ida B. Wells, Bob Marley, C.L.R. James, and Cuguano. Bogues argues that rather than thinking of these black intellectuals as derivative, they should be analyzed as providing distinctive contributions to intellectual and political theory. For Bogues heretical thinking first engages and then critiques Western episteme while the redemptive prophetic stream incites people to organize through a retelling of history and circumstance.[100] What makes this particular heretical discourse fitting for a critique of Willie Bodega is precisely this failure to think outside of the capitalistic model of accumulation and distribution. He believes that success for his Spanish Harlem welfare state will be achieved by mimicking the corrupt

[97] These statistics are accurate at the time of publishing in 2004.
[98] Ibid., 58.
[99] Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals,* (New York: Routledge, 2003).
[100] Davila, *Barrio Dreams*, 13.

Anglo political and economic patterns that comprise New York City on the one hand and the U.S. national politic on the other.[101]

Nazario, Bodega's best friend, is the lawyer and front of the real estate/reparations operation. Nazario keeps a façade of legality that comforts Bodega into complicity. Here Bodega's own double consciousness rears its head: he knows that he can never be the "face" of his own empire because he is hyperaware of how his lack of cultural capital, education, and upper middle class finesse is seen by the New York City political establishment. Furthermore, he lacks the political clout that would rally support and attention to his nationalistic goals for Puerto Rico. Instead of imagining a subversion of this power pattern, Bodega plays into it by providing the resources for a community of Latino middle class elites to emerge through the legality that Nazario provides. Bodega himself remains unknown, in the shadows, and as such is never recognized as the propelling agent for the economic and social uplift of the neighborhood. Yet, despite this invisibility, he believes that the neighborhood and his community would rally up and rise against the police and the city if he were ever to be arrested or killed. This illusion of himself as a figurehead in the community serves his need for power and recognition.

Bodega's engagement with community liberation and self-determination is single-minded. While it may first be interpreted as an instance of decolonial love, his ideations were much more selfish than selfless. Bodega emulates the pattern of elite power structures he so-critiques and attempts to mimic it at the barrio level. Willie Bodega's attempt to use the same capitalist methods that made the Rockefellers rich and the Kennedys a politically powerful family limits his radical envisioning of New York City's El Barrio and the eventual liberation of Puerto Rico. Bodega tells Chino,

> Yo, *ese tipo era un raquetero.* Joe Kennedy was no different from me. He already had enough money in the twenties but he still became a rumrunner. Alcohol is a drug, right? Kennedy sold enough booze to kill a herd of rhinos. Made enough money from that to land other, legal schemes. Years later he bought his kids the White House. Yeah, he broke the law like I'm breaking the law, but I get no recognition because I am no Joe Kennedy.[102]

Bodega explains that the name "Kennedy" allowed criminality without indictment and through that corruption Kennedy brought political clout and even prestige to his family. Bodega laments that the Puerto Ricans and other people of color, who have died in unjust wars on the side of the U.S., (he mentions Vietnam and Korea), are still systematically disenfranchised. His Great Society, which begins with social, economic, and residential reparations in his local Spanish Harlem community, would extend to have international influence. Bodega realizes that Kennedy's path of corruption to political power, could be mimicked by him, but he could never reach the same results. Bodega's position as a racial and linguistic colonized other, limits the political elite in New York to

[101] Further developments in this project will engage theories of mimicry as they relate to Bodega.
[102] Ernesto Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* (New York: Vintage Press, 2000), 25-26.

recognize him as an equal. Bodega attempts to circumvent this rejection by using Nazario as the face of his corporation while he lurks in the shadows waiting for his community of middle class elites to emerge.

Furthermore, Bodega's notion of community reparations involves a limited scope of love and responsibility. For example, Bodega does not recognize that the junkies to whom he sells drugs are part and parcel of the "community" he supports. Instead of engaging a decolonial attitude, Bodega mimics the power structures, bolstering the coloniality of power.[103] When questioned about the drug selling he whispers to Chino, "Any Puerto Rican or any of my Latin brothers who are stupid enough to buy that shit don't belong in my Great Society."[104] In this way Bodega circumvents the logic that places his drug pushing in the center of the barrio and at the core of possible familial and community crises.

Furthermore, Bodega's (re)inscription of structural patterns of power engenders a heteronormative and masculinist nationalism. Bodega's reparative nationalist vision invites us to think about the long-standing critiques by radical women of color such as Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, and Gloria Anzaldúa.[105] Of particular interest is the history of the Young Lords Party and their dealings with gender amongst active members. According to Carmen Theresa Whalen in her essay "Bridging Homeland and Barrio Politics: The Young Lord's in Philadelphia," "The Young Lords' ideology, while based on ethnic pride, was not narrowly Nationalist and instead opened the doors to discussions of gender and the possibility of political coalitions."[106] Whalen explains that nationalist and paramilitary movements often struggled with creating equal and open space for women to participate. These paramilitary and nationalist groups have been critiqued for often re-inscribing patriarchal norms and colluding against women in leadership roles.

Literature produced on the Black Panther Party, American Indian Movement, and the Chican@ Movement document how issues of gender, sex, reproductive labor, and leadership had to be addressed forthrightly by female members of the organization. Without this direct confrontation of chauvinism, sexism, and the distilled belief of women's inherent inferiority, these

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[103] I use the term community tentatively as Bodega's conception of community is tied both to the locality of Spanish Harlem but also to the nation of Puerto Rico. These two imagined communities – to borrow the words of Benedict Anderson – are his point of pride and yet, he is unknown to them since the residents of Spanish Harlem do know who "Bodega" actually is. Furthermore, his dreams of nationalizing Puerto Rico are fledgling at the very least. These strivings are dependent on a community that he imagines unto himself. In the end his dreams of them rallying for his victory are mere imaginings – perhaps a hero complex?

[104] Ibid., 31.

[105] Moya, "The Search for Decolonial Love," 2012.

[106] Carmen Theresa Whalen, "Bridging Homeland and Barrio Politics: The Young Lords in Philadelphia" in *The Puerto Rican Movement: Voices from the Diaspora*, eds. Andrés Torres and José Velázquez, 107-123, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012).

organizations feared and faced factionalism. More importantly, the addressing of sex and gender within the paramilitary organizations became an essential part of imagining a revolutionary nationalism.[107]

Many branches of the Young Lord Party faced the exclusion of women from leadership roles. It was not until the Women's Caucus was formed, for example in New York and Philadelphia, that the Young Lords shifted their attitudes from those that "based their definition of Puerto Rican culture on a reassertion of traditional gender roles for women" to one that allowed for the equal participation of women in the movement. According to Whalen, "They changed their platform from a demand that "*machismo* must be revolutionary *machismo*" to "We want equality for women. Down with male chauvinism.[108] This is reflected in their Party Platform and in the restructuring of the organization. It is the earlier omission of women in the movement, a narrow view of nationalist politics that we see reflected in Willie Bodega's imagined reparations.

Similarly, Bodega fails to unravel the matrix of power that is manifested in the very center of his story. In Bodega's revolutionary imaginary women are not featured as central or even secondary to his barrio reparations. Yet, the reader soon learns that the root of his philosophies is hinged on a long-term pining for Veronica (who turns out to be Chino's wife's aunt). When finally disentangled, Bodega's plans are revealed to be somewhat of a sham. What drives Bodega is not a love for the barrio "community" but rather a fraudulent unrequited romantic love that does not bear witness to the past nor looks to a future beyond the material of the female body. This conflation between love for community and romantic love, an oversimplification of these politics for sure, is what ultimately leads to his death at the hands of his business partner Nazario and his lover Veronica.

Interestingly enough, Quiñonez as novelist utilizes dualisms in multiple ways. The good and bad love outlined above is one example, but another more obvious dualism plays out throughout the novel. Quiñonez often writes and refers to black/white, dark/light, good/evil dichotomies, and yet the core of the story is imbued with grey areas and murky ethics. Bodega's dreams were paid for with the additional suffering of the very same community he intended to help. The sharp dichotomies of black and white however, are most obvious when women are featured as active characters and they reflect a deeper racial indictment.

The women in the novel – in particular – Blanca (Chino's churchgoing do-gooder wife) and her sister Negra are seen as polar opposites and representative of different and unequal value systems. Of Blanca he says,

> Her face could envelop you, almost convert you. She had light tan skin, hazel eyes, and a beautiful mane of semibrown semiblonde hair. Nancy exuded a purity rarely found among the church girls. She was genuine as a stature of a saint you want to light candles to,

[107] See Anderson (2011) regarding AIM and the organizing within Native social and political movements. See Blackwell (2011) regarding the Chican@ Movement and the struggles with gender, feminism, and leadership.
[108] Whalen, "Bridging Homeland and Barrio Politics," 120.

> steal flowers for, or pray in front of. When she'd say "Gloria a Dios!" she meant it. She was intelligent, polite, and friendly, and since she never cursed everyone called her Blanca.[109]

Blanca is a studious and devout Pentecostal that encourages Chino to succeed in school and be a better and more responsible family man. As a family, she and Chino refuse to incur debt and Blanca dreams of moving away from El Barrio. Blanca, though pregnant with Chino's child is depicted as virginal, akin to the Virgin Mary, a saint that is to be left in the dark about the on goings of Chino's dealings with Bodega and his friendship with Sapo.

Negra on the other hand is seen as a dark cloud of trouble. The reader first meets Negra in a scene where she has stabbed her adulterous lover for lying about his whereabouts. Negra is volatile, untrustworthy, and cunning. She often is seen blackmailing Chino for information and trying to profit from the troubled people that surround her. Blanca, and Negra along with Vera (née Veronica, Bodega's love interest), are the most prominent female characters of the novel and they represent a light and a dark side, opposing each other but also pulling Chino in divergent directions.[110]

Blanca and Negra represent conflicting sides, ever battling to win the upper hand in their respective relationships. They represent the ways that Chino wrestles with Bodega's plans for reparations throughout the novel. These women are not part of the rebuilding of the community or the national imaginings that Bodega has devised, but rather have their own machinations through which to exert power over their futures (which Quiñonez does not focus on). For Chino the black/white mentality – all good or all bad – is what drives him to first reject Bodega's offer to work in his growing empire. As the novel develops, Chino attempts to go beyond this fixed binary. While he is at first skeptical and even indifferent of Willie Bodega's call for reparations "on our terms by our own means," he then believes Bodega's intentions, he becomes a believer and his employee.

Another grey area in the novel is Quiñonez's dealing with race. While the novel does not directly engage with Afro-Latin@ characters it is placed within a predominantly Afro-Latino community. Furthermore, Quiñonez's characters, such as Sapo and Bodega, are depicted as having stereotypical African or Afro-like phenotypes.[111] Of Sapo, Quiñonez says,

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[109] Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams*, 9.

[110] Vera is perhaps the more elusive character, as she shape shifts from light to dark eventually settling on deceit and murder. She is after all a faithless lover and though she is wealthy and has the trappings of whiteness (she has changed her name to Veronica) she colludes with Nazario to murder Bodega and make away with his properties and fortune. I argue that Vera's desire for capital pulls her into the dark side – the black that Quiñonez urges us to see as evil and cunning.

[111] During the 2011 American Studies Association Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, I presented an early version of this chapter. In the audience was Juan Flores, one of the foremost scholars of Puerto Rican/Latino Studies. In our post-presentation discussion, Flores asked how I theorized the "Afro" in Afro-Latino and how I conceived of Quiñonez's characters as Afro-Latin@. Flores explained

> He was strong, squatty, with a huge mouth framed by fat lips, freaking bembas that would almost swallow you. His eyes bulged in their sockets and when he laughed there was no denying the resemblance. It was like one huge, happy toad laughing right in front of you.[112]

Sapo is Chino's best friend, a fighter, and a drug-dealing high school dropout who is exceptionally loyal and incredibly violent. The following description of Sapo opens part one and part two of the novel, "Sapo was different. Sapo was always Sapo, and no one messed with him because he had a reputation for biting. 'When I'm in a fight,' Sapo would spit, 'whass close to my mouth is mine by right and my teeth ain't no fucken pawn-shop.'"[113] Sapo has a fixed subjectivity, his violence is inherent, and his choices are often juxtaposed to Chino's choices, that is, a married college-student striving to please his devout wife. Sapo is often shown beckoning Chino to leave the apartment he shares with his wife, offering him drugs, and sometimes asking Chino to risk his own life by holding or delivering drugs.

Willie Bodega is also a character that Quiñonez depicts as Afro-Latino. Chino says of Bodega, "[he] was a man in his forties with a goatee and the droopy eyes of an ex-heroin addict. His hair was curly and he was about five feet ten."[114] Chino's conversations with Bodega we see a shift in the language used. For example, when Bodega asks if Chino attends college, Chino admits that he goes to a public college. Bodgea answers in accented writing, "Yo, college is college and thass all that maras."[115] Throughout the text Sapo and Bodega are the only two characters that are shown to repeatedly speak in this way. These linguistic markers as well as the description of phenotype are indicative of their blackness or Afro-Latinidad.

Contrary to Quiñonez's assertion that his book does not have or represent Afro-Latino characters I argue that he utilizes Afro-Latino characters that inhabit and represent Spanish Harlem. In fact, though Chino also lives in Spanish Harlem, his own speech patterns never fall into this kind of accented speech. Perhaps his college courses have removed his accents? This, though a small instance, shows how the characters are part of Chino's scene, while Chino is a nimble and neutral central character. Chino triumphs in being street smart, but can remove himself from the pull of criminality, poverty, and linguistic markers. In thinking of these characters as Afro-Latino we can pay special attention to race and power in Spanish Harlem and how these marked "others" are used as backdrops to the unfolding story.

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that in his personal conversations with Quiñonez, the author allegedly denied having Afro-Latin@ characters in the book. In so many words, the author denied the novel as an Afro-Latin@ cultural production. The book manuscript will further elaborate on questions of authorial intent and literary analysis.

[112] Ibid., 1.

[113] Ibid., 85.

[114] Ibid., 23.

[115] Ibid., 24.

Another example of the subtle (and yet not so subtle) deployment of Afro-Latinidad as racial marker in the novel can be seen in the chapter "Que Viva Changó." In this chapter we see both Sapo and Chino visiting a botánica, a spiritual medicine house, in Spanish Harlem. They bring with them a sacrificial goose from the poultry house to the botánica of Doña Ramonita, of which Chino says, "Doña Ramonita was a heavy woman with strong African roots from Puerto Rico's Loíza Aldea. With her hair pulled back in a pink bandana and her hands on her hips, she looked like Aunt Jemima from the pancake boxes."[116] Chino describes Doña Ramonita as a mammy, a black woman from a well-known (but hardly the only) Afro-Puerto Rican community. These are simplistic descriptions of Doña Ramonita and it seems that Quiñonez rests on stereotypical descriptors of phenotype, character, and community origins in order to depict blackness of the botánica and the ritualism therein.

Doña Ramonita is of course from Loíza, where many consider the epicenter of blackness in Puerto Rico. The region is also heavily associated with Afro-Caribbean witchcraft, spiritual practices, and beliefs, all of which give way to heavy handed stereotyping on the island and in diaspora.[117] The novel figures a black witchcraft mammy role for Doña Ramonita. In *Bodega Dreams* her function as mystic keeper of Afro-Caribbean rituals continues as she remerges in the scene dressed in white with beads and rosaries.[118] Her role in the novel is to act as a spiritual go-between for Willie Bodega to the god Changó – one that will summon Vera to return to New York. Doña Ramonita functions in the novel to signify Bodega's beliefs in Afro-syncretic religiosity. Furthermore, her spiritual practices including the beheading and spilling of the gooses blood, is a striking juxtaposition to the pure white Pentecostalism of Blanca. Race then, in this narrative about reparations and love, is a vital component of the storyline, even as it circumvents the importance of race by portraying blackness and race as scaffolding rather than structural.

Chino is the novel's most visibly raced character. Chino, whose given name is Julio, explains that in order to get a name that means something, you need to fight: "Getting a name meant I had to fight. [...] So I decided that I no longer wanted to be called by the name my parents had given me Julio. I wanted a name like Sapo and so I looked for fights."[119] Chino explains how he achieved being given the nickname Chino,

> During my three years at Julia de Burgos, I had more fights than Sapo. And since I was born with high, flat cheekbones, almond-shaped eyes, and straight black hair (courtesy of my father's Ecuadorian Side of the family), and because kung fu movies were very popular at the time, when I was in the eight grade, I was tagged Chino.[120]

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[116] Ibid., 51.
[117] See Samiri Hernandez Hiraldo's, *Black Puerto Rican Identity and Religious Experience* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2014).
[118] Quiñonez, *Barrio Dreams*, 51-52.
[119] Ibid., 4.
[120] Ibid., 7-8.

His nickname, Chino, is undoubtedly a middleman minority reference and he serves this role to a degree.[121] He serves Bodega as a middleman, one that carries a kind of social capital. This social capital, though not accompanied by material wealth, has been accumulated by achievements such as graduating from high school and attending college. Chino as protagonist sets the story for the reader and both translates and vacillates between these two worlds: Bodega's corrupt plans for reparations and the future he has planned with Blanca.

By the end of the novel, however, he realizes that his goal to leave Bodega and the streets behind, amassing capital, and build a middle class life with Blanca is no longer viable. Like Blalock's theory of middleman minority points out, often the middleman is isolated or alienated from both the homeland (in Chino's case the barrio) and the host society (middle class upward mobility).[122] For Chino, Bodega's illusions of a grand-scale welfare state become much more complex (and perhaps even achievable). For a time, Chino ceases to vacillate between the ethics at odds, his individualistic approach to achievement and Bodega's community welfare state. He begins to appreciate El Barrio's history and art by visiting museums, appreciating murals and tags, and seeing the community as vibrant versus vanishing.

In fact, Chino develops a decolonial love, that goes beyond the good/bad, black/white paradigm that defines him throughout most of the novel. Early on we see a Chino, who unlike Bodega and Sapo, does not see the beauty in the brokenness of El Barrio. In one moment he tells a story of flying a kite over Spanish Harlem, a passage that shows the deep difference between his vision(s) and how Bodega and Sapo see their community,

> "You know Sapo," I said to him one day as we were preparing to fly kites on the roof a project, "if we could ride on tip of these things we could get out of here. You know?" "Why would you want fucken leave this place?" he said with his Sapo smile, showing all his teeth as he glued some razors to his kite. "This neighborhood is beautiful, bro."[123]

For Chino this was a revolutionary perspective, because his own views of El Barrio were imbued with negativity and despair,

> It was easy to be big and bad when you hated your life and felt meaningless. You lived in projects with pissed-up elevators, junkies on the stairs, posters of the rapist of the month, and whores you

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[121] Many thanks to Jason Chang for this insight.
Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Middleman Minorities," *American Sociological Review* 38, (1973): 583–594; Joe R. Feagin, and Clairece Booher Feagin, *Racial and Ethnic Relations*. 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003.); Alejandro Portes and Ruben Rumbaut, *Immigrant America: A Portrait*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

[122] Hubert M. Blalock, *Toward a Theory of Minority-Group Relations*, (New York: Wiley, 1967).

[123] Quiñonez, *Bodega Dreams,* 10-11.

> never new were whores until you saw men go in and out of their apartments like through revolving doors. You lived in a place where vacant lots grew like wild grass does in Kansas. [...] All you knew was that one day a block would have people, the next day it would be erased by a fire.[124]

Chino's childhood in a blighted neighborhood, seeing little that was good and witnessing how arbitrarily it could be "erased" was the experience that fomented his indifference to his ethnic enclave. He sees terrible things and only sees an end to El Barrio, not a new beginning and definitely not a reparative possibility. What we see at the end of the novel is a radical transformation of this belief. At the end of the novel, in the spirit of decolonial love, Chino makes room in the cramped apartment he shares with his pregnant wife Blanca, for a grandfather and grandson who came in search of Willie Bodega's patronage.[125]

Though Bodega's radical dreams of a powerful mainland middle class, a grand scale welfare state in the barrios, and the decolonization of Puerto Rico were dashed, they transformed Chino. By the end of the novel, the reader understands that Chino's acceptance of the two migrants, although small, could only occur in light of Bodega's utopian imaginings. Unlike Bodega, Chino wants nothing in return for his hospitality. This decolonial love is possibility that Bodega could not imagine. Chino says of this moment,

> He was grateful. Told me his name was Geran and his grandson was Hipolito, and then he made me all sorts of promises that I knew to be true. He had come to work and start a new life and would get out of my hair as soon as possible. I told him there was no rush.[126]

Chino not only offers this man and his grandson a place to live, but also recognizes this stranger as someone who speaks truth. Geran makes promises that Chino believes and this reflects a deep and foundational shift in Chino's ethics.[127]

At the end of the novel, Chino dreams of Willie Bodega as a young man in his Young Lord's beret and with an issue of *P'alante* tucked under his arm. In this dream Bodega asks Chino to take another look at El Barrio through the fire escape window to see a mother yell directions to her son in Spanglish,[128] and says the words that makes Chino reimagine his community,

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[124] Ibid., 5.
[125] Ibid., 210-211.
[126] Ibid., 211.
[127] Early in the novel Chino is not only skeptical of Bodega's "Great Society"; spiel, but he is also dismissive of Bodega as a relic and his dreams of transformation as "Bullshit."
Ibid., 39-41.
[128] "*Mira,* Junito, go by *un mapo, un conten de leche*, and tell *el bodeguero yo le pago* next Friday. And I don't want to see you in *el rufo*."
Ibid., 212.

> "You know what is happening here, don't you? Don't you? What we just heard as a poem, Chino. It's a beautiful new language. Don't you see what's happening? A new language means a new race. Spanglish is the future. It's a new language being born out of the ashes of two cultures clashing with each other. You will use a new language. Words the might not each you in that college. Words that aren't English or Spanish. But at the same time are both. Now that's where it's at. Our people are evolving into something completely new. […] Just like what I was trying to do. This new language is not completely correct; but then few things are."

Chino awakes from his dream and walks to the fire escape overlooking a busy and beautiful day in the streets of Spanish Harlem. Music, dancing, yelling, and laughing set the stage for this final musings: "The neighborhood might have been down, but it was far from out. Its people far from defeat. They had been bounced all over the place but they were still jamming. It seemed like a good place to start."[129] For Chino, the murals left behind commemorating Bodega, the "light" and possibilities offered by Bodega's dreams, and the incitement of a "new language" was the fuel for his own continued struggle.

Quiñonez 's text re-imagines the site of power within the neo-liberal city as well as socioeconomic politics within the lower class populations in New York City's urban centers through an exploration of reparations as political and social power, and later acts of kindness and community, which I argue is a form of decolonial love. As noted earlier in the chapter, decolonial love can be define by "[…] the search for truth and knowledge," which is fundamental to the undertaking of reparations, of "building a world in which genuine ethical relations become the norm and not the exception […]."[130] This search for truth, knowledge, liberty, equality, and the recognition of the humanity of the peoples of El Barrio is what Chino experiences in the final pages of *Barrio Dreams*. Willie Bodegas welfare state, though funded through drug money, was shrouded in legality: Bodega's associate, neighborhood lawyer Nazario deftly handled the legal transactions of the welfare state. Bodega's dream ultimately fails because he is blind to the treachery of his intimate circle: his faithless lover Vera and his conspiring associate Nazario. But even in failure it produces some success. Chino begins to build authentic ethical relationships with people he knows and with people who he has never met, he has a newfound belief in humanity, a connection across difference, the strivings of decolonial love.

Díaz: Imagining New Men and a Stronger Loving World

If decolonial reparations begin with understanding and subverting long histories then Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* can be considered a major text in this area. Though this chapter does not make concerted focus on Oscar Wao, the novel's use of multiple genres and time-play is important within

[129] Ibid., 213.
[130] Maldonado-Torres, *Against War*, 244.

the context of this discussion. This Afro-Latino novel imagines futurities very differently than *Bodega Dreams* and yet still looks to the future as possibility. *Oscar Wao* is a text where the protagonist continually imagines fantastic "futures" in his "never-to-be- completed opus."[131] The novel centers on a Dominican-American anti-hero, Oscar de León, who shuffles back and forth from the urban centers of New Jersey to postcolonial Dominican Republic. Through an analysis of Oscar's family history, Díaz critiques the volatile and often violent nature of postcolonial governments and its effects on national subject/citizens on the island and in diaspora.

The traveling curse, *fukú* is associated with the processes of diaspora and it appears as, "Trujillo's payback to the pueblo that betrayed him."[132] By linking diaspora as the final curse of a heinous dictator, Díaz points to the happenings in the diaspora as the center of the novel – diaspora serving as both a curse and as a space for creating a *zafa* or a counter-spell. *Oscar Wao* begins in 1492 with Columbus, the pillaging of the "new world," the release of "*fukú*" and ends with Oscar's last written words, "the beauty!"[133] Oscar's writing is the point of departure for this analysis of reparation that envisions a beautiful future.

As a sign of Oscar's utopian imaginings, Yunior, one of the narrators, notes that Oscar - the one who had never defaced a piece of literature - circles three times the words: "a stronger loving world" in his beloved watchmen book. Oscar is a challenging character – for his family and for the reader. As a character he dwells outside the norms of his community, "he had none of the Higher Powers of your typical Dominican male, […] Had no knack for music or business or dance, no hustle no rap, no G. And most damning of all: no looks."[134] This lack of prowess makes Oscar an outsider both at home, where his oft-intoxicated uncle serves as a model of hypermasculinity, and in his personal and social life, where he can never embody the trappings of young Latino masculinity.

Oscar's only escape is imagining an unknown future. Through his writings he conjures "a stronger loving world" where he finds beauty and possibilities of love.[135] Díaz portrays Oscar as a hopeless romantic, one that keeps the idea of love alive through writing and fantasy, and later through a relationship with Ybón. Oscar believes in love so dearly that he was willing to face a death at a firing squad. His escape into an unknown future is facilitated by his love of science fiction, which finds embodiment in one of the narrators (the footnote narrator).

During the final pages of the novel the reader discovers that Oscar has completed a science fiction "opus" which he believes will be the "cure to what ails us, the cosmos D.N.A."[136] This cosmos DNA, the answer to the *fukú* that betrays the Cabral and De León family and enables violence beyond measure, is a decolonial love. In an interview with scholar Paula Moya, Díaz explains that the text was meant to unravel this complex and decolonial understanding of love, "The kind of love that I was interested in, that my characters long for

[131] Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 333.
[132] Ibid., 5.
[133] Ibid., 335.
[134] Ibid., 19-20.
[135] Ibid., 331.
[136] Ibid., 333.

intuitively, is the only kind of love that could liberate them from that horrible legacy of colonial violence. I am speaking about decolonial love."[137]

In fact, Díaz says that the central question of the novel is about the possibilities of decolonial love, "is it possible to overcome the horrible legacy of slavery and find decolonial love? Is it possible to love one's broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power self in another broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power person?"[138] In *Oscar Wao,* the legacy of slavery is seen in multiple capacities. We first encounter it in the voices of enslaved during the Middle Passage, slaves that bring the cries of *fukú* with them. We then see the slavery of colonialism and post colonialism under dictatorships, Belicia's early years of servitude as a *criada*, Lola and Oscar's slavery to the self-hate induced by diaspora which "short-circuited their minds," and Yunior and Oscar's enslavement to notions of sex, gender conformity, and masculinity that only served to uproot and destroy them from the inside out.[139]

The legacy of slavery and the brokenness engendered by the coloniality of power is at the very heart of the matter. Díaz poses the question of love and repair, a reparation of the broken self and the broken other. Anníbal Quijano defines the coloniality of power in terms of the structures that dictate the order of knowledge, power, and bodies after the process of colonialism has ceased to exist in full.[140] Though the colonization process has ended, its structures and progression remains deeply imbedded in the people and the spaces it once occupied. This legacy of slavery, rape, cooptation, violence, war, and oppression are what create the broad strokes of brokenness. The self-hate, inferiority complex bred by inequality, and the repetition of violent patterns are what Díaz attempts to unpack in the novel through the story of Oscar and his family. That the novel deals with gender and sex as a central issue is of major importance. As noted in the previous chapter, María Lugones theorizes the coloniality of gender as the intersections of gender, sex, race as embedded in the power structures of colonialism, domination, and coloniality of power. For Díaz, both the colonialty of power and the coloniality of gender are essential parts of the story of Oscar and the history of the Dominican Republic as Caribbean island and Dominicans in diaspora.

It is clear through the telling and (re)telling of his familial and various national histories that Oscar is inheriting generations of oppression, violence, pain, rape, degradation, and the *fukú* - a curse. His own status as immigrant in the U.S. marks him as other, and he is doubly negated because of his inability to be accepted as a "real" Dominican man. Though Oscar continuously writes throughout the text, for the reader the content of Oscar's writing is unknown. We do not have access to its plots, characters, or narrative arcs. However, by the end, we do know that Oscar's death highlights the mystery of the opus' end and leaves his intellectual legacy mostly unknown. His final chapter is lost and never recovered. The "answer" is that the "future" is open. The text ends with Yunior anticipating that Oscar's niece Isis, will hold the key to unraveling the *fukú*

[137] Moya, "The Search for Decolonial Love," 2012.
[138] Ibid.
[139] Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 160.
[140] Quijano, "Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America," 2000.

through her own readings of Oscars papers and incomplete opus.

In this way, Oscar's imaginings are saved for the next generation. An open question is whether this out-of-sync with one's generation, this prescience but loss of vision, is comparable to Bodega's grand vision and Chino's small act of love. Oscar's idea of reparation is immaterial, or never materializes: the future is imagined. Yet, somehow it is transformative for his contemporaries and holds promise for future generations. Oscar's hope for a stronger loving world is an impetus for other characters to imagine another way of living and being. Here I think about how Yunior begins to write as a form of self-recovery, "from can't see in the morning to can't see at night."[141] Yunior is fueled to (re)imagine his own future, the possibilities of a life outside of patriarchal masculinity and violence, and the ability to transform himself into a new man: "Learned that from Oscar. I'm a new man, you see, a new man, a new man."[142]

Mbomio Bacheng: Reparative Blood, A Feminist Critique

Taken together Joaquin Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: Sangre en la selva,* Donato Ndongo's *El Metro,* and Juan Balboa Boneke's *El reencuentro: El retorno del exiliado* all demonstrate a (re)articulation of reparations. These Equatoguinean novels tie together power, gender, and bodies in narratives that radically critique colonial and post-colonial power structures. Mbomio Bacheng's *Matinga: Sangre en la selva* is the most recently published novel of the Equatoguinean tradition. The novel tells the story of Matinga a playera (coastal peoples) Bolondo Corsiqueña (indigenous to the Equatoguinean island of Corsico but living on the island of Bolondo). She was a woman made nymph, sent forth from the world of the dead to save her people with her blood. Mbomio Bacheng tells the reader early in the novel that Matinga did not belong to either the material world or the world of the dead.

Mbomio Bacheng's narrative is a radical re-imagining of Iberian Guinean history, within and beyond colonial borders, and a radical reimagining of reparations and the reclamation of history through blood. Rather than self-sacrifice this story is about how the literal blood of women (imbued with the power of the ancestors) can help heal and rebuild a nation at the brink of extinction or collapse. Reparations in *Matinga* are more so about anti-genocidal movements than they are about possible material gains. In this way reparations are beyond the calculable material and are instead envisioned as larger acts of love through ensuring progeny. This is reparative work, however, is not without a deep and troubling tax on the power and bodies of women. These are the bodies on which the strivings of nation building are suspended.

Matinga is very much a meditation on bodies and power.[143] This is a mythological story that mixes real locations, peoples, colonial and post-colonial histories, and island oral histories, but at whose center is the story of Iberian

[141] Díaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, 322.
[142] Ibid., 326.
[143] All translations of *Matinga* in these works are my own and I accept sole responsibility for any and all inaccuracies.

Guinea née Africa. The protagonist, Matinga, is born on the islands of Equatorial Guinea. She is a human-nymph sent by the ancestors from the world of the dead. The opening lines of the novel read, "She was born where the waves die, in a narrow Guinean beach of the tropical universe, where the ocean ends and the jungle begins."[144] This immediate juxtaposition of life and death, "born where the waves die" is a foreshadowing of the perilous nature of life that Mbomio Bacheng is introducing. The novel's temporal and spatial location is at the very heart of the colonial project. Spain's loss of its New World colonies after the 1898 defeat in the Spanish American War meant a reassessment of its final colonies in Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. A renewed focus on Equatorial Guinea meant that decolonization for this continental and island nation would not occur until 1968; the very moments where Spain was transitioning from fascism to democracy. Building the novel around this historical and spatial moment allows Mbomio Bacheng to paint the reader a juxtapositional portrait: jungle and fluvial natures that are living in the same historical present as the civil and political unrest of the (post)colony.

At the center of this story we see an isolated Matinga who travels throughout Guinea every month to the shores of a new community in order to offer her menstrual blood as tokens of fertility to Guinean women. When she leaves her places on the spatial beaches the bloodstained sand is then offered to the to men as additional token of fertility. Matinga's blood is life giving, though she is unaware of the reasons why this is so. She is unable to either control or understand the life-giving power of her blood and the movement of her body from shore to shore every month. The blood Matinga offers by the ocean waters is juxtaposed with the bloodshed of the jungle where the Guineans are fighting for liberation first from the Franco regime and later from their president turned dictator Francisco Macias Nguema. Matinga's blood, then, is an integral part of building and replenishing the nation, which is undergoing internal and external tumult.

This imagining of menstrual blood as a fertile reparative force, or as reparation of the nation, speaks to the role of women as builders of the nation. In fact, Indigenous Feminists have contended with this issue for many decades. According to Shari Hundorf and Cheryl Suzack in the introduction to the collection *Indigenous Women and Feminism*, Indigenous Feminism as theoretical and practical project is often misunderstood. Yet, at the crux of this theory is the a gender struggle that, "engages the crucial issues of cultural identity, nationalism, and decolonization particular to indigenous contexts."[145] Indigenous Feminism, though often concentrated in the gender struggles of First Nations and Aboriginal peoples, can be effective when reflecting on the political and gender struggles of Equatoguineans. Particularly pertinent is the novel's

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[144] Joaquin Mbomio Bacheng, *Matinga: sangre en la selva* (Barcelona: Edicionces Mey, 2013), 9. "Nacio donde mueren las olas, en una angosta playa guineana del universo tropical, donde termina el oceano y empieza la selva. Entre tierra y mar."

[145] Shari Hundorf and Cheryl Suzack, "Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing the Issues," in *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture*, eds. Cheryl Suzac, et al. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 2.

reflections of indigeneity in the postcolonial African context. When writing comparatively about First Nations peoples, Hundorf and Suzack explain that,

> Although they do not share a single culture, they do have a common colonial history, and our conception of Indigenous feminism centers on the fact that the imposition of patriarchy has transformed Indigenous societies by diminishing Indigenous women's power, status, and material circumstance.[146]

As populations that are indigenous to their lands, the ethnic groups of Equatoguineans of all different ethnic groups have suffered under the oppression and genocidal rule of European colonial powers and postcolonial dictatorships. Efforts of ethnic cleansing under the latter wiped out almost one-third of the population, while thousands of others escaped into exile. Though the histories, memories, and practices of Indigenous peoples may be distinct, decolonial theoretical frameworks, such as Indigenous Feminism, can be useful in thinking about the coloniality of power and resistance movements.

In her essay "Affirmations of an Indigenous Feminist," Kim Anderson examines the ways in which indigenous women are oft imagined in proto-natalist terms:

> One area worthy of examination is our literal role in birthing the nations. Because we are survivors of smallpox, massacres, eugenics, enforced sterilization, residential schools, and child welfare interventions, it is not surprising that there has been some pro-natalist (i.e., encouraging women to bear children) sentiment in our communities.[147]

As Anderson notes, nationalist and revolutionary groups, such as the American Indian Movement (AIM) have, in the past, supported and encourage these ideologies of women as bearers of the nation. Mbomio Bacheng, writing between and across two distinct continents, (Africa and Europe), walks us through this challenge as imagined in the perspective of an Iberian African nation.

In a post-1960's atmosphere of political autonomy and decolonization we see the idea of nation building re-emerge as a project. Since *Matinga's* temporal scope is at the moment of transition from colony to post-colony, and at the advent of Equatorial Guinea as independent nation, the reader can imagine the kinds of violence and struggles of nation building that Mbomio Bacheng conjures in the novel. Anderson, writing from an Indigenous Feminist perspective, meditates on the nation-building projects that have emerged out of indigenous struggles. In particular she writes from her experiences organizing within Cree/Métis political groups and poses questions about what roles woman could inhabit within these projects: "[...] we have to ask ourselves how our states of national crises have influenced the image of our women and the expectations we place upon them."[148] Furthermore, Hundorf and Suzack explain that the

[146] Ibid., 3.
[147] Ibid., 87.
[148] Ibid., 87.

emphasis on nationalism within these movements can diminish issues of gender inequality and can shroud the possibilities of women of color and Indigenous women's organizing. "One of the most pressing challenges for Indigenous feminism today," they write, "is to find a basis for collective political action and engagement in broader anti-colonial struggles that also addressees the particularities of Indigenous women's social positions."[149] I pose that the novel first figures Matinga as a vessel of reparations for the future of Equatorial Guinea, and then juxtaposes this narrative by presenting Matinga's agency well beyond her initial blood offerings. Matinga is shown to have an unfixed subjectivity that is not circumscribed by her father's choice to barter her body or by the ancestor's desires to use her for the perpetuation of the living.

Matinga, as woman sent from the world of the dead, seems to inhabit the role of involuntary bearer of the emerging nation. Anderson is critical of this imagined role of indigenous women and poses that feminist literature can pose insightful critiques that turn the gaze away from women's wombs to the confining dictates of patriarchy:

> Feminist literature exposes how pro-natalist movements and ideologies related to the mothers of the nation have been common in countries worldwide during war or postwar periods and within liberation movements. Feminist history has shown just how disempowering these movements have been for the women involved, because they typically confine omen to motherhood roles within the patriarchal family.[150]

Matinaga's father is revealed to be a colonial era activist who in dying bartered his newborn daughters body to the ancestors for an opportunity for his spirit to see his child for a first and final time. The ancestors, in the world of the dead, transformed in Matinga's blood into a reparative force that could offer life-giving sacraments replenishing the decimated nation.

At the end of the novel, in a trance that has taken her to the world of the dead, Matinga learns that her father was a man named Mecheba who was "a lover of justice and of liberty."[151] Upon Mecheba's demise he chose to "[…] allow the ancestors to use the body of his child to repopulate the spatial beaches, to alleviate the depressions caused by the colonial period, and to forestall the bloodshed that would occur after independence."[152] Matinga's fertile blood and the reparative forces of her fluids were elements out of her own control - she was a vessel that provided life to others while she herself was barren, loveless, and unable to spend an evening with her mother or even a relative because the gravitations of her powers were too intense.[153] To be sure, the inability to control

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[149] Ibid., 3.
[150] Ibid., 87.
[151] Mbomio Bancheng, *Matinga*, 125. "Amante de la justicia y de la libertad […]."
[152] Mbomio Bacheng, *Matinga,* 126. "Tuvo que aceptar que los ancestros utilizaran el cuerpo de su criatura para repoblar el espacio playero, para palir las bajas causadas por el periodo colonial y prever tambien el derramamiento de sangre que tendria lugar despues de la independencia."
[153] Ibid.

her body and her complete isolation (save for her twin soul, a coconut palm on the shores of Bolondo[154]) paints a problematic portrait. In relation to this kind of limiting and controlled existence Anderson laments, "Sadly, dominance and control of women have been the classic response to nations struggling with liberation movements, war, or postwar recovery."[155] That Matinga's father's offered her body to the ancestors held her in a perpetual crossroads between the world of the living and the world of the dead from the very moment of her birth. In fact, Mbomio Bacheng tells us that, "Matinga was born this way; in the center of history, in the middle of time, in between two dramas, at the crossroads of two worlds: the colonial one which was waning and the modernist postcolonial, which was arriving."[156]

In the penultimate pages of the novel, we see Matinga now widowed. She had a brief and fulfilling love affair with Mbele a water nymph who had swum into the ocean to avenge his brother's death by a "cannibal-whale" but Mbele did not survive.[157] This relationship and deep love with Mbele is Matinga's first step toward fulfilling her own desires and rejecting the involuntary movements and of her body. Matinga feels strongly that the ancestors destine her relationship with Mbele and as such, she is not regretful for having met him or even bitter over his death. Matinga, now pregnant, travels to the island of Bolondo to visit a shaman or curandero. There learns the history of her body's involuntary gifts. Matinga is told that she was,

> […] sent by the ancestors to repopulate this country which will lose many of its sons in the bloody years that are to come as price for their independence. From town to town, year after year, your nymph blood has germinated the soil of our lands. As a result of your labor, new generations have been born to extinguish the fires of tomorrow that are gestating today in our Guinean nation.[158]

This news is transformative for Matinga. We see by the temporally unfixed words of the curandero that Matinga's blood and her existence are both past and present, and simultaneously of extreme importance to the future. Most importantly, it is this knowledge that liberates her from the shackles of uncertainty.

Matinga's venture into the world of the dead in order to find answers also furnishes her with further liberation: "Today the spirits liberate you so you may

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[154] Ibid.
[155] Ibid., 87.
[156] Ibid., 14. "Matinga nacio asi; en medio de la historia, a mitad de tiempo, entre dos dramas, en el entrecruce de dos mundos: el mundo colonial que se iba y el mundo modernista postcolonial que llegaba."
[157] Ibid., 94.
[158] Ibid., 124. "Fuiste enviada por los ancestros, para repoblar este pais que va a perder a muchos de sus hijos en los anos sangrientos que se avecinan, como precio por su independencia. De pueblo en pueblo, ano tras ano, tu sangre de ninfa ha germinado el suelo de nuestra tierra. Por tu labor, nuevas generaciones han nacido para apagar manana la hoguera encendida por el drama que hoy se gesta en nuestra patria guineana."

return to the island of Corsico and join your mother. There you will care for your child whom will also be the New man of our african [sic] country that advances (there) within the seas."[159] In Matinga's newfound knowledge of her familial past and the nature of her powers she is relived of the reparative acts of her blood. She reclaims her body as her own, free from ancestral control, and she can finally choose to imagine her future beyond the reparations her blood offers.

In fact, Matgina's pregnancy is seen as the next possibility, a continuation of a struggle. If this is so, then her impending motherhood can be read as a perpetuation of the novel's proto-natalist sentiment, but this time it is a choice that Matinga makes for herself. This agency does not free the novel of indictment, though my reading through theories of Indigenous Feminism and de-colonization ignore the possible interpretation of this novel as analogous to Greek mythologies of the underworld. Theories of Indigenous Feminism however, offer complex and fruitful ways to think about the roles of motherhood and the maternal body in ways that counter Western feminist cynicism toward the perceived injustice of such roles. Anderson offers community and collectivity as approaches in order to think outside of the fixed subjectivities that Western liberalism offers:

> If we see feminism as being too invested in Western liberalism and individual autonomy, then we need to ensure that our collective approaches serve everyone in the collective. And if we want to embrace essential elements of woman hood that have been problematic for Western feminist (such as motherhood and the maternal body), then we have to ensure that these concepts don't get stuck in literal or patriarchal interpretations."[160]

Furthermore, Matinga is no longer isolated, but is free of the conscription to solitude. She leaves Bolondo and goes to her mother on the island of Corsico in order to raise her child amongst community. This is a kind of collective and communal love that Matinga herself had never known. Her role as mother, daughter, and community member is not circumscribed by nationalist ideologies, dictatorial rule, or even by the ancestors. It is a subsequent radical reimagining of reparations (the first is woman's blood as fertile force for the nation) that looks at the possibility of familial and community love as a way repair the violence in their "broken by the coloniality-of-power" nation.

Matinga is also a folk story that is imbued with the long and lingering histories of colonialism, post-colonialism, and decolonization. These realities bear the fruit much like Matinga's blood: radical re-imaginings of the future that are made possible through acts of love but also through a belief in the power of future generations. Mbombio Bacheng offers the reader the story of Matinga, a woman made nymph at the crossroads of the living and dead. His writing however, urges the reader to see her as an allegory for the history of Iberian

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[159] Ibid.,125. "Hoy te liberan los espiritus para que puedas volver a la isla junto a tu madre en Corsico. Alli cuidaras a tu criatura, que sera tambien el Nuevo hombre de nuestro pueblo africano que avanza allende los mares."
[160] Ibid., 88.

Africa, a nation at the border of the world, a people who continue to imagine radical futures of liberation,

> Matinga was African, from that Africa that was deeply virginal and purely violated and ignored that had bloomed like an innocent flower millions of years ago and that saw time pass, century by century, year after year, from town to town and from tribe to tribe […] that was Matinga; young and old, past and future, free and enslaved […] she lived there, in the precipice of the universe, at the border of the world."[161]

Mbomio Bacheng's narrative choice to make Matinga a past-present-never-being as well as a stand-in for African and Iberian African history is arguably problematic. One reading of this novel can see it as essentialist and perhaps even fanning the flames of Negritude. That Mbomio Bacheng puts Matinga at the border or "*frontera*" of history makes it possible see her, and Africa, as ahistorical. Yet, I evoke once again the work of Feierman's critical argument that in the act of writing literature the African author "dissolves" world history. This act of writing hastens the dissolution of conceptions that cast Africa and Africans as ahistorical peoples. Mbomio Bacheng's survey of times passed for Matinga ensures an understanding that Africa is not an essentialist or static continent. Iberian Africa moves, times passes, and Matinga, a human-nymph of ancestral making has an unfixed gaze and an unfixed subjectivity.

And still, there is more to contend with in this quotation. Mbomio Bacheng's treatment of time and space in this novel is, in his oft-used word, fluvial. Matinga as Iberian Africa was seen as both virginal and violated and ignored. In this moment Mbomio Bacheng is offering distinctly different historical moments: Africa to Mbomio Bacheng is both of these things, still "pure" and virginal but also having a long legacy of colonial violation. He further notes that Matinga saw time pass "[…] century by century, year after year, from town to town and from tribe to tribe."[162]

Matinga's position at the, "[…] precipice of the universe, the border of the world,"[163] is evocative of Gloria Anzaldúa's work in *Borderlands/La Frontera* where she tells us that, "The U.S.-Mexican border *es una herida abierta* (an open wound) where the third world grates against the first and bleeds."[164] This *frontera*, this border, is one in which a new consciousness emerges, what

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[161] Ibid., 14. "Matinga era africana de esa Africa profunda virgen y pura violada e ignorada que habia brotado como una flor inocente hacia millones de años y que veia al pasar el tiempo, siglo tras siglo, año tras año, de pueblo en pueblo y de tribu en tribu, […] Esta era Matinga; joven y vieja, pasado y futuro, libre y esclava, [...] vivía allí, ella, en el precipcio del universo, en la frontera del mundo."

[162] Ibid. "[…]siglo tras siglo, ano tras ano, de pueblo en pueblo y de tribu en tribu/ century by century, year after year, from town to town and from tribe to tribe."

[163] Ibid. "[…] el precipcio del universo, en la frontera del mundo."

[164] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987), 3.

Anzaldúa calls a Meztiza Consciousness, that is contingent on a decolonial praxis and a decolonial love. The bleeding border imagery that Anzaldúa evokes, is conjured by the blood that Matinga shed on the borders of the ocean – the sandy shores of the Equatoguinean nation.

LITERATURE, RADICAL THOUGHT & DECOLONIAL IMAGINATIONS

As outlined above, the literary narratives of Afro-diasporic and exilic communities reconceive reparations through a creation of discursive spaces that fundamentally alter the terms of redemption. Here I echo Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* where his transformative mediation on time space echoes the idea that history is not static - but rather that the past is intimately tied to our conceptions of the present and the future. In this way, the past is a nymph.

These Afro-diasporic and exilic communities also share a history of colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and host of other evils whose effects are still palpable. I want to make legible how these texts enable us to imagine multiple ideas/ideals of reparation. Though the texts that I discussed each have distinct approaches to the notions of reparations, I think they are useful when thinking of the multiplicity of possibilities of justice in the Afro-diasporic and exilic literary imaginaries.

In *Bodega Dreams*, reparations are seen as a way to liberate, decolonize, and repair - through a slight, though not radical, subversion of the capitalistic and neo-liberal policies that continually push people of color to the margins of society. While the grand scale reparations fails, it succeeds in opening a deeper commitment to community and love by Chino. Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* offers a view of reparations that is intricately tied to decolonial love. Through a challenge to patriarchal masculinity, postcolonial dictatorial rule, and the fostering of a decolonial imagination, reparations of the nation and the community stem first from a reparation of the self. For Díaz, the recognition of being "broken by the coloniality-of-power" is the first step in atrophying the inherent violence of colonization. Finally, *Matinga* ties the future to the past and makes a woman's blood a key lifeline to a fertile and more loving future. Reading *Matinga*, subverts the notions of static histories - as the ancestors are active players in the lives of the living - and colonialism, post colonialism, and the moment of independence all set the stage for the story and for imagining a different kind of future, one in which communal love and collective work can act as a way to fight the upset, violence, and dictatorship of postcolonial independence.

These literatures are tied to long-standing commitments and the desire of these communities and these authors to repair themselves. By engaging in this kind of comparative project I have presented how these authors craft different visions of what a more beautiful and repaired world could be. These imagined future worlds highlight the need for reparations as a project beyond the material and beyond positivistic material attitudes that translate structural and epistemic issues into quantifiable variables. *Bodega Dreams, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* and *Matinga* are but three contemporary examples of Afro-diasporic and exilic literature that imagine reparations as transformative projects beyond the

scope of the material. And these bodies of literature speak to these realities in radically different and fascinating ways.

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CHAPTER 3

Exile and Impossibilities of Home/lands
Loida Maritza Perez's *Geographies of Home* &
Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *El Dictador de Corsico*

So carry your homeland wherever you go, and be
a narcissist if need be/
The outside world is exile,
exile is the world inside.
And what are you between the two?
Mahmoud Darwish[165]

We are lovers of origins, we're not afraid to return.
There is a memory in our forgetfulness.
Hélène Cixous[166]

The poetic words of Mahmoud Darwish's piece "Edward Said: A Contrapuntual Reading" is an homage to the life work of Edward Said. It speaks to the contradictions and burdens of exilic realities and complexities of carrying homelands in words and in the psyche. In this same vein, Hélène Cixous' meditation in "Vivre l'orange" conjures the possibilities of a constant return to a place of origin that though may not be physical, can evoke memory, which in turn fuels the writer. Both quotations reinforce the idea that the term "exile" is both a subject and a condition of writing. This chapter meditates on exile as subject and condition through a close reading of Loida Martiza Perez's *Geographies of Home* (1999) and Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *El dictador de Corsico* (2014). Through a close analysis of theories of exile, this chapter offers a decolonial interpretation of these two little-known global Afro-diasporic texts and offers a theorization of exile as a third space or space of difference.

My previous two chapters, along with the critical introduction, have undertaken a study of Afro-diasporic literature through the lens of theories of decoloniality, feminist philosophies of recognition and faithful witnessing, literary criticism, discourses on reparations, and theories of gender and indigenous feminism. This chapter shifts the focus to the concept of exile in order to examine how these global Afro-diasporic literatures engage the challenging question of home and belonging in distinct ways. By this I mean that they do so

[165] Mahmoud Darwish, "Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading," trans. Mona Anis, *Cultural Critique* 67, (2007): 175-182.
[166] Hélène Cixous, "Vivre l'orange To live the orange," in *The Hélène Cixous Reader*, ed. Hélène Cixous (London: Routledge, 1994).

differently but also, that their approach to discussing exile is subtle and very different from many of the other literatures that would typically be considered to examining exile.

Literary writers and theorists in exile and diaspora have written with expressed interest in understanding the pull of home and the pains of not-belonging. Literature on black internationalism and diaspora studies have provided invaluable analysis of the experience and cultural productions of Afro-descendants that are (im)mobile in long historical and global contexts.[167] I argue that a study of the two novels outlined above can further develop spaces for meaningful dialogues about how contemporary writers of the Afro-diaspora conceive of home/homeland for the exiled and diasporan subject.

Theories of exile most often lead us to the prolific work of Edward Said. This chapter will take up Said's work on exile in an effort to pose and juxtapose his conceptions of exile with a decolonial ethical approach to exile as a position of writing and being. In addition to culling working definitions of exile, this chapter looks to the work of Paul Tiyambe Zeleza and Azade Seyhan in order see how exile writing relates to theories of nationhood and race. Lastly, I will draw a connection between the practice of writing in exile and the ethical condition of exilic writing. This will lead me to the two aforementioned novels, one written by an exilic writer (Ávila Laurel) and the other by a diasporic writer (Perez). Both of these novels engage discourses of exile in their renderings of home and the impossibilities therein.

Through a close decolonial reading of the novels I will address the following questions: How is the concept of home and exile imagined Afro-Latin@ literature? How do these writers traverse concepts of home and inhabit unhomely spaces? How does the experience of blackness create dysfunction for the women in Perez's novel? How do the arbitrary and violent realities of dictatorial rule engender a similar dysfunction in Ávila Laurel's novel?

Loida Martiza Perez's *Geographies of Home* is a meditation on a sprawling and chaotic Dominican family in New York City. Perez's protagonist, Iliana is a young woman who has just left a hostile university environment in order to return home and help her family through difficulties that include a sister suffering from a mental breakdown, a niece and two nephews being neglected by their abused mother, and brothers at a violent crossroads over marital infidelities. Iliana struggles with the experience of finding that the home she has returned to after college proved is a hotbed of racism and degradation. What she returns to is a home that is violent, impossibly unwelcoming, circumscribed by conservative religious mores, and yet fiercely loving and steeped in Afro-Dominican syncretic beliefs and metaphysical powers. This novel, authored by an Afro-Latina writer offers a multigenerational literary critique of conceptions of home and the ways in which ideas of home are often intricately tied to the past. I also argue that Perez's protagonist experiences a kind of exile within her own family, she inhabits a third space, an inside/outside perspective that forces her to reconsider her own role in the family dynamics.

The second novel, Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *El dictador de Corsico,* is the latest piece by the Equatoguinean writer, activist, and poet. Ávila Laurel is

[167] For more regarding black internationalism and cultural productions in diaspora see Hayes Edwards (2003) and Makalani (2011).

widely considered to be Equatorial Guinea's most important living writer. He writes and works in exile in Barcelona (with the exception of very short police monitored visits to Equatorial Guinea).[168] This novel is written from the perspective of a woman named Malela, the mother of two sons, and a lifelong resident of the Corsico – an island nation that is part of Equatorial Guinea. It is no coincidence that both *El dictador de Corsico* and the novel I discussed in the previous chapter *Matinga: sangre en la selva* focus on the peripheral island of Corsio. In an article about the ruins in Corsico, Benita Sampedro Vizcaya speaks to the relevance of centering islands in discussions of postcolonial memory, ruins, and history, "[…] ghost-like villages and vacuumed-like empty islands can be as eloquent about the past as archives—as we commonly understand them—statistics, and libraries." It seems that though Corsico is a small island city its status as a marginal island makes it ever poignant to discuss a body of work and a population of people who suffer on the margins of an almost half century long dictatorship. Studying its exile literature can tell us as much as entering an archive.

El dictador de Corsico is both tied to Spanish colonialism, the dictatorial rule of Macias and Obiang, and the arbitrary abuses of power that become part and parcel of Equatoguinean life. Malela's son, relentlessly upset by the changes occurring on the island, declares himself to be the new dictator of Corsico. He misunderstands the power structure of the dictatorship and feels that his declaration of dictatorial rule can help keep their people from suffering. Her other son is dumbfounded over Anita, a tourist turned experimental lover. Malela mistakenly sees Anita (also read as Anika in the novel) as a ticket out of the rapidly declining police state of Corsico and Equatorial Guinea. Yet, this family's ties to their homeland run much deeper than first imagined and their story takes a turn for the tragic.

Both of these novels, products of different migrations and traditions, speak to ideological concepts of home and homelands through radically different formulations of exile as concept. In *Geographies of Home* exile is imagined as a failure to find home, comfort, and closure in places that are though to be safe: a familial home. The rejection of blackness becomes central to understanding this discomfort and distance from the self, which is embodied in deep resentments, madness, depression, and dissatisfaction. This exile of the self is primarily seen in the female characters and is shown through their explorations of their subjectivities as Afro-Dominican immigrants, that is, racial and linguistic others. In *El dictaador de Corsico* exile is shown as an unwanted reality that is propelled by despotic power and ecological destruction. Here the coloniality of power and repetition of violence rears its head as the protagonist and her two sons are endure (re)member and experience traumatic events. These suppressed memories, or exiled memories, are akin to an act of subversion; that is, the very act of remembering them can bring on death at the hands of the president-

[168] For more information regarding Juan Tomás' most recent attempted visit to Equatorial Guinea: http://blog.lareviewofbooks.org/uncategorized/equatorial-guineas-important-living-writer-forced-hiding/. In addition to this article, I have interviewed Juan Tomás extensively on topics of his political exile, novels and literary work, and his political activism in Barcelona and Malabo.

turned-dictator. These events lead to the eventual exile of the characters and the outcome is as tragic as the memories.

This inherent difference is what makes the comparative close reading approach so productive. Though addressing different kinds of exile, each novel speaks to-and-from the position of blackness, an "othered" subjectivity written from a faithful point-of-view, one that aligns itself with those suffering.[169] Furthermore, the novels pose relevant questions about the possibilities of home for subjects at a crossroads, those inhabiting a third space, the exile. In particular I am interested in how these authors conceive of home in such impossible circumstances, when spaces imagined as home are in fact unwelcoming or are impossible to inhabit.

THEORIES OF EXILE: THE NATION, THE NARRATIVE

> [W]riters become chroniclers of the histories of the displaced whose stories will otherwise go unrecorded. Literature tends to record what history and public memory often forget.
>
> Azade Sayhan[170]

One cannot speak too often about exile without taking into account the work of Edward Said. A distinguished writer and critic, Said has written at length about the topic of exile. Said tells us that exile is,

> […] the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted. [. . .] The achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever.[171]

As an exilic writer, Said's work took on both the mundane of the exilic condition and the broader implications of its lived realities. A staunch critic of the Israeli state in Palestine, Said offered many thoughts on conceptions of the nation and critiques the processes of nation building. Said's *Culture and Imperialism* offers some thoughts on the Afro-diaspora as well. And though his meditation on the issue of Palestinian exiles and the state of Israel takes on a different set of questions, oceans and masses away from the groups that I address here, his extensive comparative work is vital to thinking about the place of the exile in a global context.

In *Reflections on Exile,* Said writes of the exiled subject as a bane to the nationalist yearnings of their host nation. These host nations, especially those

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[169] For more on "faithful witnessing" please see Chapter 1.
[170] Azade Sayhan, *Writing Outside the Nation,* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 12.
[171] Said, Edward, *Reflections on Exile,* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 173.

engaged in nation-building projects seek to delimit those who belong in order to define what their "nation" represents. As such, Said offers this thought on exile and the nation, "Nationalisms are about groups, but in a very acute sense exile is a solitude experienced outside the group: the deprivations felt at not being with others in the communal habitation."[172] Said's concern is the exile's lack of access to communal sharing and of a sense of belonging to a larger group: the nation. The exiled subject is perpetually outside, that is, outside both the homeland and the host nation community. This is what Said calls, "a perilous state of not-belonging."[173] Said correlates the "not-belonging" position of the exile to Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the *habitus* which links the practice of habit with the act of inhabitance. Thus, the practice of living/being outside of the national collective is understood as an inferior existence. This solidification of the inside/outside binary, of belonging/not-belonging, further bolsters the foundational myths of the nation.

Paual Tiyambe Zeleza's treatise, "The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa," offers a critical reading of exile as theory. Through a grappling with the work of Sophia McClennen, Zeleza argues that exile extends beyond a binary of belonging and non-belonging,

> Rather than a series of exclusive binaries, literary production in exile is best understood as a complex "series of dialectic tensions revolving around central components of the exile's cultural identity: nation, time, language, and space" (McClennen) But the dialectics must lead somewhere.[174]

These dialectic tensions do not speak to one particular condition but rather to multiple conditions and realities of existence. The literary productions of the exilic subject are not only rooted in a place of no return, but also in the cultural productions and cultural realities of everyday life.

This not-belonging could solely be traumatic existence, a living that is perpetually outside of a recognizable modality of being, yet Said offers us a contrapuntal reading. According to Zeleza, Said emphasizes the radical possibilities of the exilic intellectual and his conception of exile, "becomes an ontological and political space of freedom. Said's argument is that the historical imperative of anti-imperialist struggle now find expression and vitality in exilic and migratory energies and movements."[175] If anti-imperial struggles can find vitality in the writing of the exile then decolonial struggles can also find vigorous allies in these works.

Said's practice of exile is not rooted in a desire to return but rather, is tied to something subtler, "Said seeks the validation of exile not in his own eventual return to the homeland but in the freedom inherent in the very condition of exile."[176] The condition of exile has both inherent freedoms and burdens of not–

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[172] Ibid.,140.
[173] Ibid.
[174] Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, "The Politics and Poetics of Exile: Edward Said in Africa," *Research in African Literatures* 36, no. 3 (2005): 10.
[175] Ibid., 10.
[176] Ibid., 9.

belonging. This constant negotiation within tenuous positions offers a third space: a critical voice that writes from a position of difference.

This particular point-of-view is important but this is not to say that the exilic condition is rare. In fact Zeleza points to quite the opposite,

> Exile is exceedingly common in modern Africa, indeed in the world at large, so much that it could even be seen as one of the major characteristics of the twentieth century, yet it remains difficult to define as a concept and a condition. The cases, contexts, courses, construction, and consequences of exile and the exilic life and identity are so complex and varied that they cannot but have multiple referents.[177]

Though exile has increasingly become the lived reality of more and more people, its exact definition is difficult to determine. Since exile can be represented by multiple conditions, it shares an affiliation with additional forms of otherness including refugees, expatriates, émigrés, and the like. Each of these conditions have distinct origins of departure and different manifestations, "exile is a metonymy for various forms of dislocation from a physical and psychic homeland."[178] Perhaps it is in this inherent dissonance that the possibility of comparativity of these "various forms of dislocation" emerges.

Azade Seyhan's *Writing Outside the Nation* examines what she calls the "culture of exile" in literary and theoretical perspectives. Part of this approach understands that exilic writings are not bound by national constraints but rather are narratives that emerge across and betwixt "national" borders. Seyhan tells us,

> The recent history of forced or voluntary migrations, massive transfers of population, and traveling and transplanted cultures is seen as part and parcel of the postwar, postindustrial, and postcolonial experience. Understandably, narratives that originate at border crossings cannot be bound by national borders, languages, and literary and critical traditions.[179]

As I argued earlier, the work that emerges at these border crossings is indicative of a third space. This third space belongs to neither of the host nation or the homeland, it is inhabited by the exile alone.

The condition of exile, the "in-betweeness" or not-belonging, is also in large part the subject of writing. Seyhan echoes this notion in her chapter entitled "Neither Here/Nor There: The Culture of Exile." She says, "Almost all the writers discussed in this study express the sentiment that neither a return to the homeland left behind nor being at home in the host country is an option. They need an alternative space, a third geography.[180] According to Seyhan this third geography is, "the space of memory, of language, of translation. In fact, this alternative geography can now be figured as a terrain (of) writing, as the Greek

[177] Ibid.,10.
[178] Ibid.,11.
[179] Seyhan, *Writing Outside the Nation*, 4.
[180] Ibid., 15.

roots of its two syllables suggest."[181] This terrain of writing that Seyhan suggests and brilliantly etymologizes is a radical reconfiguration of how exile as condition and subject is imagined.

I build on the work of these theorists as I frame my decolonial approach to think near the exiled condition. I argue that a decolonial approach to exile sees the points of departure and arrival, sees the border crossings, and witnesses the birth of the exiled self/being at the crossroads. By this I mean that the decolonial attitude allows and expects for a consideration of longer and broader historical and sociopolitical perspectives. One that not only recognizes the exiled subject as human but also looks at the emerging and established nations and questions their claims to purity and inclusion and rallies against forms of dehumanization and exclusion. Increased globalization and neoliberal economic exchanges create the impetus for increasingly large numbers of immigrants, exiles, and refugees. This means that the exiled (and diasporan) subject is not few and far between but rather constitutes a larger part and voice within their host nation(s) and in the world. Their voices and experiences should be seen as inherent to the nation instead of peripheral to its functions. The exilic voice questions the authenticity of the nation and its exigencies of belonging.

That these theorists point to the exiled subject as an increasingly important voice (that is a producer of culture) means that the exiled subject constitutes a more central rather than peripheral role. Though the position of exile is one constituted by moments of solitude and "various forms of dislocation," it is the very act of writing in exile that connects the exilic writer, to the reader and to others.[182] This is the ethical relationship built in exile. In writing, the exiled subject opens a discursive space for imagining exilic conditions and reimagines other ways to conceive the complexities and contributions of exilic existences. Seyhan offers that, "Literary expressions of contemporary sociopolitical formations offer critical insights into the manifold meanings of history and take us to galaxies of experience where no theory has gone before."[183] The exile subject is not one, but many and in the act of writing and giving a space for protagonists and characters to experiences moments of exile, the writer gives weight and importance to the varied experiences of exiled subjects. Seyhan says that these narratives, imagined or not, draw from history and the past,

> We engage in history not only as agents and actors but also as narrators or storytellers. In narrative, we may be able to redress forcibly forgotten experiences, allow the silences of history to come to word, and imagine alternative scripts of the past. Our understanding of the present is invariably predicated on actual or imagined links to, or ruptures from, a recalled past.[184]

These links to the past, though ruptured, are critical to understanding the present. It is this understanding of temporal and spatial connectedness that is at the very crux of this project. These global Afro-diasporic and exilic narratives,

[181] Ibid.
[182] Ibid., 11.
[183] Ibid., 5.
[184] Ibid., 4.

produced across far distances, within, between, and suspended across homes and homelands, speak to the experiences of the Afro-diasporic and exilic subject. They offer a different set of human ideas and practices that are frequently dehumanized and marginalized.

Yet, calling this chapter a meditation on exile as theory of being, subject, and condition begs the question: Can these two central novels be categorized as exile writing? After all Perez is not in exile but rather an immigrant and none of her characters are exiled from their homelands in a permanent or literal sense. Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel on the other hand is an exilic writer and yet, his characters, Malela and her sons, are not exiled in a strict sense. Seyhan again offers a fruitful way to reconsider the literal or strict definitions of "exile writing." Seyhan poses that these exilic and other minority or transitory writing are complex in origin and execution,

> Descriptions such as exilic, ethnic, migrant, or diasporic cannot do justice to the nuances of writing between histories, geographies, and cultural practices. Although as critics we do not have the language commensurate with our task, we have the responsibility to reflect, problematize, and preface the terms we employ. In this study, I do not use the terms exilic, diasporic, or ethnic writing in a strictly technical sense, but as signifiers of texts conceived in and operative between two or more languages and cultural heritages.[185]

Literatures of exile, diaspora, multiple migrations, and ethnic literatures speak to a myriad of histories and as such, literary critics should seek to engage the variety of the lot rather than delineate what does and does not belong. In my reading of Perez and Ávila Laurel, I seek to examine how their characters experience physical, metaphysical, and emotional exile from their homes and homelands. This is compounded by the fact that the authors and the characters are post-colonial subjects, immigrants, and that they are linguistically and racially marked as "other." Thus, in the following close-readings I aim to answer the following question: how do these characters experience forms of exile and how do they reconceive home as a space beyond the impossible limitations they encounter?

[185] Ibid., 9.

Navigating the Body as Home: Perez's *Geographies of Home*

She would leave no memories behind.
All of them were her self.
All of them were home.[186]

Perez's novel *Geographies of Home* opens dramatically as the protagonist's grandmother Bienvenida lies on her deathbed summoning her youngest daughter Aurelia.[187] All ten of Bienvenida's adult children are present except for Aurelia, who is in late pregnancy and asleep in her own home. Aurelia, in an act of rebellion and denial has negated her filial responsibilities and has refused to attend to her mother's bedside. Aurelia wakes to a sudden and strong jarring sensation and witnesses an inexplicable black cat run across the room. Just after she tastes "a bitter scent of freshly cut grass" Aurelia doubles down in pain as the black cat reemerges and begins violently juddering in the bedroom.[188] Aurelia notices that the scent and bitter taste that bring forth the pain is, "familiar as the dirt she craved since the onset of her pregnancy."[189] Her mother's death and sudden apparition as the black cat bring on the onset of Aurelia's labor pains; her child is to be our protagonist Iliana. These juxtapositions of life, death, and rejection alongside the craving and desire for dirt/earth, sets the tone for *Geographies of Home* a novel that questions familial ties and highlights spatial and metaphysical exile. Iliana, her mother Aurelia, and her sisters Marina and Rebecca, navigate through reconfigurations of home and belonging as they experience exile from foundational beliefs and their families.

Iliana is an Afro-Dominican first generation college student. We meet her in chapter one as she gazes at the word "NIGGER" written on her dorm room message board.[190] Iliana is assembling her belonging as she takes her final walk down the corridor exiting the dormitory. A disillusioned Iliana has resolved to drop out of college in order to return home to New York City to be with her family. She had imagined that the university would be a haven away from home, a place where she would be free from her overbearing and destitute family. After working tirelessly to be admitted into the elite institution Iliana realizes that the racism and isolation of life in rural upstate New York cannot possibly welcome her. She finds herself in a kind of social exile, separate from all of the other students, save one friend, Ed, a queer man of color that is her sole friend in the novel.

Iliana is at once coming to terms with the dysfunctions of her home and is plagued by the ever-present feelings of obligation and isolation. Raised in a strict Seventh Day Adventist household, Iliana is fearful of her undisclosed and possibly queer sexuality and is often taken aback by how her body is read by

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[186] Loida Maritza Perez. *Geographies of Home,* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 321.
[187] Aurelia is the mother of the protagonist Iliana.
[188] Ibid., ix.
[189] Ibid.
[190] Ibid., 1.

others. Lastly, she is a product of a family that struggles to distance themselves from their blackness. In addition to this denial of Afro-Dominicaness, Iliana's lack of attention to her appearance and lack of feminine performativity incites violent backlash from her family and sexual assault from her sister Marina who suffers from madness and delusions. Furthermore, the denunciation of their familial Afro-Dominican syncretic beliefs and deep repudiation of their racial blackness further exiles the family from any possible harmony in the dilapidated house they call home. At the heart of the novel we see that the repudiation of blackness and the normalization of violence highlights how the coloniality of power permeates Iliana's home and family.

The rejection of the Afro-Dominican syncretism and familial histories is a principal issue in the novel. The rejection of these religious practices further highlight Aurelia and Iliana's alienation from their past which in turn magnifies the feeling of exile. We first see this denunciation with Aurelia who rejects the "gifts" of telepathic communication, metaphysical powers, and the ability to "see the invisible" all of which were given to her by her mother Bienvenida.[191] Aurelia's brother, Virgilio, was also gifted with the "sight" and committed suicide in the Dominican Republic. Aurelia blamed the "sight" for his death and as a young girl Aurelia vowed to distance herself from her mother's syncretic beliefs and powers.[192]

In the same pattern of fear, we witness Iliana rejecting the ability to communicate with her mother telepathically/metaphysically. Though Iliana does not call home often, she is kept abreast of all the family business through her mothers disembodied voice coming to her in the night. Aurelia's powers incite fear in Iliana who prays feverishly every time she hears her mother's voice telling her the latest news from home,

> Don't be afraid mi'ja." The voice said, defying the distance Iliana had deliberately placed between herself and her mother. "The devil exists, but it's not me. […] She willed the voice to go away but it persisted, hounding her as her mother's had at home.[193]

Though Iliana is far from home, she realizes that her mother's voice would keep her informed of all the problems and dysfunctions of home. At first afraid, Iliana believed she was being taunted by demons or tested by sin. She slowly learns to listen to the disembodied voice with less fear and begins to distrust the strict protestant religious philosophies with which she was raised that would have denounced the voice as the devils work.

In fact, we learn that Aurelia is also at a constant crossroads, keeping herself busy at all time, in order to appear firm in her religious faith. The metaphysical powers that Aurelia wields were passed to her from Bienvenida. She fears these powers and has abandoned the long familial history of these syncretic beliefs. Aurelia shrouds her rejection of Afro-Dominican syncretism in a feigned religious fervor to please her husband Papito. Only Iliana knows of the Sabbath affected illnesses wherein daughter and mother danced merengue alone

[191] Ibid., 134.
[192] Ibid.
[193] Ibid., 2-3.

in the house.[194] Just as Iliana is torn between a life outside of her parent's home and her deep desire to return home, Aurelia is torn between the strict religious mores that her husband demands they follow and her own familial history and spiritual/metaphysical powers. Though nascent, Iliana too has these powers of communication for it was her birth that occurred on the night her grandmother died.

Though Aurelia communicates with her daughter telepathically, for most of her life she rejected the larger gifts that were offered to her by her mother Bienvenida. This rejection of Afro-syncretism by Aurelia is seen as a larger rejection of the past, of her family's long history in the Dominican Republic and of any possible homeland she could have. We learn in the novel that Bienvenida attempts to give her daughter the tools of the family practice but Aurelia closes her ears and heart to the gifts,

> She wanted no more of such a legacy. For this reason she had converted to her husbands religion and had shared with home little of her past. […] Bienvenida dropped a sack onto the hammock and again directed her daughter's fingers toward what she was determined that she should see. Aurelia allowed her hand to be guided but made no effort to identify the objects pulled out of the sack. She heard her mother's voice but did not listen to the words.[195]

Aurelia then abandons the sack with her gifts in the dirt under a tree,

> […] Aurelia for the first time regretted having discarded her mother's gifts, including the quilt and shawl, at the base of a palm tree beside the road. She regretted as well the many years she had spent running from her heritage as if the past had the power to transform her into a pillar of salt as it had Lot's wife.[196]

This regret occurs decades later when Aurelia is dealing with the madness, suicide attempts, and violent behavior of her daughter Marina. Marina believes she is being raped by an unidentified black man and stalked by thousands of black spiders. She scrubs off her skin with steel wool pads and sets the walls of the house on fire. Aurelia, facing the mental decay of her daughter Marina, the sudden return of an independent Iliana, and the abuse and malnutrition of her three grandchildren at the hands of her daughter Rebecca and her husband Pasión, pleads for Bienvenida's guidance in spite of her choice to leave the gift buried in the earth and forgotten, "Irrationally she longed for the counsel of one who had been long dead. […]." Aurelia believed that her mother left her cursed with a "legacy of woe" but resolved to save at least one of her daughters she deliberates on how to use the other gifts her mother left her.[197]

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[194] Ibid.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 135.
[197] Ibid., 295.

Aurelia uses her exceptional abilities to bring on the death of her son-in-law, Pasión, who relentlessly beats and abuses her daughter Rebecca and their two young children. Fearful of Rebecca retuning to Pasión and risking the lives of her grandchildren, Aurelia resorts to using her powers for what she believes is a just cause, "With her hands busy, she was able to concentrate on the task for which plucking the chickens was a guise."[198] Aurelia plucks the feathers from dead boiled chickens she conjures the image of Pasión feeding his own rooftop coop. She compels the hundreds of chickens to create a flurry of feathers; "She sailed toward him on the feathers depriving him of breath. His fear was palpable. It distorted his mouth and collapsed his lungs. It controlled his body as he struggled to retain what little life he possessed."[199] In doing so she seals Pasión's fate, as he is an asthmatic who is quickly suffocated by his prized possessions. "Having conjured death, Aurelia stood respectfully in its presence. Only when her son-in-law gave a final jolt did she tread on the feathers scattered throughout her kitchen floor and reached for a broom with which she wearily began to sweep."[200] Pasión's death not mentioned again and the reader does not know if his corpse is discovered but what is clear is Aurelia's return to her familial beliefs is her first step toward reclaiming her identity and her family. Aurelia's self-imposed exile begins to end with this moment of recuperation of will and power.

I trace Aurelia's gift, that is her powers that connect her to a familial home and histories, buried and forgotten under a palm tree in the Dominican Republic, to the reoccurring image of the desire to eat dirt and grass. Medical professionals classify this condition, a supposed mental disorder, of eating non-nutritional foods as "pica."[201] Many of the women in the novel, especially those who are prepubescent or pregnant, express having this particular craving. In one scene where Rebecca thinks back to her dissatisfied youth in the Dominican Republic where, "she habitually sneaked out of their house to trek to an isolated spot," where she would sit, daydream, and masturbate while chewing on grass. "[…] The movement of her hands massaging the tender flesh between her thighs; the bitter taste of a blade of grass tucked between her teeth."[202] Of this memory Rebecca laments, "It was these fantasies which had never been fulfilled, […] which no amount of abuse had managed to subdue. […] she breathed solely for the possibility of fulfillment the future might someday bring."[203] Rebecca is unfulfilled and has no real home besides the ramshackle building her husband used to horde street wares, garbage, and chickens. Her life is circumscribed by tragedy emotional, sexual, and physical violence and her only good memories are her earliest years with her grandmother Bienveida who was convinced she was special. After leaving her grandmothers home when she was eight, Rebecca

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[198] Ibid., 254.
[199] Ibid., 256.
[200] Ibid.
[201] For more information see the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders revised version 5 (DSM-5). A short hand guide to Pica can be found at: http://www.eatingdisorders.org.au/eating-disorders/classifying-eating-disorders/dsm-5 sourced 6/23/14.
[202] Perez, *Geographies of Home*, 205.
[203] Ibid.

was unmoored. Rebecca is in an emotional exile, she trusts no one, not even her mother or children, and cannot return to her "home" for fear of her vicious husband Pasión.

We are further clued into the power of dirt when Aurelia recalls her mother's explanation of the gifts in the sack left at the base of the palm tree. Of the dirt Bienvenida says, "A fistful of the earth to which we return to nourish those who follow."[204] This can be read as a desire or craving for home or homeland knowledge. Eating earth then, is a signifier for a yearning to have grounding or mooring, an understanding of past histories and beliefs. The sack had other "gifts" as well including an earthen jug and several stones. Upon further reflection Aurelia regrets having forsaken many life lessons for the simple reason that they had been taught to her by her mother.[205] Aurelia's metaphysical exile led her to reconsider her conception of home, "Only now did she understand that she should had yearned not for a geographical site but for a frame of mind able to accommodate any place as home."[206] Aurelia comes to terms with her dystopian perspective and realizes that a physical geographical home is an impossibility. She cannot return, but she would "hold herself accountable" for making possible some kind of fulfillment for herself and her children.[207]

This same feeling of alienation from home and lack of fulfillment leaves Marina in a state of exile and madness. A central theme in *Geographies of Home* is madness and Marina, Iliana's older sister best portrays this trait. Marina is battling her own demons, insecurities, and spirals into a deep psychosis as the novel progresses. Perez offers us a few glimpses into Marina's decline and what we witness is both disturbing and enlightening. Myriam J. A. Chancy's "Subversive Sexualities: Revolutionizing Gendered Identities," offers a critical gender theory reading of *Geographies of Home* that centers race, sex, gender, and madness. Chancy engages Perez's complex narratives of sex and sexuality for Caribbean women,

> What I am concerned with is investigating how Caribbean women authors who envision themselves and their characters as members of pluralistic and multiracial societies have sought to represent such multiplicity through sexuality and in defiance of patriarchal power structures. In some cases, the authors demonstrate that a simple inversion of the tropes of power does not suffice to achieve liberatory social change.[208]

Through the use of gender theorists Judith Butler and Audre Lorde, Chancy argues that the "lesbian phallus" is central to understanding Perez's female

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[204] Ibid., 134.
[205] Ibid., 135.
[206] Ibid., 137.
[207] Ibid.
[208] Myriam J. Chancy, "Subversive Sexualities: Revolutionizing Gendered Identities," *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 29, no. 1 (2008): 52.

characters, their identities, and sexualities.[209] The "lesbian phallus" trope that Chancy deploys in her analysis correlates to Marina's violent rape of Iliana later in the novel. Marina's descent into madness incited by her own real or imagined sexual assault and her trauma is deeply racialized, "No flat-nosed, wide lipped nigger would claim her soul. No savage with beads dangling from his neck. She would survive all this. There was nothing else to lose. Nothing else to fear."[210] We are unaware if this rape is a figment of Marina's imagination or an act of stealth by an unknown stranger that has incited her psychosis.

> The problem remains, however, that Marina's mind, rather than her body, is contaminated filled with both racial and sexual loathing. Does her personal memory fail her here, or does it give shape to a cultural memory of miscegenation, racial fear, and the trauma of the rapes of enslaved African women, women of whom she issues?[211]

Marina's racist and self-loathing behavior vacillates from physical convulsions, belief in spiritual anointment, and a deep distrust of her family. Marina who has, "wide lips and kinky hair," yearns to be the wife of a white or light-skinned man but has never been asked to marry.[212] Dissatisfied with her life Marina disassociates from her family mentally and emotionally and this leads to the final moments that lead to the assault on Iliana, which destroys all of her commitments to helping create a stable home environment.

Marina becomes obsessed with the possibility that Iliana may have a hidden or inverted penis; enter the lesbian phallus theory deployed by Chancy.[213] Marina has stopped taking her medication and begins to carefully study and fantasize about Iliana's hands, her clothing, and her facial structure and decides that Iliana has a secret that she must uncover,

> Marina tallied up the mounting evidence, including what she had uncovered earlier that day. […] Iliana's body – with its meager breasts, long arms and massive hands, thin legs and knobby knees – had appeared as lean as a prepubescent girl's and more so like a boy's. Her gait, when she headed into the bathroom, had been the exaggerated walk of a man imitating a woman.[214]

After assessing Iliana's body, mannerisms, and complete lack of feminine behavior and dress, Marina decides to bring Iliana's "secret" into the open. That night Marina attacks her sister twice, raping her in order to find her sisters inverted or hidden penis. Iliana's initial response to this deep and traumatic violence is one of calm and resolve,

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[209] Chancy engages a comparative approach by reading Achy Obejas alongside Perez within a framework of sexualities.
[210] Perez, *Geographies of Home,* 17.
[211] Chancy, "Subversive Sexualities," 66.
[212] Ibid., 97, 190.
[213] Ibid.
[214] Ibid., 276.

> She told herself there was no need to make a fuss, no need to wake her parents, no need to wipe the blood off her thighs or to consider in other ways the body that had been violated for what amounted to a mere fraction of her existence. She was far more than the sum of her spilled blood and her flesh that had been pierced, she was the breath seeping from her lips, the heart resounding in her chest, the anima enabling her to perceive.[215]

In the moment of violence Iliana thinks of herself beyond flesh and body. She pities her sister and is resolved be unaffected by the attack. However, when Marina attacks her for a second time, Iliana loses all sense of calm. She realizes that Marina's actions were not solely a result of her madness but also stemmed from deep hatred and jealously. In the act of raping Iliana, Marina spills her blood and takes her virginity. Iliana is taken aback,

> Her sister knew. Her sister knew precisely what it was she'd done. She knew and was pleased that no one else would ever detect what it was that she had destroyed. She knew and depended on shame to silence Iliana and to efface whatever self she'd been.[216]

Iliana, nauseated at the events that have transpired and facing the reality of her rape, races to the bathroom and feels a deep yearning to go "home."[217]

Iliana flees the next day and cannot face returning to her parents' house. She begins to contemplate suicide. She hates the very blood that flows through her veins, because she shares it with her attacker.[218] When she finally does return home she is violently struck by her father Papito -- a Seventh Day Adventist who uses corporal punishment as a way to instill his religious and moral beliefs. Iliana becomes fully aware of her exiled state: she has no home or safety with her family, at school, or any foundational beliefs to which to adhere. Iliana's exile is not one tied overtly to the nation, but rather to the reality of not-belonging in any sense to a home or family. If we think about this in decolonial terms, the rejection of blackness and of Afro-syncretism and the normalization and expectation of sexual violence is evocative of the ways that the coloniality of power is present in every aspect of Iliana's exile and her family's struggle to adhere to conservative, Eurocentric Christian mores.

The themes in *Geographies of Home* function to trouble the idea of home as a spatial location. Aurelia, Iliana, Rebecca, and Marina, are left homeless in many senses, exiled from a true sense of home or peace. The novel serves to shift the narrative of home from the traditional middle class white nuclear family of a heteronormative parents with two-point-five children to a working class Afro-Latino Caribbean immigrant household with thirteen children and a bevvy of dysfunctions catapulted by self-hate instilled through Protestant mores and the coloniality of power. In her narrative and in her own political views Perez

[215] Ibid., 287.
[216] Ibid., 290.
[217] Ibid., 291.
[218] Ibid., 311.

denounces the idea that there exists one kind of immigrant narrative and one kind of home for theses subjects. She strives to show different dimensions of exile and subverts Eurocentric notions of home.[219]

At the end of the novel, Iliana is forced to choose a life beyond the obligation she feels to her mother, father, and siblings. She turns away from her strict upbringing, the religious mores that she found hypocritical and suffocating. For Iliana the mere weeks at home had allowed her fully understand the extent of her exile,

> She had wanted, more than anything, to belong. Having spent years plotting how to leave only to discover, when she finally did, that she felt as displaced out in the world as in her parents' house, she had made the decision to return and to re-establish a connection with her family so that, regardless of where she went thereafter, she would have comforting memories of home propping her up and lending her the courage to confront the prejudices she had encountered during eighteen months away. Yet she could not now conceive of being able to interact with the members of her family or even making her own way through the world should she again leave the only home she knew.[220]

After leaving home to attend college and leaving college to return home, Iliana realizes that she can no longer stay with her family. Her desire to belong somewhere and find fulfillment is also the desire of many of the characters in *Geographies of Home*. As Chancy eloquently notes, "In this story, the subtext of the family's dysfunction is a discomfort with admitting its mixed racial heritage and loss of spiritual roots, a spirituality also encoded as Afro-Dominican rather than Latino/a."[221] This novel comprised of Afro-Latino characters and authored by an Afro-Latina writer, speaks to an often unspoken set of questions about Afro-Latino immigrant families such as race, spirituality, and sexuality.

At the crux of the story are the intricately linked paths of Aurelia and Iliana. What Aurelia struggles to build, a life away from the syncretic beliefs is what Iliana unravels, her mother's journey to cover and cast away the Afro-Dominican syncretic beliefs through a feverish protestant faith. Iliana's journey to find home outside of strict religious mores that stifle her life choices, imbue her with feelings of guilt and isolation but her return home is thwarted. In the end, Iliana leaves home again, "understanding she cannot assume her true identity or repair the harm done to her body and sexuality if she remains in the web of denial created by her Dominican parents, […]."[222] It is not a home in any real sense for her. She cannot stay solely to suffer and she cannot help any of those suffering. She embraces the exile from the family and realizes that for the racialized, sexualized, and marginalized immigrant subject, facing the impossibilities of home means coming to a radical redefinition of what home is and could be.

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[219] Ibid., Post-scriptum author interview, 5-6.
[220] Ibid. 312.
[221] Chancy, "Subversive Sexualities," 65.
[222] Ibid., 71.

Of Exiles and Dictators: Ávila Laurel's *El dictador de Corsico*

> [He] wanted to see how his land was lost as he left by sea.
> Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel[223]

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's 2014 novel, *El dictador de Corsico,* develops a distinctive conception of postcolonial homes/homelands and the political impossibilities therein, through a sustained meditation on Equatorial Guinea's island of Corsico. Ávila Laurel is an exiled writer and as such, much of his work focuses on the Equatoguinean national and regional histories and the diaspora and exile during the colonial and post independence period. A prolific novelist, poet, and essayist, Ávila Laurel continually offers a critical perspective on the conditions of living in exile and the conditions of living under dictatorial rule. Ávila Laurel is also an outspoken opponent to the over 40-year presidency of Teodoro Obiang Nguema and his literary work serves as a way through which to document these multipronged strivings.

El dictator de Corsico introduces us to an Ndowe family in the midst of both familial and political strife. Malela and her sons experience an exile of a different kind, one that is experienced as a perpetual threat of displacement and destruction as a result of colonial and then despotic rule. While Ileana, Marina, Rebecca, and Aurelia in *Geographies of Home* have psychological and emotional tribulations that they cannot escape, Malela, the protagonist in *El dictador de Corsico,* faces displacement, shame, and possible death. For her and each of her two sons, home has become unlivable because of the excesses of dictatorial power and the ecological destruction brought on by "modernization." Malela and her sons come to realize that neither a newly declared dictatorship nor an escape into exile are viable options for their futures.

El dictador de Corsico engages matters important to understanding Equatorial Guinea, including living amongst the blight of the physical and emotional ruins left by colonialism, the educational, social, and welfare neglect of the postcolonial authoritarian government, the suppressed histories of ethnic cleansing at the hands of Francisco Macias Nguema (Don Francisco in the novel), and the destruction of ecological sites without regard to the indigenous populations. Ávila Laurel links each of these themes through the story of Malela and her sons and their eventual attempted escape.

The trajectory of the novel, however, could not occur without the unexpected visit of a strange woman, a tourist from Holland named Anika (also read Anita). Though not necessarily central to the plot, it is her visit to Corsico that opens the novel, and her departure that ends it. It is Anika's visit that prompts Malela to remember and relieve some of the painful colonial and postcolonial histories that have been buried deep in the memories of the elders. This in addition to the ecological devastation undertaken in the name of progress

[223] Ávila Laurel, Juan Tomás, *El dictador de Corsico* (Malabo: Pàngola Ediciones, *2014),* 56. "Quería ver cómo se perdía su tierra al salir de ella por el mar."

and tourism and a gruesome discovery made on the other side of the island, prompts Malela to leave her homeland with her two sons.

We first meet the Ndowe[224] woman Malela as she watches a white foreigner Anika enters the town. News of Anika's arrival incited Malela to smoke her pipe, which is unheard of for a woman in Corsico especially after the departure of the white plantation and factory owners in the late 1960's. Though smoking a pipe is seen as a practice of the whites, here Malela smokes unabashedly. It is understood that Malela is an older woman perhaps with the status of an elder. Malela's pipe smoking floods her with memories about her youth in Rio Muni (Mbini).[225] Malela reminisces about her youth and laments over that fact that she was never married even though she was one of the most desirable women from a prominent family. Malela, constantly visited by a bevvy of white suitors, was never approached for marriage by anyone from her community. Though her parents strictly followed the Ndowe traditions and indeed wanted Malela to marry into the community, Malela was perceived as belonging to the white colonizers,

> The constant visits made by the factory owners made all of the families believe that her [Malela's] life belonged to the whites, which is why it would not be well seen that any man from those [Ndowe] families would want her for themselves and their families. It was thought in those times that the sea was full of fish and in the casting of a net would suffice to feed many mouths, that a woman that had been seen so much could no longer belong to any place. She was amidst her people being seen by everyone as if no one would want to recognize her as part of the community. [226]

Though she was never officially outcast from the community, Malela occupies a peripheral position. She is partially exiled from the community practices by *congosa* or gossip that she "no longer belonged to any place" and was treated as a not-outcaste outsider. Though this sets her apart from the rest of the community in social ways, Malela is not fully rejected. We learn that she in fact is a keeper of much of the community's oral histories, especially of events that have been long suppressed and forgotten. Malela's status as a resident exile enables her to keep this historical memory that many others that live day-to-day within the

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[224] Ndowe is an ethnic minority group predominantly living on the littoral coast of Equatorial Guinea and Corsico.

[225] Rio Muni or Mbini is the continental swath of Equatorial Guinea. The largest city there is Bata and much of the government business is conducted there. The island of Corsico is off the coast of Rio Muni.

[226] Ibid., 6. "Las constantes visitas que le hacían los dueños de factorías hicieron que todas las familias creyeran que su vida pertenecía a los blancos, por lo que ya no sería bien visto que ningún hombre de aquellas familias la quisiera para él y para su familia. Se pensaba en aquellos tiempos que los mares estaban llenos de peces y en que la echada de una red daba para alimentar varias bocas, que una mujer que había sido tan visitada ya no podía ser de ningún sitio. Estaba en medio del pueblo siendo mirada por todos como si nadie la quisiera reconocer como alguien de la comunidad."

community as full members do not know or remember. In this way, Malela as exile keeps alive what others have let die.

Despite the fact that Malela's community believes that they discern everything about her life, they are baffled about the origins of her two children. It is a question so perplexing that it often is the overarching conversation about the family. Many wonder what kind of power has intervened to conceal essential parts of her life, "Who had put their hand in the life of Malela in such a way that the facts of her life seemed to have occurred in a time that none of the people could be certain of?[227] Here we are cued into an issue of memory. What kind of time lapse has occurred? Have they forgotten her pregnancies? Are these sons her biological children? Has some larger traumatic event occurred that has faded their own memories of Malela and the origins of her two sons?

This trope of memory and forgetting is tied to the larger histories of trauma and forgetting in the novel. Malela's two adolescent sons occupy a similar inside/outside position within the community,

> Since Malela was never excluded from the community of her people, neither were her sons, because even though no one had claimed them as their children, the community always had considered them children of that place. Also, apart from their maternal roots, they spoke the native language, and they behaved like the other children of that place in general ways but not in particular ways.[228]

Though Malela's position within the community is tenuous, her sons are accepted as children of that place, they speak the indigenous language, and practice the customs of the people their age. However, we are pointed to the fact that these two sons engage in odd behavior. Interestingly, they do not have typical names, but rather are referred to as Primero (First) and Segundo (Second). Primero, the elder of the two, is described as having short extremities: short arms, legs, and wears shorts, short-sleeved shirts. Primero hardly speaks and suffers from an overactive blinking reflex. Her younger son, Segundo, is described as tall and handsome, with long extremities. Segundo wears long pants and long sleeve shirts, and a vest that reminds people of an explorer. This second son, unlike his older brother who shadows Malela every movement, leaves at dawn to wander and survey the island, often not returning for many hours.

The story of Malela and her sons is intimately tied to the dictatorship of

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[227] Ibid., 8. "¿Quién había metido su mano en la vida de Malela para que los hechos de su vida parecieran haber occurido en un tiempo en que nadie del pueblo los daba por ciertos?"

[228] Ibid., 7. "Como Malela nunca fue excluida da la comunidad de su pueblo, sus hijos tampoco lo fueron, pues pese a que nadie los habia reclamado como hijos propios, la comunidad siempre los había considerado hijos del lugar. Además, y aparte de sus raíces maternas, hablaban la lengua nativa y se comportaban como los otros hijos del lugar en cuestiones generales, aunque no en las particulares."

motodu Don Francisco and later the rule of motodu Obiang.[229] Malela recalls the era right after independence when Don Francisco took power and expelled all Europeans from Equatorial Guinea and sent into exile all those who had any intellectual, social, and economic relations with them. The factory owners of Corsico, though never having to physically face motodu Don Francisco, nevertheless abandoned their factories and homes never to return. Malela's retelling of this history points to Don Francisco's fear as reason for his distrust and violent rule, "Since Don Francisco did not know the sea nor had ever had any deep relationship with the whites, he feared them very much and from his position as motodu he fought to erase the fingerprint that they left, wherever they may have been."[230] Don Francisco's distrust of white people becomes his distrust of the Ndowes of Corsico who had the longest history with the European colonizers – Portugal then Spain.

Motodu Don Francisco aimed to eliminate anyone who had any relationship with whites and Malela's community was extremely fearful of this dictate because he had made it clear that after the, "glorious evacuation of the whites from the national territories, it is considered a crime of high treason that there be a group of men or an entire people that had the whites in their memory."[231] The expulsion of whites went in tandem with the destruction of any village or peoples that had at any time economic, social, or educational connections to whites. Malela's island, with its many factories was a prime example of a territory that had too much contact with whites and was thus tainted. The safety of its people however, was guaranteed by the presence of their dignified ekambi and by the necessary sea voyage to the island of Corsico, which Don Francsico feared due to his ignorance of the ocean. Malela's conjuring of the past, of the plantation owners and their post-independence departure is considered "high treason." Malela dares to remember these past events and in doing so remembers something more agonizing.

Malela's begins to remember one of the most violent episodes of motodu Don Francisco's regime. Malela painfully recalls the destruction of an entire village of Ndowes by motodu Don Francisco's military. Not only were the women and men obliterated, but also their homes were burned to the ground and the young girls were taken to woods and violently raped,

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[229] In my personal correspondence with Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel, he explained that *motodu*, an Ndowe word for jefe or chief is one that reflects a position of power that is not coated ("*revestido*") in dignity. Later in this chapter we will see the word *ekambi* used to signal another kind of jefe. According to Ávila Laurel, ekambi is a powerful position of jefe that is coated in high dignity. When speaking about he motodu's Don Francisco and motodu Obiang Ávila Laurel is speaking to Francisco Macias Nguema and his nephew Teodoro Obiang who took dictatorial power in Equatorial Guinea from the time of independence in 1968 and 1979, respectively, until present day.

[230] Ibid., 9-10. "Como Don Francisco no conocía el mar ni había tenido un trato profundo con los blancos, los temía mucho, y desde su puesto de motodu luchó para borrar las huellas que dejaron , dondequiera que estuvieran las mismas."

[231] Ibid., 14. "[…] gloriosa evacuación de ls blancos de los territories nacionales, era considereado un delito de alta tración que hubiera un grupo de hombres, un pueblo entero, que tuviera a los blanco en el recuerdo."

> The young women who had good looks and did not have children, a fact decided by God, were taken aside and forced to accompany to the woods those very same ones that had committed that terrible thing to their people. In the woods, and with no one to defend them, they suffered so much that when they returned to their burned homes they could no longer speak.[232]

Ávila Laurel's choice to make Malela recall this true historical event in detail highlights the importance of historical trauma and the significance of memory. That it appears in a literary text and not in historical archives emphasizes the role of literature as a discursive strategy with decolonial potential. This destruction of the Ndowe community is one of the few documented events of the era that propelled a great number of Equatoguinean into exile beginning in 1968. Francisco Macias Nguema's reign resulted in the execution, imprisonment, and exile of over one third of the nation's population and his tactical ethnic cleansing was pointed to groups such as the Bubi and the Ndowe. This kind of overtly violent pacifying action was meant to show the authority of Francisco Macias Nguema and ensure obedience amongst the Ndowes. These strategies were part and parcel of the brutality of the regime whose soldiers so brutalized bodies that mourners could not identify their dead.

In *El dictador de Corsico,* Malela's people suffer a great loss when their ekambi dies. The ekambi's death is especially distressing because his successor, his son, is abroad studying. They fear that he will not hear of his father's death in time for his burial and that he will have extreme difficulties to returning to post independence Equatorial Guinea. Anxiously they wait for the inevitable; motodu Don Francisco hears news of the ekambi's death and sends militants to investigate. The motodu could use any excuse of disloyalty or omission to finally wipe them out of existence. When the motodu's military forces arrive, the entire community engages in open celebrations and food preparations in order dissimulate that all is as normal. Throughout the days long visit, the body of the ekambi rots in the woods, a disgraceful decomposition not worthy of his status. The village, though putting on a façade of happiness and subservitude to the militants, are in deep mourning. Malela recalls, "the rising cries in the throats of the people."[233] In the end, the henchmen leave loaded with the goats, foodstuffs, and excessive gifts that they have demanded, but the village is traumatized not only by the loss of the ekambi and their inability to properly bury him, but also because of the angst of their prolonged act of subterfuge. Malela notes later in the novel that this event is never spoken of again. It becomes a suppressed memory, one that the elders do not want to pass along to their children.

Benita Sampedro Vizcaya's study of memory and ruins in Equatorial Guinea speaks precisely to this theme in the novel. In the article, "Routes to Ruin," Sampedro Vizcaya examines the correlation between memory, forgetting,

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[232] Ibid. "Las mujeres jóvenes que tenían Buena Mirada y no habían tenido hijos, un hecho decidido por Dios, fueron apartados y obligadas a acompañar al bosque a los mismos que cometieron aquella cosa terrible con su pueblo. En los bosques, y sin nadie que las defendiera, sufrieron tanto que cuando regresaron al sitio de sus casas quemadas no pudieron hablar."

[233] Ibid., 21. "y sube el llanto en las gargantas de la gente."

and the ruins of edifices left behind by the colonial corporations and the subsequent neglected by the dictatorial governments. The repression, fear, and distrust that ensues creates a lasting effect on the nation,

> […] people's relations with the past, and with ruins, are complex. For some people in the villages, the now run-down factory, once a flourishing, state-of-the-art palm oil processing plant, continues to evoke—in some dislocating and disturbing way—memories of the colonial order, ambivalent recollections of the past. Its rusted pipes, torn-down laboratory, rail and navigation networks, all derailed or sunken, bear testimony to the colonial enterprise.[234]

This relationship with the past is made material by the constant presence of colonial ruins, which engender all kinds of conflicting memories. The neglect of the dictatorial regimes further dislocates the present by allowing blight and disrepair overrun the neglected island, "Ruins of the old regime," Sampedro Vizcaya continues, "are a shattered mirror of colonial production, power, modernity, and subjugation."[235] The ruins reflect or act as mirrors for the tyranny and manipulation of the postcolonial regimes. These mirrored ruins also reveal a kind of memory play, what Sampedro Vizcaya calls "a combination of amnesia and nostalgia closely associated with political disempowerment."[236] However, Malela's conjuring of the past is not circumscribed by solely the destruction of the Ndowe community and the constant fear of its reprisal. Rather Malela thinks about the past colonial legacies of imperial violence while also thinking about the realities inflicted by the present dictator motodu Teodoro Obiang.

In the novel, as in reality, motodu Teodoro replaces his uncle motodu Don Francisco.[237] Motodu Teodoro and has a different approach to instilling fear than that of his deposed uncle Don Francisco. The latter practiced a sustained negligence and disregard, which resulted in the island lapsing into ruin. Motodu Teodoro later sees the island as an opportunity to grow his wealth, and seeks to attract affluent white tourists to the island to bask in its beauty:

> This discovery of the occult marvels of Malela's land made the next motodu speak with the ekambi of another far away country populated with muslims [sic]. What they said when they shook hands and hugged one another was that the country of muslims [sic] would bring many illiterates and some foremen to drain a beautiful lake that was on the west side of that land recently discovered by those they had spoken to. And since the motodu Teodoro, who succeeded motodu Don Francisco, and the ekambi of the country of muslims [sic] were two people with much power

[234] Benita Sampedro Vizcaya, "Routes to Ruin," *Lengua y Literatura* 7, no. 2 (2012) online.
[235] Ibid.
[236] Ibid.
[237] Motodu Teodoro refers to Teodoro Obiang Mbasogo the current and future dictator of Equatorial Guinea, the nephew of Francisico Macias Nguema.

over their people, what they said was done.[238]

Motodu Obiang contracts foreign laborers to drain the large lake on the western side of the island.[239] Covering the lake would ensure that an airport with a landing strip could be built so that the wealthy foreigners could easily access the island.

Ávila Laurel's narrative makes the destruction of this lake and the devastation it brings a central issue in the novel. It is a deliberate invocation of the airport and landing strip that was completed on the island of Corsico in 2011 which, extends through the entire length of the island from north to south and serves only the wealthiest of visitors. [240] We can imagine that the socioecological issues faced in the novel may reflect some of the disputes that ensued while building the real airport. In the novel, there is no regard for the people's use and need for the lake,

> The first thing that needed to be done was to tell the women of the community that from that date they needed to know that the most important thing in the country was not their plantations that served for people to each the fist that the men brought, but rather, the work of the landing strip of the rich men from other countries. So if any plantation was found in the area chosen by the muslim [sic] foremen, the women needed to rejoice because they could favor the plans of the very one sitting on the throne that was damning them.[241]

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[238] Ávila Laurel, *El dictador de Corsico,* 25-26. "Ese descubrir de las maravillas ocultas de la tierra de Malela hizo que el siguiente motodu hablara con el ekambi de otro lejano país poblado de musulmanes. Lo que dijeron cuando se apretaron las manos y se dieron un abrazo fue que de aquel país de musulmanes bajarían muchos analfabetos y algunos capataces para desecar un hermoso lago que había en la zona oeste de aquella tierra recién descubierta por los que habían hablado con ellos. Y como el motodu Teodoro, quien sucedío al motodu Don Francisco, y el ekambi del pais de los musulmanes eran dos personas con mucho poder sobre sus pueblos, lo que dijeron se llevó a cabo."

[239] Ibid., 25.

[240] Juan Tomás provided this information in our personal correspondence. Furthermore, according to Benita Sampedro Vizcaya, the airport's status is tenuous at best, "As we look to the future, a brand new airport that traverses the island of Corisco has just been inaugurated on 12 October, 2011, its landing strips running from north to south, from coast to coast, with the linear precision of a ruler. But it would be ingenuous to believe that the current generation of Corisco citizens will benefit from it." Sampedro Vizcaya, "Routes to Ruin," 2012.

[241] Ávila Laurel, *El dictador de Corisico,* 26. "Lo primero que había que hacer era decir a las mujeres del pueblo que desde aquella fecha tenían que saber que lo más importante en el pueblo no eran sus plantacions para que la gente tuviera qué comer con el pescado que traían los hombres, sino la obra de la pista de los ricos de otros países. Entonces si alguna plantación de econtraba dentro del terreno elegido por los capataces musulmanes, las mujeres tenían que alegrarse

The developing of the airport served the plans of motodu Obiang but displaced families and farmlands. Malela's community could not and did not have any opportunity to advocate for the source of their livelihood, but rather had to feign happiness that the motodu was signaling the obliteration of life as they knew it. The arbitrariness of the motodu's plans and power can be seen in the decision to forge ahead when the foremen realize the lake is much too difficult to seal. Not to be stopped when filling the lake with dirt and trees does not work, they spend excessive amounts of money securing rocks from a neighboring southern nation in order to fill the basin and displace the water. Malela laments that the foreign engineers may do so good a job that no one will remember that there ever was a large beautiful lake on the island.[242] This ecological violence mirrors the other kinds of violence that is arbitrary extended without any regard for human life. Malela believes that the destruction of the lake is a traumatic event, one so painful that it may be erased from the minds of the people. This one the central issues in the novel, memory versus forgetting. Can forgetting alleviate the pain of trauma? For Malela, it does not, and in the ensuing events exile becomes her only beacon of hope.

Segundo, Malela's second son, living under the motodu Teodoro regime, takes on its worst excesses and fancies, and becomes enraged at the destruction of the lake and ecosystem by motodu Teodoro and his gang of international conspirators. Segundo comes to believe that he can become the dictator of Corsico. This son with long extremities, excitedly unveils his plans over dinner with his mother and brother,

> Here we will fall on our ass when this turns into another Sahara because these savages are protected by the kalashnikov of Bob Denard. And no one wants to see; we will only open our mouths when we have water up to here. But I am not going to shut up. Here we need to do something before these crazies take all of the ceibas and they leave us with their old caterpillars. No one wants to do anything and since I am a muana mboka, I am going to defend my people. Here we need to install a true dictatorship and I am going be the dictator of Corsico.[243]

The son of long extremities declares that he will be the new dictator of Corsico, a true dictator that will defend his community. His rant indicts mercenaries like the infamous Bob Denard and their weapons of choice, AK47's. Segundo declares

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pues podían favorecer los planes del que estaba en la silla rununciando a las mismas."

[242] Ibid., 55.

[243] Ibid., 30. "Aquí caeremos de culo cuando esto se convierta en otro Sahara porque estos salvajes están protegidos por el kalashnikov de Bob Denard. Y nadie lo quiere ver; sólo abriremos la boca cuando estemos con el agua aquí. Pero no me voy a callar. Aquí hay que hacer algo antes de que estos mamelucos se lleven todas las ceibas y nos dejen sus viejos catapilas. Nadie quiere hacer nada y como soy un muana mboka, voy a defender mi pueblo. Aquí hay que montar una verdadera dictadura y yo voy a ser el dictador de Corsico."

that the island's ceiba trees, which were uprooted in the lake draining, will be replaced by more ruins: abandoned Caterpillar brand construction vehicles.

According to Ávila Laurel the son is unaware of how power works. Segundo believes that he can arbitrarily declare a position as a dictator and that he will prevail in changing the abuses in Corsico.[244] Segundo has only witnessed power as arbitrary declarations of power and brutal force to back it up. Malela and Primero, the son with the short extremities, are left speechless. Her son's declaration opened a floodgate of memories from the last time someone declared himself a dictator. She knows that these words have power behind them and they should not be mentioned lightly. She thinks about how the elders would feel about dictatorship and the significance of that word,

> And it was after those events and during them that those that knew the words said that all of that could happen because what propelled it was a dictatorship. Since that was said in such a low voice that sounded like a secret, the people learned that it was a word that could not be set free at whim.[245]

Malela struggles with the fact that her son feels foolishly empowered enough to make that statement and that he tosses about the word "dictator." Most importantly, she is flabbergasted that Segundo seems to know a history that has been long forgotten. Segundo continues to declare: "Since we wont enact a dictatorship we will end up tangled in the net like sardines or like the goat that the militants carried the day that the ekambi was rotting in the woods."[246] Here Segundo is conjuring a history that he should have not known, remembering the visit of the militants after the death of the ekambi. Malela closes her eyes and makes the sign of the cross over herself. She cannot believe what she has just heard her son say,

> That son of hers had mentioned the details of a very sad and difficult history in the life of the community but one which he should not have known because when they occurred he was a child and because the elders did not want it to be told as an oral history of their tradition. As a matter of fact it was a secret that the elders wanted to keep so that it would a suppressed (occult) memory of the people.[247]

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[244] Based on personal correspondence with the author, June 2014.
[245] Ibid., 30-31. "Y fue después de aquellos hechos, y durante los mismos, los que conocían las plalabras dijeron que todo aquello podía ocurrir porque lo que imperaba era una dictatura. Como aquello se decía en voz tan baja que parecía una confidencia, la gente aprendió que era una palabra que no se podía soltar así por así."
[246] Ibid., 31. "Como no montemos una dictadura para expursarlos, acabaremos envueltos en la red como sardinas o como la cabra que llevaban los militares el día en que estaba pudriendose en el bosque el ekambi."
[247] Ibid. "Aquel hijo suyo había mencionado los aspectos de una historia muy triste, y dura, en la vida del pueblo, pero que él no debería haber debido conocer porque cuando ocurrieron aquellos hechos era un niño y porque nunca quisieron

Segundo's memory of the ekambi rotting in the woods is very clear. He even remembers the militants carrying foodstuffs through the forest. Though the community elders have attempted to suppress this history, Segundo invokes it at the very same moment that he declares his petit dictatorship.

For Segundo, this dictatorship is not a fantasy, but a plan he would like to put into action. Day after day he continues to explore the island until he discovers something unbelievably grim. Segundo finds a community of people, descendants of the servants of the early colonial settlers who have made homes from caves used for preparing and burying dead bodies. He finds that in addition to them living in these mausoleum-like structures they have mass open-air graves of decomposing bodies. It is this news of what he witnesses on the island, along with Primero's perplexing affair with Anika that cements Malela's decision to escape Corsico.[248]

Malela's decision to go into exile is cemented by the fact that her sons are repeating many different aspects of histories that they do not know. Primero's affair with Anika and the possibility that it could encourage *congosa* is eerily similar to the attitudes that the community had when Malela was visited or "belonged" to the white plantation owners. Segundo's desire to become a dictator is an act of repetition in and of itself. His imagined regime, though proposed to help the communities of Corsico takes the very same approach to the dictatorial regimes that have ruled Equatorial Guinea since 1968. The destruction of the lake in order to welcome the same kind of foreigners that were expelled decades before is an act of violence and displacement atop of the long-standing neglect exemplified by blight, ruin, and the extreme isolation of the servant's descendants on the other side of the island.

Malela finally chooses exile for her sons and herself, but the emotional toll is more than she bargains for. As they board the ship to leave Corsico for Mbini and points beyond, Malela and her sons take a final look at the island, "They abandoned the land where they had always lived and from afar they saw that it was surrounded by water on all sides. The sun set and in the shadows of light you could not see that out of Malela's eyes tears fell."[249] For the first time the family sees Corsico from afar and the pangs of their decision to abandon their home for a future life in exile is felt. Her sons feel Malela's devastation as well.

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los mayores que se contara como si fuera un cuento de su tradición. De hecho era asi un secreto que quisieron guarder los mayors para que quedara en la memoria oculta del pueblo."

[248] The older son with the short extremities is carrying on sexual affair with Anika. This son who is quiet and very close to his mother, confides in Malela that Anika has one breast, that she is difficult to satisfy, and that she wants to have anal sex. For Malela is this unheard of and while at first she encouraged the sexual affair between her very quiet and subdued son and Anika, she finally decides that a possible grandchild is not worth the shame of having a "feces covered baby: "Yo Malela, sería la primera mujer del pueblo que iría a la playa a lavar al niño porque nació con caca en todo el cuerpo." Ibid., 54.

[249] Ibid., 55-56. "Abandonaban la tierra donde habían vivido siempre y desde lejos veían que estaba rodeada de agua por todas partes. El sol se ponía, y en la penumbra no de vio que de los ojos de Malela cain unas gotas de lágrima."

Primero sits next to his mother, blinking rapidly while Segundo stands up and walks to the edge of the ship,

> [He] wanted to see how his land was lost as he left by sea. His spirit, restless, took to him survey all that could be seen […] The sun had set, but the night was near, with its black arms over the waters, had things to show. This is why he stood away from where his family was seated. He went alone.[250]

This moment, where the setting sun and the night sky lights dance on the water for Segundo is circumscribed by his melancholy over leaving Corsico indefinitely. Ávila Laurel tells that he went alone, "salio solo," and Segundo does not return. The next morning Malela realizes that Segundo has vanished, perhaps he leapt overboard to his death or has disappeared in a refusal of exile and toward some other possible life. Malela and Primero, however, are never to see Segundo again; this young keeper of memories could not endure the realities of exile. Home may be impossible, but there is no other homeland for Segundo and there is no returning to Corsico for Malela and Primero.

Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's novel is about memory, the act of forgetting, and the dangerous, even deadly, act of remembering. The novel centrally features arbitrariness of power, the liminalities of dictatorship, and the indefinite repetition of unserving histories. For Malela, Primero, and Segundo, living in their home in Corsico became an impossibility. The entire novel builds to this moment of choosing exile. For Malela and her family exile is being removed from resources, land, memories, histories, and knowing that no future home/land may be possible.

CONCLUSION

This chapter looks at theories of exile as theorized by Zeleza, Seyhan, and Said and through a sustained meditation on two global Afro-diasporic/exilic novels. The chapter offers these readings as a way to broaden the scope of popular definitions of exile. These novels show, through complex and subtle interventions, that exile can be seen as permanent conditions or conditions of a moment or series of moments. In the act of writing these texts, the authors undertake a decolonial task, one that questions the very root of the exilic emotion. The exile that the characters experience in each of the two novels examined here are different but both speak to repressed memories, trauma and rejection, feelings of not-belonging and isolation, and a sense that the concept of home or homeland must be troubled and reconfigured.

In the case of the characters in *Geographies of Home*, exile takes on many forms the root of which is the rejection of blackness. This denial is seen in both

[250] Ibid., 56. "Quería ver cómo se perdía su tierra al salir de ella por el mar. Su espíritu inquieto le llevó a mirar todo lo que se podía ver […]. El sol se había metido, pero la noche cercana, con sus negros brazos sobre la aguas, tenía cosas que mostrar. Por esto se lavantó de donde estaba su familia. Salió solo."

religious and social contexts. It is this hatred of blackness, a product of anti-black racism rooted in the modern colonial project, which poisons home, the psyche, and in the end leads to the sexual assault of Iliana at the hands of her sister Marina. Furthermore, it is the rejection of Afro-syncretic beliefs that distance, or exile, Aurelia from her own subjectivity. It is only in the recuperation of these familial beliefs and the acceptance of this history that Aurelia begins to reconceive her familial history and attempts to address the trauma her daughters have suffered. Iliana is triply exiled in this novel, she is not accepted at school, home, and she is only beginning to come to terms with her racialized sexuality of which she is ignorant. Iliana, like her mother Aurelia, begins to reimagine home outside of a geographical location and decides to venture on her own to find a place to belong. Like Mahmoud Darwish's words used at the onset of this chapter, Iliana realizes that "the outside world is exile, exile is the world inside," and she alone is at a crossroads.[251] Darwish poses the question, "And what are you between the two?" and we can imagine that Iliana is just beginning to answer that for herself.[252]

Hélène Cixous' words, also used in the opening of this chapter, speak lucidly to the heart of *El dictador de Corsico.* Cixous tells us that "[t]here is a memory in our forgetfulness," and for Malela and her son Segundo this is particularly true. Malela and Segundo are like vessels for long forgotten memories, which is dangerous in a nation where remembering can be considered an act of high treason. Seemingly the central problems in the novel are the draining of the lake, Segundo's encounter with people living amongst open-air graves, and Primero's love affair with Anika – all of which thrust Malela and her sons into exile. However, the core of the novel is actually the act of remembering in spite of and against power. The act of forgetting and suppressing colonial and post-independence traumatic memories are the acts that circumscribe their existence. It is in the rejection of forgetting that Malela is able to imagine a life outside of Corsico. This imagined freedom of exile is not without its pains. Not only are they devastated by the loss of their home but also they suffer the tragic loss of Segundo, the son who declared himself the dictator of Corsico.

El dictador de Corsico, illustrates how the act of remembering trauma, of speaking its unnamable name is a kind of decolonial love. It is a speaking and writing truths and histories that have been left tacitly unspoken. Through writing narratives such as *Geographies of Home* and *El dictador de Corscio*, these writers show what Cixous calls a love of origins and fearlessness in the face of terror. The act of reading these histories with a decolonial attitude, that is taking them seriously as knowledge, closely aligning ourselves with the disempowered voices, means that we, along with the authors are "not afraid to return."[253]

[251] Darwish, "Edward Said: A Contrapuntal Reading," 175-182.
[252] Ibid.
[253] Cixous, "Vivre l'orange / To live the orange," 1994.

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CONCLUSION

Global Afro-Diasporas of (Post)Colonial Makings: Linking Literatures, Traversing Boundaries

Fiction is one of those last places where the world is bound between these pages, and you can sit with it for a while and imagine humanity in a completely different way.
(Angie Cruz)[254]

This dissertation was triggered by a simple question: can literature written in colonial languages participate in decolonial projects? If so, what are some of the themes that emerge when reading these decolonial literatures? Using the work of Ngũgĩ wa Thiongo and the long-standing debates on African literature as a point of departure I was able to create and frame a project using two distinct global Afro-diasporic and exilic populations: Afro-Latin@ Caribbean (primarily Dominicans and Puerto Ricans) and Afro-Hispanic. In the case of this project I narrowed my scope of Afro-Latino@ Caribbean to peoples from the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico with some limited commentary on Cuban immigrants in the U.S. and Equatorial Guinea. The term Afro-Hispanic generally speaks to continental African populations colonized by Spain who retain the Castilian language as a primary source of communication. For the purposes of this project, I focused on Equatoguinean writers who are the only Spanish-speaking nation in Sub-Saharan Africa.

These African and Afro-diasporic groups share a history of Spanish colonialism including religious, linguistics, and political intervention that span from the 15th century to the middle of the 20th century. Furthermore, they share a distinct relationship with the U.S. that is of contemporary political and economic interest. In the case of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, we see a history of gunboat diplomacy, depletion of island resources through multinational agribusiness, forced migration, and staunch neo-colonial rule.[255] Scholarship on the history of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean shows how U.S. intervention propelled millions of people to migrate to the U.S. as reserve labor forces and economic and political asylees. Puerto Rico's problematic position as a neo-

[254] Angie Cruz and Nelly Rosario, "Angie Cruz in Conversation with Nelly Rosario," *Callaloo* 30, no 3 (2007): 743-753.
[255] Juan Gonzalez, *Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America,* (New York: Penguin Books, revised ed. 2011); Ramon Grosfoguel, "Puerto Ricans in the USA: a comparative approach" in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 25 no.2 (1999); Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ramona Hernández, *Dominican Americans*, 2001.

colonial possession of the U.S. is seen as the backdrop in much of the literature produced by those on the island and in diaspora. In the case of Quiñonez's *Bodega Dreams* the liberation of Puerto Rico is imagined as the ultimate reparation.

In the case of the Dominican Republic, we see a tumultuous political history with U.S.-backed dictators and presidents. The preoccupation with post-independence corruption and cooptation is reflected in each of the novels that I treated in this project. For Junot Díaz, the despotic rule of president Trujillo sets the tone for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.* The novel follows the family as they battle a curse, the *fukú*, which symbolizes the both colonization and the coloniality of power. The curse of being racialized immigrant subjects of a postcolonial nation is carrying a legacy of violence and self-hate imposed by the lasting imprint of the European colonial imperial project. My decolonial analysis of the novel in both chapter one and chapter two is bolstered by Díaz's own commitment to theories of decolonial love and critiques of the coloniality of power.[256]

As the fastest growing Latin@ group in the U.S. Dominicans are at the forefront of new imaginings of U.S. Latin@ subjectivity and aesthetics. This can also be seen in the novel by Loida Maritza Perez, *Geographies of Home,* where her meditation on a Dominican family in New York City takes on the concept of exile in multiple forms. Perez's discussion of Trujillo's dictatorship in the novel is a brief yet poignant reminder of their migration history. We see the deep anxiety over blackness that is instilled by his anti-Haitian regulations and the fear of impending violence palpable in the family's very existence. It is this history of colonial and post-colonial trauma that follows them into diaspora in the U.S. and is evident it the imaginings of these authors.

In the case of Equatorial Guinea we see that renewed interest in Sub-Saharan African oil-rich shores leads to a recent relationship with the United States. The business of continual resource extraction by multinational corporations is done in spite of documented human rights violations in Equatorial Guinea. This political, economic, and social suppression in addition to the attempts at ethnic cleansing and ecological destruction propels many Equatoguineans into exile and diaspora. Thus, the comparative Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Hispanic diasporan and exilic framework was both viable and useful. Through a sustained commitment to decolonial theories, I engaged in close readings of these literary traditions and examined how they contribute to dialogues in decolonial studies and reflect some contemporary decolonial politics.

The project sought to provide a comparative analysis while engaging pertinent and long historical contexts so as not to collapse these rich and deeply distinct histories. In doing historical research I learned of intricate historical connections between Equatorial Guinea and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean. One pertinent historical connection was in the pivotal year of 1898 after the Spanish American War. Historical narratives reflect that Spain's losses in the Americas and later in the Pacific, make the colonial power shift its focus to its

[256] Moya, "The Search for Decolonial Love," 2012.

colonies in Africa.[257] Spanish Guinea, now Equatorial Guinea, was first colonized by Portugal and later Spain. For many decades in the 19th century the British also used its islands as a slave trade base. After the end of the slave trade and in an effort to utilize the nation's vast resources, Spanish settlers summarily used the islands and continental swath for cocoa plantations.[258]

Most interesting is Equatorial Guinea's long history as a penal colony where Cuban, Puerto Rican, and Pilipino prisoners and anti-colonial organizers were sent as punishment for treason or attempts to subvert Spanish rule.[259] This connection, particularly the Cuban and Caribbean connection is relevant to these regions' histories and inform some of the contemporary Equatoguinean-Latin@ Caribbean links. For example, in Equatorial Guinea one can find monuments dedicated to the Cuban prisoners as well as an active government exchange program between Equatorial Guinea and Cuban professionals (professors, engineers, etc.).[260]

I was committed to writing about two groups that write from the position of diaspora and/or exile. That these writers were speaking to and about experiences in the global south as reflected upon or felt in the Global North became a key aspect of the project. Having a dialogue between two Afro-diasporic/exilic groups in their (adopted) homelands is an approach that is not often undertaken. In the case of these particular groups, a comparative project has not been done.

Another connection that emerged in the close readings of the novels was the appearance of post-independence dictators. Despotic rule circumscribed many of the familial and personal histories, actions, and memories of the characters. The prevalence of dictatorships are another aspect of the coloniality of power and it can lead us to a different yet interrelated set of questions: How do contemporary dictators in former colonial territories function and how are they experienced by the nation's subjects? How are the dictators' existence central factors in the exile and migration of diasporic populations? The writing of these narrative fictions also serves another purpose, to document histories that may otherwise go untold or to tell histories that people may no longer be alive to tell. I find this particularly useful in my own work and also in my pedagogical approach particularly when teaching students about histories that may be intricately tied to their own presence in the classroom. These literatures serve not only as radical imagining of what could be, but also faithfully and uncompromisingly dare to indict power for reckless violations of human rights.

The writers that I engage in this project are preoccupied not simply with the past (and in the case of Equatoguineans, the present) state of authoritative

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[257] Ugarte, *Africans in Europe,* 2013.
[258] Alicia Campos, "The Decolonization of Equatorial Guinea: The relevance of the International Factors," *The Journal of African History* 44, no.1 (2003): 95-116.
[259] Francisco Lastres y Juiz, *La colonización penitenciaria de las Marianas y Fernando Póo,* (Madrid: E. Martinez, 1878).
Ugarte, *Africans in Europe,* 2013.
[260] Jonathan Silberman, "Cuban doctors help build Equatorial Guinea's health services," *The Militant* 69, no.45 (2005): online.
http://www.themilitant.com/2005/6945/694550.html

power, but also with the future. This imagining and reimagining of the future is central to global Afro-diasporic and exilic writers from these communities. The project then, is not only tied to remembering the past, but also to imagining transformative future. It is this hope in spite of travesty that makes the texts so rich and productive a read.

THEORETICAL INTERVENTIONS

What the project has provided over the course of seven years of study is a deeper and broader understanding of Afro-diasporas in both historical and contemporary perspectives. In the historical sense, learning about the connections between the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and the only Spanish-speaking nation in Sub-Saharan Africa stimulates interests for linguistics scholars, Afro-diaspora scholars, and comparative postcolonial scholars. Understanding the larger colonial and postcolonial/post-independence histories of these nations is extremely relevant for the consideration of some serious questions about the multiple migrations of Afro-descendant peoples.

In the U.S. and Latin America, most of the rhetoric about migration and immigration is narrowly focused on the topic of undocumented migration to the U.S. from Central and South America. This dominant conversation in Latin@ Studies and Migration Studies can be enriched by a comparative approach with Equatorial Guinea. Including the phenomenon of Equatoguinean (and North African) migration to Spain for example would engender a rich dialogue about the state of global migrations of disenfranchised and displaced peoples.[261] This in turn would prove to be a multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approach that can create a larger discursive space in which Afro-diaspora scholars, migration and ethnic studies scholars, etc., could think more broadly about the realities that drive global immigration from the Global South to the Global North.

Note On Transdisciplinarity

In framing this project I use the term transdisciplinary as a way to verbalize how I attempt to work across various disciplines to formulate this Ethnic Studies project. As an Ethnic Studies scholar invested in Afro-Latin@ and Afro-diaspora studies, Caribbean Philosophy, Decolonial and Indigenous Feminisms, Reparation Studies, Afro-futurism Studies, and theories of Decoloniality, it was important that each of these elements were part and parcel of my approach to the literature. This method of reading these exile and diaspora literatures as literary palimpsests with a decolonial attitude opened a space through which to incorporate Caribbean and feminist philosophies.

Note on Linguistics

Though my project does not meditate on the linguistics of these literatures, I have had the opportunity to research linguistics and morphology

[261] Ugarte, *Africans in Europe,* 2013.

alongside Dr. Yolanda María Martinez-San Miguel.[262] My time as her graduate assistant allowed me to study both linguistics and Anthropolitical linguistics in diasporic Latin@ communities in the U.S.[263] This were essential building blocks in the formation of this project that had so much to do with language and linguistics but was focused on larger thematic and theoretical questions of witnessing, reparations, and exile.

Note on Traversing Disciplinary Decadence

I imagine that this type of deep engagement and cross-disciplinary training will bring forth exciting scholarship that is not solely entrenched in one disciplinary approach. Lewis Gordon writes about "disciplinary decadence" and the ways that disciplinary limits obfuscate intellectual work that is preoccupied with liberatory struggles.[264] In both writing and teaching I have found that transdisciplinary research and approaches to knowledge challenge notions of universal truth and universal knowledge. Ramon Grosfoguel's work on decolonial paradigms offers the argument that instead of the universal we can think about the pluriversal.[265] This pluriversality would challenge the singular narratives that often circumscribe how topics are approached and knowledge is disseminated. The rejection of an intellectual or disciplinary hierarchy is a way to radically redefine scholarship in an era where ethnic studies are consistently under threat of eradication.

REGARDING FAITHFUL WITNESSING & RECOGNITION

In the first chapter I utilized María Lugones' concept of faithful witnessing and linked it theoretically to Linda Tuhiwai Smith's decolonizing methodologies and Denise Oliver's feminist philosophical treatise on representation. As theorized by Lugones, faithful witnessing is an act of aligning oneself with oppressed peoples against the grain of power. That is, not only seeing but supporting the narratives of peoples on the underside of humanity, recognizing their lives and stories to be true despite their lack of institutional endorsement. Through a discussion of faithful witnessing as a decolonizing methodology I argued it can be thought of as an essential element of the decolonial attitude.

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[262] Yolanda M. Martinez-San Miguel, *Coloniality of Diasporas: Rethinking Intra-Colonial Migrations in a Pan-Caribbean Context* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), 2014.
[263] Zentella, *Growing Up Bilingual*, 1997.
[264] Lewis Gordon, *Disciplinary Decadence: Living Thought in Trying Times,* (Boulder: Paradigm, 2006).
[265] Ramon Grosfoguel, "Decolonizing Post-Colonial Studies and Paradigms of Political Economy: Transmodernity, Border Thinking, and Global Coloniality," *Transmodernity* 1, no. 1 (2011). http://escholarship.org/uc/item/21k6t3fq.

In order to think through the theories of faithful witnessing and the decolonial attitude I engaged in close readings of two texts one from the Afro-Hispanic tradition and the other a Caribbean Afro-Latino novel. *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* by Donato Ndongo Bidyogo and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz are books that though published twenty years apart speak to similar themes of witnessing colonial/postcolonial, religious/cosmological, and sexual/gendered violence.

My reading of Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* argued that the protagonist's and narrators' faithful witnessing of gendered violence served as a way to document how the coloniality of power normalizes the brutalization of female and feminine bodies. Throughout the novel we encounter a dictatorial regime in the Dominican Republic that used sexual violence and the threat of death as ways to instill fear and power. We see this same pattern of gender violence in diaspora as Oscar recounts the beatings and abuse of his peers. Each of the narrators chooses to faithfully witness these painful events. And though Belicia, the matriarch of the family, never speaks of her vicious beating in the cane field, a central moment in the novel, the narrators echo her story; validating her experience. These acts of witnessing faithfully are the first step toward the recognition that the past is very much alive in their present.

In Ndongo-Bidyogo's *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* (*Shadows of Your Black Memory*), we encounter a nameless narrator that allows us the opportunity to witness a moment of colonial encounter. From an adult retrospective, the narrator tells us the how the arrival of the Catholic priests to Equatorial Guinea served a dual purpose: to convert the Fang peoples into Christians and to lay the foundation for the colonial plantation project. The boy's ambivalence between Christianity and his familial and tribal religious practices cause him the most anxiety throughout the narrative. Yet through a retelling of these equivocations he is able to witness and narrate the changes in the community's livelihood. As the assistant to Father Ortiz, he unflinchingly recounts his own sense of superiority over those children and adults that have not converted to Catholicism.

The most compelling part of the novel however, is the retelling of the debates between Father Ortiz and Tío Abeso. This moment of faithful witnessing offers both sides of the struggle, that of the colonial empire seeking to convert souls and develop the colony into plantations, and that of the Fang people, wanting to keep and defend their traditions, language, resources, and belief systems. *Las tinieblas de tu memoria negra* narrates the double consciousness that has shaped the boy's worldview. By attending to the resistance of Tío Abeso and his father, the boy faithfully witnesses the shifts in cosmology as a result of the colonial project.

Future Critical Developments

Looking forward I would like to further develop other theories of representation in chapter one. Texts such as bell hook's *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (1992) and Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin/White Masks* (1952) would be crucial in expanding this critical area of inquiry. In expanding my treatment of

theories of representation, including engaging the critiques of Hegelian recognition and a development of concepts of decolonial recognition, what could be a feature of faithful witnessing, the project and the concepts could take on significant meaning for other disciplinary areas and other ethnics studies projects. This particular kind of analysis would be a new and exciting way to attend global Afro-diasporic literatures and postcolonial literatures.

REGARDING REPARATIONS, FUTURITIES & DECOLONIAL LOVE

Chapter two examined how these global Afro-diasporic and exilic authors imagined reparations and futurities. In the chapter I historicized reparations as it pertains to radical black thinkers in U.S. contexts and discussed the long history of reparations for other ethnic groups such as Chinese Americans and Chinese Canadians, Native American and Aboriginal peoples, and Jewish people after the Holocaust, just to name a few. I noted how this topic is not merely a glimpse into the past but rather, is extremely pertinent to current and future postcolonial politics. One timely example is the recent lawsuit filed by CARICOM seeking recompense from European nations as reparation for slavery and economic disenfranchisement in the Caribbean.[266]

Recent scholarship in Asian Canadian and First Nations literature also reflects a preoccupation with notions of reparations beyond positivistic formulations.[267] This decolonial framework then, would be particularly useful in considering the creation of a new field of inquiry, what I called Reparation Studies. This field would take a comparative approach to the study of reparations and would also look to the future as other nations and peoples struggle toward both monetary and intangible forms of reparation.

In the three novels that I examined in the second chapter, I encountered three distinct perspectives on the possibilities of reparations and the promise of futurities: one that took on self-propelled community reparations, another that conceived of a reparation of the self and of the imagination, and lastly, one that imagined a reparation of the blood, tied intimately to women's bodies. In each of these novels imagining future possibilities is central concern of the characters. The protagonists and characters in these novels end on a note of reimagining future possibilities. These imaginings, I argue, are part of a decolonial reparation, one that looks to the past but also to a future where a better world *is* possible and does not solely hinge on probable recompense for damages done.

Bodega Dreams took us to New York City's El Barrio where one man's grand vision of barrio-wide reparation was thwarted by the same kind of capitalist neo-liberal forces he was trying to combat. For Willie Bodega, the

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[266] Dan Kedmey, "14 Caribbean Nations Sue Former Colonizers for Slave Trade," *Time*, March 11, 2014, http://time.com/19528/14-caribbean-nations-sue-former-colonizers-for-slave-trade/.

[267] Janey Lew, "Toward an Ethics of Reconciliation: Reading Against Apology in *Burning Vision* and *The Kappa Child,"* presented on the panel *Indigeneity and Diaspora: Exploring Intersections Through Canadian Literature,* (Chicago: Modern Languages Association Conference, January 14, 2014).

grand-scale welfare state he imagined was going to produce a mainland middle class of Puerto Ricans who would eventually have enough political clout to liberate Puerto Rico from U.S. colonial possession. Unfortunately for Bodega, the collusion between his deceitful lover Veronica and his traitorous best friend Nazario lead to his murder.

Yet, though the novel is about Bodega's grand dream, the protagonist, Chino is the one who is most transformed by these reparations. Initially a non-believer in the idea of community reparations, Chino becomes Bodega's assistant and later begins to think outside of his individualistic desire for monetary accumulation and social mobility. Chino, I argue, embodies decolonial love and this is seen in a final moment where he takes in an elderly grandfather and his grandson. Chino's attitude is fundamentally changed and he begins to see the beauty of Spanish Harlem, a place that he initially rejects. He recognizes the beauty of his neighbors and the new language (Spanglish) being spoken, and the resilience these diasporic peoples. Finally, Chino begins to believe in the possibility of a better future, one that is represented by the grandson and his own soon to be born child.

My treatment of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in chapter two is succinct yet useful. I chose to bring this novel back into the fold of the dissertation because of how it conceives of the self and the other in terms of decolonial love and the future. For the characters in *Oscar Wao,* imagining the future is an almost impossible task, that is, for every character except Oscar himself. Oscar writes innumerable pages wherein he imagines fantastic futures and even theorizes the cosmos DNA, the possible cure to what ails his family. For Oscar the past (both his and his family's) and the present are painful. The answer is in looking at futurity as a fertile ground for possibility. Yunior inherits most of Oscar's opus but in the end he is left without the final piece. Yunior imagines that Oscar's niece, Isis, will be the one who can piece together the end of the book and perhaps even liberate the family from the traveling curse fukú that has plagued them in the Dominican Republic and in diaspora.

Finally, chapter 2 takes on one of the most recent Equatoguinean novels, *Matinga: sangre en la selva.* This book's temporal and spatial setting is as fluvial as is its protagonist Matinga: a human nymph endowed with powers from the underworld. Mbombio Bacheng's novel takes on a different set of preoccupations than Quiñonez and Díaz's, in that it centers on both the colonial and post-independence forces in Equatorial Guinea. In Mbomio Bacheng's narrative, these forces serve to inflict suffering and degradation. Matinga's sanguine-natal powers, endowed to her by the ancestors, are meant to fertilize the spatial beaches of Equatorial Guinea. This blood offering is conceived of as a reparative action that would counteract the bloodshed in the jungle as Equatoguineans battle for liberation.

In the chapter I offered a decolonial and indigenous feminist reading of the novel, which critiqued the idea that women's primary role in nationalist movements are as literal birthing vessels. Yet, the novel is able to circumvent these conservative nationalist politics by showing Matinga as a woman with an unfixed subjectivity. As she gains knowledge about the source of her ancestral powers, she imagines a life outside of her blood offering. In choosing to live with her mother, Matinga fundamentally transforms her life and reimagines

reparations as communal love. This is exemplified by her desire to raise her soon to be born child amongst her people in Corsico.

Future Critical Developments

In the chapter I utilize concepts of reparations and futurities to engage important themes in each of these novels. An area that I am interested in further developing is the possible contributions of Afro-futurist studies. The recent curatorial work of Ytasha L. Womack is of importance in this topic as is the work of Marisa Parham. Womack and Parham represent an important portion of the work in Afro-futurist studies, particularly in the science-fiction exploratory realm and the future-past historicizing and projection of the field. Womack contextualizes and thoroughly analyzes the work of Black science fiction, music, novels, and writers.[268] Parham's most recent work provides a rich theoretical framework that allows for an analysis of robots, humans desire, struggles for social justice, and analyses of how contemporary Afro-futurist thinkers are re-engaging the field in innovative ways.[269] Expanding the discourse on Afro-futurism to include Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Hispanic writers and artists would bring an added dimension to this critical field. Finally, engaging Afro-futurism would also enrich my own close readings of these global Afro-diasporic and exilic novels by providing a new dimension through which to comparatively examine how the authors imagine the future(s).

REGARDING EXILE & MEMORY

Chapter three examined two novels through a framework of exile and memory. By reading scholars like Said, Zeleza, and Seyhan, I conceived of exile as both a subject of writing and a condition of living. Through these meditations, I examine how the characters inhabit what Said calls a "perilous state of not-belonging," and how they emerge from these exiles toward a different conception of home.[270] This state of not-belonging is akin to living in a third space a place where neither the imagine homeland is possible, nor can the current home ever be hospitable.

In my study of Loida Maritza Perez's *Geographies of Home,* I analyzed how the characters experienced moments of exile in spaces that should ideally be

[268] Womack, Ytasha L. *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2013).
[269] In particular, I am referring to Parham's forthcoming piece entitled, "Ghosts, Robots, and other Inversions of Afrofuturism," which was presented in an early form at the 2013 Caribbean Philosophical Association Annual Meeting in San Juan, Puerto Rico. Here I am evoking Parham's analysis of recording artist Janelle Monae.
[270] Said, *Reflections on Exile,* 173.

conceived as home. This exile, I argued, was deeply rooted in the rejection of long-standing Afro-syncretic beliefs and a familial denial of blackness. The characters, unable to face their own blackness, are exiled from both themselves and each other. For some of the characters this denial degenerates into self-hate. In the case of Marina, her self-loathing and fits of madness and rage impel her to violently rape her sister Iliana. Iliana's lack of traditional European feminine qualities, convince Marina that Iliana has an inverted penis and she is determined to prove this to her family. This particular experience resonates with some of the larger thematic issues in the novel. The normalization of Eurocentric beauty standards, gender norms, and religious practices are a mark of the coloniality of power. These criteria are impossible to achieve for this Afro-Latin@ immigrant family and the result is that two of the female characters begin to reimagine home outside of the familial hearth.

Iliana, the protagonist, a first generation college student is found doubly exiled from both her university and her home. Her search to find a home and a place of spiritual belonging outside of the Seventh Day Adventist religion sends her on a quest of self-discovery. It is in the act of questioning that she begins to unravel and accepts her own familial history and role in their lives. Despite the dysfunctions represented by madness, domestic violence, and sibling rivalry, Iliana confronts her reality as an immigrant subject: home is a metaphysical space. This revelation allows her emotionally survive her vicious attack at the hands of Marina. In the end Iliana returns to the university, the very place where she had been called "nigger" and rejected because of her position as an ethnic and linguistic "other." Iliana is poised to imagine and create her own home/homeland in a place of emotional and familial exile.

In the Equatoguinean novel I analyzed in chapter three, exile is conceived of as both a physical dislocation and a dislocation of memory. Juan Tomás Ávila Laurel's *El dictador de Corsico* is centered on the life of Malela and her two sons Primero and Segundo. For Malela the memories of colonial and post-independence are conjured by the arrival of a foreigner, Anika. In Malela's post-independence Corsico, however, the mere mention of the colonial past or of the cruel violence inflicted by the repressive régime is considered high treason. As such, we encounter an entire community that refuses to recollect the past and in essence are exiled from their own traumatic memories. For Malela's son Segundo, unknowable memories are triggered by a recent multinational project on the island of Corsico that aims to create an airport and landing strip for wealthy tourists. This project causes the destruction of a lake, ecological reserves, and people's farms and homes. All of this occurs while Primero, Malela's quietest and often mute son is in the midst of a shameful affair with Anika, a white woman who symbolizes the prospective wealthy tourists.

The culmination of the book occurs when Segundo erupts in a fit of rage and pseudo-bravery, and declares himself the dictator of Corsico. He believes that imposing his own dictatorship can right the wrongs done by the previous two dictators. This grave misunderstanding of power and the idealized replication of the power structure is a moment where we see the coloniality of power in action. This shocks Malela and Primero into a fearful stupor. To compound this shock Anika's sexual affair with Primero introduces him to what Malela considers depraved sex acts. Adding to this whirlwind of distress, Segundo finds massive open-air graves with the people living in mausoleum-like

structures on the far side of Corsico. Exile, then, is the only option for the family who finds Corsico increasingly inhospitable. However, their escape is not without tragedy. On the boat leaving Corsico, Segundo disappears as he stares at his slowly disappearing homeland. For Segundo the realities of physical exile are an existence that could not be. Malela and Primero are left to continually report and search for Segundo, reaching many unhelpful levels of the bureaucratic and arbitrary regime. Malela's life was forever changed by the conjuring of memories and traumas long suppressed. The imposed exile of memory is therefore paralleled to the condition of physical exile.

Future Critical Developments

El dictador de Corsico and *Geographies of Home* take on themes of exile as related to the suppression of memories or belief systems. Trauma is the lynchpin for these denials and the characters find that their imagined home is unhomely. These manifestations of exile are seen as an exile of the memory, of the self, and of the family. In the case of *Geographies of Home* the exile of the memory, self, and family culminates with a breaking away from the family home by Iliana and a renewed recognition of Afro-syncretic spiritual practices by Aurelia. In *El dictador de Corsico* the exile of memory leads the family into physical exile, which in turn leads to Segundo's apparent death. Confronting trauma and the realities of exile, then, are the beginnings and the ends of these narratives. What I found in crafting this chapter was that a continued development of theories of trauma and Trauma Studies would enhance the close readings. A further development in Memory Theory and Theories of the Uncanny, such as the work of Avery Gordon and Emanuel Levinas, would aid in reading portions of the literature. Finally, expanding my analyses of exile and race to include a development of "third space" theories would be helpful in linking exilic conditions to what Said calls a condition of "not-belonging" and to Juan Flores' conception of the "triple consciousness" of the Afro-Latin@ subject.

FINAL NOTES

The goal of this project was to aid in the mapping of the diasporic and exilic Afro-Latin@ Caribbean and Equatoguinean archipelago. My early training in Latin@ and Hispanic Caribbean Studies as well as my doctoral training in Ethnic Studies helped me to create a comparative framework through which to engage multiple disciplinary fields. At the core of this project are literary texts written by incredible artists from the global Afro-diaspora. In bringing Afro-Hispanic writers into the fold of an Afro-Latin@ project I was able to re-conceptualize the fields of Latin@ Studies and Afro-diaspora Studies as well as the study of literature in light of theories of decoloniality. Thinking about these nations and peoples in the context of the long-durée of colonial and postcolonial histories and migrations made it possible to begin mapping how the literatures and realities of these diasporic and exilic populations speak to one another.

My own investment in decolonial theories helped me reimagine the project's framework as one that went beyond close readings and literary theory. Using philosophies and theories of witnessing, recognition, reparations, futurities, and exile not only strengthened my project, but also, helped me reimagine methodological approaches in critical fields of inquiry. I imagine that scholarship in Ethnic Studies and Global Afro-Diaspora Studies can continue to radically reimagine the disciplines, using holistic approaches to various kinds of projects while working diligently toward decolonizing knowledge. This project is just a small example of the kind of scholarship that can emerge when a literary scholar engages philosophy, feminist, and decolonial theories in the study of postcolonial Afro-diasporic and exilic literature. Most important in this project is the act of witnessing these literatures and peoples and recognizing how they reflect human experiences and lived realities. Through the use of these critical theories I aim closely align my scholarship and myself with peoples whose voices are considered to be unimportant and ignored.

As I noted in the introduction, these literatures constitute a peripheral role in U.S., African, and Spanish literary canons. This dissertation is a project dedicated to the literary imaginings and strivings of Afro-descendant peoples. I sought to closely consider how these authors imagine and reimagine critical concepts. These literatures speak to pertinent contemporary and historical issues that deal with race, immigration, diaspora, exile, reparations, and futurities. Finally, I hope that this work can also contribute to philosophies of the human. It is the decolonial attitude, the critical and ethical position that aligns itself with oppressed peoples and values the knowledge and struggles of those who are typically oppressed, that helps to create a discursive space for these literatures, and the human experiences that they evoke, to be taken seriously.

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