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The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging in US Immigrant Fiction 1990 - 2015

Lauren Silber
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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**THE POLITICS OF FEELING AND THE WORK OF BELONGING IN US
IMMIGRANT FICTION 1990 - 2015**

A Dissertation Presented

By

LAUREN SILBER

Submitted to the Graduate School of the University of Massachusetts Amherst
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

September 2018

English

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IMMIGRANT FICTION 1990 - 2015**

A Dissertation Presented

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LAUREN SILBER

Approved as to style and content by:

Asha Nadkarni, Chair

Rachel Mordecai, Member

Moon-Kie Jung, Member

Randall Knoper, Department Head
Department of English

DEDICATION

To those who taught me, joined me, and let me hoch a chinik, thank you.

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Where does one begin. So much work went into this dissertation, and I feel so fortunate to fill these pages with my sincere gratitude.

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your scary parts, to maintain boundaries, and yet, to love big. From the moment I met you, it felt as if our souls had travelled together before. I look forward to our next life together.

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ABSTRACT

THE POLITICS OF FEELING AND THE WORK OF BELONGING IN US IMMIGRANT FICTION 1990 – 2015

SEPTEMBER 2018

LAUREN SILBER, B.A., UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT

M.A., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Ph.D., UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS AMHERST

Directed by: Professor Asha Nadkarni

“The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging in US Immigrant Fiction 1990 – 2015” presents readers with a distinct optic: if we are to fully grasp contemporary US racial politics, we must recognize the narrative work emotion performs in popular US diasporic fiction. Comparing the work of authors who have become mainstays in the multi-ethnic US literary canon such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Julia Alvarez, Junot Díaz, Lan Cao, Achy Obejas, Cristina Garcia, Kiran Desai, and Nora Okja Keller, I explicate how these popular authors exhume the complex entanglements of racialization, US empire, and global capitalism by narrating the everyday emotional negotiations of diasporic characters and communities. In this way, I approach national belonging as a process of emotional work, rather than a final subject formation. By bringing feminist and queer theories of emotion to bear on literatures marketed and taught as US immigrant fiction, I reveal how these authors transform emotion into a narrative technique, one that speaks back to power through the felt.

In addition to articulating a theory of emotional narrativity, “The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging” considers how Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic

texts, when put in dialogue, expose similar US empire practices enacted across the Caribbean and the Pacific. This comparative diasporic framework emerges by examining the emotional life-worlds of labor migrants, political exiles, transnational families, and refugees from Korea, Vietnam, India, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic relationally. Putting difference into dialogue elucidates how modern liberal ideals of belonging and mobility produced racialized and gendered categories that greatly limited cross-racial anti-imperial efforts. By exposing felt histories of power that continue to shape the lived and political life of race, “The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging” demonstrates the importance of literary expression for contemporary political and racial discourse.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, I have seen the determination of immigrant fathers who worked two or three jobs without taking a dime from the government, and at risk any moment of losing it all, just to build a better life for their kids. I've seen the heartbreak and anxiety of children whose mothers might be taken away from them just because they didn't have the right papers. I've seen the courage of students who, except for the circumstances of their birth, are as American as Malia or Sasha; students who bravely come out as undocumented in hopes they could make a difference in the country they love.

President Obama's Executive Order on Immigration

November 20, 2014

On November 20, 2014, following mid-term elections, President Obama made his second executive order on immigration. With immigration reform sitting stalled in the halls of Congress, the President took steps to mobilize change. In the announcement, the President proposed adjustments to the U.S. border patrol and visa system that would increase border security while restricting visas that did not profit US industry. The President's executive order simultaneously expanded the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program (DACA) and created a new program called Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, or DAPA, which would limit the deportation of undocumented parents of US citizens.

The executive order caused an uproar, and within a year twenty-six states¹ collectively sued the United States in *Texas v. United States*.² *Texas v. United States* was an attempt to circumvent the federal government's constitutional power over immigration law through arguments based on states' rights—a legal maneuver that, interestingly, would be used again to derail the following presidential executive order on immigration, Trump's Muslim ban. But it was not merely the fact that the federal government was exerting control that caused legal retaliation – historically, nearly every US administration in the twentieth century has used presidential executive order to revise immigration policy. Rather, it was the recognition and legitimization of undocumented peoples as worthy to work, live, and remain with their loved ones without fear of deportation that caused unrest. By opening up pathways of legality for those long criminalized based on circumstances of arrival, the President's executive order sought to dramatically revise the rules of national belonging. For according to the announcement, in the twenty-first century, Americanness could no longer be derived only by the “circumstances of [one's] birth,” but also by one's “determination,” “courage,” and “hopes” to “make a difference in the country they love.”

In making this claim, President Obama borrows heavily from the work of undocumented activists who, for nearly the past three decades, have worked tirelessly to invigorate change by translating *feelings* of national belonging into stories that could

¹ Texas, Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine, Michigan, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, West Virginia, and Wisconsin

² On May 26, 2015, the U.S. fifth Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the 26 states, blocking the implementation of DAPA, and on June 23, 2016, the Supreme Court reached a 4-4 decision, leaving in place the ruling from the fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. There would be no DAPA.

sway voters and politicians alike.³ Starting in the late 1990s with the re-emergence of increased federal focus on border patrol and legality, the fight for comprehensive immigration reform began anew. As the central figures in the fight for access to education and citizenship, undocumented youth became crucial to the immigration rights movement by providing life-stories that complicated the state's narrative of national belonging. The strategy was straightforward: Migrating to the United States as children, undocumented youth were positioned as good migrants, blameless minors who were trapped in an antiquated immigration system that left no room for their lived realities.⁴

The comprehensive immigration reform movement appealed to a general, documented public hoping to, discursively and legislatively, transform undocumented immigrants into American subjects. Rather than contest the illegality of undocumented migration through considerations of the ways in which globalization, the transnational movement of labor and capital (including people), and long historical practices of importing contract labor to sustain US industries have affected the documentation status of migrants in the US, the movement focused on differentiation. They produced a new

³ This focus on undocumented migrants' and their life-worlds is not President Obama's alone. Arguably, the focus on undocumented US residents dominated immigration decisions since the 1980s when the Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and W. Bush administrations continually amended or created policies to address this growing population. With the 1982 Supreme Court ruling in *Plyer v. Doe*, it was made clear that youth, regardless of documentation status, had the right to public K-12 education. In 1986, the Reagan administration passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) which granted amnesty to nearly 3 million undocumented immigrants, while making it illegal to hire undocumented immigrants, making it difficult for undocumented immigrants to access welfare benefits, and increasing border enforcement. The question of how best to manage an increasingly large population of undocumented residents was paramount to US governance in the 1990s as well: Under the George H W Bush administration, the Immigration Act of 1990 was passed, lifting the English language test of the 1906 Naturalization act, opening up naturalization options for queer migrants, and dramatically revising the visa allotment system. Following this large-scale reform, however, immigration acts such as the 1996 Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigration Responsibility Act (IIRIRA) and welfare legislation such as the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Enforcement Act (PRWEA) limited undocumented immigrants' access to public benefits, tightened restrictions for undocumented entry (legalizing the current ten-year probation period following re-entry after detention and deportation), and increased border enforcement.

⁴ Nicholls, Walter. *The DREAMers How the Undocumented Youth Movement Transformed the Immigrant Rights Debate*. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2013. 52-3.

subset of undocumented immigrants, Dreamers, whose educational and community-oriented successes made them “worthy” of inclusion. This rhetoric perpetuated a good/bad immigrant dichotomy that has long structured nationalist logics for excluding certain migrants, often in the name of national security.⁵

For many undocumented activists, this seemingly reactionary political maneuver was necessary, both for their own emotional well-being⁶ and for eliciting sympathy that could undergird immediate legislative change. However, in 2010, when Congress failed, yet again, to pass immigration reform, and the number of deportations under the Obama administration was reaching the two million mark,⁷ undocumented activists re-adjusted their narrative to be more inclusive. Soon stories of undocumentedness included details about being queer, being poor, and, quite importantly, being proud of the families and community members who were part of their lives. Activists brought these stories to the public through acts of civil disobedience such as the 2010 sit in at Senator John McCain’s office; performative and yet highly dangerous acts that underscored the immediate need for state and local policing, profiling, detention, and deportation reforms. The change did not quell the power of the movement. In fact, as we see above, undocumented activists’ stories continued to transform public opinion, going so far as to provide the language for the President of the United States’ announcement. By turning inward, articulating the individualized, ephemeral, and often-invisible *feeling* of national belonging,

⁵ For more on the good/bad immigrant dichotomy see Bakirathi Mani’s *Aspiring to Home*.

⁶ Seif, Hinda. “‘We Define Ourselves’: 1.5-Generation Undocumented Immigrant Activist Identities and Insurgent Discourse.” *North American Dialogue*, no. 1 (2016): 23. As Seif notes, many undocumented activists found support in sharing their stories, coming together with other undocumented youth to “overcome ‘fear’ and ‘shame’ stemming from their status” (27).

⁷ Numbers from the PEW Research Center

undocumented youth fought for expanded living opportunities while challenging citizenship-bound notions of national belonging.

It was this felt experience that President Obama tapped into during his 2014 announcement: *Determined* immigrant fathers, *anxious* children, and *courageous* students litter the President's speech as he carefully and strategically sketches visions of undocumented migrants that can elicit empathy from a leery voting public. Though the President's language was clearly rhetorically driven, his emotionally attentive language illustrates an intriguing discursive shift in mainstream US political rhetoric, one that marks a politicization of the *felt* experiences of national belonging making us wonder: What does it mean that the President of the United States has not only heard migrants' stories – has not only addressed these individuals– but is now revising national policies and procedures around the experiences of residents who *feel* American without any documental proof? How has a movement based in the emotional work of identity politics transformed into a political movement that has sway in federal policy-making? What is the relationship between emotion and narrative, between narrative and politics?

These questions of power relations, language, and the emotional work of migration that surface when we consider President Obama's 2014 executive order on immigration are what Michael Hardt calls "the challenge...of the affects" (ix). Affects, he writes, "require us...to enter the realm of causality" because they "illuminate...both our power to affect the world around us and our power to be affected by it, along with the relationship between these two powers" (ix). Understanding President Obama's executive order requires us to explore the "power" of DREAMers "to affect the world around" them as well as President Obama's "power to be affected by" migrant emotional life worlds.

Arguably, innumerable presidents, justices, and congressional representatives have been engaged in the “causal relationship” of the affects, but one would be hard pressed to find a moment in U.S. history where the *emotional* claims of non-citizens have had such a far-reaching effect on the political discourse of U.S. immigration. In this way, President Obama’s executive order illustrates how the emotional work of migrants, when translated into narrative form, can re-structure life opportunities for minoritized populations.

Embedded in this complicated matrix of politics, affect, and narrativity, lies a curious comparison hidden in a seemingly banal literary device, a simile. For as President Obama sketches the emotional life worlds of undocumented families, shedding the criminalized images manufactured by the mainstream media, he turns to his own family, likening the American-ness of undocumented youth to his daughters. This association is quite profound when we consider that Malia and Sasha experienced first-hand how citizenship functions as a political tool to legally exclude individuals from the polity. For during the 2008 presidential campaign, as the first black presidential hopeful, Barack Obama’s birth to a white mother and a Kenyan father in Hawaii (an archipelago long fought over by the world’s empires) became fuel for the subsequent ‘Birther’ fire that sought to discount Obama’s candidacy on the basis of citizenship, re: his blackness.

For scholars of U.S. immigration, the President’s discursive entanglement between national belonging and racialization is not shocking.⁸ U.S. immigration policy

⁸ The relationship between white supremacy and citizenship is regularly tied to the 1790 Naturalization Act, the 3/5ths compromise, the blood quantum system for indigenous recognition, along with exclusionary immigration policies and judicial acts. For more on this relationship between white supremacy and citizenship see Bil Ong Hing’s *Defining America through immigration policy*, Richard King’s *Postcolonial America*, Margot Canaday’s *The straight state: sexuality and citizenship in twentieth-century America*, Cheryl Shanks’ *Immigration and the politics of American sovereignty, 1890-1990*, Eithne Luibhéid’s *Entry denied: controlling sexuality at the border*, Jung, Vargas, and Bonilla-Silva’s *State of White Supremacy Racism, Governance, and the United States*, Evelyn Nakano Glenn’s *Unequal freedom: how race and*

has long been used by the state to manage its various colonial, imperial, and capitalist interests; an apparatus that regularly adjusts to maintain a balance between the political legitimacy of the nation-state as liberal democracy while legalizing various white supremacist, heteronormative, and patriarchal exclusions. By contending that “except for the circumstances of their birth,” undocumented migrants are “as American as Malia or Sasha,” however, President Obama not only puts into question the United States’ laws around citizenship (birthright in this case), but boldly re-orient the racial politics of US immigration away from historically anti-black logics *while also* illustrating a non-white center for US racial politics. He does this, precisely, by making his two black daughters the marker of Americanness to which others should be compared, placing women of color at the center of debates over national belonging and making it blackness, rather than whiteness, to which citizenship is racialized.

And it is through both the uptake of the life *narratives* of undocumented youth and the use of a *literary* device that this reorientation takes shape. The use of simile, in particular, is suggestive of an attitude towards migration that resists the dominant approach that migration stems from the movement of a *singular*, rational actor⁹ through an analytic framework that requires comparison. Much like the work of affect, the causality and relationality, so too, does the simile function to produce or to represent relation, rather than totality. In this way, President Obama’s announcement not only illustrates how contemporary US immigration policies are being shaped by emotion-based, transnational and diasporic logics of national belonging, a la the undocumented

gender shaped American citizenship and labor, and Mae Ngai’s *Impossible subjects: illegal aliens and the making of modern America*.

⁹ For more see *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the End of the Millennium*.

activism of the past thirty years; so, too, does it reframe national belonging with women of color at its center, making femininity and blackness the barometer for Americanness.

Though I am drawn to the import of this discursive shift in mainstream discourses of national belonging seen in President Obama's announcement, I cannot overlook the fact the President's 2014 executive order never went into effect and the horrors of undocumented living in the US continues to grow. The necessity for robust change has not ended *and* undocumented activism has been imperative to the discursive shift we see at work even today. That being said, the potentiality for discursive and structural change to be catalyzed by the emotional and narrative work undertaken and shared by undocumented activists seems of upmost importance for our understanding of Post-Cold War national belonging. Put differently, if President Obama's 2014 executive order on immigration suggests anything worthy of critical inquiry, it is that we must examine how the *felt* experience of un/belonging came to infiltrate discursive and institutional debates over national inclusion.

This is the work *The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging* undertakes, seeking to understand how feelings and narrativity work together to elucidate the everyday work of un/belonging. Quite specifically, I look at an archive of popular, regularly taught literatures of Asian and Latin Caribbean US diasporas, in order to examine the ways in which writers of fiction are theorizing belonging. I concentrate on authors who have spent the majority of their writing careers fictionalizing the subject of migration, re-imagining past lives in previous homelands, and teasing out the complexities of ethnic, diasporic, and postcolonial identification. I bring together Jhumpa Lahiri's *Interpreter of Maladies* and Junot Diaz's *Drown*, pairing the early work of these

popular authors with the less famous Nora Okja Keller and Lan Cao, whose novels, *Comfort Woman* and *Monkey Bridge*, respectively, regularly appear on the U.S. multicultural literary canon. I interrogate Kiran Desai's highly praised novel, *The Inheritance of Loss*, alongside Cristina Garcia's similarly acclaimed early work, *Dreaming in Cuban*, juxtaposing these well-received fictions with lesser-known works by Julia Alvarez and Achy Obejas. Bringing together this array of post-Cold War immigrant fiction allows for an exploration of how the emotional work of migration iterates various political engagements as it is translated into narrative, rather than experiential, forms. Paying close attention to the ways in which post-Cold War stories of migration challenge normative scripts and affective structures through revisions of literary form, this dissertation illuminates a theory of emotional narrativity embedded in these cultural texts; a theory that relies on exposing power as it manifests in colonial, imperial, and nationalist forms.

By examining the ways in which fiction writers are revising discourses of belonging in the Post-Cold War era of neoliberalism, global capitalism, and social media through the production of narrative forms and techniques reliant on exposing, if not expressing, the emotional work of belonging, this dissertation illustrates the political importance of the fictive. For it is the emotional grammars that these writers compose that teach us to imagine the way our feelings of un/belonging can affect the power dynamics that all too often feel impenetrable. As the rest of this project will show, this requires a comparative analytic that does not shy away from difference, but instead explores how different histories of colonialism, imperialism, militarism, and capitalism, when put in conversation with each other, illustrate how empire-states like the United

States rely on differentiation to leave accumulated power unquestioned. For ultimately, given the power undocumented migrants' narratives have had in reforming the U.S. immigration system, we must wonder: what can emotional management, when translated into narrative form, do for the world?

The Politics of Production and the Polemics of Consumption: Stories of Migration in the U.S. Imaginary

Immigrant fiction has a long and controversial history in the United States. Regularly tasked to cohere stories about settler-colonialism, Western expansion, European immigration, and non-white immigration,¹⁰ even when not pushed to its most extreme uses, 'immigrant fiction' is often used as marketing ploy, a way to color literature as American no matter the content. Compared to descriptors like diasporic fiction, postcolonial fiction, and even transnational fiction, immigrant fiction remains tightly wrapped around nationalist ideals of belonging in the United States – that anyone, from anywhere, can come to the country, and, with hard work, become American, with all of its social and economic privileges.

This relationship between nationalist notions of belonging and immigrant stories grew into dominance during the late 19th and early 20th centuries when assimilation became the dominant scientific approach to migration. During this time, the United States was managing its rules of inclusion given its newly conquered territories in the Pacific

¹⁰ See *Ethnic Passages: Literary Immigrants in Twentieth-Century America*, *Growing up Ethnic in America: Contemporary Fiction about Learning to be American*, *Crossing into America: the New Literature of Immigration*, *New Strangers in Paradise: The Immigrant Experience and Contemporary American Fiction*, *The Immigrant Experience in North American Literature: Carving out a Niche*, and *Becoming Americans: Four Centuries of Immigrant Writing*

and Caribbean after the Spanish-American War¹¹ as well as all claimed under manifest destiny during the 19th centuries and a new population of enfranchised African Americans. With the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo making many indigenous peoples of Mexican descent American citizens and the *Insular Cases* allowing legal differential treatment of citizens in incorporated and unincorporated states like Hawai'i and Puerto Rico, citizenship was used to construct racial hierarchies in newly acquired US territories and colonies.¹² In this way, immigration legislation and juridical decisions around national belonging provided additional rules around legality that, as Mae Ngai writes, attempted to produce “a racial logic capable of circumventing the imperative of equality established by the Fourteenth Amendment” (*Impossible Subjects* 8).

The role of state power and racial difference in immigrant experiences, however, was curiously absent from studies of assimilation. This was driven in large part by sociologists of the Chicago School who conducted studies in race and urbanity that produced the empirical evidence that undergirded what we now call the ‘classical assimilation model.’¹³ Though this theory had dissenters, assimilation dominated sociological studies, accumulating more explanatory intricacies¹⁴ and finding empirical and theoretical analogues in migration and demographic studies¹⁵ throughout the twentieth century. So, too, did assimilation become *the* lens for reading immigrant

¹¹ Puerto Rico, Guam, the Philippines were ‘awarded’ the United states, while Cuba was granted independence from Spain, and the US took control of Hawai'i.

¹² For more on incorporated and unincorporated states see *States of White Supremacy*.

¹³ According to this model, assimilation was a linear process, a progressive narrative of development towards a final subject formation: American

¹⁴ See Milton Gordons' *Assimilation in American life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (1964).

¹⁵ Migration studies as a field, developed models for migration based on economic assumptions of an individual, rational migrant actor (a ‘general’ person, with an assumed white race, male gender, and heterosexuality). For more on this see *Worlds in Motion* and Bloemraad et. all's “Citizenship and Immigration: Multiculturalism, Assimilation, and Challenges to the Nation-State.”

narratives, whether the fiction of Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yeziarska, and Sui Sin Far or the memoirs and sociological studies of immigrant writers such as Mary Antin and Jacob Riis. These texts were recognized and popularized for the linear story of transformation they provided: details of destitute, old-world minded migrants and liberated and financially independent Americans, realist aesthetics, univocal narration, and a singular subject focus and their plots structured around the Old World/New World conflict.¹⁶

Though the dominance of the immigrant Bildungsroman form splintered as realism was overtaken by modernist aesthetics during the interwar period of the twentieth century, assimilation's stronghold on immigrant narratives did not dwindle. That is, until, social movements like the civil rights movement, the feminist movement, third world liberation front, queer rights movement, and importantly, the rise of ethnic studies departments in the academy made room for major critiques. Suddenly, the American dream was called out as a myth. Quite quickly the American Dream and its discursive partner, assimilation, were described as normative scripts, discourses of belonging that disciplined subjects into the United States' capitalist meritocratic myth of upward mobility.

Immigrant cultural production quickly became entangled in critiques of the nation-state. This is unsurprising, however, if we consider, as Mai Ngai writes in *Impossible Subjects*, that the "telos of immigrant settlement, assimilation, and citizenship...has been an enduring narrative of American history...in large part from the labor that it perform[ed] for American exceptionalism" (5). Instead of continuing this

¹⁶ Boelhower writes that literatures of immigration to the U.S. share these features: "an immigrant protagonist(s), representing an ethnic world view, comes to America with great expectations, and through a series of trials is led to reconsider them in terms of his final status." (4-5).

process, many scholars turned to immigrant cultural production and immigration legislation to mount critiques of the state apparatus itself. This led to, or at least was paramount to, a dramatic shift in studies of migration that understood the United States as an empire, rather than nation-state.¹⁷ As Moon-Kie Jung argues, reconceptualizing the United States as an empire-state allows for full recognition of how “racial domination and inequalities are not anomalies, betrayals, relics, or contradictions to be overcome by an ever more perfect nation-state but the basic building blocks and products of a modern empire-state” (934). Of crucial importance to Jung in reconceptualizing the United States as empire state, is its potential to interrogate white supremacy as a “web of crisscrossing discursive and practical ties” that allows for a “comparative and relational approach” to racial subjugation that “can provide a fuller, more complicated understanding of anti-Black as well as other racisms...” (935-6).

Addressing race when discussing immigration became central to dislodging immigrant cultural production from the reconciliatory category of “immigrant fiction”. This was of particular importance given the power of the immigrant analogy: an approach to studying migration that equated experiences of white, European immigrants to that of non-white, non-European immigrants.¹⁸ This flattening, or deracination, of immigrant

¹⁷ This was also part of a larger turn in American studies towards the transnational as exhibited by texts such as Donald Pease’s *National Identities and Postnational Narratives* and Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease’s edited collection, *Cultures of United States Imperialism*. Though this approach to colonialism, empire, and transnationalism was new for many Americanists, as the work of Caribbeanists such as Stuart Hall have long made clear, empire is central to an understanding of the Americas.

¹⁸ In his text, *Still the Big News: Racial Oppression in America*, Blauner addresses this immigrant analogy and suggests a new dichotomy for thinking about race and migration in the United States: the colonized minority and the immigrant minority. Arguably, another problematic division, Blauner’s 2001 book illustrates the strength of immigrant analogy in studies of race, migration, and belonging in the United States.

experiences,¹⁹ obscures what Lisa Lowe, in her book *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, calls the “[m]odern hierarchies of race” that “emerged in the contradiction between liberal aspirations to universality and the needs of modern colonial regimes to manage work, reproduction, and the social organization of the colonized” (36). In her earlier work, *Immigrant Acts*, Lowe elucidates how this contradiction between “capital and state imperatives” could be seen clearly when looking at racialized immigrant labor in the US, particularly migrants from Asia, Mexico, and Latin America (*II* 12). Rather than “legislate the improvement of labor conditions,” Lowe continues, “the U.S. economy systematically produces jobs that only third world workers find attractive” which subsequently produces a “dehumanize[d]” subset of “migrant workers” that exists in contradiction to the liberal democratic ethos of the United States (*II* 21).

As scholars wrestled the immigrant narrative from its American exceptionalist strangleholds, the question of culture and its role in the complicated matrix of power historians, sociologists, and cultural theorists laid out became of utmost importance. Most literary and cultural studies scholars took to heart Lisa Lowe’s contention in *Immigrant Acts* that “the cultural productions emerging out of the contradictions of immigrant marginality,” are in a crucial position to “disrupt the myth of national identity by revealing its gaps and fissures” (8). Immigrant cultural production is, in the words of Lowe, “an alternative cultural site,” a “place where the contradictions of immigrant history are read, performed, and critiqued” rather than resolved, cultural forms that refuse to resolve the state’s contradictions, instead “permit[ting] us to imagine what we still have yet to live” (x). The potential for culture to be a site of rupture and resistance,

¹⁹ For more on the deracination of the immigrant analogy see Moon-Kie Jung’s “The Racial Unconscious of Assimilation Theory.”

perhaps, even a space for utopian imaginings, was powerful. Not only did it allow scholars to address the oppressive conditions of racialization and im/migration, but it also permitted scholars to make a case for culture *as* political participant. The possibility was contagious, and, as Inderpal Grewal notes, by the mid-1990s, “immigration and immigrant writers, in particular” became “crucial locations” “used to both challenge and to recuperate forms of nationalisms, citizenship, and politics of the nation-state, as well as the disciplinary technologies of transnational capital” (Grewal 46).

Central to these critiques were questions about content and form – Did the piece formally reify migration as a linear, developmental process of Americanization? Were artists addressing issues of power, particularly global capitalism and racism? Perhaps unintentionally, these debates entrapped inquiries of narrative form and immigrant cultural production within a scholarly binary: were texts reifying and reproducing normative, nationalist scripts of the happily assimilating immigrant or were they contesting such plotlines, utilizing non-normative narrative structures to describe actual, multifarious processes of identification, subjectification, and national belonging? This question quickly became politicized, a metric of radicalness based, in large part, on archive of study.²⁰

The result of this, as one could imagine, was a hesitance towards cultural artifacts that were popular or normative in their content, form, and characterizations. Arguably, at

²⁰ As Bakirathi Mani notes in *Aspiring to Home*, the use of immigrant cultural production to produce critiques of the state, capitalism, and racism, perhaps unknowingly prompted a scholarly “turn away from popular narratives of multiculturalism,” which perpetuated a “reliance on ‘good’ and ‘bad’ subjects of immigration” where good subjects of study were cultural practices and cultural productions that were alternative to or in opposition to normative immigrant storylines and identificatory practices (13). And it was in this way, Mani explains, that the “binary logic” of immigrant cultural production “generate[d] a teleological narrative of progressive politics within which minority subjects resist assimilation to the United States” (13-4). For more on this see Viet Thanh Nyugen’s *Race and Resistance*.

the heart of this scholarly turn was an attempt to critique immigrant fiction as a genre with immense power to shape our understandings of the world *through* an understanding of genre as, what John Frow calls, a set of “stylistic devices” (2). However, this notion of genre is limited. For as Frow clarifies, genres are “form[s] of symbolic action” that “actively shap[e] the way we understand the world” (2). Importantly, as Frow notes, though genres “create effects of reality and truth, authority and plausibility,” genres are not “fixed” or “stable” (Frow 2). In fact, as Frow argues, texts “even the simplest and most formulaic...do not ‘belong’ to genres but are, rather, uses of them” (2). This is precisely why, Frow contends, “genre matters,” for genres are “central to human meaning-making and to the social struggle over meanings” (10). The flow of power, then, in Frow’s conceptualization of genre, moves in both directions.

In this way, we can see how critical uptakes of texts categorized as immigrant fiction are, in fact, critiques of US immigrant fiction *as a genre*. Though this might seem quite obvious, acknowledging this makes room for analyses of immigrant fiction that might be less interested in the text’s “stylistic devices,” its characters, form, or themes, or its representation of nationalism, capitalism, and racial formation. For though I agree with scholars who make strong arguments for cultural production as a site of resistance, we must also acknowledge that resistance takes different shapes for different people. And genres like “immigrant fiction,” as performative, unstable, and exceptionally powerful discursive entities, offer an opportunity to understand how power is negotiated by those most affected by it. In this regard, I’m reminded of undocumented activists. Their production of the Dreamer narrative, a genre in and of itself, was in the opinion of many, reactionary; narrative acts that inflicted great harm to other undocumented peoples. And

yet those narratives led to new narratives, stories that were more inclusive, yes, but were indebted to the emotional work of navigating social structures that make it difficult for any racialized, non-citizen to feel as if they have the option to resist the nation state.

Contradictory or not, states have power, and that power effects individuals differently.

Scholars such as Bakirathi Mani, Meredith Gadsby, and José Muñoz have taken up these complex, messy, and contradictory processes in their projects *Aspiring to Home*, *Sucking Salt*, and *Disidentifications*, respectively. In these projects, it is the everyday negotiation and management of dominant structures, ideologies, and discourses that is of interest, even if they find form through normative devices or themes. Take Muñoz's articulation of disidentification. Citing the work of Michel Pêcheux and Judith Butler, Muñoz describes disidentification as a "third mode of dealing with dominant ideology, one that neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly oppos[e] it" (11). This third option, one that does not "buckl[e] under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempt[t] to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism)" works "on and against dominant ideology," a strategy, Munoz notes, that "tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance" (11-12). Identificatory and artistic practices like disidentification take into consideration, knowingly or not, how texts (or identities for that matter) do not, as Frow writes, "'belong' to genres but are, rather, uses of them" that can disrupt dominant social meaning from within (10).²¹

²¹ The idea of disidentification is similar to that of Melamed's race radicalism, articulated in *Represent and Destroy*.

Projects like Muñoz's approach minority cultural production, performance, and identification as a complex and messy project, a process that never ends, never reaches a final state of resistance or a stable subject formation. These projects hold space for such complexities and heterogeneous negotiations of power, whether it be nationalist, filial, capitalist, or any other formulation, by investigating how cultural production illuminates what I call the *work of belonging*. Belonging is a complicated matter, particularly when one seeks to belong to what Lauren Berlant calls "the normal world, the world as it appears" (*Female Complaint* 9). Though such desires might very well be quite normative, as Berlant and Sara Ahmed have shown,²² normative desires often exhibit contradictions and confusions that unearth both the hegemonic forces that make such interests desired as well as the psychic and interpersonal work that goes into maintaining such normative attachments. This is because, as Berlant notes, attachments to normativity are "social relation[s]," "a scene of negotiated sustenance that makes life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently" (14).²³

Understanding these scenes of negotiation, the work of attachment, whether normative in shape or not, is precisely what this project aims to do, taking up moments of ambivalence or incoherence or anxiety and seeking to understand how such feelings relate to dominant structures, institutions, and discourses of power. To do so, I focus on national belonging *not* as an endpoint or final subject position, but rather, a continual process that entails the management and negotiation of different emotional and psychic

²² Particularly in Ahmed's *The Promise of Happiness* and Berlant's *The Female Complaint* and *Cruel Optimism*.

²³ Sociologist and historian, Moon-Kie Jung, also suggests that we turn to national belonging in "The Racial Unconscious of Assimilation Theory" in order to adequately address race, domination, and inequality in the US.

attachments to national, communal, familial, and individual rules of inclusion. By investigating the work of belonging, we can see the oppressive power of the structures that scholars have so carefully pointed out in the everyday. In this way, an analysis of belonging, alongside the careful historical and socio-economic and political work of scholars that critiqued ‘immigrant fiction’ and all that came with it, continues this critique, but comes from a different perspective. By examining the work of un/belonging in popular Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic fiction of the 1990s and 2000s, we see how these authors were theorizing contemporary US racial politics through language, literature, and form.

Language, Poetics, and Form: Feminist Practices and Emotional Politics

Investigating the everyday work of belonging in narratives of migration requires an attunement to emotion, and the work it requires both to be felt and to be translated into the language of fiction. Though there has been a growth in theories and studies of affect over the past twenty years, analyses of what I call emotion work – what Sara Ahmed calls “the regulation of desire” and what Lauren Berlant calls “affect management styles”—have not necessarily dominated affect studies (37; 20).²⁴ The ability to manage one’s emotions is related to cognition. As Silvan Tompkins explains, the cognitive aspect of

²⁴ Studies of feeling have grown in the past twenty years as feminist and queer theories of the body and emotions transformed into an academic field of its own right: affect studies. Though studies of affect –and its linguistic cousins, feeling and emotion – have a long history (from Aristotle to Spinoza to Sedgwick), affect has not been pinned down: Some see affect as the ineffable, inarticulable sensorial experiences of our bodies; others differentiate affective systems from drive systems, complicating the innate-ness of affect, and opening up pathways for an exploration of affect that incorporates, though does not necessitate, the cognitive capacities of the human brain. In this project, I use affect, feeling, and emotion to discuss the cognitive aspects of the senses. When I use these terms, I am describing the sensorial, though more often psychic, sensations of socially agreed upon feelings (anger, shame, happiness, etc.) that individuals are or can become cognizant of and manage according to social expectations.

affect “includes an examination of all incoming information for its relevance to a particular affect” as well as “a set of strategies for coping with a variety” of affects (21).²⁵ Thus we not only feel our attachments and desires and bodily sensations, but we examine them and manage them according to our social worlds.

This emotional work – of feeling, examining one’s feelings, and then managing one’s feelings according to social norms and normative affective expectations—is central to Arlie Russel Hochschild’s early work on emotion. Before she became known for her exploration of affect in the service economy in *The Managed Heart*, she was carefully explaining what emotions and feelings were. In her 1979 article “Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure,” Hochschild argues for emotional management by explicating how social rules are imperial.²⁶

As Hochschild explains emotion work, she identifies emotion management as a site for political engagement, writing:

One can defy an ideological stance not simply by maintaining an alternative frame on a situation but by *maintaining an alternative set of feeling rights and obligations*. One can defy an ideological stance by *inappropriate affect* and by *refusing to perform the emotion management necessary to feel what, according to the official frame, it would seem fitting to feel* (567; italics added).

²⁵ Silvan Tomkins is a mid-twentieth century psychologist whose theories of affect have been influential to queer studies on shame thanks to Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s interest in his work in *Shame and Its Sisters*.

²⁶ Hochschild develops this concept of emotion management and work in her book *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. In this text, Hochschild defines emotional labor as “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” that is “sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*.” (7). Hochschild distinguishes emotional labor from *emotion work* or *emotion management* because she sees the latter two terms as referents for the “same acts done in a private context where they have *use value*” (7).

Hochschild argues that affect and emotion management are sites that can affect ruptures to ideology. She proposes two methods of defying an ideological stance: turning inward to identify dominant ideologies and then ‘maintaining an alternative set of *feeling rights* and *obligations*’; and turning outward, performing ‘inappropriate affect’ as a ‘refusa[1] to perform the emotion management necessary to feel what’ the ‘official frame’ suggests you should.²⁷

Charisse Jones and Kumea Shorter-Gooden’s 2003 study *Shifting: The Double Lives of Black Women in America* identifies this work in their study of African American women and name it *shifting*. Jones and Shorter-Gooden’s research “shows that in response to...relentless oppression, Black women in our country have had to perfect” shifting, “a sort of subterfuge that African Americans have long practiced to ensure their survival in our society” (6). Shifting refers to “all the ways African American women respond to and cope with racial and gender stereotypes, bias, and mistreatment” which often result in adjustments in speech, bodily comportment, dress, beauty routines, and “the way [African American women] think or feel,” as well as, at times, producing an urge to fight against racial and gender discrimination (7; 61-2). According to Jones and Shorter-Gooden, the work of shifting is undertaken both to adapt—to ease African American women’s pursuits of “opportunities in the mainstream”—and to survive oppressive, quotidian conditions (63).

Jones and Shorter-Gooden’s study illustrates the work of living in a world that sees you as Other. Though they do not restrict their study to the affective and emotional

²⁷ Sara Ahmed calls the outward, often performative act of ‘inappropriate affect’ the work of the killjoy—the person who expresses inappropriate affect in objection to the official frames and imperial social codes Hochschild describes.

dimensions of their participants' shifting, their work makes clear how we can learn about oppressive structures by examining how people manage them, either through what Jones and Shorter-Gooden call shifting or by examining what Hochschild calls emotion work. For as both studies make clear, the *work* of managing dominant narratives of belonging, particularly when they do not address the structural and quotidian disadvantages faced by racial, gender, and sexual minorities in the US, is, in fact, quite political. *The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging* brings this analytic into its reading of popular Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic fiction marketed and taught as US Immigrant Fiction; mining each text for the emotional work of belonging and, in doing so, extricating a theory of emotional narrativity that illuminates a politics of form rendered through emotional vernaculars.

The relationship between emotional work and narrative work has not been deeply analyzed in either narrative or affect studies which is a bit surprising given what each field has to say about the other.²⁸ Though there has been work from a cognitive-science oriented approach to affect and narrative,²⁹ cultural studies uptakes of affect, emotion, and feeling have not found harmony with narrative studies for the simple reason that affect – as it has been theoretically construed – is, in many ways, antithetical to language itself. Configurations of affect as pre-verbal have contributed to this scholarly divide. That being said, scholars like Ahmed and Berlant have worked to broach this divide.

²⁸ Narrative theorists understand narrative to be a primary feature of human cognition—a tactic for understanding our selves in the world. As Roland Barthes notes in his formative essay on narrative, “An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,” narrative is present “at all times, in all places, in all societies” (237). David Herman contends that what Barthes is arguing in his essay is that “stories are cognitive as well as textual in nature, structures of mind as well as constellations of verbal, cinematic, pictorial, or other signs produced and interpreted within particular communicate settings” (8). More than this, Herman argues that narrative “is a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change,” an “essential part of our mental lives” (1-2; 9).

²⁹ See Patrick Hogan’s “Affective Narratology: The Emotional Structure of Stories.”

Ahmed argues that “narrative” can be thought of as “a form of affective conversion,” a site where change wrought on by emotional work can be found (45). Berlant looks to genre, arguing that it is “an aesthetic structure,” a form “of affective expectation...with porous boundaries” that allow for “complex audience identifications” (45; 4).³⁰

That is to say, studies have been limited in certain circles. For women of color feminists, particularly black and queer feminists, have done much work articulating the relationship between feelings and poetics. In Audre Lorde’s essay “Poetry is Not a Luxury” published in *Sister Outsider*, Lorde explains how poetry, for women and black women in particular, is “carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives” that become central to survival and possible change” (37). Much like Hochschild’s concept of emotion work and Shorten-Gooden and Jones’ shifting, Lorde explains that as women “learn to bear the intimacy of scrutiny, and to flourish within it,” they “learn to use the products of that scrutiny for power within [their] living,” and “those fears which rule [their] lives and form [their] silences begin to lose their control” (36). Importantly this happens through the work of writing. For as Lorde writes, “[w]e can train ourselves to respect our feelings, and to discipline (transpose) them into a language that matches those feelings so they can be shared” (37). And it is poetry, Lorde contends, that “coins the language to express and charter this revolutionary demand, the implementation of that freedom” (38).

Contemporary female immigrant writers of color share Lorde’s interest in the feeling-poetics relation, producing yet another potentiality for examining narratives of migration vis-à-vis emotion work. As Paule Marshall, author of *Brown Girl, Brownstones*

³⁰ For more works on affect and expression see Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*, Eve Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich’s *An Archive of Feelings*, Jeffrey Santa Ana’s *Racial Feelings*, Sianne Ngai’s *Ugly Feelings*, Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward*, and Sara Ahmed’s *The Promise of Happiness*.

(1959), writes in the introduction to *Merle: A Novella and Other Stories*, she “grew up among poets... They were just a group of ordinary housewives and mothers” who met in “the basement kitchen of the brownstone house where my family lived” and talked and talked, “endlessly, passionately, poetically, and with impressive range” (4). Describing these women as “the female counterpart of Ralph Ellison’s invisible man,” for as Marshall notes, “they suffered a triple invisibility, being black, female and foreigners,” these women “fought back using the only weapon at their command: the spoken word” (7). It is these women, Marshall explains, that “taught [her] [her] first lessons in the narrative art. They trained [her] ear. They set a standard of excellence” attesting to “the rich legacy of language and culture they so freely passed on... in the workshop of the kitchen” (11-2)

These kitchen poets are who Edwidge Danticat calls upon in the epilogue of her short story collection, *Krik, Krak*. “Kitchen poets,” the narrator explains, “slip phrases into their stew and wrap meaning around their port before frying it” (219-220). So too, are these the women to whom Julia Alvarez attributes her narrative voice in her essay “Of Maids and Other Muses” from her collection of essays *Something to Declare*. After arriving in New York City and being transformed from upper-class white(ish) Dominicans to “Latinos,” members of “the American servant class” who “spoke English with an accent,” it was the voices of these women that Alvarez heard (160). It was the “voice of a woman, sitting in her kitchen, gossiping with a friend over a cup of coffee. It was the voice of Gladys singing her sad boleros, Belkis putting color on my face with tales of her escapades, Tití naming the orchids, Ada telling me love stories as we made

the beds” (160-1). Though Alvarez had “never seen voices like these in print,” it was these voices that allowed her to produce fiction in her own voice (161).

Marshall, Danticat, and Alvarez’s descriptions of kitchen poets not only illustrate precisely what Lorde writes about in “Poetry is Not a Luxury” but their descriptions call forth the work published in *This Bridge Called My Back*, the steady stream of testimonios produced to fight for recognition and change and cultivated as crucial narrative form in Latinx communities, and the importance of orality in indigenous literatures in the US, reminding us that the connection between feelings, poetics, and power has a long and robust history, albeit non-European, non-white, and not-male. *The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging* joins in these feminist, queer, and minoritarian projects by resuscitating formal literary analysis from its structuralist strongholds, directing our attention to the ways contemporary authors of Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic fiction use emotion as narrative technique for troubling or highlighting or contesting the uneven power relations born of empire, capitalism, and liberal modernity.

Comparative Methodologies: Race, Empire, and Cross-Racial Alliances

In addition to exposing a theory of emotional narrativity in popular Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic fiction of the 1990s and 2000s, this project also embarks on a comparative practice that seeks to expose the complex, hierarchical racial formations that allow nationalism and capitalism to flourish regardless of the great violences they inflict. This begins by looking at popular fiction marketed and taught as US immigrant fiction published in the post-cold War era. During the 1990s and 2000s, work of U.S.-based writers such as Jhumpa Lahiri, Junot Díaz, Cristina Garcia, Julia Alvarez, Lan Cao, Kiran

Desai, Nora Okja Keller, Chang Rae-Lee, Jessica Hagedorn and less well-known authors such as Achy Obejas, Karen Tei Yamashita, and Loida Maritza Pérez, garnered attention of writers and scholars alike who worked to articulate the particularity of this new cohort of ethnic US writers. For example, author Bharati Mukherjee called this assemblage of immigrant writing the “Literature of New Arrival,” differentiating post 1980 immigrant cultural production from what we might now consider to be the vanguard of post-war U.S. ethnic and immigrant literatures: the work of Oscar Hijuelos, Paule Marshall, Maxine Hong Kingston, Teresa Hak Kyung Cha, Carlos Bulosan, and John Okada (683).

Though Mukherjee’s teleologically-temporal categorical name hovers awfully close to immigrant analogies that erased race and state power from studies of assimilation, she is right in differentiating this cadre of writers from the post-1965 generation. As Min Hyung Song points out in *The Children of 1965*, U.S. immigrant writers of the post-1980 era debated whether their work should be “read as aesthetic objects” or ethnic literatures; a question of literary categorization that questions the applicability of the latter category for literatures that may not be as interested in what Song calls the “racially based political project that began as a politicoeconomic critique and aspirations for alternative social formations” (4-5). Just as many writers of this era were approaching the question of racial difference in new ways, so, too, did questions of national belonging get upended as global capitalism and the growth of digital technologies rerouted the movement of belonging, dislodging it from the nation-state. As Inderpal Grewal notes, out of these conditions grew various “mediat[ions]”, “material[izations]”, “articulations”, and “transl[at]ions” of nationalist discourses that emerged with the rise of “ethnic and multicultural version[s]” of belonging (Grewal 6-7).

The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging takes up these texts, looking to them as theorizers of contemporary racial politics during a time of emerging technologies, growing globalization, and ever-violent racializations and nationalisms. I focus, specifically, on Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic fiction, pairing texts based on the ‘type’ of migrant or migratory experience being narrated – think labor migrants, exiles, refugees, and transnational families. The popularity of these texts is deeply tied to the histories of these diasporic communities in the United States; histories of imperialism, militarism, and liberalism. On the ground in countries throughout Asia, most notably Korea and Vietnam, the United States also provided military personnel and weaponry throughout South Asia, especially Pakistan and Afghanistan. The United States regularly occupied the Dominican Republic, first from 1916-1924 and then from 1965 until 1966, to maintain its capitalist interests and promote democratic governance while quieting any socialist tendencies from another neighbor of the South, Cuba, of the United States most formidable Cold War foes.

When the Cold War ended the United States turned to immigration legislation to manage its racial hierarchy vis a vis a need to maintain an ethos as democratic safe haven for communist-fleeing migrants *and* leading power in global capitalism.³¹ The Hart-Celler

³¹ Besides the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act of 1975 and the 1982 Amerasian Immigration Act and 1980 Refugee Act, The Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 was the first federally legislated immigration policy to be passed in over twenty years. The law focused on undocumented migration, making undocumented migrants illegal to hire as it offered amnesty to undocumented migrants living in the United States. This was followed by the 1990 Immigration Act, which increased total immigration limits and increased visa limits by 40 percent and then the 1991 Armed Forces Immigration Adjustment Act. Then came the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which ‘reformed’ the system used to detain and deport undocumented migrants and refugees. The 2000s saw an increase in surveillance immigration legislation, illuminating the shift from discipline to control societies (see *Affective Turn*) with the rise of biometrics with the passing of the 2001 USA Patriot Act, the 2004 Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, the 2005 Real ID Act, and the 2006 Secure Fence Act.

Act, in particular, aided the US in its official-antiracist agenda, opening up migration from non-European regions of the world, and aiding in the growth of Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic and transnational communities becoming the new face of America.³² Because of the United States' involvement in Korea, Vietnam, the Dominican Republic, and Cuba, immigration laws were carefully written to protect the migratory routes from these nations while prohibiting political refugees from other Latin American and Caribbean countries – most notably Mexico and Haiti. This management of US militarism occurred at the same time the United States ushered in labor migration from South Asia through the preference system of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act; a migratory pattern that illuminated the triangulated relationship between the United States, the British empire, and post-colonial states in the subcontinent that were part of complex investments in development in the subcontinent and throughout the global South.³³

Though there had always been migration from Asia, and especially the Latin Caribbean, migrants from these regions received an increase in public attention during the waning of the Cold War, when their presence in the states became newly politicized due to their integration into the U.S. economy and the events of September 11th, 2001. Migrants from Southeast Asia and South Asia were quickly lumped into the Asian American model minority – a category spawned from the 1960s that discursively pit racial minorities against each other based on the meritocratic, capitalist logics of U.S. democracy. Migrants from the Latin Caribbean fared quite differently. Because many of

³² See cover story of TIME Magazine's November 1993 issue entitled "The New Face of America: How Immigrants Are Shaping the World's First Multicultural Society."

³³ As international institutions like IMF have successfully 'liberalized' the markets of the subcontinent, over the past twenty years, India has quickly become a major economic interlocutor with the United States. India, and other nations of the subcontinent, serve as key examples of how national legislation around labor migration is deeply entrenched in capitalist imperialism and development projects throughout the global south. For more see Asha Nadkarni's chapter in *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*.

these migrants spoke Spanish, the American public clumped these migrants with the Latina/o and Chicana/o population – ethnic groups that faced discrimination based on negative stereotypes about their work ethic, intellect, and proclivity towards criminality. However, following the events of September 11th, 2001, South Asians faced violent discrimination – a misreading of their brown bodies as not merely ‘foreign’ but terrorist.

By centering the cultural production of these diasporic communities, then *The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging* highlights the different imperial and capitalist histories that routed migrants from these regions to the United States in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. Exploring the ways the United States’ triangulated the post-colonial relationship between Britain and parts of South Asia through its imperialist capitalist ‘outsourcing’ and skill-based visa hierarchies allows for a complex analysis of labor migration between the United States and the formerly colonized global South.³⁴ Interrogating the various imperial, often militarized occupations in Southeast Asia and the Latin Caribbean calls into question the growth in U.S. refugee legislation, most commonly instated through Presidential executive order.³⁵ In this way comparing these literatures complicates the United States’ categorization of economic and political migrants, teasing out the relationship between U.S. immigration law and its empire practices while exposing the variegated racialized reasoning behind

³⁴ See *Sun Never Sets*.

³⁵ President Kennedy’s executive action that initiated programs for Cuban refugees came the executive orders of Ford and Carter during 1975-9 regarding Vietnamese refugees, then Carter’s 1980 executive action that addressed Cuban and Haitian refugees and the Mariel boatlift, then Reagan’s 1987 action in regards to Nicaraguan refugees, then Reagan’s 1987 executive order that legalized undocumented migrants’ statuses as it made undocumented migrant labor illegal; then, came Bush’s 1989 executive order to help Chinese nationals after Tiananmen Square, followed by Bush’s 1990 executive order that extended Regan’s work on ‘family fairness’ to include spouses and unmarried children of people legalized from the 1986 act; this was followed by both Bush and Clinton’s executive actions in 1992-3 in response to Salvadoran refugees, followed by Clinton’s 1997 executive order addressing Haitian refugees.

U.S. legislative and military action; calling into question what constitutes the ‘political’ in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 era. Thus in turning to what critical race scholars have called America’s ‘racial middle’,³⁶ each dissertation chapter compares Asian and Latin Caribbean stories of migration in order to expose the relationship between race, migration, and empire.

Chapter Summaries

Each chapter of this dissertation will analyze different emotional narrative techniques plotted in post-Cold War immigrant fiction, concomitantly connecting these narrative choices to the emotional work of migration – work that spans generations just as it structures our daily decision-making. Analyzing the affective experiences of immigration, focusing on the emotional work undertaken to produce shareable narratives, will show us what individual emotional management can produce

In the first chapter, I compare the experience of US labor migration as narrated in Jhumpa Lahiri’s “The Third and Final Continent,” a short story about a high-skilled professional from Calcutta, and Junot Díaz’s “Negocios,” a short story about an undocumented worker from the Dominican Republic. I examine how moments of emotional ambivalence disrupt linear, assimilationist narratives of migration by exposing how the immigration and state-building policies of the 1970s, 80s and 90s provide access to the American Dream to the South Asian migrant, but not to his Dominican counterpart. By teasing out a theory of emotional narrative vernaculars, this chapter illustrates the feminist analytic employed throughout the dissertation.

³⁶ See Eileen O’Brien’s *The Racial Middle: Latinos and Asian Americans living beyond the racial divide*

Chapter 2 examines Nora Okja Keller's *Comfort Woman* and Julia Alvarez's *In the Name of Salomé*, arguing that both novels utilize the genre conventions of historical fiction to narrate the complex psychic attachments that emerge through violent revolutions and war. Quite specifically, I compare the feelings of disembodiment seen in *Comfort Woman* to physical manifestations of anxiety seen in *In the Name of Salomé*, illustrating how these sensory experiences expose the racialized and gendered violences of colonialism and imperialism, illustrating how history is felt.

Chapter 3 reads Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*, a story of Vietnamese refugees, with Achy Obejas' novel *Days of Awe*, a story about Cuban refugees, opening up considerations of how the US positioned migrants fleeing Communist regimes into its racialized and gendered discourses of belonging. This chapter examines Cao and Obejas' similar use of narrative products—notes and letters—that transfer hidden memories to each of the protagonist daughters; narrative acts that lead each daughter to a more comprehensive history of their positionalities in the US.

Chapter four considers how Cristina Garcia and Kiran Desai use literary forms to reworld notions of globalization and transnationality through the work of relations. To do so, I compare how Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* and Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* use the family saga as a narrative structure that allows the affective psychodynamics of trauma and racialization to emerge across generations, political divides, and class and caste.

The project ends with a rumination on the poetic entanglements of language, memory, the body, and feeling seen in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*. Addressing the relationship between Rankine's use of emotional vernaculars to narrate

experiences of anti-black racism to the emotional grammars developed in popular Post-Cold War immigrant fiction, end this project centering blackness. In this way, I both challenge the anti-black racism that upholds theories of US assimilation, while illuminating how emotional labor can become grounds for anti-racist and anti-colonial political action.

CHAPTER 2

LABOR MIGRATION, EMOTION WORK, AND THE POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE IN JHUMPA LAHIRI'S "THE THIRD AND FINAL CONTINENT" AND JUNOT DÍAZ'S "NEGOCIOS"

In 2013, following the publication of her third book, *The Lowland*, Jhumpa Lahiri was interviewed in *The New York Times*. The interviewer covers the basics, asking Lahiri about her recent reads and writers she admires. Quite quickly, Lahiri's interlocutor centralizes Lahiri's migration experience, questioning her about the role immigrant fiction played in her writing process. Lahiri's answer is evasive, as if stepping around the assumption that her family's history of migration deeply shapes her aesthetic sensibilities: "I don't know what to make of the term 'immigrant fiction,'" she explains. "If certain books are to be termed immigrant fiction, what do we call the rest? Native fiction? Puritan fiction? This distinction doesn't agree with me. Given the history of the United States, all American fiction could be classified as immigrant fiction" ("Jhumpa Lahiri: By the Book"). In this moment, pressed to relate her writing to her migrant subjectivity, Lahiri dodges the question. The result is a problematic equation where slavery, indentured labor, settler colonialism, indigeneity, family reunification, and labor migration are all congealed through the use of a national ideological epithet of equality: American is a nation of immigrants.

Jhumpa Lahiri's 2013 interview is more difficult to digest when placed in dialogue with comments made by her contemporary, Junot Díaz. Only one year earlier, in

2012, Díaz was interviewed in *The Atlantic* about his newest collection of short stories, *This is How You Lose Her*. Much like Lahiri, Díaz is questioned about how features of his life influence his writing. Unlike Lahiri, however, Díaz's identity enters the dialogue through accolade – his interlocutor is impressed with Díaz's female narrative voice in “Otravida, Otravez”, a departure from his usual male-narrated fiction. In response to the congratulations, Díaz notes that women regularly write from perspectives not their own – an interesting iteration of patriarchal expectations for women to attend to men. Seemingly perplexed by Díaz's feminist retort, Díaz is asked if “literary ‘talent’ doesn't inoculate a writer...from making gross, false misjudgments.” But according to Díaz, “unless you are actively, consciously working against the gravitational pull of the culture, you will predictably, thematically, create these sort of fucked-up representations. Without fail” (Fasler). For Díaz identity politics and the power systems that shape our lives are inseparable from cultural production.³⁷

The distinct tenors of Jhumpa Lahiri and Junot Díaz's interviews are unsurprising for those that have followed their illustrious careers. Lahiri and Díaz gained mainstream attention in the late 1990s with the publication of their debut short story collections, *Interpreter of Maladies* (1999) and *Drown* (1996), respectively. Both collections were praised for their artistic ingenuity: Lahiri's plots “as elegantly constructed as a fine proof in mathematics” (footnote interview in New York Times Book Review), Díaz for his searing narrative voice and striking structural recursivity.³⁸ Though the artistic prowess of

³⁷ As he told Diogenes Cespedes and Silvio Torres-Saillant during a 2000 interview in *Callaloo*, “I have an agenda to write politics without letting the reader think it is political. That's my game plan for every story” (901).

³⁸ Their successes continued to accrue as both authors published additional work. In 2000, *Interpreter of Maladies* won the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction and the Hemingway Foundation/PEN Award a year after it was published. And with the publication of *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Díaz, too, joined the club of Pulitzer Prize winners for fiction.

both authors is undeniable, both short story collections offered publishers something even greater than perfectly woven stories and critical considerations of masculinity. Both *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Drown* provided (fictionalized) insight into two growing immigrant communities in the post-1965 United States, South Asians and Dominicans. Thus, in the 1990s and early 2000s when *Drown* and *Interpreter of Maladies* were published and gaining traction in the literary world, both collections were quickly taken up as texts that could make sense of the changing racial demographics and racial discourses of the late twentieth century *while offering* readers the opportunity to safely understand and consume racial difference.³⁹

Notably, as literary and cultural critics got their hands on Lahiri and Díaz's work, they were overwhelmingly more suspicious of Lahiri's writing, regularly addressing how Lahiri's rendering of migration in *Interpreter of Maladies* did not challenge the genre conventions of US immigrant narratives as well as Díaz's fragmented collection, a near composite novel. Moreover, scholars were wary that Lahiri's stories about comfortably integrated migrants perpetuated the neoliberal multiculturalist vision of the United States as a place of freedom and opportunity for all.⁴⁰ Though Díaz's work also narrated the

³⁹ This is not uncommon for texts written by and about racialized minorities in the US. As Jodi Melamed notes in *Represent and Destroy*, literary studies, as a field and as a market, regularly utilizes literatures by racialized minorities to perpetuate the US as an officially anti-racist state.³⁹ In the late 1990s and early 2000s, when *Drown* and *Interpreter of Maladies* were published and gaining popularity, both texts became caught in a shifting mode of official US antiracisms: from the liberal multiculturalism of the 1980s and 1990s to the neoliberal multiculturalism that came to define the 2000s. According to Melamed, liberal multiculturalism's focus on assimilation (regardless of racialization as a limiting material structure) transformed into a neoliberal form of multiculturalism whereby certain individual migrants could be valued over others. In this era, logics of national belonging were shaped by governments and economic institutions' ability to "protect" and thus give worth and belonging to "those who [were] valuable to capital, whether formally citizens or not" and making "vulnerable those who are not valuable within circuits of capital, whether formally citizens or not" (Add melamed page).

⁴⁰Jodi Melamed explains the particularities of neoliberal multiculturalism in *Represent and Destroy*, contending that in order to "respon[d] to the reconfiguration of state powers and boundaries under global capitalism," neoliberal multiculturalism "portra[ys] the United States as an ostensibly multicultural

complexities of interpersonal relationships, his incorporation of historical background in his fiction and his articulation of white supremacy throughout the Americas began to separate his work from that of Jhumpa Lahiri.

In many ways, this schism between the critical reception of Lahiri and Díaz's work reflected a trend in US ethnic literary and cultural studies scholarship that emerged in the 1990s. As Inderpal Grewal notes, during this period, scholars of US immigrant cultural production focused intently on whether or not representations of migration resisted or "recuperate[d]" "forms of nationalism, citizenship...[the] politics of the nation-state...[and] the disciplinary technologies of capital" (Grewal 46). *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Drown* were published amidst these hyper-bifurcated debates over the politics of representation. And because both collections were positioned by publishers and readers alike as texts illustrative of a multicultural anti-racist United States, the stakes were quite high for criticism to address both the particularities of the writing itself and the politics of both collections' popular representations. Though scholars have confronted and worked to move beyond this dyad approach to ethnic US literatures about migration,⁴¹ Lahiri and Díaz's 2012 and 2014 public comments remind us that this binary still holds weight today.

This chapter re-considers the seemingly oppositional approaches of Lahiri and Díaz by reading their early work *together*, taking note of similar narrative techniques utilized to produce alternative narratives of migration within assimilationist driven stories

democracy and the model for the entire world" as it suggests that "neoliberal restructuring across the globe" is the "key to a postracist world of freedom and opportunity" (xxi).

⁴¹ See Kandice Chuh's *Imagine Otherwise*, Inderpal Grewal's *Transnational America*, Lisa Lowe's "Heterogeneity, Hybridity, Multiplicity," Stuart Hall's "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Bakirathi Mani's *Aspiring to Home*, and Meredith Gadsby's *Sucking Salt*.

that seemingly fulfill traditional modern liberal ideals of freedom and progress. Taking up the final stories in each of their first collections, “The Third and Final Continent” from Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies* and “Negocios” from Díaz’s *Drown*, I investigate how both stories about male labor migrants contain alternative narratives of diasporic dis/identification within linear plotlines by narrating the emotional work of belonging. By taking note of ambivalence, both as a felt experience *and* as a narrative disruption, I illustrate how both Lahiri and Díaz critique US immigrant fiction for its assimilationist tenors by disrupting the literary form through emotionally evocative narrative moments. By doing so, both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” address how US power, state-building practices in both India and the Dominican Republic, and capitalist development across the Caribbean and Indian subcontinent in the latter half of the 20th century was formative in structuring the different migratory experiences represented in both short stories. In this way, both Lahiri and Díaz utilize emotion not merely as a technique to add to the realist nature of their fiction, but instead as a political narrative technique that disrupts nationalist plotlines, exhumes the role of US power and state-building development projects in pitting racial minorities against each other, and makes room for alternative feminist and diasporic narratives of migration to emerge.

Emotion as Trace: Assimilation, Modern Liberalism, and the Politics of Affective Disruption

In 1996 Junot Díaz published his first collection of short stories, *Drown*. Made up of ten stories, *Drown* dives deeply into the intimate life-worlds of its characters, moving between life in the Dominican Republic, New York, and New Jersey. Díaz sutures these

stories together through a shared narrative voice, suggesting that in each story he is returning to the same characters, constructing a recursive look into the interpersonal and psychic lives of one family shaped by Dominican labor migration to the US. Narrated predominately in first-person, *Drown* takes full advantage of a sense of autobiographical veracity to make palpable the internal struggles of the characters as they reconcile lives touched by toxic masculinity, poverty, and racism. Three years later, Jhumpa Lahiri published her first collection of stories, *Interpreter of Maladies*. Made up of nine stories, the collection is told primarily through third person subjective point of view, detailing the lives of Bengali and Indian migrants at the precise moment when what they desire comes into conflict with a changing political landscape, communal expectations, or the feelings of those they thought they would build their life with. The collection moves cleanly in and out of 9 different lives – some in the US, others in the South Asian subcontinent – building narrative resolutions out of the heart wrenching truth that life isn't neat or contained.

Both *Drown* and *Interpreter of Maladies* focus on the complicated and messy life-worlds of their im/migrant and diasporic characters by centralizing the intimate, banal, and quotidian details of their characters' lives: broken marriages, infidelities, physical and emotional estrangement, secret keeping, exasperating loneliness, childhood adventures, and the comforts of tastes, sounds, and smells. Interestingly, both collections end with stories that diverge from the narrative technique used in other stories: "Negocios" is told in third person and "The Third and Final Continent" is narrated through a first-person point of view. In addition to their different uses of narrative voice, both stories describe the lives of male migrants, men who move to the US with the idea

of finding work and escaping familial expectations. In both tales, the American Dream is ever-present, both within the fictional world – as goal, as desire – and as narrative structure for plotlines that follow a traditional, linear progressive plot development.

Though “Negocios” and “The Third and Final Continent” share characteristics in terms of characterization, theme, and form, they tell vastly different stories. “The Third and Final Continent” narrates the migration story of an unnamed protagonist who leaves his home in Calcutta in 1964 “with a certificate in commerce and the equivalent, in those days, of ten dollars” for London (174). Four years later, in 1969, the narrator-protagonist is offered a full-time job in the US, and with his 6th preference green card, he travels, yet again, to Cambridge, Massachusetts where he works in the library at MIT. After taking about “a week” to adjust to life in the US, the rest of the story retells the protagonist’s search for an apartment, his time living with Mrs. Croft, his centenarian landlord, and the experience of his wife, Mala, coming to live with him (175). By the end of the story, the protagonist and his wife have become US citizens, and their son, a child who cannot speak Bengali and does not eat with his hands, is a student at Harvard University –the American Dream of a better life being confirmed through the next generation’s matriculation at a premier institution of higher education.

If the protagonist in “The Third and Final Continent” is continually content, the protagonist of “Negocios,” Ramón de las Casas, stands in stark contrast: Ramón is regularly regulating his feelings of anger and disillusionment, often through the numbing effects of alcohol, as his life constantly contradicts the promises of the American Dream. Unlike the protagonist in “The Third and Final Continent,” Ramón leaves the Dominican Republic without a job offer in hand. Without a secure mode of entry into the US,

Ramón's life in the US becomes guided by the ebb and flow of luck, in his case, mostly bad: Ramón is swindled by his fellow Latino migrants while trying to live and work in Miami, which prompts his decision to head to New York, a trip he logs mostly "on foot" (174). Once in New York, Ramón's life is haunted by his low-wage work and his expired visa. Though he saves enough money to "start looking for a wife to marry," he is cheated out the \$1000 he paid for the contact with the potential wife—a loss that leads to Ramón being fired from his job after he punches the friend who set up the deal while on the clock. Though his luck briefly changes at a laundromat when he meets a woman, Nilda, a Dominican-American who he courts and eventually marries, Ramón's life continues to be affected by "pronounced" racism at work and the aftereffects of a life of quite literal backbreaking work (194). Once Ramón hurts his back at work, his dreams of making it big in New York dissolve. He finds work as a super for a new apartment complex in New Jersey, leaves his American wife and children, and moves to the apartment complex where he plans to bring his family from the DR.

When we compare both protagonists, it appears that when read together "The Third and Final Continent" and "Negocios" illustrate what sociologists Portes and Zhou have termed segmented assimilation.⁴² The protagonist of "The Third and Final Continent," with his son who no longer eats with his hands or speaks Bengali at Harvard, illustrates what sociologists Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou call "growing acculturation and parallel integration into the white middleclass" whereas Ramón with his life of quite literal back breaking work in "Negocios" is illustrative of "permanent poverty and

⁴² As Moon-Kie Jung summarizes in "The Racial Unconscious of Assimilation Theory," segmented assimilation suggest that second generation immigrants have three distinct forms of integration: the first, is acculturation and integration into the white middleclass, the second is poverty and assimilation into the underclass, and the third is maintenance of ethnic identity and economic success (379).

assimilation into the underclass (1993, p. 82)” (“Racial Unconscious” 379). And these contrasts appear most starkly when we compare the endings of each short story: the successfully and happily assimilated protagonist-US citizen of “The Third and Final Continent” versus the disillusioned Ramón, citizen through marriage, who is perpetually struggling against the swift current of poverty and racism. That is to say, these stories are most oppositional when we read each story as culminating in a final endpoint – a narrative resolution as a final subject position.

This kind of reading relies heavily on discourses of assimilation, particularly as a narrative form of what Lisa Lowe calls modern liberalism. In her most recent monograph, *The Intimacies of Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe focuses on what she terms an “‘archive of liberalism’ – that is, the literary, cultural, and political philosophical narratives of progress and individual freedom that perform the important work of mediating and resolving liberalism’s contradictions” (4).⁴³ Importantly, as Lowe notes, though processes of differentiation have regularly been obscured through narratives of liberalism as inclusion and freedom, they leave traces, often in race and racialization, which becomes “an enduring remainder of the processes through which the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the peoples who created the conditions of possibility for that freedom are assimilated or forgotten” (6-7). These traces not only emerge in analyses of racial formations, but also in readings of literary and cultural genres that, as Lowe notes, “emerged alongside liberal economics and political philosophy” and were tasked with

⁴³ According to Lowe, the main contradiction of modern liberalism is rooted in how the human was defined and universalized based on “attributes” of the “European man,” a task that “differentiated populations in the colonies as less than human,” *as it* articulated dictates of equality and inclusion (*Intimacies* 6). Thus, as Lowe continues, “[e]ven as [modern liberalism] proposes inclusivity...in the very claim to define humanity...[modern liberalism]’s gestures of definition divide the human and the nonhuman, to classify the normative and pathologize deviance” (6).

“the important work of mediating and resolving liberalism’s contradictions” (*Intimacies* 46). Though Lowe focuses on the autobiography and novel, particularly the slave narrative, so, too, can we see how narratives of immigration, particularly those structured through assimilationist plotlines like “Negocios” and “The Third and Final Continent” are tasked with the work of alleviating the contradictions of modern liberalism in the United States.

However, a careful analysis of both stories illuminates that they do not deliver simple narrative resolutions. At best, they produce the *effect* of narrative closure through inventive narrative techniques such as Lahiri’s metonymic signification and Díaz’s vacillation between first and third person narration. In this way, a reading of “Negocios” and “The Third and Final Continent” as oppositional reifies assimilationist, and thus modern liberal, reading practices. And more simply, this kind of reading ignores what makes these stories, and their respective collections so captivating – an exceptionally detailed focus on the everyday lives of diasporic characters and a resistance to closure.

In both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” it is the daily, even hourly, details of the psychic and emotional lives of the protagonists that produce narrative momentum. Quite specifically, in both stories narrative tension is derived from moments when the protagonist must work to manage their conflicted sense of duty. In these moments of ambivalence – narrative pauses where each protagonist cannot perfectly perform their affective duty to the American Dream’s promise of happiness – both Lahiri and Díaz narrate what Susan Koshy calls the “affective labor of *diasporic maintenance* that undergirds the manifest economic success and discernible achievements of *diasporic making*” (352). This is because moments of emotion work trigger each

protagonist to consider their past, producing a connection to the India and the Dominican Republic respectively, that inhibits a full severing of ties.

In this way, emotion acts as narrative trace, one that disrupts the linearity of both stories, and, by doing so, subsequently challenges modern liberal assimilationist readings of the story. For though the protagonists of both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” appear like *affective* opposites, perfectly packaged iterations of the best and worst-case scenarios of migration, they are both negotiating, and often suppressing, the emotional conflicts that emerge when their duty to the American Dream conflicts with obligations to their families. Importantly, these narrative disruptions not only occur through characters’ felt experiences but are also rendered formally. For in the moments where emotional work takes over both storylines of “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios,” so too does the linear narrative of migration falter. This occurs in two substantial ways: in emotionally ambivalent moments that are narratively adhered to historical referents that exhume the role of US power and capitalism in shaping both protagonists’ lives; and again, through ruptures in narrative point of view that temper the dominance of the singular, male narrative perspective of each protagonist. By disrupting the linear narratives that leave no room for the families left behind, both authors embed a particular kind of political intervention in their short stories. This is an emotionally rendered politics, one that, as Susan Koshy argues, is “harbored in the simplicity and restraint” of narrative technique (355).

In what follows I approach these different narrative resolutions, and the racial politics encoded within them, with an attention to how both Lahiri and Díaz embed the emotional work of belonging into their fiction by adhering sensorial and experiential

details of migration to historical referents, unearthing the role of US power and global capitalism as they bear witness to the constructed nature of traditional narratives of US labor migration. In this way, I move away from readings of each story as narratives that resolve when the protagonists find a stable subjectivity, instead investigating the moments of each story where the certainty of characters' 'selves', and the certainty of their stories, wavers. To do so, I focus on ambivalence, both as an *affective* experience felt by both protagonists, and also a *narrative* dimension, an uncertainty regarding the reliability of our narrators and the certainty of their conclusive life stories. Reading these narratives as stories of emotional management, rather than unwavering attachment to the American Dream, opens up their political resonances. Ultimately, I argue that the vastly different tenors of US racial politics that sound through Lahiri and Díaz's fiction are shaped just as much by state policy and global capitalism as they are by authorial intent. For when read relationally, the role of US power and capitalism, particularly its codification of racialized hierarchies into officially anti-racist legislation, comes to light.

Emotional Work and State Power in “The Interpreter of Maladies” and “Drown”

When *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Drown* were published in the late 1990s, they presented mainstream readers with a kaleidoscopic fictional mediation of two major waves of migration to the United States following the passing of the 1965 Hart-Celler Act: primarily high-skilled South Asians (primarily from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan) and droves of middle-class Dominicans who, after the assassination of Raphael Trujillo in 1961 made their way to Puerto Rico, Miami, and New York. The Hart-Celler Act (also known as the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act) abolished quotas based on

nationality, instating a new seven-preference system that created a tiered visa system based on the skillset of the migrant and family reunification.⁴⁴ Following the passage of the legislation, the United States saw a dramatic increase in non-Northern European migrants, and it utilized its seven-preference system to both regulate and import the types of migrants that could fulfill the labor sector's needs, make amends for military interventions abroad, offer sanctuary for refugees of communism, and bring families separated by migration together again.

Both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Drown” situate their protagonists within this changing migratory landscape at the start of each tale. The first sentence of “The Third and Final Continent” provides immediate contextual placement: “I left India in 1964,” our protagonist explains, “with a certificate in commerce and the equivalent, in those days, of ten dollars to my name” (173). Aboard the “*SS Roma*, an Italian cargo vessel, in a third-class cabin next to the ship’s engine,” the protagonist travels “across the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, the Mediterranean, and finally to England” (173). Once there, the protagonist “attend[s] lectures at LSE and work[s] at the university library to get by” (173). He lives with other Bengali bachelors, “three or four to a room,” where they create their own diasporic landscape of “egg curry” and “Mukhesh” “watch[ing] cricket at Lord’s” and “drinking tea and smoking Rothmans” (173; 174). In 1969, the same year he turned thirty-six and had his “own marriage...arranged,” the protagonist was “offered a full-time job in America, in the processing department of a library at MIT,” where his

⁴⁴ This preference system, was modified in 1990, created a higher preference for relatives (within a strict heteropatriarchal conception of family) of American citizens and permanent residents (slot 1 and 2 for unmarried adult children of US citizens and spouse and children and unmarried children of permanent residents) than applicants with special job skills (third position was workers with exceptional skillsets, while slot 6 was for skilled and unskilled workers where there was a need for laborers). This legislation was the first time the Western Hemisphere was included in the quota system.

salary would be “generous enough to support a wife” and provided him with a “sixth-preference green card” (174). As Bakirathi Mani notes in her reading of “The Third and Final Continent,” the protagonist of the story is curiously absent from momentous historical events, though he clearly lived in the UK during a period of growing white supremacist anti-immigration sentiment in the UK that led to Enoch Powell’s “Rivers of Blood” speech in 1968 and arrived in the United States amidst the Civil Rights Movement.

Unlike the highly educated and financially stable protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent” who finds his way to the United States via London, the protagonist of “Negocios” leaves the Dominican Republic with less security. “My father, Ramón de las Casas, left Santo Domingo just before my fourth birthday,” the narrator explains:

Papi had been planning to leave for months, hustling and borrowing from his friends, from anyone he could put the bite on. In the end it was just plain luck that got his visa processed when it did. The last of his luck on the Island, considering that Mami had recently discovered he was keeping with an overweight puta he had met while breaking up a fight on her street in Los Millonitos (163).

Ramón’s life before America is one of chance and luck. He has no sixth-preference visa and financially secure job. Instead, he prepares for America by saving up as much money as he can, however he can, and hoping to get a visa that will take him away from the filial dramas caused by his infidelities. We later learn that most of Ramón’s savings came from his wife, Virta, ’s father with the promise that it will be used to bring his family to the United States.⁴⁵ Tied up in his responsibilities to his wife and children, Ramón’s exodus

⁴⁵ “I want a good life for them,” Ramón insists (164).

from the Dominican Republic is, from the outset of the story, tied to a heteropatriarchal family unit. The protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent,” is less concerned with his familial situation. For although he mentions his marriage early in his narrative it is a small detail, one lodged in a curiously subordinating set of clausal structures, that quickly marks his opportunities to work at a “world-famous university” in Boston as more important than his time in “Calcutta, to attend [his] wedding” (174).

At the heart of these differences lies documentation, or more precisely, the way each male migrant is categorized by the US state. Ramón is granted a visa by luck (not skillset), one we later learn expires, leading us to believe it was a visitor’s visa. The protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent,” on the other hand, has a sixth-preference visa, allotted to individuals whose skillsets fulfill the needs of specific US employers, in his case, the library of MIT. In both cases, the men’s mobility is also influenced by state-building practices of their home countries. In the case of the protagonist in “The Third and Final Continent,” his 6th preference green card is explained through a description of his time attending lectures at the London School of Economics after leaving Calcutta with “a certificate in commerce.” Thus, it is the certificate, one accrued in India, that begins the journey of “The Third and Final Continent,” a clear nod to the state-building practices of Jawaharlal Nehru.

After independence, Nehru focused extensively on building a state through education, particularly in technical fields and the sciences. When these workers decided to migrate out of the country, going to the US, rather than Britain who had begun restricting immigration from former colonies precisely when the US abolished quotas, India quickly responded to the capital flooding its economy (often through remittances)

by, as Susan Koshy notes, producing “non-resident” categories that could “confer special economic benefits in areas of foreign exchange, investment in finance, real estate, and visa-free entry” (Koshy *Transnational South Asians: The Making of a Neo-Diaspora* 17).⁴⁶ In this way, the protagonist’s sixth-preference green card signals a particular kind of value, one accrued to him by both the US and Indian state who created structures to allow easier access for individuals like the protagonist to gain access to mobility and state recognition.

Ramón’s experiences similarly reflect structural apparatuses that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century. Prior to the 1960s, the Dominican Republic did not send a significant number of migrants to the US.⁴⁷ However, once Trujillo was no longer in power, there was a dramatic surge in outmigration, primarily to Puerto Rico, Miami, and New York where many migrants could find work “industrial centers...that sought cheap, unskilled labor” (*Dominican Migration: Transnational Perspectives* 13-4). This migration was driven by political unrest on the island, which combined with state-building practices that could not maintain a middle class and US investment (both monetary and military) drew Dominicans to the United States. By the 1980s and 1990s, as the Dominican Republic faced major economic difficulties that led to un- and

⁴⁶ As Vijay Prashad writes in *The Karma of Brown Folk*, when Jawaharlal Nehru became prime minister of India, he focused extensively on building “a free and self-reliant India’...that would go beyond its gains in theoretical physics and move toward technology for the masses” (75). As such, the “nascent state” worked “to extend the number of technical institutions and to create a culture of science in the country,” and these “technical workers, trained by the good graces of the socialistic Indian state, decided to travel overseas for work” (76). This outmigration was spurred by US immigration policies that not only opened up visas for non-Northern European migrants, but also created an entirely new category of labor migrant to which these skilled technical workers could utilize (Prashad 77). This happened at the precise time that Britain, who had once greatly relied on laborers from its colonies to fill its labor shortages following World War II laborers, was “tighten[ing] its immigration provisions” so many migrants who had gone to Britain went to the United States (Prashad 77).

⁴⁷ Raphael Trujillo had strict restrictive policies on outmigration, and before his regime took power in 1930, the Dominican Republic was historically an importer of labor, primarily from Haiti and Jamaica.

underemployment, an increase in the cost of living, and “near-collapse in basic public services such as electricity, running water, housing, health care, and education,” emigration to the United States became a “survival strategy for the lower and middle classes” (Duany 58; 24).⁴⁸ In opposition to professional labor migrants from South Asia, Dominican migrants like Ramón specialized in the “service, trade, and manufacturing industries” (Duany 68). As the Dominican diaspora grew in the US, with predominantly male migrants finding work in New York and Miami, so too, did family reunification become a growing method of outmigration. This notably included an influx of non-immigrant visas, some of which would be overstayed, as we see with Ramón in “Negocios.”

At the outset of both stories, then, it is state-building practices and global capitalist needs for both high-and-low-skilled laborers that determine the starting point from which both protagonists can proceed once in the United States. The space between these different entry points only grows as each protagonist faces vastly different allowances and expectations as their bodies and skillsets are racialized and valued in the United States. These geopolitics emerge, notably, when both narratives describe the non-filial interpersonal relationships with US citizens both protagonists manage while making a life in the US. For the protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent,” this means connecting with his centenarian landlord, an old woman who only houses “boys from Harvard or Tech” – a qualification his sixth preference green card permits. And for Ramón, it means consulting, and regularly disagreeing, with his Puerto Rican-American

⁴⁸ The Dominican Republic promoted such transnational familial networks in the 1990s when along with Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Mexico, the country amended its constitution to allow for dual citizenship (Duany 24).

friend, Jo-Jo, eventually following the lead of his fellow-unionized coworker, Chuito. Within these moments of emotional work – where the dominant affects of each story falter – the relationship between geopolitics of migration and domestic racialization is exposed.

The first time an ambivalent affect emerges in “The Third and Final Continent” occurs the first time Mrs. Croft requests the protagonist respond to her surprise at the lunar landing with the word ‘splendid’. The first exchange of ‘splendids’ occurs when the protagonist sets out to meet his potential landlord. Interestingly, it is the heat of the day he interviewed for his apartment that allows for the narrator to address some sense of racial difference: “In spite of the heat,” he recalls, “I wore a coat and a tie, regarding the event as I would any other interview; I had never lived in the home of a person who was not Indian” (177). The semi-colon stands out, suggesting that the protagonist’s social capital, his knowledge that proper garb will add to his qualifications as a tenant, includes a knowledge of his racial difference in the US. Though some readings, like Bakirathi Mani’s, overlook the pause of the semi-colon, arguing instead that the protagonist’s experiences “acquir[e] a normative value,” we cannot ignore the fact that the protagonist is acutely aware of his racial difference (37).

When he enters the home for his interview he meets his potential landlord, an elderly woman who interrupts their conversation to announce that “[t]here is an American flag on the moon” (179). Confused by her statement, the protagonist does not know how to react, opting to remain silent. In response to his silence, Mrs. Croft requires that he agree with her; this feat is, as she puts it, “splendid” (179). The command punctures the narrator:

I was both baffled and somewhat insulted by the request. It reminded me of the way I was taught multiplication tables as a child, repeating after the master, sitting cross-legged, without shoes or pencils, on the floor of my one-room Tollygunge school. It also reminded me of my wedding, when I had repeated endless Sanskrit verses after the priest, verses I barely understood, which joined me to my wife” (179-80).

As the protagonist is faced with the task of managing his emotions to impress his interviewer, he feels a strange mixture of surprise and discomfort. The expectation held by his landlady that silence is an impermissible reaction to the fact that man was on the moon becomes adhered to moments in the protagonist’s life when other powerful figures in his life required affective performances he felt no connection with. This brief rumination about required emotional work illustrates how affect is ruled by what Arlie Hochschild has called imperial social codes, emotional expectations that shape one’s daily interactions particularly with more powerful figures like a teacher, a priest, or, in this case, a landlady (Hochschild 566).

It cannot go unnoticed that this moment of felt ambivalence centers around the United States’ moon landing, an effect, as we know from Vijay Prashad’s *The Karma of Brown Folk*, of the United States’ intent to bolster its technology industries in order to hold its own in the Cold War (72-77). This advancement that Mrs. Croft finds so ‘splendid,’ is historically and materially linked to the fact that she is speaking with the protagonist, a man who came to the United States because of the newly restructured immigration legislation of the Hart-Cellar Act. For Mani, this obsession with the moon landing, and its recurrence as the only conversation Mrs. Croft and the protagonist share,

obfuscates the intersections between domestic racialization and US imperialism. For the fact that the protagonist arrives in Boston on the same day that the first American men land on the moon continues to subjugate his diasporic experiences to the story of US global power.

Importantly, it is only a few moments of ambivalence, for almost immediately the protagonist provides the necessary reply to appease Mrs. Croft. And he continues to provide the response of ‘splendid’ every night for the entirety of his stay at Mrs. Croft’s house. Though his feelings of ambivalence erupt precisely in the narrative moment where his racial difference, or at the very least his Indian-ness, is acknowledged, the connection between US racialization and imperialism quickly dissolves as the protagonist suppresses his discomfort and performs according to the expectations of his landlord. Importantly, his ability to live with Mrs. Croft does not rely on these affective expectations – for as Mrs. Croft constantly reminds him, she is much more interested in his employment or matriculation at MIT or Harvard. In this way, the state’s selection of the protagonist has already provided him with the advantage needed for a more private living situation. Nevertheless, the protagonist feels the need to perform his affective duties to Mrs. Croft every night. In this way, we can see how the suppression of ambivalence – as a sign of the model minority immigrant racial formation in the US – is, as Vijay Prashad argues, the “result of *state* selection” that situated many professional South Asian migrants into the upper-rungs of the economy (3).

Unlike his model minority counterpart, Ramón faces racial and class discrimination throughout his time in the US—plot details that expose the historical and materialist differentiations made by the US between high-skilled and low-skilled laborers

in the post-1965 era through Ramón's feelings of anger and letdown. As the narrator of "Negocios" explains, Ramón regularly "drank too much and went home to his room, and there he'd fume, spinning, angry at the stupidity that had brought him to this freezing hell of a country, angry that a man his age had to masturbate when he had a wife, and angry at the blinkered existence his jobs and the city imposed on him" (179). Rather than address his feelings of loneliness by, perhaps, bringing his family to the US, Ramón interprets his feelings as confirmation that he "wasn't ready to start bringing his family over" (179).

This conflict erupts most dramatically when Ramón tries to communicate his dilemma to his friend, Jo-Jo, a man he met once he moved in with his US wife, Nilda. Jo-Jo was a "five-foot-tall Puerto Rican whose light skin was stippled with moles and whose blue eyes were the color of larimar" (189). He owned his own business and the "local kids left him alone" and "instead terrorized a Pakistani family down the street" leaving the "Asian grocery store" looking "like a holding cell, windows behind steel mesh, door reinforced with steel plates" (189-90). Jo-Jo's light skin and blue eyes, his success as a business owner, and the upper-hand he has on his Pakistani business owners illustrates how he has overcome the stereotypes of the inassimilable Latinx migrant. He has achieved an entrepreneurial version of the American Dream, one, in the context of "Negocios" that disrupts the extent to which South Asians, such as the Pakistani grocery store owner, can be called "model" minorities. Jo-Jo represents a classic tale of assimilation: if one works consistently, one will be successful no matter what skills they bring to the market.

According to Jo-Jo, a man who had "already rehabilitated two of his siblings, who were on their way to owning their own stores," Ramón needs to bring his family to the

US (190). To do so, Jo-Jo offers to help Ramón start a little business of his own, proposing that he “sell [him] one of [his] hot dog carts cheap” (190). But Ramón would not have it. Though he “wanted a *negocio* of his own,” Ramón

balked at starting at the bottom, selling hot dogs. While most of the men around him were two-times broke, he had seen a few, fresh off the boat, shake the water from their backs and jump right into the lowest branches of the American establishment. That leap was what he envisioned for himself, not some slow upward crawl through the mud. What would it be and when it would come, he did not know (190-1).

Ramón’s deep attachment to normative and unrealistic narratives of upward mobility limits his imagination, and ultimately, misaligns him with Jo-Jo, a man who could help him in material ways. And this is because Jo-Jo preaches “loyalty to familia,” an ideology Ramón is deeply “troubled” by (191). For Ramón “had difficulty separating the two threads of his friend’s beliefs, that of *negocios* and that of *familia*,” though as the narrator notes, “the two became impossibly intertwined” in Ramón’s life; a life deeply shaped by a two-pronged US immigration system based in family reunification and labor skills (191).

Much like Mrs. Croft symbolizing US power in “The Third and Final Continent,” Jo-Jo symbolizes the assimilated Latino migrant, and as such, is the strongest illustration of US power in the story. Unlike the protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent” who acquiesces to the imperial social codes of landlord and tenant, Ramón rejects Jo-Jo’s help with starting a business and his advice regarding his family. It isn’t until Ramón’s friend Chuito, a fellow unionized worker at Reynolds Aluminum tells him about an opportunity

to become a superintendent, that Ramón considers bringing his family to the US. And this detail is not insignificant, for it is his experience working at Reynolds Aluminum that solidifies Ramón's complicated and fraught entwinement of family and work.

Though Ramón has a unionized job where “the money and the benefits were exceptional,” it was also the “first time he had moved outside the umbra of his fellow immigrants” and “the racism was pronounced” (195). “The whites were always dumping their bad shifts on him and on his friend Chuito,” and when Chuito complained about the behavior to the bosses, he was “written up for detracting *from the familial spirit of the department*” (italics added; 195). Here, family becomes euphemism for white supremacy, a racial superiority that infiltrates a union to consolidate power for white workers at the expense of their racialized co-workers. Much like the splendid of “The Third and Final Continent,” family gains metonymic signification throughout “Negocios” as Ramón works to negotiate his conflicts about both work and family. And so, too, does the tension between work and family not only lead to the narration of emotional work undertaken by Ramón, but also illuminates how state systems, like legislation such as the Hart-Celler Act, shape Ramón's life. For although on the surface the Hart-Celler Act abolished racial quotas, fulfilling the egalitarian ethos of a state furiously fighting Cold War alternatives to capitalist-democracy, the legislation re-codified racial capitalisms' ability to profit off of differentiation – hierarchizing individuals through a seven-preference tiered system that valued employers' needs over employee's skills while normalizing a heteropatriarchal vision of family.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ As Lisa Lowe notes in the *Intimacies of Four Continents* this contemporary legislative act is illustrative of a long practice of negotiating the inherent contradictions embedded in modern liberalism.

In this way, US immigration legislation is part of what Lisa Lowe calls a larger “architecture of differently functioning offices and departments” of “the imperial state,” methods of “knowing and administering colonized populations, which both attest to its contradictions, and yielded its critique” (*Intimacies* 4). When Ramón comes to realize that attachments to both family and work are laced with disappointment and discrimination, he decides to follow the lead of Chuito and take up work as a superintendent for a new housing development; a decision that prompts him to leave Nilda and their son in order to bring over his family from the Dominican Republic, resolving the dilemma that had plagued him since he left Santo Domingo.

In both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” it is emotion work that undoes the narrative of American exceptionalism bubbling under both protagonists’ attachment to better lives in the US. Without any overt explication of the racial politics of US legislation or (post-colonial) state-building practices in both India and the Dominican Republic, both stories are able to exhume the entanglements of US immigration policies and global capitalism. And they do so by narrating the quotidian negotiations of emotion, work that arises when immigrants come into direct contact with power through interpersonal relationships. For when both protagonists drift from their dominant affects of anger or content, when they work through feelings, regularly suppressing what they actually feel in order to keep on keeping on, so to speak, it is then that these stories articulate a similar note on US power. Importantly, the note is not necessarily critical—at least not in the way much criticism of the nation-state, US power, empire, and global capitalism takes form. Instead, it is simply aware, making present what so often goes unnoticed. Or, put differently, elucidating how complex systems and institutions of

power, like legislation and hierarchies of labor, are the structures to which everyday people must negotiate. In this way, through a similar focus on emotional ambivalence, both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” illustrate how US power is founded on differentiating migrants often based on race, as part of colonial and imperial practices. Thus, “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” *when read together* expose what Lisa Lowe has called “modern hierarchies of race” and “modern colonial regimes” that are needed “to manage work, reproduction, and the social organization of the colonized” under the guise of “liberal philosoph[y]” (*Intimacies* 36). For when placed, side by side, Ramón and the protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent” illustrate the myth of liberalism, one that works to obscure the fact that Ramón never had the chance the protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent” had.

Unreliable Narrators and Diasporic Identities

In addition to the disruptions created through the narration of emotional ambivalence, both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” break their diegetic frames, and thus their assimilation-driven plotlines, through elements that put into question the reliability of their narrators. These moments of *narrative* ambivalence interrupt the linearity of both stories – through flashback and metonymy in the case of “The Third and Final Continent” and first-person narration in “Negocios.” In both cases these disruptions produce an alternative narrative of diasporic identification – stories that are not invested in American theories of assimilation or national belonging, but instead, focus on the relationships each character has with family members that share their national origins.

This alternative narrative begins to pause the forward momentum of the protagonist's happy migration in "The Third and Final Continent" when Mrs. Croft's daughter comes to the house to attend to her mother. The narrator is surprised by this visitor, a woman whose care work both informs him of the age of his landlord (she is 103) and reminds him of the filial obligation to care for one's parents in their old age. When the narrator meets this visitor, he ignores her introductory microaggression ("Are you new to Boston," she asks him) when at the mention of Mrs. Croft's widowhood he falls into a long rumination about his life in India:

That this person was a widow who lived alone mortified me further still. It was widowhood that had driven my own mother insane. My father, who worked as a clerk at the General Post Office of Calcutta, died of encephalitis when I was sixteen. My mother refused to adjust to life without him; instead she sank deeper into a world of darkness from which neither I, nor my brother, nor concerned relatives, nor psychiatric clinics on Rashbihari Avenue could save her. What pained me most was to see her so unguarded, to hear her burp after meals or expel gas in front of company without the slightest embarrassment. After my father's death my brother abandoned his schooling and began to work in the jute mill he would eventually manage, in order to keep the household running. And so it was my job to sit by my mother's feet and study for my exams as she counted and recounted the bracelets on her arm as if they were the beads of an abacus. We tried to keep an eye on her. Once she had wandered half naked to the tram depot before we were able to bring her inside again (187-8).

In this flashback we receive more information about the protagonist's migration story. It is his father's death and brother's agreement to fill his father's position as jute mill owner that allows the narrator to leave India. However, it is his mother's suffering, her inability to manage her grief, that has traumatized him into a life of independence and emotional vacuity. This matrilineal connection is what the protagonist has severed in order to make his way in the US, and it is this connection between his mother's grief and the care work undertaken by Mrs. Croft's daughter that emerges through this moment of narrative ambivalence.

The protagonist's avoidance of caring for others overtakes the happy narrative once again, when word comes that his wife's green card has been processed. When the protagonist gets a letter from Mala in the mail, it's as if his singular world is opened up – he sees a woman walking whose sari gets caught up on a walk and realizes “[s]uch a mishap... would soon be my concern. It was my duty to take care of Mala, to welcome her and protect her. I would have to buy her her first pair of snow boots, her first winter coat. I would have to tell her which streets to avoid, which way the traffic came, tell her to wear her sari so that the free end did not drag on the footpath.” (190). And the protagonist is annoyed by this duty. No longer by himself, he would have to help Mala, a woman who, based on her brief messages, seemed unable to handle a “five-mile separation from her parents” let alone a life in the US (190).

This disconnect between the protagonist and his wife only grows when he meets Mala at the airport, speaking “Bengali for the first time in America,” asking her if she is hungry (191). When they get home, again, he experiences a first: eating with his hands, “another thing I had not yet done in America” (192). Though Mala brings out many firsts,

the protagonist recalls how little connection or intimacy they shared: “I waited to get used to her, to her presence at my side, at my table and in my bed, but a week later we were still strangers” (192). In the same time it took the protagonist to adjust to life in the US, a week “more or less” (175), he has yet to feel such an acclimation to his wife. This remains their pattern until the protagonist decides, after their first week together, to go out. Though Mala gets dressed for a more formal affair, the protagonist merely takes her to the apartment he shared with Mrs. Croft: ““This is where I lived before you came,” he tells Mala, explaining how his landlady, to Mala’s surprise, ““takes care of herself”” (193).

When the protagonist knocks on the door to say hello, worried that Mrs. Croft won’t remember him, he meets Helen, her daughter, who rushes out to run an errand leaving the protagonist and Mala alone with Mrs. Croft. It is in this moment – when both Mala and the protagonist are alone in Mrs. Croft’s home – that they connect as Mrs. Croft, yet again, requires the protagonist to respond to her story of falling with their traditional ‘splendid’. “Mala laughed then,” the protagonist explains, “Her voice was full of kindness, her eyes bright with amusement. I had never heard her laugh before, and it was loud enough so that Mrs. Croft had heard, too” (195). In this moment of recognition and intimate connection, the protagonist quickly worries that Mala will be judged by Mrs. Croft, who upon hearing Mala laugh, commands her to stand up. “Mala rose to her feet,” our protagonist narrates,

adjusting the end of her sari over her head and holding it to her chest, and, for the first time since her arrival, I felt sympathy. I remembered my first days in London, learning how to take the Tube to Russell Square, riding an escalator for

the first time, being unable to decipher, for a whole year, that the conductor said ‘mind the gap’ as the train pulled away from each station. Like me, Mala had traveled far from home, not knowing where she was going, or what she would find, for no reason other than to be my wife. As strange as it seemed, I knew in my heart that one day her death would affect me, and stranger still, that mine would affect her (195).

In this long soliloquy, Mala’s affective response to ‘splendid’ disrupts the forward movement of the plot as it prompts the protagonist to finally admit struggle. Rather than carrying on about his ease with migration – positioning himself as more equipped than the overly emotional Mala who cried at being separated from her family – he begins to think relationally, rather than hierarchically. Moreover, he wants to explain all of this to Mrs. Croft, who, he can see is “still scrutinizing Mala from top to toe with what seemed to be placid disdain” (195).

This fear and ambivalence is surprising for the self-assured protagonist. His concern for Mala, and the judgment she might receive from the very white, very old-fashioned woman with whom he has formed a close relationship intersect – is he worried that Mrs. Croft won’t approve or that Mala will be judged? Within the next sentence, we learn, that Mrs. Croft finds Mala to be a “perfect lady” – a comment that made the protagonist “laug[h]. I did so quietly, and Mrs. Croft did not hear me. But Mala had heard me, and, for the first time, we looked at each other and smiled” (195/196). Here, again, it is laughter which connects the protagonist with his wife. But in contrast to the laughter of splendid, or perhaps as a clarification of that bonding affective response, it is a laugh at

Mrs. Croft – a sound she does not hear and does not share –that solidifies the connection between Mala and the protagonist.

When the story continues, the protagonist insists that he now thinks “of that moment in Mrs. Croft’s parlor as the moment when the distance between Mala and me began to lessen” (196). The protagonist explains how in “the months that followed” he and Mala “explored the city and met other Bengalis,” they shared stories and “wept” together over losses experienced both in Calcutta and in Boston (196). Through flashback and the bond formed over the ‘splendid’ that once only signified US power, “The Third and Final Continent” transforms. Once a seemingly clear-cut story of assimilation, the tale becomes centered on the protagonist’s journey from a desire for US national belonging to the comfort found in diasporic identification and community building. It is through the emotional disruptions, narrated through flashback and metonymic signification, that this alternative narrative emerges.

The use of narration as a means of rendering the work of diaspora is also present in “Negocios.” Much like “The Third and Final Continent” which includes metadiegetic features like figurative language and flashback to blur the boundaries between “the world *in* which one tells and the world *of* which one tells” (from Lowe 54), so too, does “Negocios” temper its narrative of downward assimilation through the interjection of an additional narrative of diasporic identification. In “Negocios” this work is done through a shifting narrative voice that reminds readers that the whole of Ramón’s story is filtered through the perspective of the son he abandoned in the Dominican Republic, Yuniór.

Though the story begins in first person – “My father, Ramón de las Casas, left Santo Domingo just before my fourth birthday” – which centralizes the narrator,

Ramón's son, within his father's migration story, this voice disappears as soon as Ramón arrives in the US (163). Hinting at presence during moments where Ramón is called Papi, the narrator does not re-emerge in the first person unless both the father and son are together. But this togetherness is always in the geographical sense, not the emotional. For example, when Ramón visits the DR with Nilda, a visit that does not bring him together with his first family, we learn about this lack of connection during a moment of narrative ambivalence. Our narrator explains that in the DR, Ramón "tried to see his familia but each time he set his mind to it, his resolve scattered like leaves before a hurricane wind. Instead he saw his old friends on the force and drank six bottles of Brugal in three days...." (198). Then the narrative voice shifts, as our narrator explains that "[i]n the end, [Ramón] never visited us. If Mami heard from her friends that he was in the city, with his other wife, she never told us about it. His absence was a seamless thing to me. And if a strange man approached me during my play and stared down at me and my brother, perhaps asking our names, I don't remember it now" (199). Slowly moving from the use of Mami and she, to his and then to me before ending with *I*, our narrator is revealed during the moment where Ramón could have made good on his promise to take care of his family. Here Ramón's son is able to illustrate the work he has undertaken to produce what appears to be a third person omniscient narrative: It relies on what his father and mother have told him, as his youth produced gaps in his memory that he feels compelled to fill. In this way, the narration of "Negocios" suggests that the story is not merely about labor migration and US power – a critique of the American Dream – but is also about the emotional work of those left behind due to US strictures on migration.

If this moment in the DR vacillates between third and first person, the end of the narrative objectively breaks the linearity of “Negocios” to clarify the constructedness of the third person story of migration told in “Negocios”. “Years later,” our narrator explains, “I would speak” to Nilda “after he had left us for good, after her children had moved out of the house” (206). In this moment, one completely outside of Ramón’s narrative perspective, the narrator visits another woman his father abandoned in his dreams for a better life in America. In this moment, the narrator presents Nilda’s point of view: “She cracked her knuckles slowly. I thought that I would never stop hurting. I knew then what it must have been like for your mother. You should tell her that” (207). Nilda connects with the narrator’s mother through their shared feelings of abandonment and anger and hurt – affects caused by Ramón, a man furiously trying to fulfill his desires for a better life no matter the cost.

This notable inclusion of Nilda’s point of view preempts the final lines of the story –all spoken in first person –where the narrator commandeers the story, ruminating on how he imagines the final moments of his father’s life without him: “The first subway station on Bond would have taken him to the airport and I like to think that he grabbed that first train, instead of what was more likely true, that he had gone out to Chuito’s first, before flying south to get us” (208). The entirety of the story has confirmed to the narrator that his father never cared for them, or at least, was so focused on paid labor that he refused to engage in un-paid labor, that of emotional work that would have helped him maintain his obligations and duties to his family in the DR. In this way, “Negocios” transforms from a story about immigration and un/belonging into a tale that desperately seeks to make sense of absence. The interjections of Yuniór’s first-person voice

centralize the experience of a child left behind, both by his father *and* by dominant narratives of US migration that focus on the choices of migrants as if they are simple results of cost-benefit analyses. This story makes room for Nilda, the woman to whom Ramón owes his citizenship, and Virta the woman to whom Ramón owes his visa. More than acknowledging the figures too regularly left out of discussions of migration, Yuniór's narrative point of view overrides the linear narrative of migration that structures most of "Negocios." For every time Yuniór's voice breaks through Ramón's story, readers are reminded that the tension of the narrative itself is centered around a son's attempt to reconcile the fact that his father never wanted him. It is this work, the diasporic work of a son left behind, that is moving the narrative forward, trying, desperately, to produce the happy narrative of a hard-working, but constantly thwarted, father.

What these moments of narrative ambivalence in both "The Third and Final Continent" and "Negocios" show, is the work each short story undertakes to narrate undervocalized perspectives of diaspora and transnationalism. By directing our attention to the families left behind by labor migration – to the individuals underserved by neoclassical models of migration that conceive of migration as a choice made by a singular, rational actor — both "The Third and Final Continent" and "Negocios" present a feminist critique of the US state apparatus who not only constructed racial hierarchies that pitted racialized migrant minorities against each other, but simultaneously reified heteropatriarchal family relations that privileged experiences of male labor migrants. As such, the unreliability of the narrators – exposed through flashback and Yuniór's narrative voice – become political dimensions of the stories for they illustrate that simple and for that manner, linear, narratives of migration are highly constructed.

In this way, both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” use emotion work as moments of metalepsis, or interruptions of time by another, that make clear the work it takes to produce a linear, let alone assimilationist, narrative of migration. This transgression of the boundaries of narrative is done through emotion, a narrative dimension that creates the boundary between the world *of* the story and the world *in which* the story is told. Sara Ahmed’s theory of emotion nicely articulates this precise work of narrative point of view. That is, narrative point of view in fiction manages the interiority of characters as it describes the worlds characters live in; it functions as a tool for constructing both “the psychic” and the “social” in fiction; or to use Ahmed’s theory of emotion, narrative point of view “produce[s] the very surfaces and boundaries that allow the individual and social to be delineated as if they are objects” (10). This is because, as Ahmed argues, “emotions provide a script” for behavior, and participants in discourses like the American Dream must decide whether to “accept the invitation to align [one]self with the nation” or not (*Cultural Politics* 12). In this way, the happiness of “The Third and Final Continent” much like the anger of “Negocios” offers entry into how the American Dream, as psychic attachment to a better life, is a cruel optimism that migrants in the US must negotiate.⁵⁰ It is by examining moments of ambivalence, however, where we can better understand both protagonists’ attachments to “the very idea of the good life” (Ahmed 6). For attachments to the American Dream “are also sites of ambivalence, involving the confusion rather than separation of good and bad feelings” (Ahmed 6).

⁵⁰ For more on cruel optimisms see Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*.

Thus, by narrating the everyday details of living within a geopolitical system that uses racial difference to promote racial inclusivity in order to maintain racial oppression, both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” present a political rebuttal to dominant discourses of belonging. And, importantly, they do so by using emotion as a narrative trace of the power systems that make Ramón’s experiences so different from the protagonist of “The Third and Final Continent.” Thus, just as Jhumpa Lahiri and Junot Díaz had to contend with vastly different readings of their bodies in the interviews that began this chapter, so, too, must their characters contend with different affective experiences of being both migrants and racial minorities in the United States. By bringing forth this history of labor migration to the United States, I want to suggest that the critiques of Lahiri’s stories and the praise of Díaz’s are not only about the politics of aesthetic choices but are illustrative of the ways in which the US state and global capitalism more broadly, have structured success and opportunity into the lives of some migrants and their families, but not others. Historical materialist readings put these stories in opposition: “The Third and Final Continent” exhibits the details of an American exceptionalist, assimilationist narrative of migration; “Negocios” explores the ways the American Dream fails over and over again. These differences are undeniable. However, to reproduce this reading not only limits our abilities to speak back to the power of the state to situate racial minorities in opposition to one another but risks the reproduction of racial ideologies founded on anti-black racism that pit minorities against each other based on the meritocratic, capitalist logics of US democracy.

For when read relationally, the role of US power and capitalism, particularly its codification of racialized hierarchies into officially anti-racist legislation, comes to light.

As such, the quotidian details of *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Drown* illustrate a unique approach to post-Cold war US racial politics. Not only do both collections represent migration, diaspora, and un/belonging as a continual *process*, one that requires a regular return to questions of self, place, family, and finances, but both texts narrate this experience by focusing on the emotional work of belonging their characters undertake as migrants in the US or members of transnational, diasporic communities. When spoken through these emotional narrative vernaculars both “The Third and Final Continent” and “Negocios” illustrate a change in US racial politics; one where race is no longer a singular entity to critique, but a place of intersection where gender, sexuality, and citizenship converge to manage and mechanize imperialist, racial capitalism. And as both stories suggest, if we are to speak back to these colonial and nationalist mechanisms of subordination, perhaps, we must better learn how to listen to ambivalence by reorienting our politics towards the felt experiences of migrant national belonging.

CHAPTER 3

IMAGINING HISTORY: FORMAL DIVIDES AND THE STORY OF IMPERIALISM IN JULIA ALVAREZ'S *IN THE NAME OF SALOMÉ* AND NORA OKJA KELLER'S *COMFORT WOMAN*

Comfort Woman begins with death. Thinking about her mother, known to her as Akiko, after her recent passing, Beccah, one of the two narrators and protagonists of the novel, remembers when her mother claimed to have killed her father by sending death arrows at him. Accustomed to her mother's unusual statements, Beccah deftly switches to a memory of her father, ruminating on "the color of his eyes" and "the black of the Bible he always carried with him" (2). Beccah remembers how "the blue of his eyes sharpen[ed]" on her as a child (2). So, too, does Beccah remember conjuring up images of her "father as an angel coming to comfort" her after he died, leaving her alone with her mother, never stable, never present (2). "My daddy," Beccah thinks, "would save my mother and me, burning with his blue eyes the Korean ghosts and demons that fed off our lives" (2). Occurring on the second page of the novel, here we see that Beccah, unable to make sense of her mother's spiritual practices, thinks of her father, and his blue eyes – his symbolic Americanness scripted as whiteness – as her savior. But just as Beccah searches for a father to save her from her 'crazy' mother, so too does "the blue of [her father's] eyes sharpe[n]" not "on the demons but on [her]... burn[ing] [her]...into nothingness" (2).

Published in 1997, *Comfort Woman*, the first novel by Nora Okja Keller, came out at a moment when the history of Korean comfort women was finally being publicly spoken about.⁵¹ The novel is composed of two narratives, each built out of six dreamlike, highly fragmented chapters, about the lives of Akiko, a Korean ex-comfort woman originally named Soon Hyo, and her American-born daughter, Beccah. The story is set against a historical backdrop of imperialism, seamlessly moving from Japan's invasion of Korea in 1910, to the Japanese comfort camps and American missionaries in Korea during the Second World War, and ending in Hawai'i during the 1990s. Though history surrounds the novel, its narrative tension is centered around Beccah, a writer by a trade, who when tasked to write an obituary for her recently deceased mother, "found that [she] did not have the facts for even the most basic, skeletal obituary" (26). Beccah's writer's block signifies the disconnection from her mother—a lack that emerges from her mother's silenced past as a comfort woman. However, when Beccah finds a cassette that her mother left for her – with recordings of a *chesa*, or memorial for her deceased grandmother, and recollections of her time as a comfort woman – she finally feels the history her mother has left for her.

This need to feel the weight of history is central to Julia Alvarez's 2000 novel, *In the Name of Salomé*. Like *Comfort Woman*, *In the Name of Salomé* opens with a rumination on the protagonist, Camila's race: "She stands by the door, a tall, elegant

⁵¹ In December of 1991, on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the attacks on Pearl Harbor, three Korean women filed a class-action lawsuit against the Japanese government. All three were ex-comfort women, three among upwards of 200,000 women from primarily Japanese-occupied regions who had been abducted, sold, and deceptively recruited by the Japanese Imperial Army and forced to work as sexual slaves in camps across Asia throughout the Second World War. During the 1990s, the history of comfort women, and the continued lack of public acknowledgement and apology from the Japanese government, became a pressing issue for the Korean women's movement, leading to a renewed interest in the fight for public confession and financial reparation. As more and more women began to share their stories, what was once a silenced history of shame soon became a crucial issue of human, women's, and Korean rights.

woman with a soft brown color to her skin (southern Italian? a Mediterranean Jew? a lightskinned negro woman who has been allowed to pass by virtue of her advanced degrees?), and reviews the empty rooms that have served as home for the last eighteen years" (1). *In the Name of Salomé* begins with Camila, the daughter of the novel, as she prepares to leave her job teaching Spanish at Vassar College to join the literacy work that has begun following the revolution in Cuba. Alone in her room, Camila is "worried about the emptiness that lies ahead. Childless and motherless, she is a bead unstrung from the necklace of the generations" (2). "She must not let herself get morbid," she thinks, "It is 1960," the time of revolutionary change (2). The back and forth of Camila's interior dialogue quickly situates her reader in a time and place. Camila continues her reverie, telling herself that these changes are "positive signs," an old habit of "rous[ing] herself from a depressive turn of mind" that she "inherited from her mother" (2). The "bigger picture is rather grim," she thinks, but what can she do? "Use your subjunctive (she reminds herself). Make a wish. Contrary to possibility, contrary to fact." (2).

In the Name of Salomé tells the story of two famous Dominican women—Salomé Ureña a famous poet and pedagogue, known for opening the first school for women in the Dominican Republic in the late 19th century; and, her daughter, Camila Henríquez Ureña, a well-known writer, educator, and Cuban revolutionary. Like *Comfort Woman*, each chapter of the novel alternates between the lives of mother and daughter: Salomé's story unfolds linearly, beginning with her childhood and ending when she succumbs to tuberculosis; Camila's story moves in the reverse, beginning in what seems to be the present and slowly going back in time to the moment of her birth. *In the Name of Salomé* unfolds as the Dominican Republic becomes independent in the 1850s, during the

Dominican Republic's occupation by the United States from 1916 until 1924, and ends in the 1960s. Camila spends the majority of her life in exile. Her mother died when Camila was three, and her father's political career (he was the president of the Dominican Republic for four months before the United States occupied the island) led Camila and her siblings to forge lives in the United States, Haiti, Mexico, Argentina, and Cuba.

Both *Comfort Woman* and *In the Name of Salomé* are works of historical fiction, or rather, both stories make historical figures central to their plots – *In the Name of Salomé* is arguably more specific than *Comfort Woman* in this regard. The novels imagine these histories – the wars and revolutions, the imperial underside of Americans abroad – and their aftereffects through plots based on two perspectives: mother and daughter. In both novels, each daughter struggles to feel connected to their mother. For Beccah, this is in large part due to the trauma she endured living with her mother; the extreme poverty, the lack of food, and her mother's intense episodes spent in the spirit world that left Beccah alone to fend for herself with the living. Camila, on the other hand, lost her mother to consumption at the age of three. She spends most of her life desperately wanting to live up to her mother's magnitude, but somehow always allowing herself to slip into the background; she bites her tongue, takes the easy path, and listens to her brothers. Both daughters struggle with their place in society. Whether it is their racial difference, the fact that their mothers are lost to them, or the fact that their fathers would never save them like they wished, both *In the Name of Salomé* and *Comfort Woman* make plain that without a clear understanding of their mothers and what they suffered, Beccah and Camila are left to float among historical facts that never feel right. That is, until both

women learn about their mothers: the pain they suffered, the silences they kept, and the histories they lived through that never made it into history books.

In what follows, I examine how both *Comfort Woman* and *In the Name of Salomé* incorporate the affective histories of women shaped by war, revolution, and violences beyond their daughters' imaginations. Quite specifically, I focus on moments in the text where the disconnect between mother and daughter is tied to social expectations; imperial social codes that mark each mother as unstable or crazy. I show how both daughters come to realize that their bond with their mothers is precisely the bodily experiences they have been taught to run from – Camila's anxiety and depression and Beccah's shame. Elucidating how these physiological similarities represent a historical lineage, we come to understand how both Alvarez and Keller challenge dominant notions of history, by centering the emotional negotiations of women regularly cast aside when it comes to historical truth. For as Camila makes clear early on in *In the Name of Salomé*, if we are to understand the grim reality of the global economy and the conflicts inherent in state sovereignty and egalitarianism, we must understand how we *feel* about such histories. We need to use our subjunctive to, in her words, "Make a wish. Contrary to possibility, contrary to fact." History, Camila reminds us, is not just about getting the tense right; it is not merely an assemblage of moments in time. History is lived. It is experienced. It is wrestled with. It limits how we can negotiate the national, economic, political, and filial obligations that deeply shape the visions of our futures.

"A Way to Travel Through the Human Heart": History and the Politics of Fiction

Both *In the Name of Salomé* and *Comfort Woman* have garnered attention for their use of history, whether it be the inclusion of famous Dominican historical figures or the little known history of Korean comfort women. Julia Alvarez has long been intrigued by the possibilities of historical fiction. According to Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez, “Alvarez’s writing has progressively ventured further and further into” “the messy world of politics,” engaging in “writing as a process intimately connected with history and social struggles” (133-4). *In the Name of Salomé* uses its two-pronged narrative to present nearly 150 years of what Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez have called a “hemispheric history” (136). Importantly, as Dalleo and Sáez note, “through its contextualization of events in U.S. history as part of a larger world-historical processes,” the novel “contests the tendency toward American exceptionalism,” a narrative act whereby “the United States becomes a part of New World history...just another player with a history of corruption and turmoil” (136-7). *In the Name of Salomé* presents this hemispheric history by fictionalizing how both Camila and Salomé navigate their feelings given their politicized positionalities. Whether it is Salomé, the nation-bound daughter of a man always in exile for his political dissidence, or Camila, an always-in-exile daughter of a father desperate to run the Dominican Republic as its president, *In the Name of Salomé* brings forth history insofar as it lives in the bodies of those that live it. For, as Julia Alvarez writes in the postscript to *In the Time of the Butterflies*, “a novel is not, after all, a historical document,” Alvarez contends, “but a way to travel through the human heart” (324).

Nora Okja Keller utilizes a similar narrative technique in *Comfort Woman*, a novel about the intergenerational trauma inflicted upon a mother and daughter following

the mother's internment as a sex slave in the Japanese army camps during the Second World War. "Inspired by a 1993 talk in Honolulu by a seventy-year old Korean woman who lived as a 'comfort woman' for Japanese soldiers during World War II," Seiwoong Ong notes, Keller became deeply interested in imagining the life story of *Keum-ja Hwang* (102). In this way, Keller's novel differs from *In the Name of Salomé* for it does not rely on historical documentation. Instead, *Comfort Woman* tells the story of two forgotten—perhaps completely fictionalized—historical figures: a Korean born mother and 'comfort woman,' Soon Hyo, and her American born daughter, Beccah. In a 2003 interview about her second novel, *Fox Girl*,⁵² Keller explains that she was "compelled to write" because of the "silence" that surrounds the history of Japanese and American imperialism in Korea—practices that violently oppressed women as the state figured them as sexual objects rather than feeling subjects (158). Keller goes on to explain "that with *Comfort Woman* part of [the lack of historical acknowledgement] was that the silence came from the women themselves...out of a sense of shame or fear of condemnation" (158). *Comfort Woman* is built out of this silence as the narrative speaks the bodily, mental, and spiritual traumas of imperialism, nationalism, and heteropatriarchy.

In interviews, Keller is careful to clarify that although research is part of her writing process, she is first, and foremost a writer of fiction. "I try to write about the story," she explains, "I try to capture something that I feel should not be neglected or overlooked. And I try to get that story" (161). Notably, where Julia Alvarez is praised as political for her use of imperialist histories as setting for her fiction, Nora Okja Keller has

⁵² Since the publication of *Comfort Woman*, Nora Okja Keller has become known as a writer deeply interested in imperialist and heteropatriarchal historical traumas. Keller's second novel, *Fox Girl*, is what Keller considers a sequel to *Comfort Woman* as it continues to examine the sexual work—both coerced and forced—Korean women performed after World War II.

faced criticism for her work with historical figures. Kandice Chuh argues that “the ‘comfort woman’ as exemplary figure of subjugation under Japanese imperialism seemingly argues for U.S. intervention in the peninsula’s affairs,” “effectively masking U.S. imperialism” while “simultaneously reinstalling American exceptionalism” (8). Though Chuh sees the ways in which “postcoloniality grounds [Keller’s] investigation of the past’s relationship to the present,” she is critical of the novel’s focus on Beccah, particularly what her future in the US will hold. In this way, Chuh fears that *Comfort Woman* “operate[s] on well-trodden, even clichéd grounds” in so far as “the retrieval of this history is ascribed to the desire for happiness for the next (U.S.) generation” (19).⁵³

When faced with these critiques in an interview about her second novel *Fox Girl*, asked why she presents “America as dreamland,” Keller responds with a question: “But don't you think that those women there, they do feel that America is like a dream? You know, that's their perception of it” (Lee 163). Keller’s question reveals an interest in narrating the experience of being attached to what Lauren Berlant calls “the normal world, the world as it appears” (*Female Complaint* 9). According to Berlant, these attachments represent a cruel optimism of sorts, “when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing” (*CO* 1).⁵⁴ In this way, Keller’s fictionalization of characters who arrive in the US where they eventually live out their days, might not be as

⁵³ Though Chuh is right in her remarks, her concern over Beccah’s happiness ignores the work that goes into it. For Beccah does not magically discover her mother’s past and become happy. Instead she comes to realize that she has victimized her mother – turned her into a weak, helpless individual all the while imagining her father as her strong savior; point Keller makes clear at the onset of the novel. For when Beccah is ignoring her mother’s talk about killing her father – instead remembering her dad as a savior – she also ignores her mother’s insistence that she was “teaching [her] something very important about life” (13). Thus, Beccah’s resolution emerges only when she reckons with her fault – that her mother hadn’t been keeping her past from her, but that Beccah hadn’t been listening.

⁵⁴ According to Berlant, “[t]hese kinds of optimistic relation are not inherently cruel,” rather they “become cruel only when the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially” (1).

problematic as Chuh's critique suggests. For as *Comfort Woman* makes clear, Beccah is only in the United States, in fact is only born, because of her father, an American missionary's pedophilic desires for Soon Hyo, a woman he meets when she is only 14 and "saves" by making her his wife while working in a Christian mission abroad.

These complex histories of imperialism, colonialism, and war are explored both in *Comfort Woman* and *In the Name of Salomé*, through the complex attachments such geopolitical circumstances create, particularly between mothers and daughters. As Berlant makes clear, attachments, no matter how normative they may appear on the surface, are complex sets of relations, and as such, they offer an opportunity to understand the power dynamics that undergird stories of migration and exile like those detailed in *In the Name of Salomé* and *Comfort Woman*. In this way, both novels use history as imaginative fodder for building a more robust story of migration, one based on messy attachments and confusing senses of belonging. According to Vijay Prashad in his essay in *The Sun Never Sets*, this is precisely what is needed if we are to better understand the reality of migration and exile. In his afterword, Prashad emphasizes how the "typical story...of the migrant coming into the United States to seek freedom" can be challenged by exhuming the discursive "tentacles of American power" from their material hiding places (379). Once these "invisible inklings of power" come "to light," Prashad continues, then "it becomes easier to see how this power detaches people from their moorings, throws them in dire need of migration, and draws them to stand, like penitents, at the doors of the U.S. embassy, or cross, like thieves, over the Walls of Un-Freedom" (379).

Interestingly, Prashad describes power as a force that ‘detaches people from their moorings,’ creating psyches in need of new attachments and often in need of migration. This language of attachment is noteworthy particularly for our understanding of popular fiction like *Comfort Woman* and *In the Name of Salomé* that take up the histories of US imperialism and the ravages of revolution and war in Korea and the Dominican Republic, respectively. For though scholars have been curious about both texts’ use of history in stories predominately about the everyday emotional negotiations of female characters, Prashad’s language of attachment makes clear that part of “imperialism as context” to “the story of migration” includes the work of detachment and the management of need (379).

Though they appear to be static, attachments involve an enormous amount of emotional work, particularly for those marginalized by dominant social norms. According to Sara Ahmed “emotions ‘matter’ for politics” precisely because “emotions can attach us to the very conditions of our subordination” (12). Our attachments are felt. And in this way, power is felt. Prashad’s use of the language of attachment suggests that the ever so individualized emotional work of migration tells the story of how migrants negotiate their feeling rights and obligations within shifting geopolitical terrains. The felt experience of migration, according to Prashad, *is* the story of migration.

By imagining the emotional negotiations of their characters, both Alvarez and Keller flip the script on historical fiction by *fictionalizing history*. By doing so, these writers activate fiction, transforming a static term used to describe the end product of imaginative work into a verb that shapes and produces history, rather than the reverse. By challenging the affective expectations of the genre of historical fiction, Alvarez and

Keller insist that the story of migration not only requires the context of imperialism in order to be understood, but also the story of how individuals come to know the affective histories of imperialism, the processes of detachments and attachments that led them to the shores of the United States.

Social Codes and Narrative Form: Mother-Daughter Distances and the Weight of History

Keller begins her mother-daughter narrative from the perspective of the daughter, introducing readers to the dreamlike narrative style of *Comfort Woman* by narrating Beccah's thoughts. As Beccah's mind wanders, she quickly surveys a childhood where normal meant that her mother "seemed to know where she was and who [her daughter] was" (2). She remembers the stories her mother told about Beccah's father and Korea, and the tale of how her mother tried to return to Korea, a trip that left her and Beccah without any savings living in Hawai'i. She thinks about how her mother would struggle to keep the spirits at bay long enough to work her shifts at a restaurant, and the days she would "rac[e] home" after school, "fearful of what [she'd] find when [she] slipped back into [her] apartment," ready to "explain [her] mother's insanity" (5). As she paints the picture of her childhood in broad brush strokes, Beccah thinks about how her mother would tell her that she was "teaching [her] something very important about life," a lesson Beccah never understood as anything other than crazy talk (13).

This plot tension – the distance between mother and daughter—is rendered formally: *Comfort Woman* moves between chapters narrated by Beccah and chapters narrated by her mother. The Akiko chapters tell the story of Soon Hyo's migration to the

United States; how she was sold to the Japanese imperial army by her sister after her mother's death; how she became Akiko 41 after the death of Induk, Akiko 40, a sex slave at the Japanese recreation camp where Soon Hyo cooked and cleaned; how her abortion left her unguarded, allowing her to flee the camp only to be bought by American missionaries where she became baptized and married; how her marriage took her to America, a place she tried to leave after her husband's death, only getting so far as Hawai'i before accepting the help of a local believer, Reno, who was convinced her Shamanistic abilities were the effects of surviving great hardship, and thus put her to work both in her restaurant and as a fortuneteller for the neighborhood. Soon Hyo's story breaks only once during the novel, in the chapter entitled Soon Hyo, where Soon Hyo tells the story of her mother, a Korean revolutionary who gives up her political aspirations, moves to the Northern parts of Korea, and marries in order to survive the killings of revolutionaries happening across the country.

The Beccah chapters are less organized around the explanatory power of linear time, as they are by her inability to know what to do when her mother dies. A writer by trade, Beccah works for a local newspaper writing obituaries. Though she knows the format, "Name, age, date of death, survivors, services," "when it came time for [her] to write [her] own mother's obituary" she "found that [she] did not have the facts for even the most basic, skeletal obituary" (26). Unable to "start imagining her [mother's] life," Beccah's writer's block comes to signify Beccah's disconnect from her mother. Each of the Beccah chapters work to explain this separation: Beccah narrates her childhood of neglect and radical spiritual practices; a pubescent period where her acceptance of her mother's beliefs leads her to anorexia and near death; and, a crucial moment of

embarrassment when Beccah's classmates laugh and taunt her mother for her public displays of spirituality.

In many ways, it is this moment, one where her peers mark her mother as crazy, that provides Beccah with language for her feelings of neglect and confusion as a child. Beccah recalls this moment at school, and the feelings she had when she "first saw the frail, wild-haired lady in the pajamas throwing handfuls of pebbles into the crowd" (87). Beccah remembers not even realizing the woman was her mother; not until her mother "raised her arms into the air and pivoted toward" her crying out for Induk, the spirit of the sex slave Soon Hyo replaced, did Beccah "recognize her" (87). As her classmates took in the behavior of her mother, Beccah watched. She "wanted to scream, to tell the kids to shut their mouths and go to hell," to "pound the laughing heads into their necks" (87). In this moment, where Beccah's love for her mother and knowledge of her oddities come into conflict with her peer's reactions, she cannot act according to her feelings.

Instead of telling the kids to stop laughing at her mother, she remains silent. As Beccah explains, in this moment, she looked "at the only part of [her]self that [she] thought contained power" and "saw [her] hands as the others around me must have seen them: feeble, scrawny, ineffectual" (87). Seeing her mother out in public during one of her episodes, and watching her peers react, Beccah begins to see herself in a negative light. Though she "wanted to help [her] mother, shield her from the children's sharp-toothed barbs, and take her home," for "the first time," Beccah recalls, she "watched and listened to the children taunting [her] mother, using their tongues to mangle what she said into what they heard," and in that moment she "saw and heard what they did" (88).

Though Beccah suffered greatly as a child, it is not until this moment, when she sees her mother as others see her, that she feels shame. This shame changes Beccah. It morphs her into a woman who constantly runs from her mother; a woman who wishes her mother dead. Importantly, this is not because of neglect, but because of how other people see her, given her mother's uncommon behaviors. Though Beccah's mother is able to make money and provide a home for her daughter, in large part due to Reno, a woman who understands her mother's behaviors as a *power* and thus keeps her on her payroll as waitress and fortuneteller, Beccah can only see her mother as crazy from this point on. Beccah's life becomes dictated by the social codes and expectations of normativity voiced by her classmates. These voices make her feel weak and ashamed, a psychic space that Beccah inhabits into adulthood. Importantly, this pattern of shame develops into Beccah's habit of turning to men to avoid her mother. These relationships, first with her college boyfriend Max, and then with her boss, Sanford, show Beccah how "stuck" she is in her life (137).

Beccah's shame and lack of connection stands out as odd, in many ways, when narrated alongside her mother's story – a woman so deeply connected to the spiritual world that her body is overtaken by their voices. For as the novel unfolds, and Soon Hyo's story grows in detail after horrific detail, it is her behavior that makes the most sense. For her episodes, her connection to spirits, and her insistence on certain behaviors to protect her daughter seem natural given the immense trauma she experienced when she was sold into slavery by her sister, used as a sex slave by the Japanese military, and then taken in by American missionaries to be saved. It is this experiential knowledge that

guides Soon Hyo in her parenting, particularly in how she protects her daughter from her father's blue eyes.

The most striking example of this occurs when Soon Hyo describes how she hides the toys he buys for Beccah – baby dolls, with blue eyes: “I pick out the dolls with the plastic skin and the unyielding, staring blue eyes and put them in the linen closet...I feel sick thinking of my baby lying next to, gaining comfort from, the artificial dead” (55). As an alternative, Soon Hyo “picks up [Beccah], placing her against [her] chest” to nurse her, allowing Beccah’s “heat” to “invade” her body, her “heart [to] beat against [her own]” (55). Soon Hyo rejects the comfort her husband thinks these lifeless, blue eyed baby dolls will provide her daughter, by replacing the dead replicas of life with her own body, allowing her daughter to “roo[t] against” her, building identificatory practices spoken through silent, bodily exchanges.

Soon Hyo’s interest in the powerful connection of silence stands in stark contrast to her husband, who believes that language being a known entity, provides stability. In describing her husband, a man who speaks four languages, Soon Hyo rebukes his belief that “the words he reads” can provide “concrete” meaning:

“He shares all his languages with our daughter, though she is not even a year old. She will absorb the sounds, he tells me. But I worry that the different sounds for the same object will confuse her. To compensate, I try to balance her with language I know is true. I watch her with a mother’s eye, trying to see what she needs—my breast, a new diaper, a kiss, her toy—before she cries, before she has to give voice to her pain” (21).

Again, we see how Soon Hyo's critique of the father, his methods for comforting her daughter, is tied to his belief that language is both objective and something to be mastered. To combat this, Soon Hyo again relies on silent practices, this time a mode of anticipating needs, and touching her daughter's body, "waiting until I see recognition in her eyes... before language dissects her into pieces that can be swallowed and digested by others not herself" (22).

This alternative preverbal language is grounded in the feminine affective history of comfort and care that Soon Hyo sees as a method of surviving the violences of colonialism, nationalism, racialization, and sexual violence. Recalling the moment when her mother, a Korean nationalist during the 1910s—a time of Japanese invasion and occupation – became part of a "generation...in Korea [that had] to learn a new alphabet, and new words for everyday things....to learn to answer to a new name, to think of herself and her world in a new way. To hide her true self" (153), Soon Hyo notes that this ability to hide one's true self, to re-locate and re-narrate, is the lesson that she hopes to pass onto to her daughter, the lesson, she knows "enabled [her] to survive in the recreation camp and in a new country" (153).

In this way, Soon Hyo's disagreement with her husband's parenting practices is tied to his assertion that language, with its stable meanings, can comfort their daughter just as the little dolls with blue eyes can provide companionship, comfort, and identity as opposed to a mother's body and breast. Soon Hyo's refusal, however, is not only tied to a desire to teach her daughter the ways of the women who have come before her and will undoubtedly come after her, but so too is it part of a larger critique of the use of linguistic dominance as a justification for racialized subordination, colonialization, and sexual

violence. This becomes clear during a recollection Soon Hyo has at the American mission, after she overhears women gossiping about her silent nature:

At the camps where the Japanese called us *Jungun Ianfu*, military comfort women, we were taught only whatever was necessary to service the soldiers. Other than that, we were not expected to understand and were forbidden to speak, any language at all.

But we were fast learners and creative. Listening as we gathered the soldiers' clothes for washing or cooked their meals, we were able to surmise when troops were coming in and how many we were expected to serve. We taught ourselves to communicate through eye movements, body posture, tilts of the head, or—when we could not see each other—through rhythmic rustlings between our stalls; in this way we could speak, in this way we kept our sanity.

The Japanese say Koreans have an inherent gift for languages, proving that we are a natural colony, meant to be dominated” (16)

The language of the camp, meant to alienate the women, became a tool for Soon Hyo to help the women connect with each other and to develop a subversive pride in their Koreanness. Soon Hyo become well versed in this language, explaining how she

would sing to the women as [she] braided their hair or walked by their compartments to check their pots. When [she] hummed certain sections, the

women knew to take those unsung words for their message. In this way, [they] could keep up with each other, find out who was sick, who was new, who had the most men the night before, who was going to crack” (20).

This moment in the camp echoes a memory from Soon Hyo’s childhood, a time when she and her mother would send “secret signals...singing out messages only [her and her mother] could understand” while washing clothes at the river (17). With the narrative echo comes the notion that this language of silence is a feminine language, long cultivated amongst the women in Soon Hyo’s life. Borrowing from the feminized language of her family, Soon Hyo transforms silence into a mode of resistance. A practice she continues to use after she escapes from the camps.

It is this language that Soon Hyo uses to tell her daughter, Beccah, that she loves her:

I touch my child in the same way now; this is the language she understands: the cool caresses of my fingers across her tiny eyelids, her smooth tummy, her fat toes. This, not the senseless murmuring of useless words, is what quiets her, tells her she is precious. She is like my mother in this way.

Because of this likeness, this link to the dead, my daughter is the only living thing I love (18).

The need to survive and resist the camp ironically what separates Soon Hyo from her daughter. This is, in large part, because of Beccah’s father, a man who used God to hide his secret sexual desires for the young Soon Hyo. But Soon Hyo knew his “secret,” one she had “learned about in the comfort camps” and saw “in the way his hands fluttered

about his sides as if they wanted to fly up against [her] half-starved girl's body with its narrow hips and new breasts" (94-5). "This is his sin," Soon Hyo explains, "the sin he fought against and still denies: that he wanted me—a young girl—not for his God but for himself" (94-5).

It is this use of God to dominate others and fulfill pedophilic urges that Soon Hyo fights against in her parenting of Beccah. For just as the Japanese imperial army used language as the reason for colonial domination and sexual subjugation, the American minister also uses a higher power to justify his domination over and sexual desires for Akiko. Only for the minister, it is combined with American exceptionalism – the belief that by baptizing Akiko and marrying her, in order to bring her to America that he is, in fact, saving her. What he does not know, however, is that she has already been saved. She has been saved, over and over again, by an affective history that connects her to women who have survived the traumas of imperialism, of colonialism, of domination and abuse. She has been saved by Induk, the woman who was Akiko before her, who came to her after she fled the comfort camp and helped her find a way to survive when she was starving and alone. Soon Hyo has tools, methods for surviving that are not necessarily spoken, but intuited and felt. And it is this that she intends to teach her daughter. Not to find comfort in words or language but instead to remain connected to the earth and the sea, to those that came before and those that will come after.

Growing up in Hawai'i, however, Beccah vacillates between revering and resenting her mother's storytelling and spiritual practices. And the narrative shows this. Telling stories of their lives, but never to each other, Beccah and Soon Hyo remain completely apart throughout the novel, both in terms of their lives *and Comfort Woman's*

form. Without the knowledge of Soon Hyo's life, without an understanding of her survival tactics, Beccah is left without a way to connect to her mother. Without imperialism as context, as in Vijay Prashad's argument, the story of Soon Hyo's migration is bewildering to her daughter. Moreover, because Soon Hyo's story of migration involves such intense, bodily trauma, Beccah's lack of context does more than perpetuate dominant, exceptionalist discourses of America: it splinters connections between generations, leaving a second-generation daughter alone.

The violences of migration, war, and revolution similarly wedge a distance between Camila and her mother, Salomé. If it is the shame of American perceptions that turn Beccah from her mother, then for Camila, it is her mother's revolutionary fervor and fame. For unlike Salomé, Camila lives her entire life in exile, never spending more than a few years in her mother's beloved patria. This disconnect is also rendered formally in *In the Name of Salomé* which moves back and forth between Camila's story and Salomé's. Camila's story moves in reverse, beginning with her decision to leave her full-time teaching position at Vassar for Cuba, then recalling her work with a student organizing her mother's ephemera to decide what should be included in a public archive, back again to her relationship with Marion during and after college, then her time in D.C. when her father was in exile after becoming president of the Dominican Republic, and then to Cuba where her family lived when her mother first died.

Unlike her daughter's narrative, Salomé's chapters move from childhood to adulthood to death, attaching themselves to linear time for coherence much like those of Soon Hyo's. Though Salomé's chapters appear to follow a progression, her life is regularly disrupted by her emotions. Salomé suffers regularly from crying fits, "days

when [she] wake[s] up crying and cannot even say why [she is] crying” (15). Salomé regularly cries so hard that her “chest tightens up and [she] can’t breathe,” physiological symptoms that doctors consider a “touch of asthma” (15). Though it might be true that Salomé has asthma, so, too, does she simply feel deeply. Whether it is about her parent’s troubling relationship or her country’s politics, Salomé is often caught up in her strong feelings. This becomes a power of sorts, however, when she turns 15 on “March 18, 1861,” the day her country “had been given back to Spain and become a colony once again” (50). It is then that she puts her father’s lessons to work, to turn her tears into words. At 15, Salomé, writing under the pen name Herminia, “would free la patria with [her] sharp quill and bottle of ink” (50).

Quite quickly, Salomé’s poems became the talk of the town. Though her family feared for their lives— “Exile would be the least of it”— Salomé was “secretly...glad” that her “[p]oetry...was waking up the body politic” (62). She “kept writing bolder poems,” not “wasting her tears” to anything but words (62). Soon, other people were submitting poems signed Herminia. These fakes made Salomé bold, prompting her to publish a new poem in her own name, making clear who the real Herminia was. Though Salomé found power in poetry, she continues to suffer from “shortness of breath” every time she had to speak to others in person (66). Salomé continues to suffer to voice her wants and desires to others, though she can speak so boldly of a better country. In this way, she begins to wonder if “she is developing the bad habits of writers, creating the world rather than inhabiting it” (113).

Salomé’s life continues. She gets married to a man deeply committed to a life in politics, has children, and suffers greatly from anxiety, asthma, and an inability to speak

her truth in real time. As Salomé gets older, she loses “heart in the ability of words to transform us into a patria of brother and sisters” (187). She turns instead to education, focusing on bringing “up a generation of young people who would think in new ways and stop the cycle of suffering on our island” (187). Somewhere in the process, however, Salomé loses her outlet for her feelings and succumbs to whatever life hands her. We see this most clearly when she realizes her husband has been cheating on her: “I felt that old scorpion, jealousy, stirring in my heart, but immediately, I chased it out...I did what I had always done with pain. I swallowed my disappointment” (308-9). By the end of her life, Salomé recognizes her desire to transform her feelings into political action has somehow led her to swallow disappointment in her personal life.

This, however, is not the history of Salomé the world knows. The difficulties of her life, her struggles with her health and her family, are of no interest to those who turn to Salomé for the resistance she comes to represent. It is this distance, between how the world knows her mother and the brief memories Camila has of her, that plague Camila throughout her life. Like her mother, Camila suffers from anxiety and depression. She too, regularly feels “the familiar tightness in her chest” when she speaks in public (117). “These attacks,” Camila notes, “first started she was a child” and “a sense of panic and breathlessness would overtake her” (117). Her father “was convinced that Camila had inherited her mother’s weak lungs” and made sure to move the family to climates better for his daughter’s breathing (117). And so, like her mother, Camila is taught interpret her feelings as signs of biological ailments, rather than as products of a psychic negotiation with the social world. This leads her to a life where she struggles to understand what to do with her life.

Camila's relationship with her feelings results in a life quite different from her mothers. Though she, too, ends up becoming a teacher, abandoning the work of writing for the work of education, she never centers her life around her emotions like Salomé did. Instead, she learns to assuage her feelings, to manage them internally in order to produce the acceptable affective response in nearly every situation. This becomes clear to Camila during her time living in exile in Washington, D.C. when Camila becomes involved with a man working at the White House. She pressures the man to put her in contact with the US official put in charge of her country. When she finally has the opportunity to meet this man and protest the U.S. occupation he laughs at her. In this moment Camila realizes that "her anger does not show" (210). She wonders "if she is incapable of offending. If every angry emotion is filtered through the memory of her noble mother and her suffering nation and comes out as a muted, mannerly remark" (210).

Salomé's fame and her poetry are limiting. Camila comes to realize that it is this history of her mother, one she learns from others rather than from experience, that forces her into a life of subjugation, of making her feelings less than those around her. In this way, Camila is much like Beccah; a daughter who struggles to connect with her mother and opts instead to live a life of solitude and loneliness in order to appease the American, or in Camila's case hemispheric, perspective. Unlike Beccah, however, who struggles to understand her mother's spiritual practices, Camila comes to realize, towards the end of the novel which is, in fact, the start of her life, that she has always had a bond with her mother that no one else could understand. A cough, a panic, a racing heart, this is what keeps Camila and her mother together.

It takes Camila much of her life to understand this. A process that begins when she is tasked with the job of sorting her mother's things, deciding what should be kept private and what can be made available for her public archive. Camila receives two trunks in the mail from her brother, Max, who has returned to the Dominican Republic where he works for the government. As Camila notes, she has been instructed to "sort out what to give the archives and what to destroy," a task she finds ironic since "she, the nobody among [her family], will be the one editing the story of her famous family" (38). Camila hires a student, Nancy Palmer, to help her with the task of sorting, a process that requires some of the basics: "I'll start with Salomé Ureña, my mother—some of the letters might say 'la poetisa nacional.' She married Francisco Henríquez, whom everyone calls Pancho or Papancho..." (40). Camila goes on to explain how her father was president in 1916, for, "[s]he counts the months out on her fingers to be sure," four months (41). At that point, Camila explains to Nancy, she and her family were living in Cuba. She does not explain that "it was the American occupation that forced Pancho out" (41). She continues. Her mother died. Her father remarried. And of course, there was the Parisian family (42). As Camila haphazardly explains the nuances of her family, she gets a sense of clarity. "Just introducing these ghosts by name," Camila notes, "has recalled them so vividly, they rise up...then shimmer and fade in the shaft of sunlight in which she is sitting" (42). She begins to think it was "a good thing to finally face each one squarely. Maybe that is the only way to exorcise ghosts. To become them" (42).

The boxes were put together by Camila's aunt, Mon. It is she who became "something of the guardian of [her mother's] memory" (43). With Nancy's help, Camila is able to get through the trunks. "Every night," Camila explains,

she pores over her mother's box: notes to her children; a sachet with dried purplish flowers; a catechism book, *Catón cristiano*, with a little girl's handwriting on the back cover; silly poems from someone named Nísidas; a lock of hair; a baby tooth tied up in a handkerchief; a small Dominican flag her mother must have sewn herself, its stick snapped off, no doubt from the weight of the other packets upon it (45).

Camila does not have a clear sense of what "these things mean," but "they are details of Salomé's story that increasingly connect her mother's life to her own" (45). In this moment, as Camila pours over her mother's ephemera, deciding what will be included in her archive, she realizes that is finally ready to jump into her life and begin living it.

Much like the cassette Soon Hyo leaves Beccah, so too, does Camila find her self through her mother by listening to what was left behind, what was not included in the history she learned. This is what forces Camila out of her life of ambivalence and deference, launching into a feeling of possibility that rescripts her story. For just when "she thought her story was over, epilogue, coda, diminuendo, she has happened upon a caravel with sails filling with wind" (48). Camila prepares to go to Cuba where she plans to "*meet [her] mother*" (48). Returning home, "or as close as [she] can get," provides Camila with the opportunity to address her feelings head on, and to finally live with her mother's spirit rather than alongside it (48). Notably, Camila does not forge this life in the United States, a country that will forever be the power that occupied her country, that left her in exile.

This critical mindset, however, is not reserved only for the United States. Instead, it is mode of being. For when Camila is asked to speak at the institute her mother founded

in the Dominican Republic, she is placed in the position to critique Trujillo, to put forth a critique of totalitarian and violent power whether in the DR or abroad. After reading her mother's poems, Camila bravely "brings up the recent disappearances, the murders, the massacre of the Haitians" all things "she has never mentioned publicly before" (85). For "[a]ll her life," Camila "has had to think first of her words' effect on the important roles her fathers and brothers and uncles and cousins were playing in the world" (85). "Her own opinions," Camila explains, "were reserved for texts, for roundtables on women's contributions to the colonies, for curriculum committees implementing one theory of language learning over another" (85). But in this moment, having learned of her mother through the trunks saved by her aunt, Camila decides to speak up. She speaks truth to power, in her mother's name, and embarks on her final journey to her self.

Coming Together, or Telling History

The mother daughter disconnect that produces much of the momentum of the two-pronged narrative in both *Comfort Woman* and *In the Name of Salomé* does not outlast the novels themselves. In fact, both novels present ways of reading these disconnects that make clear how it is American perspectives and imperial projects that are at the heart of these mother daughter conflicts. This becomes clear to both protagonists later in their lives. For Beccah, this happens after her mother dies. Unable to write her mother's obituary, unable to recount her life, Beccah finds herself deeply in need of her childhood home. There, she finds a cassette tape her mother left for her; a cassette filled with the stories Beccah had never heard before.

The cassette is where Soon Hyo shares the history of her life and of her mother's life; providing a long, multigenerational explication of the ways in which patriarchal and imperialist powers have violated and killed Beccah's matrilineal line. As Beccah listens to the "death anniversary *chesa* that [her mother] performs for...Beccah's grandmother" she realizes that she struggled to write her mother's obituary because she did not know the language her mother spoke to her in. Once she is able to hear her mother's language – to listen to what she says and comprehend the complicated meaning—Beccah is able to recognize the cassette as a model for what she, too, must do for her mother.

With her boss and ex-lover, Sanford, outside the door, Beccah listens to the sounds of her mother's voice as it fills her apartment complex. Beccah suddenly hears her name on the cassette:

Beccah-chan, lead the parade of the dead. Lead the Ch'ulssang with the rope of your light. Clear the air with the ringing of your bell, bathe us with your song. When I can no longer perform the chesa for the spirits, we will look to you to feed us. I have tried to release you, but in the end I cannot do it and tie you to me, so that we will carry each other always. Your blood in mind (197).

With Sanford pounding on the door begging to be let in, Beccah realizes that "while [she] had felt invisible, unimportant, while [her] mother consorted with her spirits, [she] now understood that [her mother] knew [she] watched her. That in her way, she had always carried [Beccah] with her" (197). Reliving her mother's acts of ripping apart Beccah's sheets for her spiritual practices, Beccah does the same and scribbles down dates on her bed sheet: "1995, 1965, 1945, 1931-2-3" (196).

The dates, of war and conquest, of migration and exile, become central to Beccah's transformation. Having just heard about her mother's past, Beccah realizes that she had mistakenly seen her mother as "weak and vulnerable," never knowing that she had lived as one of the "'comfort women' [her mother] described" (196). "Even though [Beccah] heard her call out 'Akiko,' the name she had answered to all [her] life," Beccah could "not imagine her surviving what she described" and then "have married" and "had a child" after being "forced into the camps" (196). As Beccah inhabits her mother's history, putting herself in her place, she is "given new context" for understanding her mother (196). With this context, comes a "half-forgotten memory" of her father hitting her mother, "pushing her into the damp ground in an attempt to cover her mouth" (196). Beccah recalls her father telling her mother to be silent, to hide her life as a "prostitute" from their daughter to "protect" her...from that shame" (196).

This memory floods back to Beccah as she listens to the tape, offering a revision to the dreams of her dead father saving her from her mother. Now it is her dead mother she seeks for salvation. For in these final moments of *Comfort Woman*, Beccah comes to realize that her mother, in the words of Reno, was "one survivor" (203). With the knowledge she needs to re-interpret the neglect she felt as a child, Beccah begins her process of emotional management by re-narrating the disconnect with her mother as the effects of a father who silenced his wife into shame. As Sanford "slammed his weight" against Beccah's door, begging to get in, Beccah decides to leave him: "With my mother's voice filling the apartment, her words swirling around my shoulders, I thought how easy—in a pinch, with a blink—it was to make someone disappear. 'Goodbye,' I told him. 'My mother is calling me'" (198). Abandoning the habits forged out of the

shameful realization that her peers deemed her mother's behavior inappropriate, Beccah chooses what she could not do as a young child – she chooses her mother.

In the climax of the novel, Beccah realizes that she could not balance her obligations to her mother and her feelings of neglect because she didn't know the affective history of her mother's migration. With the message of the cassette heard, Beccah storms to the funeral home where her mother's body is being prepared for the outlandish wake Auntie Reno is planning in her honor (and to make money). Faced with the outspoken Reno, Beccah's newfound knowledge about her mother is not only confirmed but criticized. For as she argues with Reno about the proper way to mourn her mother, she realizes that Reno never doubted Soon Hyo's abilities, was never embarrassed by her actions. She allows Reno to hold the funeral in her mother's honor but does not allow her to dress her mother up for people to gawk at. Instead, Beccah decides to have her cremated. She collects her mother's ashes and then shakes them into the river, slowly dipping her finger to the water, putting it to her mouth, bonding her body with her mother's one last time.

In this way, the cassette becomes a material trace of the imperialist histories that brought Beccah and her mother to Hawai'i to begin with. The cassette becomes the object that holds their histories; a confirmation that Beccah's bond with her mother was thwarted by the silences expected of oppressive and violence invocations of power, both by the Japanese *and* by Soon Hyo's American husband. Moreover, the cassette spurs Beccah to remember a past she had lodged inside of her psyche, memories of shame and abuse, that had transformed into idealizations of a father who would save her from her 'crazy mother'. In this moment, hearing the *chesa* for her grandmother and the name of

her mother and her sisters, Beccah realizes she needn't have prayed to her father, to his God, and to those blue eyes to save her; she only had to learn to listen to what her mother had been telling her all along. She had a place. She belonged. To a long line of women who have combatted the discomforts of life by shifting shape, by caring for one another, and passing on these lessons of survival in a language much more flexible, much more felt, than the words that Beccah has spent her life trying to command (as a writer).

And it is in this way that *Comfort Woman*, though focused on the potentiality of the US-born child, offers an alternative method of historiography for Korean comfort women. For as Soon Hyo reminds us, as readers, the meaning of her story is not easy. It is not simply about a mother-daughter connection being discovered, though our tropes of generational conflict in US ethnic literature, and particularly Asian American literature, might bring us to these conclusions. Instead, what *Comfort Woman* offers is a representation of the work required to speak the violences of converging imperialist endeavors, of sexual violences enacted in the name of the nation and God. *Comfort Woman* reminds us that we must practice listening to literature, paying attention to the affective resonances and linguistic echoes, to uncover a history that must be *felt* in order to be *heard*.

Just as silenced histories provide Beccah with a pathway towards living, so too, does Camila discover her self through the story of her mother. This resolution, however, is harder to notice, for as mentioned earlier, Camila and Salomé's stories move in reverse. In this way, the conclusion of the story actually occurs at the start of the novel itself. During the prologue, Camila is with her friend and past lover, Marion as they drive to Florida. It is in this southernmost state that Marion has decided to settle down with a

man (a surprise to Camila) and where Camila will leave to return to Cuba. As they sit together, preparing to start two very different lives, Camila decides to tell Marion why she's decided to return to Cuba after all of these years. "I'll have to start with my mother," Camila explains, "which means at the birth of la patria, since they were both born about the same time" (7). The dialogue pauses as Camila reflects on how her voice "sounds strangely her own and not her own" as she is explaining herself to her friend (7). "She's done it all her life," she thinks, "this habit of erasing herself, of turning herself into the third person, a minor character, the best friend (or daughter!) of the dying first-person hero or heroine" (7-8).

As if letting us in on a little secret, Camila suggests that what appears to be a story told by an omniscient third person narrator, is actually being told by Camila herself. As such, what appears to be a novel made up of two temporally distinct stories is in fact one story being narrated by Camila, though she might diminish herself, turn herself into a 'the best friend (or daughter!) of the dying first-person hero or heroine.' Marion, however, doesn't understand this, Camila explains, for she "has not gotten past the first few years of Salomé's life and the wars of independence when her friend interrupts. 'I thought you were finally going to talk about yourself' (7-8). "I *am* talking about myself," Camila insists, "before she begins again" (7-8).

In this moment, we realize that *In the Name of Salomé* is a novel about how a Dominican woman in exile explains her political investments to a white woman from the Midwest. In order for Marion to understand Camila's decision she needs to understand how Camila's choice has risen out of a long history; one that begins with her mother and the birth of the Dominican Republic as an independent nation, but also stems from her

personal struggles to speak for herself – to negotiate what is expected of her as a daughter, a sister, a lover, and a Dominican. Camila has to explain the feelings that surround the history of her country, a story her mother's life tells well. And so she uses her subjunctive; she turns to her mother's story, situating her life beside it, exposing the affective similarities that connect Camila and her mother across time and space.

This point is made explicit in the epilogue. Much like the framing provided in the prologue, the epilogue continues the novel's meta-narrative as Camila returns to Santo Domingo to meet her nieces, visit her family's old living quarters, and see where she will be buried. Narrating in first person, Camila thinks about the pain of realizing her mother was never going to return. As she reflects on the strategies she used to manage her grief, she details one that sounds strangely like the novel itself: "I learned her story," Camila explains, "I put it side by side with my own. I wove our two lives together as strong as a rope and with it I pulled myself out of the pit of depression and self-doubt (335).

According to Camila, the hybrid structure of *In the Name of Salomé* is a strategy for managing grief; storytelling is how Camila saves herself. For as Camila explains: "no matter what [she] tried, [her mother] was still gone" (335). The only place she could find her mother was "among the living. Mamá was alive and well in Cuba, where I struggled with others to build the kind of country she had dreamed of" (335).

In these final moments of the novel, we see that the struggle of building a country out of a dream has been at the center of this emotionally charged novel. But this is not without struggle. Camila makes this point when explaining the meaning of revolution to her niece, Elsa: "It was wrong to think that there was an answer in the first place, dear. There are no answers." Camila explains. "It's continuing to struggle to create the

country we dream of that makes a patria out of the land under our feet. That much I learned from my mother'" (350). By narrating how her mother managed her feelings, exposing the relationship between emotions and politics, Camila realizes that radical politics is not an event or a concept to arrive at; rather, it is a struggle, a process in which you navigate the various social structures and ties to which you are obligated to and inscribed within. Politics, history, and narration require the subjunctive. And by narrating the affective history of the hemisphere, Camila is able to finally realize that at the center of radical politics lay our imaginations and our emotional attachments to a future that can be better than our present. Importantly, Camila had to narrate the affective histories leading up to her migration, tracing her mother's life, the various occupations and dictatorships of the Dominican, and her personal struggles with articulating her desires in order to explain to her friend, Marion, why she is departing for Cuba. The context is important. But so, too, is the subjunctive.

Using similar narrative forms – alternating between mother and daughter and exploring the emotional connections and disconnections felt between both parties—both *In the Name of Salomé* and *Comfort Woman* create a fictional story of migration that addresses the attachments and detachments, what I've been called the affective histories, that emerge when individuals navigate and negotiate imperialist powers. By narrating the affective history of imperialism in these stories of migration, both writers historicize migration, reaching back through generations, and resituate the United States, not as exception to the rules of empire, but as exemplary imperialist contender. Showing how women deal with, and ultimately survive, the structural as well as individual traumas and oppressions and limitations incurred under (Western) heteropatriarchal, white

supremacist imperialism, *Comfort Woman* and *In the Name of Salomé* are able to narrate how the ‘historical’ is felt. By providing these affective histories, both *In the Name of Salomé* and *Comfort Woman* revise the affective expectations of historical fiction—centering their novels around imaginative characterizations, rather than historical truths. In this way, they make it clear to their white, American audiences, whether it is Beccah’s father or Camila’s ex- Marion, that the story of exile is rooted in lifetimes of feelings.

CHAPTER 4

ALTERNATIVE ARCHIVES:

NOTES, LETTERS, AND MIGRATORY SECRETS IN LAN CAO'S *MONKEY*

BRIDGE AND ACHY OBEJAS' DAYS OF AWE

Revolutions happen, I'm convinced, because intuition tells us we're meant for a greater world. If this one were good enough, we'd settle, happy as hens, and never rise up. But we know better: We feel the urge, ardent and fallible as it may be, for a kind of continual transcendence (Obejas 1).

Achy Obejas' 2001 novel *Days of Awe* opens in an italicized meditation on longing: Revolutions are born out of desire for something greater, our narrator tells us, poignantly and briefly lingering on "Eve's—or was it Lilith's" "pang of desire for something else," "a longing" that led to the rebellious trade-in of immortality for "the anarchy of emotions" (1). According to our narrator, giving ourselves over to our emotions is, "[i]n a word, revolution" (1). And these revolts, "inevitably messy and bloody, no matter how just...only provoke a wish for more and more uprisings" (1). Though regularly figured as a political practice – a determined effort to change one system and replace it with a better, more just, governing and economic system – as our narrator makes clear, revolution is intimate. For revolution is about desire; aches for better that never end, no matter what the result of a revolution may bring.

This opening meditation on feminine rebellion, emotions, and revolution sets the stage for *Days of Awe*, a novel that narrates the inner thoughts of Alejandra, a Cuban-

American who left the island as a young child with her parents just as the country saw a shift in regime from Batista to Castro. In this way, the opening mediation can be read as an introduction to Alejandra, a character whose life is marked by the weight of revolution: Born on New Year's Day in 1959 in Havana, Ale and her family fled the island on the night of the Bay of Pigs invasion, making it to Miami only to realize that the Cuban planes they fearfully saw the previous night were really US planes in disguise. The entanglement of revolution, birth, and departure that begins *Days of Awe* grows more complicated ironically as the narrative gains coherence through its dominant plotline based around Alejandra's desire to uncover a family secret – why her father, Enrique, a descendent of anusims from Spain, keeps his faith a secret. Jumping between visits to Cuba for work, dates with men, relationships with women, dinners with her parents, and childhood memories, *Days of Awe* pulls together disparate scenes and timeframes through Alejandra's perpetual desire to understand her father's secret; using emotion, quite specifically longing, to provide a sense of narrative coherence without temporal linearity.

The centrality of desire is quickly swallowed, however, by *Days of Awe's* plot; one, like many 1.5 generation immigrant narratives, that centers around a parent-child divide, a filial lack to which many ascribe the protagonist's uncertainty about their place in US, originary homeland, and diasporic communities. Given the dominance of Cold War discourses, particularly in the US, and especially in US literary studies, it is easy to assimilate *Days of Awe* into the cadre of texts about Cuban exiles. And yet, the novel resists such placement, situating itself in abstraction – seeding itself within a history of feminine and emotional rebellion (aligning itself with Eve, or maybe Lilith), rather than Western Cold War politics. By unearthing the conflicting dimensions of revolution, its

micro and macro valences, Obejas suggests that stories like Alejandra's are more about the emotional work of migration, than clear cut critiques of U.S. nationalist projects domestically and abroad *and* nationalistically-tethered (normative) desires for a better life.

With its focus on the emotional anarchy of revolution— both individual and geopolitical — *Days of Awe* sounds similar notes to those heard in Lan Cao's 1997 novel *Monkey Bridge*, a novel that considers the American War in Viet Nam through the perspective of Vietnamese refugees, a mother and daughter struggling to connect as they build a new life in the US. Though *Monkey Bridge* was published before Obejas' *Days of Awe* and takes up a different experience of exile, both novels notably share a plotline about a 1.5 immigrant protagonist's desire to uncover a family secret. *Monkey Bridge* focuses on a small family of Vietnamese refugees: Mai, a teenager, and her mother, Thanh who are living in the Little Saigon section of Falls Church, Virginia. The novel opens in Arlington hospital where Mai, along with her best friend, Bobbie, and her family's close friend, Mrs. Bay, sit with her mother, Thanh, who is recovering from a stroke. The narration in this scene moves between the present moment in the hospital to Mai's memories of volunteering in a hospital in Viet Nam and back again to the hospital room where her mother, Thanh, is calling out for Baba Quan, the grandfather missing from Mai's American life. The flashbacks are clear indications of trauma, a recurring narrative element of *Monkey Bridge* along with Mai's inability to rest without the aid of sleeping pills and Thanh's incessant calling out for "Baba Quan." It is the longing for Baba Quan that becomes the novel's dominant narrative tension. For Mai regularly assumes that her mother's mental instability, her facial scars, and her deep entrenchment

in the Vietnamese community in the US, (all antithetical to Mai's interests in entering into the US higher education system, an attempt at the American Dream and national belonging through matriculation at Mt. Holyoke University), are tied to the family's secret – she and her mother being in the US while Baba Quan is in Vietnam.

In this way, both *Monkey Bridge* and *Days of Awe* utilize what many might read as a trauma temporality – a disorienting, non-linear, even circular compilation of flashbacks, memories, anecdotal narration, and dialogue – in order to confront the filial lacks that follow each 1.5-immigrant protagonist throughout their lives in the US. Though both characters could be read as traumatized and obsessed (and have been), this trauma temporality is not merely a sign of pathology – an injury of sorts so regularly attributed to diasporic subjects – but is a narrative technique that bolsters the affectively driven narrative landscape of perplexing and incongruent family desires, some known and many more not. In this way, both novels steer clear of modern-liberal narratives of progress and development (a la ch. 1) by moving seamlessly between time and space. By doing so, both *Days of Awe* and *Monkey Bridge* weave together subterranean narrative threads that both sustain the dominant tensions of both novels – the secrets of (grand)fathers – while elucidating a feminist critique of Western Cold War and nationalist US immigrant politics.

As this chapter will show, both *Monkey Bridge* and *Days of Awe* construct these alternative narratives of diaspora by embedding discrete narrative objects within the texts themselves. In *Monkey Bridge*, it is through diary entries and a final suicide note that Mai is able to learn of her mother's history; in *Days of Awe*, it is hand written and hand delivered letters between Ale and her father's best friend, still in Cuba, Moisés Menach.

Unlike letters in epistolary novels or objects seen in detective novels—things in literature that move the plot forward—the narrative objects in both *Monkey Bridge* and *Days of Awe* do not provide the protagonists with a clear answer to their questions. Instead, these narrative objects serve as archives of alternative knowledge practices, objects that require both protagonists to consider the complicated and contradictory psychic, sensorial, and bodily histories of un/belonging managed by past generations. These archives, unlike those constructed and propagated in and by the US state, media, and military/citizenry, emerge from the intimate act of translating deep psychic wounds into language, and passing these notes onto the next generation so that they might begin to understand that their desire to feel closeness – to their families, their country, and their intimates—might be part of a longer story of isolation. And it is this process, one of decoding narrative objects, that both protagonists undertake as they work to (re)script their identities as children of exiles and refugees of the Cold War.

In what follows, I examine how *Days of Awe* and *Monkey Bridge* both situate their stories about revolution (one in Viet Nam and one in Cuba) within a landscape of longing, one where both protagonists desire private knowledge that public history, archives, and news reports cannot quell. In this way, Chapter 2 moves away from specific emotions – like the ambivalence explored in chapter 1 – in order to consider the anomalous and asynchronous affective experience of desire for 1.5 generation immigrants part of refugee and exile communities in the U.S. In this way, when read together, *Days of Awe* and *Monkey Bridge* illustrate how both Achy Obejas and Lan Cao, two post-Cold war authors of popular US immigrant fiction, suggest that an alternative to dominant racialized and gendered (and sexualized) discourses of US liberal democracy

forged after the Second World War through war, occupation, and domestic legislative revisions lies in the connection between the ‘anarchy of the emotions,’ narrative acts, and diasporic longing. For as the italicized opening of *Days of Awe* makes clear, if we are to understand desire and longing – whether it is propagated by the state or exists interpersonally – we must take note of the (feminist) genealogies of emotion and narrative practice.

Cold War Epistemologies and Affective Worldmaking: Re-Figuring the Refugee through Literary Representation

Though both novels never reached the mainstream popularity of *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Drown*, discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that like the work of Lahiri and Díaz, *Monkey Bridge* and *Days of Awe* gained popularity, in large part, because of the growing multi-ethnic US canon. Tackling topics of exile, refuge, and migration through different diasporic landscapes –the American War in Viet Nam and the Cuban Revolution – both *Monkey Bridge* and *Days of Awe* received similar critical receptions upon publication. Both Cao and Obejas were critiqued for technical flaws yet praised for their thematic fixation on experiences of the 1.5 immigrant generation from Communist regimes.⁵⁵ In this way, both *Monkey Bridge* (1997) and *Days of Awe* (2001) delivered what mainstream literary publishers wanted, fulfilling neo/liberal

⁵⁵ An unknown in the literary world, Michiko Kakutani, critic for the New York Times, was quick to charge Lan Cao’s *Monkey Bridge* as “melodramatic,” “incongruous,” and “clumsy.” Though the response to Cao’s technical prowess was lukewarm, Kakutani found Cao’s representation of Vietnamese-Americans “impressive,” comparing her to more canonical authors such as “Salman Rushdie and Bharati Mukherjee” known for their “mapping [of] the state of exile and its elusive geography of loss and hope.” *Days of Awe* was critiqued in *Publisher’s Weekly* for technical aspects like a “near plotless” that was “drag[ging] in places.” However, the content of *Days of Awe*, its focus on a 1.5-generation Cuban immigrant, was considered, at least by *Publisher’s Weekly*, the novel’s “redeem[able]” quality, “clear-eyed” and “remarkably fresh meditation on familiar but perennially vital themes.”

multiculturalist impulses of the US literary market and imaginary of the late 1990s and early 2000s by providing a peek into America's growing immigrant populations.

Beyond receiving similar reviews, *Monkey Bridge* and *Days of Awe* both utilize detective narrative frameworks to tell their stories. As mentioned in the introduction, both novels center around young, female protagonists who feel emotionally detached from their lives in the States and attribute that disconnect to a parental unknown. Importantly, in both novels, it is not a general lack, a disconnect between parent and child so common in US immigrant fiction that centers around the question of assimilation and acculturation, but rather both stories feature a parental secret that once known expands the singular migration story that dominates each text, into a manifold story about colonialism, imperialism, and identity that links each protagonist's experiences as racial minorities in the United States with histories of un/belonging based on gender, race, and religion across time and, importantly, empires. In this way, both *Days of Awe* and *Monkey Bridge* stand out as mainstream texts that challenge dominant narratives of migrancy and exile in the US.

This is due, in large part, to the point-of-view seen in both novels. For example, *Monkey Bridge* deals with the American War in Viet Nam and Vietnamese refugees in the US, but does so through the perspective of Vietnamese refugees. Published in 1997, *Monkey Bridge* was the first novel of its kind – written about Vietnamese refugees by a Vietnamese refugee.⁵⁶ So, too, is *Days of Awe* a novel of Cuban exiles written by a

⁵⁶ For more on how Cao understands her position within the Vietnamese-American literary canon see her interview with Audrey Chin, "Diving into the Wreckage and Into the World" published in *diaCRITICS*. For examples of how American experiences in Vietnam dominated literary and cultural studies see Philip D. Beldler's *American Literature and the Experience of Vietnam*, Maureen Ryan's *The Other Side of Grief: The Home Front and the Aftermath in American Narratives of the Vietnam War*, the *Vietnam Anthology* edited by Nancy Anisfield, or *Vietnam War Literature*, an annotated bibliography compiled by John Newman, David A. Willson, David J. Derose, Stephen P. Hidalgo, and Nancy J. Kendall.

Cuban exile. Though authorial biographies can be insightful, what makes these conditions of production critically important is that the US cultural, political, and especially literary imagination had been filled with texts about both the Vietnam War and the Cuban revolution. For both historical events represented losses to the democratic ethos of the US. Put differently, Cuba and Viet Nam, two of four socialist states remaining in the world, held (and arguably continue to hold) a special place in the US imaginary as sites of both failure and democratic need. And literary and cultural representations of these wars and the immigrants they created have been tasked with the work of (re)producing an image of a benevolent, democratic United States.

As the globe reconfigured itself following WWII,⁵⁷ the United States positioned itself as global power by touting its liberal democratic ideals, a tactic that necessitated underplaying its colonial, imperial, and discriminatory practices both at home and abroad. As Jodi Kim notes in *Ends of Empire: Asian American Critique and the Cold War*, “[t]his logic of empire” of “contain[ing] the double threat of Soviet communism and totalitarianism” and “spread[ing] capitalism and ‘democracy,’ or American empire,” was adopted by U.S. policy makers by 1960 as they engaged in diplomacy and policies “not only [in] Asia and the Pacific Rim...but also the ‘ten pins’ of America’s extensive informal global empire in other regions of the world” like the Caribbean and Latin America (27). By spreading capitalism and democracy, Kim explains, the United States attempted to “transfer [the] political, military, and economic hegemony from Europe to the United States and shift from European territorial colonialism to a less formal, but no

⁵⁷ See Howard Winant’s *The World is a Ghetto: Race and Democracy Since World War II*.

less insidious, U.S. (neo)imperialism” (26).⁵⁸ This deployment of empire in the name of liberal democratic capitalism, Kim argues, simultaneously “aided the avoidance of a civil or class war in the United States” itself (27). In this way, Kim argues, the Cold War and its dyad of “capitalist democracy” and “communist totalitarianism” functioned as what Cedric Robinson called a “discursive cloak,” “an ideological machine with which to preserve imperial and colonial 'adventures' among darker peoples and to suppress democratic movements at home” (27-28).

US Immigration Law serves as a clear example of this discursive cloak. As chapter 1 explicates, immigration legislation has historically been used by the US to regulate the conflicts between its liberal democratic ethos and its racial-capitalist driven exclusions. So, too, was immigration legislation a crucial state apparatus that managed migrant populations from regions militarized by the US. Importantly, Southeast Asia, Vietnam in particular, and Cuba feature prominently in revisions to US immigration legislation in the latter half of the twentieth century as both regions became crucibles for the mixing of Western ideals of liberation and freedom, capitalist exploitation, and neoimperialist militarization. With the passage of legislation acts such as the 1945 War Brides Act, the 1946 Alien Fiancées and Fiancés Act, the 1946 Chinese War Brides Act, the 1950 Act on Alien Spouses and Children, and the 1968 Armed Forces Naturalization Act, the US made clear that military work abroad was not only necessary, but was worthy of citizenship, both for those who worked with the US (1968 act) and for those individuals who came to be involved in intimate, familial relations with US military

⁵⁸ In this framework, Kim suggests that the Cold War was “a trade war,” one that relied on ‘neocolonial’ restoration of economic and trade patterns modeled on previous colonial relations” and “an increasing reliance on military Keynesianism, with the wars in Korea and Vietnam serving as key ‘pump primers’” (23; 24).

peoples abroad. In 1982, the US passed the Amerasian Homecoming Act which offered entry to children born of American fathers in Cambodia, Korea, Laos, Thailand, or Vietnam after December 31, 1950, and also allowed their immediate relatives to receive refugee benefits.

Through the framework of a (militarized) heteropatriarchal unit, the US was able to extend citizenship to those who were affected by US imperialism/militarism abroad, assuaging the ravage of war by focusing on US soldier-citizens and those they met while defending their country. Additionally, with the passage of the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act (also known as the McCarran-Walter Act) and later the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, US immigration legislation functioned to assuage the United States' domestic discrimination by 'opening up' its borders to racialized migrants from across the globe who were 'victims' of communism in particular. There was first the 1975 Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act which was followed by the 1975 Appropriations for Vietnamese and Cambodian Refugees, the 1976 Amendment to the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act, and then the 1977 Amendment to the Indochina Migration and Refugee Assistance Act. These acts, as their names suggest, focused extensively on Southeast Asia and Soviet-allied regions, including Cuba, and not only offered entry into the country, but often provided financial assistance for relocation and resettlement.

In this way, Cuba and Vietnam quickly hardened into crucial symbols in the narrative of US liberal democracy. And so they remained long after the end of the Cold War. According to Jodi Kim, this is because the Cold War was not merely a "historical event or epoch," but also a "structure of feeling, a knowledge project, a hermeneutics for

interpreting developments in the ‘post’-Cold War conjunction” (3). According to Kim, these Cold War epistemologies functioned as “pedagogy” that “generate[d] and t[ought] ‘new’ knowledge by making sense of the world through Manichean logics and grammars of good and evil” (8). Central to these Cold War epistemologies and imperial logics was the figure of the refugee. First formally delineated as a subject in the global landscape following the second world war, the 1951 UN Convention Related to the Status of Refugee defined a refugee not only as a person in a position of state-less-ness but also someone who lacked a state because of *fear* of persecution.

In her book *The Gift of Freedom*, Mimi Nguyen notes how grounding the definition of a refugee in fear made the refugee, as figure, one that was “incontrovertibly traumatized” (58). In this way, the logic of empire developed and deployed during the ‘Cold War’ utilized the refugee as what Mimi Nguyen calls a “condition,” a “medico-juridical structure” that functioned to pathologize the refugee (as traumatized subject, as wanting freedom, etc.) rather than being a “diagnostic of underdevelopment (in multiple senses)” or as a “sign or symptom testifying to the entanglement of race...and liberal governance” (61). In this way, the focus on the individual categorized as refugee – as figure to save, to help, to give freedom to – “eclipse[s]” the “other harm that the diagnosis or cure might itself enact” (Nguyen 65).

The refugee, then, was a traumatized figure caught in a world of decolonization and communism. The United States, as the leader of the ‘free’ world, swiftly stepped in, often with military intervention, to protect such peoples and the places from which they emerged. Under this schema, liberalism was “conceived as a gift of quickened time to those who [were] waiting and wanting” (Nguyen 45). This link between what Yen Le

Espiritu in her book *Body Counts* calls “the trope of the ‘good refugee’ and the myth of ‘the nation of refuge’” makes the “conjoined term ‘*refuge(es)*’” illustrative of how “*refuge* and *refugees* are co-constitutive, and that both are the (by)product of U.S. militarism,” what Espiritu calls “militarized *refuge(es)*” (2). Calling attention to U.S. militarism, Espiritu calls for a new approach to refugee studies – one that no longer maintains a “hyper-focus on the refugee’s needs and achievements” as “located...within the bodies and minds of the refugees rather than in the global historical conditions that produce massive displacements and movements of refugees to the United States and elsewhere” (5).

Working within critical refugee studies, this chapter compares representations of Vietnamese refugees and Cuban exiles in the fiction of Lan Cao and Achy Obejas. Being mindful of the (neo)colonial practices undergirding the routing of peoples from both Cuba and Vietnam into the United States, I turn to the desires undergirding the narrative tensions of both novels – the longing for knowledge that will make sense of their family life, the truths that will fill in the gaps in their stories of exile. Placing desire at the center of literary analysis centers what Espiritu calls the “messiness, contingency, and precarious nature of refugee life” (2). As this analysis will show, both texts incorporate discrete narrative objects that complicate the singular point of view presented in their novels, providing additional voices and meaning-making practices that compel each protagonist to develop a way of knowing rooted in the contradictions of colonialism, liberalism, and diaspora.

With the growth of studies in new materialism and thing theory,⁵⁹ it is imperative to clarify how the narrative objects in *Days of Awe* and *Monkey Bridge* illustrate the importance of narrative and emotion for untethering the experience of exile and asylum from Cold War epistemologies. Unlike other literary considerations of things, Cao and Obejas' narrative objects are not commodities; they do not circulate within markets (capitalist or not). Rather, these objects move between people, and as such, these narrative objects direct our attention to alternative forms of exchange that are certainly shaped by the economy, but do not derive their value from the marketplace alone. For what these narrative objects do in each novel is expose the importance of non-protagonist and crucially non-US character narratives for the emotional desires of each protagonist. By doing so, the novels illustrate the importance of the felt for our understanding of narrativity and the communities to which language seeks to represent.

Importantly, both novels set up the importance of these narrative objects by including ruminations or entire scenes devoted to clarifying a particularly emotion-based approach to narrativity. Take for example, *Days of Awe*. Ale's interest in her father's secret begets comparisons between the two characters. In many ways, her father's secretive nature is tied to his work as a literary translator. If her father was "one of the most sought-after literary translators in the United States," "fascinated by the pursuit of meaning, by corralling significance in a word or phrase from the vast array the universe offered," Ale describes herself as "an interpreter of the broad and mundane sort...the mouthpiece for whom I'm paid to speak, whether it's the victim or the victimizer" (10-

⁵⁹ See Bill Brown's *A Sense of Things* and Arjun Appadurai's *The Social Life of Things*

11; 51). Though Ale speaks dismissively of her work, she, too, is a philosophizer of language, meaning, identity, and history. “I’m an empath,” Ale explains,

I slip my client’s words through my mouth as if they were formed by the electrical impulses of my own brain. I don’t think, I hook in, I mind-meld, I feel and I articulate all the agony or joy or confusion the client is experiencing, no matter how horrible or banal the proceedings. When I’m in my reverie, I have no clue about what I’m actually saying. It’s all aaaah-wh-eeeeeeeeee” (92).

According to Ale, translation is about the body, the senses, and feeling, connecting with someone else’s experiences – whether agony or joy or confusion—in totality; losing one’s own sense of self or bodily comportment and transferring the experience through the act of articulation. In this way, Ale is more like her mother’s habit of translating for others. As Ale notes, her mother “would decipher messages as much from facial expression and posture, tone and attitude, as from any etymological knowledge” (10). Adding a third point on the filial translation matrix of the novel, Ale’s ability to translate her client’s experiences is illustrative of her mother’s translation skills; approaches to ‘decipher[ing] messages’ that are just as (if not more) attuned to the language of the body and the import of sound as to the historical and cultural impact of the word itself.

A small detail in the novel, Ale’s connection to her mother, one based in the body and the felt, sets the stage for our understanding of the narrative objects that are exchanged throughout the text. Similarly, *Monkey Bridge* incorporates a story of female rebellion – that of the Trung Sisters—to mark Mai’s ability to perform affectively (and successfully) during her Mt. Holyoke interview as an act of feminine rebellion. Trung Trac and Trung Nhi were female warriors, leaders of the first Vietnamese independence

movement against the Chinese-Han-dynasty. Before her Mt. Holyoke interview, the “multitudes of stories [she] had been told about the Trung sisters” from her mother and father flood her mind (118). Mai imagines herself in “this world,” claiming that she “was Trung Trac, the first fighter, along with her sister, to elevate guerilla warfare and hit-and-run tactics into an art of war, the first Vietnamese to lead a rebellion of peasants against the Chinese empire” (119-120). According to Mai these tactics, “the poor person’s weapon” of “all-out guerrilla warfare,” were meant to “strike physically and psychically” (120). The goal was to “unsettle the enemy’s nerves,” turning a powerful enemy into a “terrorized one” (121). According to Mai, the Trung tactics take the felt experience seriously, situating it at the center of the power dynamics of warfare, recognizing the power of psychic domination so that “the hunter” would “suddenly become the hunted” (123).

Mai uses this story of feminine power during her interview at Mt. Holyoke; a formality that requires Mai to sit through her American interviewer’s innumerable questions about the war in Vietnam. “If the dreaded college interview was to be a battle,” Mai explains, “and the interviewer my opponent,” she would use the story of the Trung sisters as “the battlefield strategy my parents taught me” (118). This scene is one of the only moments in the entirety of the novel when Mai recounts her experiences and memories of Viet Nam. Moreover, it is one of the few moments in the novel where Mai’s parents are not pathologized or depressed or dead. Instead, they are the bearers of the stories she needs to survive this moment. Interestingly, and much like Ale’s turn to her mother’s silent and empathy-based practice of translation, so, too, does Mai take on the anti-imperial and anti-American exceptionalist work of rendering Viet Nam *internally*.

And as her use of the Trung sister story makes clear, her silence is not a lack, rather Mai's performance during her interview illustrates the importance of emotional control in countering Western stories of Viet Nam.

This chapter follows these threads of feminine rebellion and emotionally based understandings of language to explicate a theory of emotional narrativity that stems from the figure of the refugee and the experience of exile. Importantly, it is the desire to fill in gaps in their knowledge of their family life – a longing that drives Mai and Ale's investigatory demeanors – that create an opportunity for affect-based world making. According to Claudia Breger, “the inclusion of affect facilitates a non-linear concept of narrative worldmaking,” one that does not see narrative incongruence or flashback or circularity as a sign of pathology or authorial deficit (229). Turning her attention away from the “privilege[ing of] the mimetic dimension of narrative,” and towards “detailed investigations of narrative form,” Breger describes narrative worldmaking as “*a performative process of configuring affects, associations, attention, experiences, evaluations, forms, matter, perspectives, perceptions, senses, sense, topoi, and tropes in and through specific media, including mental operations as well as graphic notations, words and gestures, images and sounds*” (231). Breger continues, arguing that “[i]n the realm of literature... such worldmaking is firmly anchored in the *rhetorical loops of composition (or production) and reading (or spectatorship)*” (231).

Though Breger's attention to the “*distributed agency of nonsovereign actors*— including but not limited to authors, narrators, characters, and readers in the literary circuit” might lead too easily to reader response approaches to literature, she is correct in clarifying the role of “*reading (or spectatorship)* in narrative worldmaking (231). For as

scholars such as Mimi Nguyen and Yen Le Espiritu made clear, the power of readers, the market place, and the state and capitalist structures that influence banal and daily practices like reading, are central to the solidification of the refugee as a figure that upholds liberal, democratic capitalism and U.S. militarism. For as Jodi Kim argues, cold war epistemologies *are* pedagogies, reading practices that perpetuate uneven representations of refugees, asylum seekers, and exiles as ‘pathological’ individuals in need of (U.S.) liberal saving. In this way, then, Breger’s concept of narrative worldmaking “provides...a way of conceptualizing how affects, and affectively charged (bodily and other) memories, associations, topoi and tropes, do not just disrupt or break into texts as a force of immediacy, but circulate, stick in, and co-constitute narrative texts” (232-3). Just as affects such as fear and want have stuck to the figure of the refugee, transforming them into medico-juridical figures to be saved rather than people with complex attachments and experiences, so too, do literary narratives become trapped in “literary circuit[s]” (Breger 231) that inform the narrative worlds being made in the texts themselves.

This is precisely what both Ale from *Days of Awe* and Mai from *Monkey Bridge* do as they journey to discover the truths that elude them. Though they seek to find what Breger calls the “(singular) ‘truth value’” of their parents’ secrets, they end up having to “explor[e] the *plural, sensory, and conceptual truths*, evoked by a fictive reconfiguration of real world pieces” that come to them through narrative objects like letters and diary entries (234). In this way, the work of finding and reading these narrative objects *is* emotional work. For as Sara Ahmed argues in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, “[f]eelings...take the ‘shape’ of the contact we have with objects,” “whether something is

beneficial or harmful involves thought and evaluation, at the same time that it is 'felt' by the body" it "involves reading the contact we have with objects...a process of reading" attuned to the senses and the felt (5, 6). This is the work that both Ale and Mai undertake – work that is not narrated, but instead exists in the silent space of the novel where readers engage with the same narrative objects the protagonists do, but without any protagonist-narrator meditation. The narrative objects in both novels prompt this kind of work, engaging both protagonist-narrators in an emotional process of discovery; a process that simultaneously produces alternative narratives of exile that complicate the Cold War epistemologies that both Ale and Mai rely on when trying to uncover their filial secrets.

Feminist Genealogies of Exile in *Monkey Bridge*

The use of narrative objects in *Monkey Bridge* has garnered some attention by scholars of Cao's work.⁶⁰ For many, the narrative objects – the two diary entries and Thanh's final suicide letter – highlight the trauma of Thanh and Mai. For both objects are written through clouded intent, that is to say, both narratives are meant to be shared, but are never actually transferred between mother and daughter. Take the diary entries, stand-alone narrative objects written in italics that make up their own chapters. Mai finds these entries in her mother's bedroom dresser at her mother's request: "The red and pink pajamas at the bottom of the third drawer of my bedroom chest, counting from the bottom up," Thanh instructs her daughter while in the hospital healing from her stroke (45).

⁶⁰ See Michele Janette's "Guerilla Irony in Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*," Bukong Tuon's "An Outsider with Inside Information": The 1.5 Generation in Lan Cao's *Monkey Bridge*," and Quan Manh Ha's "Conspiracy of Silence and New Subjectivity in *Monkey Bridge* and *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*."

The specificity of these directions is seemingly lost on Mai who assumes that her mother had “forgotten her bedroom was a catacomb of recesses in which secrets could be hidden and later found” (45). In the drawer, Mai finds “common notepad paper from the local dime store, crowded with columns of black ink” in her “mother’s handwriting,” “formal, authoritative Vietnamese” Mai “could still read and understand but could not, at this point, writer [her]self” (46). Holding these papers, Mai “contemplate[d] the possibility of touching, actually touching, this untouchable part of my mother’s nighttime life” (46). Seeking a sensorial knowledge of her mother, one brought on through writing, Mai quickly disappears from the novelistic frame as Thanh’s voice, italicized, takes precedence.

The diary entry begins with Thanh noting how her daughter does not understand her: “*Mai doesn’t believe in the magic that’s locked in my ears,*” she writes, continuing that Mai “*doesn’t know that the story of my ears is the same as the story of my mother’s life in the rice-growing province of Ba Xuyen*” (46-7). The rest of the diary entry narrates the story of Thanh’s ears, a tale that requires her to recount Thanh’s mother’s life, Tuyet, who at age 14 was preparing to marry Baba Quan. Though there is much to say about Mai’s grandmother, Tuyet, the diary entry focuses on an old tradition, one where the newly married woman was taken to “*a bed of bleached white cotton*” on the night of her wedding to prove her virginity (49). For Tuyet, at 14, this tradition occurred “*in the black stupor of her husband’s house, in a village a three full days and nights away by horse-drawn carriage*” (49). As the story goes, Tuyet produced “*fresh blood, three drops,*” which led to her being returning to her village “*in full fanfare*” with people cheering and waving white clothes “*like miniature flags hoisted by a conquered land.*” (49). Tuyet

returned, Thanh writes, “*an accidental victor in a very old war*” (49). For having produced blood on her wedding night, Tuyet secured good karma for generations to come.

Cognizant of the complex narrative web she is weaving for Mai, Thanh returns to her opening conundrum – that is, the relationship between her “*mother’s wedding day*” and her “*ears*” (51). According to Tuyet, Thanh’s ears “*were ears reborn and made permanently whole to compensate for the stumps of pig ears that had been inflicted generationally on the girls of our village*” who did not produce blood on their wedding nights. Referencing the village practice of cutting off a pig’s ears if a newlywed woman did not produce blood on her wedding night, Thanh makes clear the feminist import of her ears. “*Inside my ears,*” Thanh explains, was

the rage and revenge of every girl from every generation before whose return with a shameful and earless pig had destroyed her family’s lives... Through my ears...I would have the power not only to heal my mother’s fear but also to repair generations after generation of past wrongs by healing the faces of karma itself” (52).

In this way, the story of Thanh’s ears – the story that fills the pages Mai is instructed to find in order to bring her mother pajamas at the hospital – is a story of feminine rebellion.

Thanh already knows Mai won’t believe the story of her “*even if [she] were to tell her directly*” (53). In this way, the narrative object becomes crucial. For in writing to Mai, under the guise of writing to herself, she is able to produce the sensation in Mai of discovering her mother’s secret – a desire central to Mai’s drives throughout the novel. Moreover, the narrative object – the story it tells and the process through which it is

delivered—exhibits Thanh’s agency. For though Cold War epistemologies teach us to read Thanh as sick and disconnected from her daughter, this entry makes clear that Thanh has alternative ways of connecting with her daughter; methods, like this not-so-hidden diary entry, that connect her to her daughter and attempt to provide care and support for Mai as she journeys through life. For as Thanh writes, she knows what Mai seeks and willfully goes along with Mai’s desire, knowing her daughter is “*so lost between two worlds that she can’t find her way back into the veins and arteries of her mother’s love... She wants me to let her walk blamelessly out of one life and into another. And that was my gift to her, to allow her the satisfaction of thinking I’m unaware*” (53).

But Thanh is not unaware, and by instructing her daughter to bring her pajamas, Thanh brings Mai to this story of blood, belonging, karma, and power. Moving Mai’s attention away from Baba Quan and towards the invisibilized woman by his side, Tuyet, Thanh disrupts the singular voice of *Monkey Bridge*; unsettling the dominance of Mai’s point-of-view and amending the stories of Viet Nam and the American War that Mai absorbs from the news media, the community of exiles in Little Falls, Virginia, and her adoptive parents in Connecticut, Uncle Michael and Aunt Mary. In this way, Thanh is active, a mother carefully assuaging the disconnect she feels growing between her and her daughter; *managing* disconnect through narrative. Through narrative object – a diary entry tucked inside a dresser—Thanh provides her daughter with a new historiography, one centered around gender and sexuality, crucial details for Mai to have if she is to understand Baba Quan’s absence.

The work these narrative objects are tasked with to explain Thanh’s scars and Baba Quan’s absence continues in the second (and final) diary entry included in *Monkey*

Bridge. Unlike the first narrative object that is ‘found’ by Mai as she looks for the pajamas, Mai seeks out the second installment of Thanh’s ‘diaries,’ reading them after her interview at Mt. Holyoke and her discussion with Uncle Michael about Baba Quan. Importantly, it is at this intersection, where the perpetual question of “what happened to Baba Quan” and what “sort of sorrow” Mai’s mother was “living with” juts up against Mai’s complex assimilatory desires that the second narrative object of the novel appears. As she turns the pages hidden in the dresser drawer, Mai “feel[s] the pulsing of [her] veins,” a sensation “that usually precedes entry into a forbidden, private realm” (168). Her sensorial experience erupts out of the knowledge that “right here, within [her] reach, was the truth of [her] mother’s many lives” (168).

The novel then turns to its italicized rendering of Thanh’s writing, an entry that continues to expose a long karmic connection between Thanh and Mai. To tell this story, Thanh provides an examination of her own life, including her marriage, at age 15, to Mai’s father, Binh; a story that much like Tuyet’s tale, illuminates the gendered lineage and feminized exiles that superseded Mai’s move to the United States. Thanh begins:

I too was an immigrant at practically the same age Mai was when we first arrived in this country. Before I crossed the Pacific Ocean to join my daughter in the United States, I had already crossed the Mekong River to embark on what would be one of the more furious riddles of my life, wifehood. The year I turned fifteen was the year I left my beautiful school to marry her father, left my village with its green liquid rice fields to go to her father’s village, many kilometers away (171-2).

Starting with similarity, Thanh again reorients Mai's narrative of migration by centering her experience of exile by marriage. Central to her experience exile, Thanh writes, was her husband's disposition. For though Binh "*could recite the political philosophy of Jean-Jacque Rousseau,*" he was only politically open minded "*for the world... not for his wife*" (180).

As the note continues, so do the details of Binh and Thanh's marriage, a moment that marked "*the union of two of the most prosperous landowning dynasties of the Mekong region*" (182). As Thanh writes, she "*was ushered out of the Providence and into a whole new life...with one stroke of the pen, one nod of the head from Uncle Khan and Baba Quan*" (186). And it was there, Thanh writes, "*hidden behind my husband's gorgeous gesture of love, was the beginning of a lesson I would realize soon enough: gorgeous gestures backed by a thousand years of tradition may not be much different from wars and other acts more stark and obvious in their capacity for violence*" for just as "*Vietnam became Cochin Chine, 'Annam, and Tonkin*" so, too, did Thanh become "*Mrs. Nguyen Van Binh*" (186). Importantly, Thanh pairs this description of exile to her critique of Binh and his notions of progress for Viet Nam. For though her husband was progressive, marrying out of love and writing "*against feudal vestiges*" in Vietnam, he sought progress for "*those in the open-air world out there—landless peasants, factory workers, tribal minorities whose struggles had been documented in books he read and collected*" (187). Thanh was not a part of this vision. For rather than cultivating their marriage out of love, not arrangement, Binh left Thanh alone "*two days after their wedding to go spread his wing...at the University of Saigon, where he stayed almost ten years while*" Thanh worked to learn "*the new details of [her] life*" by "*listen[ing] to the*

servants talk” (188, 190). In this way, Thanh’s narrative objects, function as crucial reorientations to notions of migration, exile, and, importantly, state-formation – alternative intimate histories that demonstrate how such histories of war, militarization, and revolution are part of the everyday life of subjects, like Thanh, whose gendered and sexualized identities are also entrenched in practices, both modern and traditional, that subjugate some and lift up others.

As she nears the end of her story, of marriage and exile and progressive (Socialist) ideals—Thanh turns to Mai, writing

[p]erhaps, if Mai were to read this, she would ask: Is that all? My daughter, like the American accustomed to hearing about the savagery of foreign lands, might expect much more drama from a life in a country back there... What she wants to see is a good exciting movie of adventure set in a foreign land where people are as capable of inflicting brutalities—of the kind no one here could be accused of inflicting—as they are of enduring them.

No, I had had a good house, my new parents called me a model daughter-in-law. But it was an entry into a sort of exile, nonetheless (191).

Directly contesting Cold War epistemologies that figure the “third world” and the refugee as undergoing immense violence, Thanh’s description of her marriage illuminates a different vision of exile; one that is nuanced and strange and difficult, where violences and subjugation and lack of freedom is vocalized in the quotidian details of an absent husband and a new family.

Up until this point, the narrative objects in *Monkey Bridge* work together to produce an alternative narrative of ‘the refugee’ through an intersectional feminist approach to exile and freedom. In this way, *Monkey Bridge* illustrates how narrative work – as seen in each of these ‘found’ narrative objects—is central to the reorientation and ultimately disruption of dominant Cold War binary logics. And it is precisely the *work*, emotional, karmic, *and* narrative, that becomes apparent in the final narrative note of the novel. This object, Thanh’s suicide note, is written directly to Mai and confirms that like Mai, Thanh has also “*tried to extinguish the imprints of [her] life and create alternate visions that suit [her] imagination and heal [her] soul*” (227). Referring to letters she “*left in a drawer for you to find*” as this “*new world*,” Thanh explains to Mai that those notes are (were) the “*legacy*” she wanted to give to Mai (227). It is here, in this final note, that we learn what happened to Baba Quan – why he did not go to the United States with Thanh and Mai and Uncle Michael. The secret that Thanh had been hiding from Mai was that Baba Quan was a “*Vietcong from whom I am still trying to escape*” (227).

A Vietcong in the family, as Thanh writes to Mai, in “*the world of Little Saigon*” was a secret to keep close (227). And yet the secret that Thanh has kept from Mai is much more complicated than the political allegiances of Baba Quan. For as the letter continues, we learn that Thanh was the daughter born of Tuyet, Baba Quan’s wife and the heroine of the first note, and Uncle Khan, the wealthy land owner of the Mekong Delta whose wife suffered from infertility and miscarriages. Thanh was begot out of a deal, one where Baba Quan gave his wife to Uncle Khan as concubine in order to remain farming the land of Ba Xuyen, a region where family after family found themselves deep in unpayable debt and kicked off the land. It was this choice that started “*Baba Quan’s*

passion...about possession...not the land but his wife and his daughter, and later on,” Thanh explains, “*you, the darling grandchild. The thought of reclaiming what had been wrongfully wrested from him*” became an “*inexhaustible passion that he managed to hide behind the cold, calculating doctrine of class warfare between landlord and peasant*” (234).

Baba Quan’s desire for revenge, however, is only the beginning of the secret Thanh has been withholding from Mai. Thanh continues, explaining that while Mai lived in Saigon with her father, Thanh and her family left Ba Xuyen as the region became more and more dangerous and militarized, moving to barracks where “*[t]acked on the wall was our schedule for the week, lectures on civic duty, lessons on the art of uncovering Vietcong agents, seminars on village autonomy and economic self-sufficiency*” (246-7). There, away from the land she had cultivated all of her adult life, Tuyet died, after only “*one week*” (247). With Baba Quan away, “*supposedly engaged in self-defense maneuvers designed to train villagers to protect themselves from Vietcong attacks and propaganda,*” Thanh took matters into her own hand, bringing her mother’s body back to “*the graves of [her] ancestor*” in Ba Xuyen (247). It was there, in her now heavily militarized home, among the “*gray-hued tombs of our ancient burial grounds,*” Thanh describes watching Baba Quan murder Uncle Khan, who “*had returned from Saigon to pay homage to his mother by her grave*” (249). “*Right there,*” Thanh explains, “*on sacred earth...a murder was being committed before my eyes, a slow-burning rage that had begun years before, finally released with the deadly precision of a knife’s edge*” (249).

Watching Baba Quan murder Uncle Khan – knowing full well that she was watching her father murder her father – all while trying to bury her mother was a moment in Thanh’s life when “*everything made sense*” (250). Seeing the “*raw, untamed anguish of a man who had lived his life like a clenched fist, a man who had dreamed of turning a cool hatred into a tormented howl for revenge—against a landlord who had turned his wife into a concubine and taken from him a child who should have been rightfully his,*” Thanh writes that she “*understood*” Baba Quan’s “*messy rage... as nothing more than a pristine lesson in class warfare*” (250). It is this understanding – of the complexities of class, gender, sexuality, nationality, war, and refuge – that Thanh is passing to Mai through her a letter. For it was this moment, “*by that river’s edge*” where a “*part of [Thanh] died forever*” (250). This is the loss that Mai does not understand. It is not simply the loss of Viet Nam or even Ba Xuyen. It is not the loss of Baba Quan or Tuyet, or at least not only. It is the realization that freedom is so difficult to attain, for even those who have more than others – Baba Quan compared to Tuyet for example – are still ravaged by the class system that makes them in debt to land owners with so much power that they can maintain a family structure while stealing a wife and child.

The murderous rage she sees on Baba Quan – the emotions pulsing outward into reparative action – is the knowledge she passes to Mai. It is *this* that has traumatized her and killed a part of her. Not the war as it is represented on Mai’s television or constructed by Little Saigon or Uncle Michael or the interviewer from Mount Holyoke. It is this war – a war between people, the intimate, personal struggles that dominate a person’s affective life-world for decades, leading a man to commit murder in the most sacred of places – this is the war that Thanh tries to explain to Mai. This is the war that has left her

dead. And it is the story of this war, one told through individual, narrative objects, that Thanh gives to her daughter in order to save her.

This final narrative object, one that sounds the second to last note of the novel, is Thanh's final act of love. And it is this love, the love, Thanh describes, as the love of a mother, that Thanh hopes "*will give [Mai] the new beginning that [she] deserve[s], far from the concealing fields and free of a destiny that should never have been [hers]*" (253). As Thanh works to make this meaning clear, utilizing a regular technique of her writing – the insertion of a story as analogic explanation – she assures Mai that the process of writing to her daughter has allowed her to "*feel something [she] ha[sn't]felt in a long time, an unburdened sense of tranquility palpable enough that [she] can almost run through it with [her] hands*" (253). These pages are the legacy she seeks to leave her daughter. For in addition to "*the workings of the cells, and the replications of our DNA structures*" she uses these narratives –these discrete, almost benign, objects – to transfer a "*different inheritance, an unburdened past, the seductive powers of an American future, [and] a mother's true memories....*" (254)

We never learn if these narrative objects work as they were intended – if Mai is freed from her karmic inheritance. The novel ends with a final chapter where Mai recounts her mother's funeral, describing Thanh as "a depressive, someone not with supernatural ears but ears that heard voices of despair urging her on" (255). Though this moment suggests that Mai might have succumbed to the medico-juridical vision of refugees as pathologically traumatized, her story ends with a vision of Vietnam. In the room made her own in Uncle Michael's house, Mai looks at her Mount Holyoke acceptance letter, sobbing, knowing she "would follow the course of [her] own future,"

but carefully aware of “a faint sliver of what only two weeks ago had been a full moon dangled like a sea horse from the sky” (260). With the final note of the novel being a figure of Viet Nam, it is clear that Thanh’s message about their home is, at least, still hanging in suspension as Mai manages the assimilatory possibility of her matriculation to college.

This lack of traditional resolution is important. For understanding why Baba Quan never came to the US, though important, never heals Mai in the way she thinks it will. In this way, the narrative objects of the novel are not included only to present the details Mai seeks, but also to bear witness to the *emotional* work of exile; the narrative work of constructing alternative historiographies and genealogies of exile and migration that complicate the unilateral stories produced in an effort to maintain the dominance of, say, liberal US democratic capitalism. For as Thanh recounts the secret that has kept Baba Quan from Mai, the secret that helps explain the depth of the karmic retaliation that Thanh fears for her daughter, so, too, does she illuminate the complexities of class warfare. By doing so, she not only implodes the unilateral vision of the war in Vietnam, but she presents to her daughter a complex and nuanced story of relationality that highlights the importance of class, gender, and sexuality in Mai’s history. For in this description of Baba Quan, we see how his identity as a Vietcong – clearly meaningful for a US readerly audience, members of the Little Saigon community, *and* his family – is only one dimension behind his passion for class warfare. For the other, perhaps more central, longing undergirding Baba Quan’s attachment to alcohol and revolution was revenge; revenge for a wife he could not have to himself, a daughter that was not his. And it is precisely these complicated heteropatriarchal possessive desires that Thanh has

been highlighting for Mai through her writing. For in each of the previous two diary entries, Thanh has made clear the ways in which rebellion and revolution must be framed through differences of gender and sexuality, not only class. So, too, must understandings of exile be considered as an affective experience deeply tied to freedom, or more specifically, a lack of freedom, rather than a mere condition forged out of displacement and the movement between and across national borders. By telling this story and working diligently to construct a new life story for Mai to inherit, Thanh de-centers the state – both socialist and capitalist—and, remarkably, puts forth an arguably fuller articulation of the complex entanglements of revolution and exile based on, as the first note suggests, a story of feminine rebellion.

Dialogic Diaspora and the Vulnerability of Correspondence

Unlike the narrative objects in *Monkey Bridge*, which are rich in content, the letters that break up the prose of *Days of Awe* are short and one-sided. A pseudo secret from her father, Ale begins to correspond with Moises through handwritten and hand delivered letters after her visit back to the island for work. Though it is clear that Ale is engaged in the letter writing practice, regularly asking her father's childhood friend questions, the purpose of the letters is less clear than the diary entries in *Monkey Bridge*. Whereas Thanh writes the diary to be found and read by her daughter, Mai, the letters between Moisés and Ale – and eventually the letters between Ale and Orlando – do not involve her father. For though the first letter delivery began when Ale visited Cuba for work and her father wrote a letter to Moisés, a letter Moisés says should be written to Ale, Enrique remains removed from these narrative objects for the rest of the novel. What

these letters do, however, is build a connection between Ale and the island first through Moisés and then Orlando. This connection becomes crucial for Ale to understand her father's secretive practices.

It is not random that this process begins through the transference of letters. For letters, handwritten and hand delivered, are crucial aspects of the Cuban community. As Ale notes “[a]nytime a Cuban returns to the island, [they] become couriers for those who do not. No matter how obstinate those who remain abroad may be about their exile, how partisan to the U.S. embargo, there is no blockade of emotion” (63). Without a direct route to communicate, Ale explains, Cubans have constructed an alternative circuit of exchange; one that maintains (emotional) attachments between domestic and exilic Cuban communities, families, and friends through an individualized courier system.

Though this system emerges because of the embargo between the US and Cuba,⁶¹ the letters are different from other commodities that find their way from the US to Cuba. For unlike other “souvenirs from capitalism” that “returning exiles” brought into Cuba’s “cash economy,” signs that “regardless of politics” or adamant desires to never “give Fidel a single dollar to prop up his Communist dictatorship” exiles could not help but send provisions to Cuban counterparts still on the island, these letters could never be absorbed by (black) markets (64). For, like the diary entries and letters in *Monkey Bridge*, the letters exchanged by Cubans that Ale describes in *Days of Awe* are ephemera – emotional and intimate private transfers that accumulate most of their value outside of

⁶¹ The United States began its financial, economic, and commercial embargo on Cuba in March of 1958 during the Batista regime when the US prohibited sales of arms to Cuba. They did so again in 1960, this time focusing on exports to Cuba (except food and medicine). By 1962, the embargo included nearly all imports. Part of this embargo included letters, which could be sent between the countries, but only when re-routed through a third country.

economic systems. It is this alternative economy of intimacies – one that emerges regardless of political difference and geographical distance—that Ale comes to participate in, a practice of writing, delivering, and deciphering letters that leads her closer to knowing her father.

This process of coming to (un)know her father and the trauma undergirding his closeted Judaism begins the first time Ale goes to Cuba “as an adult...in 1987, two years before the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, and eventually, the vast wasteland of the Special Period and Zero Option, the economic disaster that came to the island after the fall of the Soviet Union” (50). It is on this trip that Ale first is entrusted with the precious Cuban cargo – a letter. Ale almost does not get to deliver the letter, a mixture of a busy work schedule and a determinedly unsentimental attitude. For as her narration makes clear, Ale is not interested in fulfilling expectations of return: She has no plans to “go looking for [her family] home in Havana” where she “would break down and cry at an unexpected moment” (67). On her “last Sunday in Cuba,” still having not “delivered the letter for Moisés Menach,” Ale considers giving the letter to “one of the government interpreters, a gracious young woman named Estrella Rodríguez” (67). But Estrella surprises Ale, offering her the day off to explore the island and deliver her letter, insisting that even though Ale may “think[s she’s] immune” to the emotional attachments that can grow on such a visit, she should still take time to explore (67).

Curiously, on her only day off, Ale’s meandering leads her, “as if by magic” to her “old apartment building sitting ashen on a residential street in the Vedado” (69). Remembering the building from photographs, Ale gets into a disagreement with a man from the neighborhood who assures her that these apartments were too new for her to

remember. But then, a voice emerges, insisting that the building Ale is referring to is the only one in the area that is “prerevolution” (71). This voice comes from Moisés Menach himself, who having heard Ale describe the apartment as the one she and her parents lived in before they left for the US, calls her by her name: “...you must be...Alejandra, right? Enrique and Nena’s daughter?...The revolution’s own!” (71). Laughing “uneasily,” “unnerved by the fact that he knew [her], knew [her] birthday, knew [she] shared the same life span as the island’s most recent experiment” Ale explains that she “felt ephemeral” (71).

This moment of being seen and known – of feeling ephemeral—passes quickly as Moisés invites Ale into his home to meet his family including his wife, Ester, Ester’s father Rodolgo, divorced son Ernesto, daughter Angela and her husband Orlando, and their daughters Deborah, Yosemite, baby Paulina, and teenage son Rafa. As the novel continues, and Ale’s visit with the Menachs is fleshed out with descriptions and stories and a dramatic run in with Orlando and his teenage lover, we learn that it isn’t until Ale returns to “Cuba a decade later” that she asks Moisés about “the wrinkled envelope” she had “finally handed him in [their] last moments together that first time around” (73). Though Ale narrates this moment as memory, as she describes Moisés’ response to her question about the letter, she switches tenses, describing how Moisés “grins” before going into “a difficult, creaking drawer in a bureau in his unlit and crowded living room and pulls it out, smoothing the stationary with his fingers” (73). Having saved the letter, quite poignantly given the objects in *Monkey Bridge*, in a dresser drawer, Moisés hands Ale the object: “‘Moisés,’ the letter reads, ‘this daughter of mine, Alejandra, is precious

to me. She is my darling child. When the time comes, tell her everything.’ It’s signed: ‘Your brother, Enrique’” (73).

Unlike Mai who seeks out her mother’s narrative objects, Ale does not care to read her father’s words, waiting ten years to realize that the letter she carried for him held a deep desire – for Moisés to explain “everything” to her. The “everything” that Enrique instructs to tell Ale is not uttered until the end of the novel, when Ale travels, for the third time, to Cuba in order to disperse her father’s ashes over the Bay of Havana. Instead, it is letter writing that occurs throughout the rest of the text, suggesting that the “everything” Enrique entrusts his dear friend to tell his daughter is tied to the diasporic practice of letter exchange – the cultivation of an emotional connection, rather than a simple retelling of a story. In this way, the letters of *Days of Awe*, much like the narrative objects in *Monkey Bridge*, are tasked with the emotional work of constructing a non-US-based connection; a connection that requires the work of un-knowing a story of migration, disentangling dominant Cold War narratives of liberal democratic capitalism from experiences of exile.

Ale’s process of un-knowing her father, Enrique, begins “on a Cold December day in late 1987” when a letter from Moisés arrives to Ale “in the trembling hand of a shivering Cuban standing at [her] door who spoke virtually no English” (154). It doesn’t take long before Ale realizes it is Felix García, the Menachs’ neighbor and brother of Orlando’s teenage lover, Celina. Much like the narrative objects in *Monkey Bridge*, the letters in *Days of Awe* are reprinted in the text as discrete narrative objects, that not only test the boundaries of textual materiality but also provide an alternative point of view from the 1.5 generation protagonist-narrator, Ale. In this way, Moisés letters rupture the

dominance of narrative voice, an act, much like that of Thanh's letters to Mai, that provides an alternative, non-US perspective on war, revolution, and un/belonging.

In this first letter, dated "4 December 1987" and addressed "My dear Alejandra," Moisés writes of the "beautiful dawn" he is watching, noting how the light is "pouring in the windows," filling "the house" and "remind[ing] him of [Ale's] great-grandfather, Ytzak" (161). Ale knows of Ytzak, her father's grandfather who left his family to live in Havana and practice Judaism without any fear or shame. Ytzak is also the man who took Enrique from his family for a circumcision, keeping him and educating him in the ways of an urban Cuban Jew, forcing Enrique to abandon his family (as Ytzak had done). But of this, Moisés does not write. Instead, Moisés merely shares his wish that Ale "could see this house when it is quiet and peaceful, and not just when it is in convulsions" as it was during her last visit to Cuba (161). Sending "[m]uch love from the entire family," the letter ends (161).

With little more than a quick reflection on the weather, this first note to Ale, though simple, combines a crucial component of Enrique's secret – Ytzak – with an attempt at vulnerability and acceptance – a remark about the disarray of his family and his home. The delicate simplicity of the note, though irritating to Ale's current partner, Seth, does not shake Ale. Instead, she goes to her father's house to share the news of her recent "correspondence from Moisés" (163). Hoping that the news will draw her father out, begin a conversation between them that she so longs for, Ale is disappointed with her father's response: "'That's wonderful'" (163). Asking him if he "want[s] to know what he said," Ale is again disappointed by her father's "shru[g]" (162). "'If you want to tell me, yes, of course, but the letter is to you, no? It is not to me,'" Enrique replies (162).

This back and forth between father and daughter – a dance around sharing– continues with no end. The novel continues, however, with another letter, postmarked “20 February 1988” (163).

Beginning with his regular address, “My dear Alejandra,” Moisés opens his letter by telling Ale how “much joy” her letter brought to his family when it was delivered by Estrella, her interpreter friend (163). Moisés writes about the stories Estrella shared with them about her trip to Chicago, including details about Seth, a man Moisés was “particularly happy to hear...is a Jewish boy, although in the end, it is only love that matters” (163). Without knowledge of Ale’s bisexuality and long-term relationship with a Jewish woman, Leni, Moisés lets thoughts of Seth bring him to his own practices of parenting when it comes to love, marriage, and religion. He explains how “happy” he was “when Angela married Orlando,” though he was not Jewish. He even shares how “[s]ome members of [his] community used to protest his not being Jewish to cover up their real objection—that he is of African descent—but having felt the sting of that kind of racism myself, however erroneously, I find the whole idea of judging a person this way simply repulsive” (163). The outing of anti-black racism within his own Jewish community quickly gives way to Moisés thoughts on the photograph Ale had included in her last letter of her parents: “Your mother, of course, is as radiant as ever...But your father...I can hardly believe that he has become such a large, robust man” (163).

Much like the previous letter, the weight of its contents – anti-black racism, anti-Semitism, marriage, and the bodies of people long gone from Cuba – do not garner exorbitant prose or formative conclusions. Just as easily as Moisés shares his thoughts on how he feels “closer to [Ale],” so too does he thank her for the “vitamins and jeans for

Deborah and Yosemite” that Ale sent with her last letter (164). Again, the arrival of Moisés letter does not prompt deep thought or narration. Instead, Ale goes to her father, again, to ask him why he doesn’t write to Moisés. According to Enrique, the answer is simple: “‘Alejandra,’ he said, gazing at me over his glasses with a vaguely condescending air, ‘he did not write back to me, but to you’” (164). Though at this point, Ale does not know that her father’s first letter asked Moisés to tell Ale what he never could, her father’s response to her inquiries suggests that he recognizes that Moisés job is not to rekindle a relationship with Enrique, but instead, to develop one with Alejandra so that he can one day tell her the story her father has kept from her.

Ale, however, pushes her father for more, suggesting that the disconnect between Moisés and Enrique has to do with the revolution. Here Enrique speaks more freely. Though he and Moisés both read “all that Communist stuff” together, he explains, they “responded differently. I just wanted to keep reading, to enjoy the words. He wanted to go to Spain and fight against Franco” (165). This difference, Enrique explains, is why he feels no need to write to Moisés. “‘A man like that,’” Enrique tells Ale, “‘what can I tell him? That I spend all my time by myself scrutinizing letters, doing exactly what I’ve always done? He likes action, gestures even if they’re small...Better you write, Alejandra. Your voice is fresher’” (165).

And write she does. On August 13, 1988 another letter arrives. “It’s El Comandante’s birthday,” Moisés letter begins, “and your father’s too” (166). The coincidence makes Moisés “chuckle,” he writes, and makes him realize there can “be no truth to astrology” if “two such different men share the same day of birth” (166). As Moisés shares his ruminations on birthday presents for the two men, he recalls how

sensitive Enrique was a child, unable to handle Moisés chiding him for his “family tradition” of writing poems “to honor his parents” (166). The small detail about Enrique’s disposition quickly turns into discussion about recent “negotiations between El Comandante and an American Catholic cardinal,” talk that “doesn’t bother” Moisés even though he is Jewish (166). “[I]t is not like you’ve been told,” Moisés explains to Ale, “as a Jew, I can’t complain. It’s true there’s not much of a community here” since the revolution, but Jews were not forced to leave, nor was it only their land that was “nationalized but everyone’s” (166). In the next paragraph, Moisés references one of Ale’s letters, specifically her inquiry into how he “could reconcile being a Jew and a revolutionary” (166). For Moisés, the answer is simple as there “is no contradiction. Jews are revolutionaries, the very first real revolutionaries. Jews—who have always been a small nation—changed the world, just like we are doing here, on our little island” (166). “Cuba is not a perfect place,” Moisés continues, “[o]urs is not a perfect revolution. But if everyone left, who would stay to keep it on course? The world is changing so dramatically, so unpredictably. How would I know what to do anywhere else? Who would I be anywhere else?” (167).

With these questions hanging in the air, Moisés signs off, leaving a short post script that asks Ale, if she “ever talk[s] to [her] father about any of this” (167). It is this last comment that seems to illustrate the significance of these letters. That is, Moisés regular correspondence, his ability to share his thoughts on his life, both intimate and political, acts as foil to Ale and Enrique’s relationship. For as Ale’s attempts at talking about the letters with her father make clear, Enrique is not interested in saying more than

he has to Moisés already nor is he available to answer Ale's questions about Judaism, socialism, and the Cuban revolution. For those details, Ale turns to Moisés.

Moisés and Ale's dialogue grows more entangled in the geopolitics around them after the Berlin Wall falls. Watching the news on the television with her parents, Ale is acutely aware of her father's discomfort. In this moment of vulnerability, Ale goads her father, mocking his discomfort at seeing neo-Nazis in the frame of the news camera. "A little racial memory, Papi," Ale asks, "A little trouble with the family secret?" (173). Enrique explodes: "How dare you!" he boomed, shooting up from his chair and grabbing [Ale's] arm, turning [her] around so fast that [she] fell back flat on the couch. "You don't know!" he shouted. "You don't know!" (173). As her father storms out of the room, Ale turns to her mother. Flabbergasted that Enrique could think that Ale didn't know that "he's a Jew" at this point in her life, she tells her mother that he is "in some sort of historical denial," for "when the neo-Nazis come, he and I," she notes "will both be tossed into the ovens no matter how much he explains that we're Spanish nobility" (174). And so the scene ends. There is no conversation. No dialogue between Nene and her daughter, nor Enrique and Ale. Instead, the novel reproduces another letter from Moisés, suggesting, at least formally, that the answer to Ale's questions come in this correspondence.

Post marked December 31, 1989, and sent "through the regular mail as a test," Moisés wishes Ale a happy new year (175). The letter is filled with big news: Ernesto is reconciling with his wife, and, Angela "has begun a new job with the Spanish embassy" (175). Angela's new job leads Moisés to reflect on the "lines of Cubans wishing to leave the country," something he wish "would disappear" though it's clear there "is much

anxiety” on the island given recent events (175). Moisés’s commitment to the revolution shines through his letter, for though he shares the island’s anxiety, he believes that the state “will prevail” (175). Nonetheless, Moisés shares with Ale how he knows that many “in Miami, and perhaps Chicago, too” are watching, hoping for the same kind of “rocks” to “fall” in Cuba, for the creation of “a bridge from Mariel or Cojimar straight to Key West so that they could rush back, like the West Germans did into East Berlin” (175). Differentiating Cuba from Germany, a place divided by Western powers following the second world war, Moisés ensures Ale that “there won’t be civil war” in Cuba, “or the kinds of demonstrations they dream about in Miami” for the “walls” in Cuba “are all of our own making—all of us—and none of them are real” (175). Implicating Ale in the divisions that uphold the socialist state of Cuba, Moisés ends his letter noting that as a Jew, looking “at the fall of the wall in Berlin” he “knows that it is more than just a pile of bricks,” he, too, “worr[ies] about what unification will mean, and what will happen next” (175). Briefly, before signing off, Moisés asks Ale to send his thoughts to her father, insinuating the challenges that he is facing watching the news of the Berlin Wall and thus, illustrating, his connection to Enrique, though they no longer keep in touch.

Like nearly every letter before this one, then, Moisés continues to encourage Ale to reach out to her father, to recognize his vulnerabilities and make room for questions to be asked, rather than secrets to be known. Notably, Moisés also uses his post script to express his condolences for Seth and Ale’s break up, completely unaware of Leni Bergman, Ale’s deepest love and the relationship to which she was able to be most vulnerable. Following Moisés’ letter, Ale narrates a story about Ale and Leni as a couple, suggesting that just as Moisés is trying to connect to Ale by explicating non-binaristic

approaches to Cuban politics, so, too, does he have much to learn about heteropatriarchal understandings of Ale's love life. And it is this story, about Ale's relationship with Leni, that we learn about how Enrique's secret shapes Ale's own identificatory practices, and thus, her ability to connect with other people like her boyfriend, Seth, and her girlfriend, Leni. This story recounts a moment where Leni was read as Jewish on a public bus, a curious moment of ethno-racialization, that Ale admits she yearned for.

Without diving into the significance of this moment of US racialization, the novel switches into a chapter composed of three letters from Moises: July 1990, November 1990, and January 1991. These are the three final letters signed by Moisés seen in *Days of Awe*, and each one tackles a different topic. The first letter dated "31 July 1990" describes what life in Cuba is like following the fall of the Berlin Wall. In the letter, Moisés addresses the "rumors that [Ale was] hearing—the ones [she] wrote about," explaining that it is true that "everyone" in the city has to adjust to a new set of rations and inflation in prices for everyday items like eggs (183). He also confirms that "some young hooligans have doctored some of the signs on the roadways to read 'Socialism Is Death,'" acts that he and Orlando have woken up early to take care of before others see it (184). However, when it comes to the "incident" Ale "described" in detail, "about the man who rose from the audience during the World Cup boxing match," he cannot confirm (184).

Though Moisés is honest in his recounting of the hardships faced on the island, he cannot understand "why...people want to leave" (186). He hopes that Ale, in her next letter "can explain it to [him]" (186). "I know life is hard here," he writes "it will get harder before it gets better...but it is our country, after all...How can they want to go the

U.S. when it is the source of all of our problems?” (186). Insisting that this question is not a “recrimination,” for Moisés knows it was not Ale’s choice to leave, he continues in his questioning. However, he quickly provides a some-what veiled answer to why people leave, noting how Ale’s “father was never entirely comfortable in Cuba. He suffered a lot here, he felt very alone” (186). “Has it been better for him” in the States, Moisés asks Ale (186). With another question that requires Ale to think deeply about her father, his sense of un/belonging, and perhaps prompt the emotional work needed to bridge the distance that has grown between them, the letter ends. As with most of Moisés letters, the dialogic nature of correspondence requires questions to be answered that leads to descriptions of current events, ruminations on politics and the meaning of exile, and more questions. In this letter, however, Moisés makes clear his disdain for the US, attributing the problems in Cuba to the hemispheric power. But Moisés is able to fold into this critique of the US, a recognition of the struggles Enrique faced in Cuba, particularly as a Jew, and his desire that the US can, at the very least, offer Enrique the solace he has long sought.

The next letter in the three-part chapter series begins with immediate reprimand: “I think you are too hard on your father,” Moisés writes to Alejandra,

[j]ust like you did not choose to go to the United States and be an American, he did not choose to be a Jew. Yet he’s stuck with it, with all that knowledge, all that anguish in his blood. It’s not not unlike your situation as a Cuban in the U.S.: Even if you wanted to assimilate, to become one of them, you would still know in your heart that you are Cuban...It has affected your life in a way that no American could possibly know (188).

At this seemingly late stage in their letter-driven relationship, Moisés finally tells Ale she must work towards understanding her father, seeing their similarities instead of only seeing their differences. Importantly, it is through Ale's own disdain with the US and assimilation that Moisés forges this connection, attempting to produce a shared concept of belonging that allows race and nationality to intersect with, rather than work outside of, religious identity.

After challenging Ale to see her father relationally, rather than always, already in opposition, Moisés shares news from the island, including details about Orlando, Deborah, and Angela. This eventually leads Moisés to his now common refrain about Cuba. This time, reflecting on foreign businesses infiltrating the island, it is that he “want[s] Cuba for Cubans, not to the exclusion of others but so that we are not under anyone's boot” (188). Moisés wonders “how much of this desire comes from being Jewish and [his] generation's understanding of the Holocaust” and the current settler-colonial practices in Israel “with the intifada and the killings...consequences of...fears run amok” (188). Admitting that his prose is “rambling,” Moisés signs off, leaving Ale with a complicated meditation on Jewishness, genocide, fear, and nationalism.

The final letter of the chapter turns to Orlando, who has recently lost his job due to his skills as a socialist economist. Unlike Orlando who is frustrated, Moisés knows they will be okay, “that the revolution will take care of” them (188). Though Moisés seeks to tell Ale this story about the complexities of the Cuban state and its place in a global capitalist system – a story, arguably, he's been attempting to articulate throughout all of his previous letters—Ale has requested information about her father, a “time when [Enrique] was glad to be a Jew” (188). Moisés acquiesces to Ale's insistent focus on her

father's Jewishness, explaining that there was "a period...when being a Jew symbolized both community and hope for him. But that same moment turned catastrophic and is what made him turn away most dramatically. To this day," Moisés notes, "I am not allowed to speak about it" (188). And he doesn't. Instead, Moisés writes of the everyday and vocalizing his deep belief that the revolution will eventually solve his family's issues. In this way, Moisés's letters are a consistent disruption of a unilateral narrative of diaspora both insofar as their existence directly defies the US embargo, an attempt to keep US products out of the country and families unable to communicate via direct mail *and* by never quite delivering the messages that Ale so desperately seeks.

Moreover, these letters – narrative objects that produce an alternative narrative of exile founded in the dialogue between a diehard Cuban revolutionary and a 1.5-generation Cuban American – illuminate Ale's deep longing to feel a sense of closeness to her father. Importantly, it is not until Ale has developed a relationship with Moisés, one based around narrative objects, that she is finally able to articulate how her desire to know her father is deeply tied to her own sense of self. "Who am I in all this," Ale asks herself, acknowledging that for her, the "problem is that when [she] stand[s] alone before the mirror" seeing her "blue-gray eyes just like [her] great-grandfather" and her "mother's pouty pillows for lips," she "know[s] everything and nothing at all" (193). Ale wants to be seen, she wants to be known, she wants to be loved. And though she has sought this kind of connection by chiding her father, throwing his secret in his face, making central the issue of belonging when it comes to racism, anti-Semitism, and nationalism, it is Ale who longs for a sense of closeness.

After a series of heart attacks, Enrique finally opens up to Ale, first leaving her with the task of translating the work of a client (a Cuban, *not* in exile, who writes racy fiction) and then, asking her to get his prayer shawl and tefillin as he prepares to die. In this intimate moment on his deathbed, covered in his tallis and tefillin that Ale helped wrap around his feeble arm, Enrique shows Ale an image he has kept tucked inside his siddur. This image, Enrique mumbles to Ale, is “[f]or Moisés,” the final sign for his friend to tell Ale everything (278). And though Ale was upset that her father’s final wishes, contained in a written note no less, allowed for a Christian burial, she was also surprised to see that her father entrusted her to return his ashes to Cuba (287).

To Cuba she returns. And on this final visit of the novel, much like her first, Ale is unable to bring herself to ask Moisés for the story behind the picture. Instead, she spends much of her time with Orlando, days that lead to intense arguments about the purpose, practice, and reality of revolution; conversations that illuminate Ale’s false enchantment with Cuba and its revolutionary aims at a better world. According to Orlando, Ale thinks in black and white. She cannot understand that the revolutionary fervor that she admires in Moisés is the same attitude that persists regardless of the fact that his son is “dead” and his daughter “Angela’s in Spain,” neither “a Jew or a revolutionary” (329). A devotee to the revolution himself, Orlando’s time with Alejandra makes plain – there are no easy answers to a just world, there is no perfect system.

And perhaps this mess of complexities is precisely what Ale has been longing for throughout the novel – a framework to understand her father’s perplexing secret. Arguably, this is what she gets. For towards the end of her trip, Moisés finally tells her the story she’s been wanting to hear. Moisés explains how Ytzak, while living in Havana,

responded to growing anti-Semitism during the time after the Great Depression by “throwing his Jewishness in everyone’s face,” a bold decision that ultimately led to “burly German immigrants...beat[ing] the living daylights out of” both Ytzak and Enrique when Ytzak took down their Nazi flag. Enrique was in a coma from the attack, just barely surviving. Ale is shocked to learn these traumatic and violent details, and though she begs Moisés to pause his story, he continues, explaining the details around the photograph her father gave her.

The picture is of a woman on the *St. Louis*, the ship filled with refugees from Nazi Europe turned away from countries throughout the Western hemisphere. Moisés recalls how “Cuba refused to let the refugees disembark” and the ship was eventually “forced back to Europe” where most of the “passengers ended up in concentration camps” (350). While docked in Cuban waters, Ale’s father brought food to these passengers, forming a bond with the girl in the photo, and falling in love. Or at least, that’s what he told Moisés. After hearing the details of the ship and the coma, Ale finally feels like her father’s behavior from the moment they landed on the shores of Miami made sense. But Moisés stops her. There is more. “And this one’s a little harder to tell” (351).

Moisés begins his final story about Enrique. This one places them in “December in 1939, just six months after the *St. Louis* debacle,” one a night when Enrique “was wandering down Tracadero to just where it became Tejadillo at Prado” (352). At this intersection, he realized there was shouting coming from a “demonstration by Cubans and Spaniards snapping their hands in the air to the rhythm of a sharp Nazi beat” (351). “Bewildered and terrified,” Moisés describes how Enrique “stumbled and fell, only to be

yanked back on his feet by a flushed-faced young man who laughed good-naturedly at his clumsiness” (352). But Enrique’s fall was quickly described by another demonstrator as signs of Enrique’s weakness: “As soft and gawky as a Jew,” the demonstrator notes (351). Caught in the crowd and his own fear, Enrique was quickly surrounded by everyone heiling Hitler. In that moment, Enrique followed suit “Heil Hitler! He shrieked” before running through the streets away from the crowd (352).

It is this moment, one where fear drove Enrique to blend into a crowd of Nazis, that is supposed to speak for his complex religious practices. Nazis and European refugees in Cuba are the details Enrique cannot seem to explain to Ale; the reason his exile was necessary and his religiosity was secret. The shame and fear that Enrique has bottled up – feelings that no revolution could cure – are what Enrique entrusts Moisés to give his daughter. Much like Mai, then, Ale comes to learn her family’s past only to realize it cannot provide the resolution she so desperately sought. For like Mai, when Ale finally learns the truth about her father – comes to know the reason for his secrecy – she does not feel saved. Instead, she has the knowledge she needs – the knowledge that there is no simple answer or resolution to her aches, but to work with others, to connect with others.

For again, like *Monkey Bridge*, the conclusion of *Days of Awe* does not provide an easy resolution to the novel. Instead, Ale, much like Mai, is left with the details of trauma. Enrique was caught in history: a grandfather’s ache to be openly Jewish in a family of closeted Jews and a country desperate to show the world they knew better. As Orlando makes clear to Ale, nothing is clean cut. There is not easy explanation. We can admire Moisés commitment to the revolution, but then what do we make of his children’s

unfortunate lives. We can assume Cuba is the best, or maybe the US, but in reality, neither country let in the refugees from Nazi Europe. The letters exchanged, often from Cuban to Cuban, throughout *Days of Awe* suggest an alternative model of knowledge; one forged through dialectics, non-capitalist exchanges, and the work of translating from head to hand. This is what Ale is left with at the end of the novel.

In this way, the narrative objects in both *Days of Awe* and *Monkey Bridge* function as alternative knowledge production. Both archives of objects are completely subjective and untrustworthy to be sure. But it is these narrative objects – the emotional work they contain and the work they prompt – that wrests Ale and Mai from the dominant Cold War narratives, offering them something less Western, something a bit more grounded in the everyday inconsistencies of revolution, warfare, and family politics. Forcing both protagonists to move away from the histories and the news, these narrative objects turn toward quotidian emotional experiences as sites of knowledge. And it is not merely the experience of emotion – the trauma of violences, lies, and disappointment that stuns their parents into secrecy – but the process of connecting to others on this emotional plane that these narrative objects cultivate in both protagonists' lives.

CHAPTER 5

“IF THE GRASS WERE BLACK, WOULD THE WORLD BE DIFFERENT?” GLOBALIZATION, THE TRANSNATIONAL FAMILY, AND THE WORK OF RELATION

Celia's Letter: 1959

January 11, 1959

My dearest Gustavo,

The revolution is eleven days old. My granddaughter, Pila Puente del Pino, was born today. It is also my birthday. I am fifty years old. I will no longer write to you, *mi amor*. She will remember everything.

My love always,

Celia

Cristina Garcia's first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*, ends with a letter composed by the matriarch of the story, Celia del Pino to her long lost Spanish lover, Gustavo. Celia met Gustavo while working in Havana, where she lived with her Aunt Alicia during her childhood, a circumstance of being the child of a man with two families. After a brief love affair, Gustavo left Celia for his wife and family in Spain. It is then that Celia begins to write to him, a practice she continues once a year for twenty-five years. Celia never sends the letters, however, instead saving them for her granddaughter, Pilar. Celia's letters, reproduced in the text much like those seen in *Days of Awe* and *Monkey Bridge*, are scattered across *Dreaming in Cuban*, often arising in multiples as their own chapters. It cannot be lost on us, that much like the narrative objects examined in chapter 2, so, too, does Celia intend for her letters to cultivate an alternative, feminine history for her

granddaughter to remember. However, unlike the letters examined in Chapter 2, narrative objects that challenge Cold War epistemologies that trap 1.5 generation immigrant characters, Celia's letters function as one narrative thread within a complex, multi-vocal novel about the geopolitical differences of a transnational Cuban family dispersed by revolution, unlikely political allyships, and personal trauma.

Moving between three generations of the del Pino family, some dead, some alive, *Dreaming in Cuban* exposes the intimacies of globalization, revolution, and budding post-colonial nationalism by narrating, often in third-person, the thoughts, memories, and experiences of Celia's family. The novel opens with a family map:

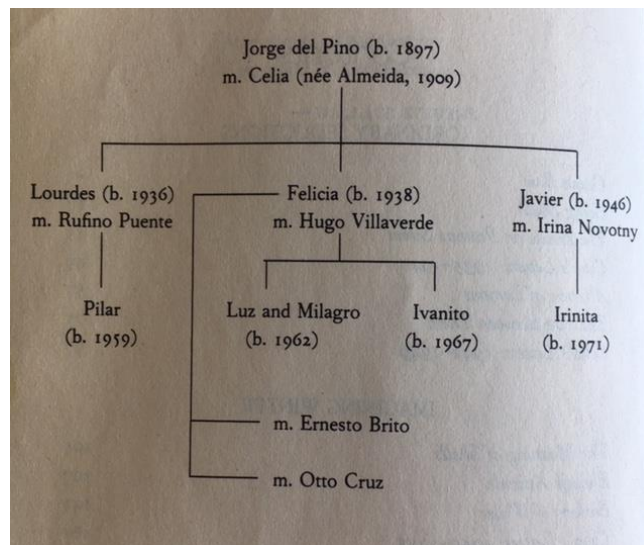


Figure 1.1: del Pino Family Tree, *Dreaming in Cuban*, Cristina García.

As the image shows, though in love with Gustavo, Celia marries Jorge del Pino. They have three children, Lourdes, Felicia, and Javier, who in turn, have one, three, and one children respectively. The map, with its straight lines to represent lineage, is where the simplicity of the del Pino family ends. For arguably, the entirety of the novel, is an

attempt to sketch a map of relationality between the now disparate and separate family members.

There is Lourdes, married to Rufino, son of the landowning class in Cuba, works in her New York City bakery tirelessly, sending pictures of her eclairs to her Communist mother as proof that capitalism is plentiful, their migration successful. Lourdes struggles to connect with her punk, artist daughter Pilar; a child she sees as too similar to her mother, too ready to challenge norms and revel in being different. Pilar is deeply connected to her grandmother, Celia – they speak to each other through dreams – and spends the entirety of the novel seeking ways to return to Cuba, the place she senses she belongs. Felicia, Celia's second daughter, complicates the capitalism-communism dyad of mother and daughter by living aimlessly, and arguably without much mental stability, in Havana. Felicia lives with her three children, the twins, Luz and Milagro, and her son, Ivanito, all born from an abusive and philandering husband who gives Felicia syphilis, a disease that she struggles to manage throughout her life. Not a supporter of the revolution per se, Felicia finds herself in a revolution-backed 'rehabilitation' camp after one of her mental breakdowns; an attempt to give her structure. After another episode, Felicia discovers she has been married. After yet another, she is riding a rollercoaster with her third husband and only remembers him falling from its highest point. It is only through santería, a spiritual longing satiated through her friendship with Herminia, daughter of a santería priest, that Felicia steadies. Rounding out Celia's family is Javier, who, as a young adult, won a prize as a student that landed him in Czechoslovakia where he teaches and lives with his daughter and wife.

Much like the complex network of relationships that make up *Dreaming in Cuban*, Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* dives deeply into the effects of globalization and postcoloniality by narrating the diverse perspectives of characters connected through a rural region in Northwestern India, Kalimpong. Published in 2006, a vastly different cultural and political time than García's 1992 *Dreaming in Cuban*, Desai's second novel is a similarly multi-narrated novel formed out of the differences of a rural household in Kalimpong during the late 1980s. *The Inheritance of Loss* moves between two parallel stories: the first, is set in Kalimpong where Sai, an orphan of two Russian-employed Indians, lives with her grandfather, retired Judge Jemumbhai Patel and his cook, Nandu, who, grows close to Sai, calling her sweet names like "Babyi or Saibaby" (21). Sai is tutored by a neighbor, Noni, who lives with her widowed sister, Lola, whose daughter works in the UK as a broadcaster on BBC; an accomplishment regularly compared with their friend, Mrs. Sens' daughter who works as a broadcaster for CNN in the US. There, in the home of her tutor, Sai meets Uncle Potty and Father Booty, and when Noni can no longer tutor Sai in math, she meets Gyan, a Nepalese-Indian college student. Along with Sai, the novel follows the life of Biju, an undocumented labor migrant trying to make his way in the restaurant world of New York City. Unlike Lourdes, the successful immigrant bakery owner in *Dreaming in Cuban*, Biju is part of the underclass who quite literally staff the basement kitchens of New York City restaurants.⁶² Eventually, Biju returns to Kalimpong, where, after being robbed on route to Kalimpong, he returns empty handed to his beloved father, Nandu.

⁶² In fact, Biju is precisely the kind of employee Lourdes regularly seeks out: down and out migrant, often without papers, that she can pretend to help, but really exploit. In this way, Biju and Lourdes represent near inverses of the labor migrants examined in chapter 1: It is the Cuban exile who is protected by the state in

Published nearly 15 years apart – *Dreaming in Cuban* in 1990 during the early stages of US liberal multiculturalism and *The Inheritance of Loss* in 2006, post-9/11 and solidly in US neoliberal multiculturalism⁶³– both novels tackle transnationalism and globalization by examining the dis/connection experienced in specific households. Narrating the thoughts of characters divided by space, time, political allegiance, nationality, race, class, and caste, both novels are regularly read as metaphors for (im)migration and colonialism.⁶⁴ Both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* lack a linear plot line as seen in the stories of labor migrants in Chapter 1. Additionally, neither novel has a central concern, a secret or lack, that drives the momentum of the plot as seen in the novels in Chapter 2. Instead, both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* cohere around difference, particularly the (dis)connections of a transnational family. It is the tension between the characters, their longings for each other and their (in)ability to connect, that produces a gravitational pull in the novel, one that maintains coherence between fragments of character-centered anecdotes and flashbacks. Moreover, and as this chapter will show, both texts use these interpersonal relations, particularly the family and household as a cohering unit, to illustrate the temporal and spatial transgenerational influences of colonialism, capitalism, labor migration, and diaspora in novels about late twentieth century globalization and migration.

this case, not the low-skilled Indian migrant from a rural region a generation and class/caste out of the reach by Nehru's education policies.

⁶³ For more on liberal and neoliberal multiculturalism see Jodi Melamed's *Represent and Destroy*.

⁶⁴ Though the scholarly work on *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* tends to be critical of US empire and colonialism/capitalism more generally, much of the work focuses on Celia, Pilar, and Lourdes in *Dreaming in Cuban* and Jemumbhai and Biju, sometimes Sai, in *The Inheritance of Loss*. These studies illustrate a dominant, perhaps unconscious, US-centric approach that collapse stories that deal with a much grander spatio-temporal landscape than the US-Cuba dyad or US-UK-India imperial triangulation suggested by these character-based analyses of diaspora, globalization, and postcolonialism.

In what follows, I examine how the family as a literary form provides both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* with a structure to graft the contradictory dynamics of transnationality, globalization, nationalism, and postcolonialism onto. Quite specifically, I contend that the family is not merely an analogy or symbol for globalization, but instead is a particularly feminist narratological approach that centralizes the emotional work of relationality for globalization, labor migration, and belonging. After explicating how the narrative *form* can catalyze political change, I look carefully at both novels, first examining the emotional work characters undertake to manage the complex relationships of transnationality, and then explicating how they similarly construct non-heteropatriarchal family units that expand the temporal scope of each novel and challenge anti-black racism that has long infiltrated migration studies (in the US). Ultimately, then, I contend that García and Desai's choice to build a narrative out of the relationships of the family and household unit, make them feminist narratives – novels that place value in the family as a space where knowledge and understanding of complex processes like transnationality, postcoloniality, diaspora, migrancy, and globalization begins

“What was a country but the idea of it”: The Family Saga, Literary Reworlding, and the Politics of Relation

Dreaming in Cuban and *The Inheritance of Loss* are both set amidst large-scale political change, revolutions that produce messy and often contradictory postcolonial politics that characters must negotiate. *Dreaming in Cuban* is about a family divided by the Cuban revolution. Part of the family is in Cuba, Celia by the sea in Santa Teresa del

Mar and Felicia and her children in Havana, another sector is in the United States, Brooklyn to be precise, and a third is in Czechoslovakia. *The Inheritance of Loss* takes place amidst the Nepalese nationalist rebellion in the rural district of Kalimpong in West Bengal, India. The political movement – Ghorkas for Ghorkaland—grew in Kalimpong, “high in the northeastern Himalayas” where “India blurred into Bhutan and Sikkim,” and the army “maintain[ed] their tanks with khaki paint in case the Chinese grew hungry for more territory than Tibet” (10). Both novels rely on form to cohere the differences that emerge between characters navigating these political changes. Quite specifically, it is the family, as a unit of relation, that becomes a crucial formal feature that expands and contracts – both temporally and spatially—the plotlines of *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, illuminating critiques of empire, anti-blackness, and heteropatriarchal capitalist logics of belonging embedded in each novel’s investigation of migration and globalization.

The idea of the family is regularly taken for granted – an expected, inevitable element of the human experience, whether biologically based, chosen, or otherwise. Along with its quotidian nature, the family is often relegated to the private world of unspoken, often suppressed, intimacies and cathexes. So too, has the family become imbued with what Sara Ahmed calls ‘the promise of happiness,’ an expectation of relationality that lands many of us in the chairs of therapists and social workers alike.⁶⁵ Outside of the private sphere, the family often gains importance insofar as it constitutes a household or a calculable set of attachments that guide our choices as, say, consumers.

⁶⁵ According to Sara Ahmed’s work in *The Promise of Happiness*, feelings, like happiness, are often expected from certain lives. It is a tactic used by many to obscure difference and violence. Ahmed points specifically to the phrases “happy housewife” and “happy slave” to make this point.

Though these approaches to the family are not wrong, both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* utilize the family as a narrative structure that centralizes the work of relation, work that allows for connection while maintaining difference.

Though the family saga features prominently in popular culture, it has not garnered much critical attention.⁶⁶ Those that have studied the form note how the family saga features polyvocal narration, movement between time and space, and an interest in generations, history, and lineage. According to Lori Ween's study of José de la Cuadra's *Los Sangurimas* (1934) and Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* (1991), the family saga is a form of storytelling that is interested in the "downfall" of a family "root[ed] in a specific location or period of time" (111). In Ween's analytic, the family saga is a plotline, one that upholds nationalist notions of rootedness and relation as derived out of sameness, particularly biological, rather than difference.

However, in both *The Inheritance of Loss* and *Dreaming in Cuban*, the family is less singular plotline and more narrative structure, one that coheres characters' stories as they appear, in fragments, throughout both novels. In this way, both novels adhere more closely to Christine Bridgwood's understanding of the family saga, as a story that resists narrative closure (167). Part of this resistance to closure stems from the family saga's ability to "subordinate" the "three-dimensionality of character" to the form of the text itself with its "structure of repetition, contrast, variation, and anthesis by which" the family saga "constructs its cross-generational profile of the *family* in its multiformity" (168). In this way, the family saga functions as a literary *form* rather than a plotline or narrative drive hinged on a character's desire for stable identification. We see this in both

⁶⁶ For more on the meek amount of scholarship on the family saga see Lori Ween's "Family Sagas of the Americas: *Los Sangurimas* and *A Thousand Acres*."

Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, for both novels are built out of the tension of the *relationships* between the characters; how characters manage the conflicts and differences that arise amongst them. It is difference, then, and the work the characters undertake to manage these differences, that produces the narrative tension *and* coherence of each novel.

The emotional vibrancy of interpersonal difference experienced by individuals scattered across the spatio-temporal landscapes of *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* perform what Pheng Cheah calls a reworlding. In his 2016 book, *What is a World? On Postcolonial Literature as World Literature*, Cheah critiques how world literature has come to denote the movement of texts across national borders, often through translation. Such arguments, Cheah contends, minimize the power and agency of literature, placing it in "a reactive position" whereby literature merely represents or reflects globalization (5). In his book, Cheah intervenes in this scholarly practice by providing an extensive exploration of the concept of the world in continental philosophy⁶⁷ that illustrates the power literature "can exert in the world" by "opening up" new "ethicopolitical horizons" "for [an] existing world" that is "being destroyed by capitalist globalization" (5; 16).

Though Cheah is chiefly interested in how postcolonial literatures from the global south use temporality as a literary process of reworlding, he also identifies the power of a literary text's "formal features" to "present solutions" to a text's "thematic concerns" (16). For Cheah, form, then is a "force and ground of worldly intervention" (16).

Bringing Cheah's arguments about the political potential of reworlding through literary

⁶⁷ Cheah focuses extensively on Goethe, Hegel, Marx, Heidegger, Arendt, and Derrida.

form to bear on Bridgwood's work on the family saga, we can see how the family saga does the work of reworlding by, as Bridgwood contends, by "using history and the family as a means of *exposing* the interrelated dynamics of gender, class and power, and attempting a *recuperation* of the disturbances caused by this exposure through an appeal to precisely those same concepts of history and family" (184). In this way, the family saga provides an "imaginary resolution" through its form that holds the "ideological contradictions" of the thematic concerns of the text itself (190). Thus, it is form that coheres the novel's pieces, both presenting a narrative with tension and the feel of resolution *while still* resisting narrative closure.

In the case of *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, the reworlding performed by the family saga form is seen in moments akin to what Edouard Glissant calls relation. In his book *The Poetics of Relation*, Glissant provides a lyrical exploration Caribbean self-formation, creolization, and rootedness, ultimately explicating "poetics as a transformative mode of history" and "relation as the process of this change" (xiii). A concept that eludes definition, Glissant's Relation is grounded in Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's "rhizomatic thought" (11). Just like the rhizome, "an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently" can maintain the "idea of rootedness" while "challeng[ing]" the idea of a "totalitarian root," so, too, does Glissant's "Poetics of Relation" conceptualize identity as a process "extended through a relationship with the Other" (11).

To make such claims, Glissant differentiates "Relation identity" from what he terms "Root identity" (143-4). According to Glissant, root identity is tied to empire and the power dynamics that emerged from it, for root identity is "ratified by a claim to

legitimacy that allows a community to proclaim its entitlement to the possession of land, which thus becomes a territory,” and is “preserved by being projected onto other territories” (143-4). Root identity gains such power from, as Glissant argues, being “sanctified by the hidden violence of filiation” that is founded on a “myth of the creation of the world” (143). Glissant makes clear how root identity, as a concept of self, pathologizes the migrant subject. For “[w]hen identity is determined by a root, the emigrant is condemned (especially in the second generation) to being split and flattened. Usually an outcast in the place [they] ha[ve] newly set anchor, [they are] forced into impossible attempts to reconcile [their] former and [their] present belonging” (143). In this way, root identity functions similarly to chapter 2’s discussion of the refugee as medico-judicial condition needing care (from a democratic capitalist state re: the US), by pathologizing the migrant and upholding notions of stable (re: nationalist) identity.

Rather than argue for or against root identity, Glissant suggests an additional option for identification: relation identity. Relation identity emerges out of the “conscious and contradictory experience of contacts among cultures,” “produced in the chaotic network of Relation” (144). Part of this process is a vision of land as “place[s] where one gives-on-and-with rather than grasps” (144). Glissant suggests the visual of the Caribbean archipelago “provides a natural illustration of the thought of Relation” (34). Providing a slightly different model from Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizome, the archipelago, Glissant notes, illustrates how, in this case island, can exist as separate and distinct entities *in relation* to other distinct and separate entities. Rather than seeing the other through “the duality of self-perception (one is citizen or foreigner)...(one is visitor or visited; one goes or stays; one conquers or is conquered),” Glissant says we must “acknowledg[e]”

difference, allowing it to exist, among other different entities, without attempt to enforce sameness (17). As a close reading of *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* will show, the families and households that are (dis)connected and (dis)located in chapters and narrative segments, construct a matrix of transnational, emotional, and political relationality. This matrix of relation, one spoken through the form of the novels themselves, challenge notions of identity as stable and rooted while elongating the history of twentieth century US migration to include the Atlantic slave trade, the growth of Spanish, English, Chinese, and US empires, and the indentured labor system that brought South Asians to the Americas and elsewhere. As my analysis will show, both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* do the political work of reworlding through the family saga form; constructing a novel out of the work of relation.

“We’re all tied to the past by flukes”: Relation, Form, and The Political Work of Worlding

“I’m afraid to lose all this, to lose Abuela Celia again. But sooner or later I’d have to return to New York. I know now it’s where I belong—not *instead* of here, but *more* than here. How can I tell my grandmother this?” (236)

Dreaming in Cuban

“Life wasn’t single in its purpose...or even in its direction...The simplicity of what she’d been taught wouldn’t hold. Never again could she think there was but one narrative and that narrative belonged only to herself, that she might create her own mean little happiness and live safely within it” (355).

In both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, it is a third-generation character that provides a meta-recognition of the import of relation for lives so dictated by filiation, roots, and place: Pilar, from *Dreaming in Cuban* and Sai, from *The Inheritance of Loss*. Both characters lack the connection provided by lineage. Sai is an orphan, or as Noni and Lola put it, an “orphan child of India’s failing romance with the Soviets” (48). According to the nuns at the convent, Sai’s condition was tied to dismissal of filial bonds that came before her. For the nuns at the convent “remembered her mother and the fact that the judge paid for her keep but never visited” (31). And they knew that Sai’s father “had been brought up in a Zorostrian charity for orphans” being “helped along by a generous donor from school to college and then finally into the air force” (31). “In a country so full of relatives,” they noted, “Sai suffered a dearth” (31).

Though Pilar lives with her parents and has a strong bond with her grandmother, Celia, she spends most of her life feeling “in preparation,” as if “waiting for [her] life to begin” (179). In many ways, Pilar ties this ennui to her migration. Being wrested from Cuba at a young age, Pilar often “wonder[s] how [her] life would have been if [she’d] stayed with her” grandmother (32). The power for people like parents and “politicians and...generals” to “force events” on others frustrates Pilar; a critical approach to history, truth, and power that sets her apart from her mother (137). For according to Pilar, her mother “systematically rewrites history to suit her views of the world” (176).⁶⁸ However,

⁶⁸ Notably, Pilar reroutes her mother’s migration history, wondering if she had “[b]oarded a ship in Shanghai and crossed the Pacific wave by wave,” “[r]ounded Cape Horn, the coast of Brazil, stopped for carnival in Port-of-Spain,” if then she would have a different political mindset (219). In this way, Pilar not

when Pilar finally escapes the States when she and Lourdes return to the island for Felicia's funeral, she realizes that her ennui is not cured. Instead, her return to the island makes her realize that she belongs in "New York," "not *instead of*" Cuba, "but *more than*" Cuba. Pilar's return makes her realize that belonging is never final. Instead, belonging is a process of relation, not either or, but *more than*.

Understanding oneself *in relation* is precisely what Sai grasps at the end of *The Inheritance of Loss*. After finding her way through the complex social web of Kalimpong, and navigating her budding romance with Gyan, a love that disappears with Gyan's participation in the Nepalese fight for statehood, Sai comes to realize that she has been all wrong about life. "'Shame on myself...,' she said... Who was she... she with her self-importance, her demand for happiness, yelling it at fate, at the deaf heavens, screaming for her joy to be brought forth" (355). All of her "tantrums and fits... Her mean tears... Her crying," it was "all for herself" (355). This was her mistake. Her singularity. For, Sai realizes "[life] wasn't single in its purpose... or even in its direction" (355). Life was multiple threads, multiple narratives, all intersecting, all influencing the other. The idea that "there was but one narrative and that narrative belonged only to herself" was pure folly (355). For Sai was part of a larger history, one that was part of Gyan's story, and Noni and Lola's, and Biju's and all the migrant laborers, documented and not, that he met before returning to Kalimpong.

Both Pilar and Sai realize that their ache for a self, for a history unencumbered for revisions and falsities, is an impossibility. And, at the same time, they understand that their positions are carved into a social landscape by the choices of others, whether family

only brings up the history of indentured labor from Asia in the Caribbean, but simultaneously marks her mother's rewriting of history as a particularly imperial, colonial, and white practice.

members or the ruling elite. With this knowledge, they must turn away from seeking solidity and rootedness, and work towards fluidity and relationality. The importance of the self *in relation* to others is central to political import of both *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss*, novels that attempt to represent twentieth century migration and globalization through the family. As each novel moves between its characters, narrating their inner thoughts, memories, and dialogues with other characters, they create a complex matrix of relationality; creating a structure out of seemingly fragmented chapters and narrative segments. In this way, the idea of a self in relation, is not only important for Pilar and Sai, but becomes a central feature to the construction of the novels themselves.

This process begins with the settings of the novels themselves, particularly their plantation histories. According to Glissant, the plantation, as a “universe of domination and oppression, of silent and professed dehumanization,” also saw “forms of humanity stubbornly persis[t]” (65). This contradiction, Glissant, continues, begot more. The one most interesting to Glissant is that the plantation, a social system that required “[a]irtight seals” to maintain its “social hierarchy,” a “maniacal, minute detail to a mercilessly maintained racial hierarchy,” produced “ambiguous complexities” particularly around racial identity (65). Though Glissant is interested in the plantation as it emerged in the Caribbean, his description of its “social hierarchy,” one that begot “ambiguous complexities,” is an apt description for the community Sai enters upon arriving to Kalimpong. For region had “always” had a “messy map” for a “great amount of warring, betraying, bartering had occurred; between Nepal, England, Tibet, India, Sikkim, Bhutan; Darjeeling stolen from here, Kalimpong plucked from there—despite, ah, despite the mist

charging down like a dragon, dissolving, undoing, making ridiculous the drawing of borders” (10).

These borders are not only drawn by politicians and revolutionaries, but so, too, are they managed and maintained in everyday by the people in the region. Take Noni and Lola for example. They reprimand Sai for developing a bond with the cook, the only adult in her life that shows care for her. For though both women know that it must be “difficult living like that with [Sai’s] grandfather,” Noni was clear on the importance of “draw[ing] lines properly between classes” for if they didn’t, “it harmed everyone on both sides of the great divide” (75). Though Noni and her sister are clear about the boundaries that must exist between social classes, as Glissant argues, contradictions arise. For instance, Lola and Noni struggle to “discourage their maid, Kesang, from divulging personal information” (75). This was not because the maid was overly talkative, but instead, because of the immediate closeness Noni, Lola, and Kesang shared; a proximity to each other that made it made the sisters “too fascinated to stop their maid [from] telling them of her romance with the milkman” (75). Noni and Lola had been “shocked” by Kesang’s love, having thought “that servants didn’t experience love in the same manner as people like themselves” (76). But after hearing Kesang’s story, both sisters begin to doubt themselves and their certainties. They arguably enter into what Glissant calls the process of relation: Did Lola ever have “such conversation of faith over the plunge” with her deceased partner Joydeep? Did Noni ever experience “the brief glorious flag of romance” (76)? As Noni recalls, in this moment with Kesang, in the privacy of their home, “[t]he lines had blurred” and perhaps she was wrong in her advice to Sai (76).

Though the social hierarchy of Kalimpong is rife with contradictions and, as within Glissant's framework, "ambiguous complexities," many of the characters mindlessly perform their part. Take for example, the cook. When Cho Oyu is raided by GNFL soldiers and the police are sent to investigate the cook's hut, he responds with "lines" that "had been honed over centuries, passed down through generations, for poor people needed certain lines; the script was always the same, and they had no option but to beg for mercy. The cook knew instinctively how to cry" (6). It is the cook, most often, who informs Sai of the social hierarchy around her, noting how it is "strange" her "tutor is Nepali" and not "Bengali" for, the cook insists, "[e]veryone knows.... coastal people eat fish and see how much cleverer they are, Bengalis, Malayalis, Tamils...Nepalis make good soldiers, coolies, but they are not so bright at their studies. Not their fault, poor things" (82). Sai responds to the cook's rigid system with a joke, telling him to "[g]o and eat some fish [him]self" given all of his "stupid" comments (82).

Sai's bond with the cook allows such joking. This bond, however, is fragile. Though it allows them to reorient the social boundaries that would keep them apart, it is because of the cook's son's absence – Biju off in New York trying to 'make it' – that ultimately upholds their connection. Sai spends the entirety of the novel "ill at ease" worrying that "their closeness" would be

exposed in the end as fake, their friendship composed of shallow things conducted in a broken language, for she was an English-speaker and he was a Hindi-speaker. The brokenness made it easier never to go deep, never to enter into anything that required an intricate vocabulary, yet she always felt tender on seeing his crotchety

face, on hearing him haggle in the market, felt pride that she lived with such a difficult man who nonetheless spoke to her with affection (21).

Though Sai worries that her relation with the cook is false, so, too, does it exhibit one of the major contradictions of plantation social hierarchies: creolization. A dialectical movement, a mixture and blending of difference, Glissant's concept of creolization is at play in Sai and the cook's relationship. For not only are they able to connect through their different vocabularies, forming a bond of care, but so, too, does this creolization challenge social hierarchies that place them in different social spheres.

Nandu and Sai stand in contrast to Jemu, for the judge is unable to relate across difference. Besides his dog, Mutt, the judge remains detached from those around him, suppressing his memories and feelings to maintain his solitude.⁶⁹ However, Sai disrupts the judge's life of singularity, prompting him to have flashbacks to his childhood as a member of the peasant caste in the small village of Piphit in Gujarat, his education in the UK, and his work as judge in Uttar Pradesh. As the judge's history floods into his present, his carefully constructed third-person persona (he only refers to himself as "one"), becomes his greatest challenge. For though the judge works to relate to Sai as a nice addition to the cook, a woman who can help around the house, not before long he realizes that Sai, with her convent education and English ways, "was more his kin than he had thought imaginable" (230). Even the judge, then, "*more lizard than human*" as Sai puts it, finds himself in relation to others. And as he comes to recognize Sai's

⁶⁹ Arguably an effect of colonial trauma, the judge begins his life of solitude during his time at school in the UK. At this time the Judge's "mind [began] to warp" and "he grew stranger to himself than he was to those around him, found his own skin odd-colored, his own accent peculiar" (45). Along with what we can only assumed was the colonization of the mind a la Fanon, the judge began to "wor[k] twelve hours at a stretch" allowing his "loneliness" to find "fertile soil," "retreat[ing] into a solitude that grew in weight day by day" becoming "a habit" which then "became the man" (45).

“westernized Indian” nature as similar to his one experience as an “estranged Indian living in India,” so too, does he wonder he “had made a mistake in cutting off his daughter” (230). Perhaps, he wonders, “[t]his granddaughter who he didn’t hate was...the only miracle fate had thrown his way” (230).

Though *Inheritance of Loss* explicates the work of relation through a number of characters, it is the relationship between Sai and her Nepalese-Indian tutor, Gyan, that explores how relation can lead to social change. Though the young couple quickly notice how different they are, their vastly different social standings and histories become a point of relation. In an attempt to connect with his newfound crush, Gyan shares with Sai that “his own family story also led overseas,” “[t]hey had more in common than they thought” (157). According to Gyan, the “story went like this: In the 1800s his ancestors had left their village in Nepal and arrived in Darjeeling, lured by promises of work on a tea plantation” (157). There, his family farmed and his great-grandfather, “an exceptionally glossy and healthy boy,” became a prime recruit for “the Imperial Army,” a conscription that began “over a hundred years of family commitment to the wars of the English” that took Gyan’s predecessors into Mesopotamia, Burma, Gibraltar, Egypt, and Italy (157, 158). Gyan recalls that as a young boy, “the last family recruit had one day limped off the busy in Kalimpong’s bus station” with a “missing toe” (159). Since then his family “had invested in school teaching and Gyan’s father taught in a tea plantation school beyond Darjeeling” (159).

Though Gyan provides this history in an attempt to connect to Sai, showing a similar transnational family history, their differences, particularly in terms of class and caste, remain a struggle for them to overcome. For as Gyan grows more involved with the

Nepalese movement for statehood he got “a feeling of history being wrought, its wheels churning under him” pulling him into the movement that provided him with “an affirmation he’d never felt before” (173). Ultimately, the sense of belonging provided by the movement leads Gyan to put Sai and her household in danger, setting them up to be robbed by insurgents looking for weapons and provisions. Though Gyan feels trapped by “history,” “from family demands and the built-up debt of centuries,” when in conversation with Sai they both work to relate amidst great conflict and contradiction (173).

This is most prominent when Sai, fed up with Gyan’s disappearance from her life, goes to find him where he lives. Shocked by the class status the house communicated, Sai’s surprise quickly turns into shame both for how Gyan “must have hoped his silence would be construed as dignity” as he managed his difference within the walls of Sai’s house *and* for her own “lin[k] to this enterprise,” a connection she hadn’t had any “knowledge” of or “consent” to (280). When Gyan realizes he has a visitor, he and Sai immediately enter into an intense debate, launching into what has become a perennial argument about their differences. However, as “the conversation disintegrate[es]” into the same complaints, Gyan starts “to giggle” and “his eyes [begin] to soften,” and he and Sai start to “fal[l] back into familiarity, into common ground, into the dirty gray” (283). Together, Sai and Gyan become “ordinary humans in ordinary opaque boiled-egg light, without grace, without revelation, composite of contradictions, easy principles, arguing about what they half believed in or even what they didn’t believe in at all, desiring comfort as much as raw austerity, authenticity as much as playacting, desiring coziness of family as much as to abandon it forever” (283-4).

In this moment, Sai and Gyan are working to connect with each other against great odds. History is against them. Class is against them. Caste is against them. Language is against them. Politics is against them. And yet, they relate. Rather than position each other as opposites, as either or, visitor and visited, they call upon history and its complications and their shared position within it. As Gyan tries to make sense of their differences *and* his desire to be with Sai, he realizes “[e]very single contradiction history or opportunity might make available to them, every contradiction they were heir to, they desired. But only as much, of course, as they desired purity and a lack of contradiction” (284). But before he can tell Sai how he feels, she jumps in: “‘You hate me,’ said Sai, as if she’d read his thoughts, ‘for big reasons, that have nothing to do with me. You aren’t being fair’” (285).

Here, at the end of the novel, and during one of the first major arguments we read about any character engaging in, we see relation attempting to reworld the differences that maintain capitalist production. Rather than allow their anger, feelings tied to their social standings and the histories of labor, migration, and domination that come with them, to keep them distant, Gyan notes how “[t]he chink [Sai] had provided into another world gave him just enough room to kick; he could work against her, define the conflict in his life that he felt all along... In pushing her away, an energy was born, a purpose whittled” (285). This energy, born of relation, is what Sai and Gyan both manage. For though they are drawn to each other and have built a relationship, one with its own language of intimacies, so, too, did that relation call into question their “part” in “the larger questions... of politics and history” (299). Caught in histories of difference that had been used to uphold the social hierarchy of the region, Gyan is struck by “the guilt” that

“came back strong” (299). Though he had felt that pang of belonging while participating in the GNLFF, he wonders why he “told the boys about the guns?...How could he have put Sai in such danger?” (299).

Importantly, *The Inheritance of Loss* does not deliver narrative closure for Sai and Gyan, or any of the characters in the novel. There is no clear-cut identification, no easy side to choose and defend. There is only the work of relation and the archipelago of islands it creates. Calling upon Glissant’s geographically derived visual is not meant to abstract the meaning of Desai’s scathing critique of inequality, domination, and globalization. Instead, I bring in the visual of the archipelago as it also represents the form of *Inheritance of Loss*, its collection of short single character-centered chapters and anecdotal segments.

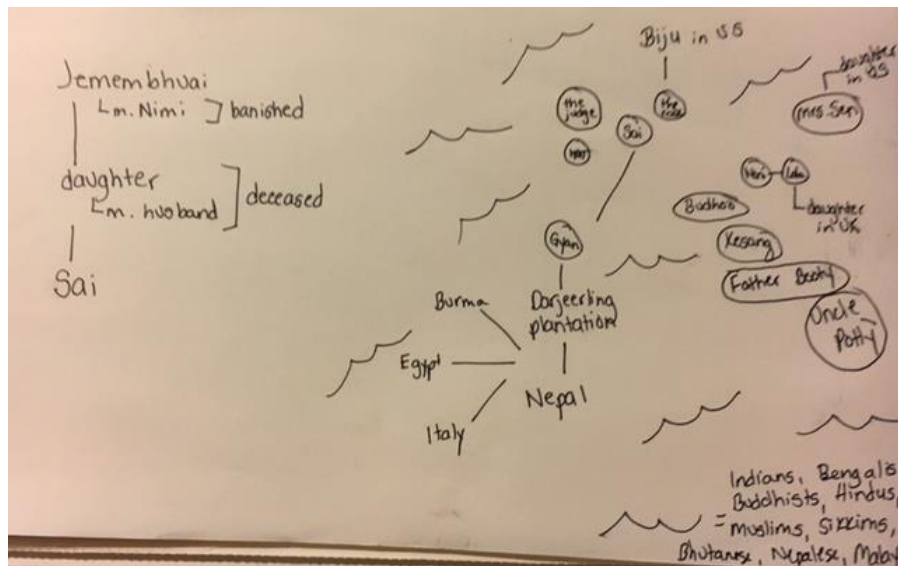


Figure 1.2: Relation in *The Inheritance of Loss*, Lauren Silber.

As opposed to a root-identity map of the family saga of *The Inheritance of Loss* as seen on the left, by examining the work of relation in the novel, we come to see how Desai

constructs a complex, and arguably, transnational representation of Kalimpong that complicates heteropatriarchal notions of the family as lineage *by* exposing class, caste, and ethno-racial conflicts produced by the strict hierarchy of the region.

In this way, the work of relation narrated in *The Inheritance of Loss* not only positions each character within the complex social hierarchy of Kalimpong, but also reworlds the region, one that might be considered ‘postcolonial’ a term that can greatly limit the immense coagulation of differences in the area. And it cannot go unnoticed that it is the movement for state recognition – something that prompts Sai and Gyan into the work of relation – that invigorates such change. Take Noni and Lola. As the movement grows and their land gets taken over, used to build huts for Nepalese-Indians involved in the fight for Ghorkaland, Noni and Lola finally grasp they are part of a larger system. All of a sudden, they realize that it “*did* matter, buying tinned ham roll in a rice and dal country; it *did* matter to live in a big house and sit beside a heater in the evening, even one that sparked and shocked; it *did* matter to fly to London and to return with chocolates filled with kirsch; it did matter that others could not” (266).

The Success of Saeed Saeed, or Racism, Relation, and Biju in American

Along with the network of relations in Kalimpong, *The Inheritance of Loss* also provides an image of New York City’s ‘underclass’ by following Biju as he attempts to work his way out of poverty and into the security provided by a green card. When Biju arrives in the US, he is thrown into a world of undocumented laborers that supersedes his own rural community in Kalimpong.

‘Where is Guatemala? He had to ask.

‘Where is Guam?’

‘Where is Madagascar?’

‘Where is Guyanna?’ (23-4)

Biju’s lack of knowledge stands out, for his interlocutors certainly know about India.

“‘Don’t you know?’ the Guyanese man said. ‘Indians everywhere in Guyana, man’” (24).

So, too, does Biju learn of Indians in Guam, Trinidad, Madagascar, Chile, Kenya, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Fiji, New Zealand, and Surinam. “In Canada,” Biju learns “a group of Sikhs came long ago; they went to remote areas the women took off their *salwars* and wore that kurtas like dresses” (24). So, too, are there Indians in Alaska, “a *desi* owned the last general store in the last town before the North Pole,” and in Hong Kong and Singapore, and Indians “running a spice business” “[o]n the Black Sea (24). Biju is left wondering how he had “learned nothing growing up. England he knew, and America, Dubai, Kuwait, but not much else” (24).

Biju’s work experience teaches him a history he never learned in Uttar Pradesh. Most strikingly, Biju learns about himself in relation to others through the colonial-capitalist network of restaurant workers: “On top, rich colonial, and down below, poor native” (23). Working in the basements of restaurants across New York City, so, too, does Biju come to realize that the world is much bigger than he imagined – it expands beyond England and America, Dubai and Kuwait, and it has for centuries. The Indian diaspora is large, and it has only been Biju that has thought of the world as much smaller

than it is. As Oana Sabo notes in “Disjunctures and Diaspora in Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss*” notes, this knowledge of the Indian diaspora extends the diasporic landscape charted in *Inheritance of Loss* to include pre-1965 labor migration. But the expansive vision of Indian diaspora requires Biju to embark on the work of relation. For having never been surrounded by people so different from him, he must begin to take into consideration how his prejudices and beliefs will shape his life in the US. Nowhere is this work most stark than with Saeed Saeed, a black Tanzanian that Biju meets while working “at the Queen of Tarts bakery” (60).

Saeed Saeed introduces himself to Biju saying he was from Zanzibar, “*not* Tanzania,” a distinction Biju didn’t understand (60). Surprised by Biju’s lack of knowledge, Saeed Saeed exclaims “Zanzibar full of Indians, man! My grandmother—she is Indian!” (59). Saeed Saeed continues, explaining how in “Stone Town” everyone “ate samosas and *chapatis*, *jalebis*, pilau rice” (60). Biju was surprised to find out that “Saeed Saeed could sing like Amitabh Bachhan and Hema Malini...He could gesture with his arms out and wiggle his hips, as could Kavafya from Kavafya from Kazakhstan and Omar from Malaysia, and together they assailed Biju with thrilling dance numbers. Biju felt so proud of his country’s movies he almost fainted” (60). Through Saeed Saeed, Biju learns about the power of culture, whether it is Bollywood films, music, or food, Indian-ness has moved across the globe, making men like Saeed Saeed able to relate to Biju.

Biju struggles, however, to let Saeed Saeed into his life. As Biju puts it, his “admiration for the man confounded him” (85). For Biju longed for Saeed Saeed’s friendship, was “overcome by the desire to be his friend” because “Saeed Saeed wasn’t

drowning, he was bobbing in the tides” (85). But Biju, unpracticed at relating to those different from himself, struggles to make sense of Saeed Saeed, a black man and a Muslim. Biju’s attempt at relation takes up space in the novel, visually disrupting the narrative being told, to present a visual of the relation work at hand:

Saeed was kind and he was not Paki. Therefore he was OK?

The cow was not an Indian cow; therefore it was not holy?

Therefore he liked Muslims and hated only Pakis?

Therefore he liked Saeed, but hated the general lot of Muslims?

Therefore he liked Muslims and Pakis and India should see it was all wrong and hand over Kashmir?

No, no, how could that be and— (85)

Biju first tries to navigate Saeed Saeed’s religious identity. As a Hindu man, Biju works to understand how he could work in restaurants that serve beef, but not befriend a Muslim man. Caught in this negotiation is the complex history and ever-present reality of partition, and the subsequent wars and negotiations that constructed the complex relations amongst different peoples living in the South Asian subcontinent. The messiness and

complexity of the subcontinent, arguably the effects of attempts at root identity, make Biju stumble. For Saeed Saeed is someone he admires, though he is Muslim.

Biju must also confront his anti-blackness when it comes to Saeed, particularly how he has absorbed “what they said about black people at home” (85). Once again, the form of the narrative shifts as Biju tries to make sense of his admiration for Saeed Saeed:

Therefore he hated all black people but liked Saeed?

Therefore there was nothing wrong with black people and Saeed?

Or Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese, or anyone else...??? (86)

Interestingly, as Biju works to make room for Saeed Saeed in his life – work he undertakes out of admiration and a longing *to be like* Saeed Saeed – he gets caught up in the complexities of racism and prejudice. For if he is like Saeed Saeed, he must recognize that “there was nothing wrong with black people” which opens the space of recognizing the good of “Mexicans, Chinese, Japanese” and presumably anyone else of ethno-racial difference from Biju (86).

Through this process, Biju becomes aware of his “habit of hate” along with his “awe of white people, who arguably had done India great harm, and a lack of generosity regarding almost everyone else, who had never done a single harmful thing to India” (86). The change happening within Biju is one, he learns, occurs all over the world. For through his work in different kitchens, Biju learns “what the world thought of Indians” (86).

In Tanzania, if they could, they would throw them out like they did in Uganda.

In Madagascar, if they could, they would throw them out.

In Nigeria, if they could, they would throw them out.

In Fiji, if they could, they would throw them out.

In China, they hate them.

In Hong Kong.

In Germany.

In Italy.

In Japan.

In Guam.

In Singapore.

Burma.

South Africa.

They don't like them.

In Guadeloupe—they love us there?

No.

Presumably Saeed had been warned of Indians, but he didn't seem wracked by contradictions; a generosity buoyed him and dangled him above such dilemmas (86-7).

Just as Biju has to learn about the Indian diaspora, so, too, does he come to realize that diasporic communities are not always wanted. In this way, Biju's process of relation exposes how nationalism propagates inclusion that relies on exclusion, often on the basis of ethno-religious-racial difference. Rather than sustain such root identity, Biju hopes to become more like Saeed Saeed, a man who does not struggle with the "dilemmas" of belonging inherent in root identity.

In this way, Biju connects Saeed Saeed's successes to his ability to relate. As Biju explains, Saeed Saeed "had an endless talent with doors," for even when he was found "during an INS raid" and "deported" back to Zanzibar, he was able to leave, once again, for the United States (88). According to Biju, Saeed Saeed "relished the whole game, the way the country flexed his wits and rewarded him," "he charmed it, cajoled it, cheated it,

felt great tenderness and loyalty toward it” (88). Saeed Saeed ends up getting his green card from a marriage to a woman whose family finds Saeed Saeed’s struggle admirable. Biju learns of this in one of the many exchanges he and Saeed Saeed share in haphazard meetings across the city. For unlike Biju, who remains disconnected from others and struggling with loneliness and an ache to return to India, Saeed Saeed continues to make his way through the system, ultimately coming out on top.

In this way, Saeed Saeed becomes a crucial part of the map of *The Inheritance of Loss*, a non-filial relation that opens up the world of the novel to include a wider vision of the Indian diaspora that requires Biju to enter into the work of relation. And it is through this work – rendered on the page in short sentences, often questions, with lots of blank space – that addresses how racism, and anti-black racism in particular, dramatically shapes the experience of migrants in the US *and* the homes from which they left and the diasporic communities they create. Thus, *Inheritance of Loss* not only complicates heteropatriarchal and capitalist understandings of the family through its use of the family saga form to map the relationality of a rural region in India, but so too, does the novel’s form reworld US migration by addressing the complex social relations at work in a migrant’s life. For thought dominant narratives might assume that the migrant is always, already, advantaged or disadvantaged, Biju’s work of relation, undertaken out of admiration of Saeed Saeed, disintegrates these either-or approaches opting instead to represent the messiness of migration, integration, and belonging.

Revolutionary Distances and Heteropatriarchal Violences in *Dreaming in Cuban*

Dreaming in Cuban produces a similar matrix of relationality as seen in *The Inheritance of Loss* through its use of the family saga form. However, unlike *The Inheritance of Loss* which illuminates the work of relation, *Dreaming in Cuban* highlights patriarchal violences, regularly tied to state-building, that limit and often suppress the work of relation between members of the del Pino family. The differences between Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss* and Garcia's *Dreaming in Cuban* are noteworthy since they focus on a capitalist postcolonial state and a socialist postcolonial state respectively. Though much can be said about how difference is managed under capitalism and socialism, it would be remiss to ignore the fact that where *The Inheritance of Loss* deconstructs rooted identity through the narration of relation between different class, caste, and ethno-racial characters in a similar *region*, *Dreaming in Cuban* challenges rooted identity through the *filial* family. Though more attention can and arguably should be paid to this point and its relation to the economic and governing systems of Kalimpong and Cuba, it is important to note that the zoomed in attention to the del Pino family – its (dis)connections – ultimately erases the hierarchy and contradictions of the Cuban plantation(s). For instead of diving into the contradictions of the *island*, García unearths how intimates, in this case family members, attempt to (re)connect through the communication of trauma and violences enacted, primarily, against the women in the family.

Built out of disconnect, the del Pino family struggles to maintain what biologically should be a simple fact of filiation. As the novel moves between del Pino family members – a chapter for Pilar, a chapter for Celia—it becomes clear that the disconnect is generational. In many ways, however, the lack of connection between Celia

and her three children, is narratively overlooked by her deep connection to her granddaughter, Pilar. Celia and Pilar, though living nearly the entirety of their lives apart from one another, have a near magical bond. As Pilar notes:

I feel much more connected to Abuela Celia than to Mom, even though I haven't seen my grandmother in seventeen years. We don't speak at night anymore, but she's left me her legacy nonetheless—a love for the sea and the smoothness of pearls, an appreciation of music and words, sympathy for the underdog, and a disregard for boundaries. Even in silence, she gives me the confidence to do what I believe is right, to trust my own perceptions (176).

Pilar and Celia's bond is unspoken; built from a sense of psychic exchange that need not be proven for it is already felt. They communicate in dreams, a practice that fades with time, but one that allows Pilar to learn that her grandmother dreams "[o]f massacres in distant countries, pregnant women dismembered in the squares" (218). And it is through these dreams that Pilar learns that her "mother is sad inside and that her anger is more frustration at what she can't change" (63).

Though Pilar and Celia find great comfort in their bond, as Pilar notes, "[s]omething" between Celia and her children, "got horribly scrambled along the way" (178). Though the family tree at the start of the novel makes Celia's family appear quite clear cut, Celia is in fact lost to her children, or perhaps her children are lost to her. Celia wonders if it is her devotion to the revolution that has caused the schism. For example, when Celia acts as resident judge for her local community, she wonders "[h]ow it is possible that she can help her neighbors and be of no use at all to her children? Lourdes

and Felicia and Javier are middle-aged now and desolate, deaf and blind to the world, to each other, to her” (117).

Celia ascribes her children’s ennui and disconnect to the unrooting of migration, telling Pilar that “[f]amilies used to stay in one village reliving the same disillusion. They buried their dead side by side” (240). But the del Pino does not share a village, and according to Celia – much like Ween’s arguments about the family saga – this unrooting of the family has led to its demise. With Lourdes in the United States, Javier in Czechoslovakia, and Felicia lost to her own mind in and out of Havana, Celia turns to Pilar as her hope for generational continuity. After Felicia dies, when Celia finally has Pilar at her side, Celia tells Pilar about the “man before [her] grandmother” and the “promise” she made “before [her] mother was born not to abandon her to this life, to train her as if for war” (222). She tells Pilar about how “[her] grandfather took [Celia] to an asylum before [Lourdes] was born” (222). “I told him all about you,” Celia recalls, “[h]e said it was impossible for me to remember the future” (222). “Women who outlive their daughters,” Celia continues, “are orphans... Only their granddaughters can save them, guard their knowledge like the first fire” (222). Celia requires Pilar to remember her story, for without her children, Celia is orphaned.

But Celia has long been plagued by solitude, even before she lost her love, Gustavo, to Spain or bore any children with Jorge. As a child, Celia grew up with a slew of “half brothers” due to her father having “two families, each with nine children” (92). When Celia’s parents eventually “divorced, they dispersed their children among relatives throughout the island” (92). That was how Celia arrived in Havana to live with her Great-Aunt Alicia, where she survived the starvation and poverty of plantation life and was

raised with “progressive ideas” (233). Celia works to forget this time before the revolution, when Cuba “was a pathetic place, a parody of a country” with only “one product, sugar, and all the profits” going “to a few Cubans, and, of course, to the Americans” (233). However, in her older age, living alone by the sea, Celia struggles with “a loneliness borne of the inability to share her joy” (119). It is the work of relation, and the joy it can bring, that Celia misses. And it is this relation she intends to create with Pilar.

Pilar, however, is not the only person with whom Celia attempts relation. Notably, Celia also works to relate to her son, Javier. Javier spends the majority of the novel with his “Czech wife...and baby girl” “far from the warm seas” of Cuba (10). Unlike her husband and daughters, Javier joined Celia in her joy when “the revolution triumphed” (118). Though he was just barely thirteen at the time, his attachment to the revolution ultimately led him away from his father in a “silent” act of “defiance” when he “left for Czechoslovakia secretly in 1966, without saying good-bye to anyone” (118). Javier eventually became a “professor of biochemistry at the University of Prague, lecturing in Russian, German, and Czech,” a fact he wrote to his mother about along with the detail that he spoke Spanish to his daughter, Irinita (118).

As Celia recounts it, Javier’s marriage ends traumatically. One day, Javier “returned home from the university to find a note on the kitchen table” that explained how his wife had “left him for the visiting mathematics professor from Minsk” and that his “daughter, his beloved daughter, to whom Spanish was the language of lullabies, had left with her mother for good” (156). The loss brings Javier back to Cuba, where he suffers from alcoholism. Celia becomes obsessed with caring for her son. She studies

him, noticing the “lump” on his “neck and the curious scar on his back” (156). She wonders if Javier “inherited her habit of ruinous passion” hoping that the sea “with its sustaining rhythms and breezes from distant lands, will ease her son’s heart as it once did hers” (157). But Javier’s illness gets worse no matter the attention Celia redirects from “her revolutionary activities,” her worry about her daughter Felicia “who has been missing since the winter,” “the twins or...Ivanito, away at boarding school,” or even “the faraway Pilar” (158). Celia believes “that if she can’t save her son she won’t be able to save herself, or Felicia, or anyone she loves” (159).

If Celia is struck by her disconnect from her children, a rootedness she seeks to resuscitate through Pilar and Javier, then her daughters, the female branch missing from Celia’s family tree, spend their life managing traumas that leave them unable to connect. Consider Lourdes whose adamant hatred of anything Communist or Cuban along her inability to relate to her daughter, Pilar, is narrated as the result of the loss of her unborn child. During one of Lourdes’ flashbacks we learn about when she was pregnant with her second child in Cuba. While out riding, “her horse reared suddenly, throwing her to the ground” (70). The horse “fled, leaving her alone,” where it took her “nearly an hour” to find someone who could help her return to her villa (70). When she arrived, Lourdes saw “[t]wo young soldiers...pointing their rifles at Rufino” (70). In this moment, Lourdes jumped in front of them, yelling for them to “[g]et the hell out” (70). In this moment of protection, Lourdes noticed a “pool of dark blood” collecting “at her feet” (70). The soldiers returned, of course. This time they “handed Lourdes an official sheet of paper declaring the Puentes’ estate the property of the revolutionary government” (71). Lourdes “tore the deed in half,” but one of the soldiers “grabbed her by the arm” (70). She was

then raped and abused. The soldiers took a knife, torturing her with the potential of death, instead opting to carve lines into her abdomen, forever scarring the place where her second child once lived.

When Lourdes returns to Cuba after Felicia's death, the memories of her miscarriage and rape come back to her. She remembers what the "doctors in Cuba" later told her, "[t]hat the baby inside her had died," and that "they'd have to inject her with a saline solution to expel her baby's remains" (174). Following the procedure, "she would have no more children" (174). During the trip, Lourdes returns to her in-laws' villa, and the memories of her loss and rape flood back to her:

She remembers a story she read once about Guam, about how brown snakes were introduced by Americans. The snakes strangled the native birds one by one. They ate the eggs from the nests until the jungle had no voice.

What she fears most is this: that her rape, her baby's death were absorbed quietly by the earth, that they are ultimately no more meaningful than falling leaves on an autumn day. She hungers for a violence of nature, terrible and permanent, to record the evil. Nothing less would satisfy her (227).

Though Lourdes fears the loss of her rape and child's death to forgetting, she goes her entire life without sharing this violence and loss. Instead, she allows "[i]mmigration" to "redefin[e] her" (73).

Or at least that what Lourdes tells herself, hiding her loss and the trauma of her rape through disordered eating that undergirds obsessive *éclair* eating and the gaining of 118 pounds and then the loss of this weight through fasting. Lourdes is only able to find

comfort and stability from her father, Jorge. Though they were always exceptionally close, Lourdes finds her ability to communicate with Jorge to grow stronger “after his death” (131). They speak to each other most often while Lourdes is walking around the city, and often their talks center around politics. When Pilar attempts to return to Cuba via Miami, an unsuccessful trip after Lourdes’ in-laws tattle on Pilar, for example, Lourdes looks to her father for advice. While in Miami “to pick up Pilar,” “Lourdes could smell...the air of her mother’s ocean nearby,” a sensory experience that makes her wonder if it is Celia’s inability to love Lourdes that has led her to this place where her only child would run away from her and the life she has built (74). In this moment she calls out to her father: ‘No matter what I do, Pilar hates me.’” (74). Jorge speaks back, ensuring Lourdes that “‘Pilar doesn’t hate you, *hija*. She just hasn’t learned to love you yet.’” (74)

This lesson – that love is not born out of filiation, but takes time, and often work, to cultivate – is what Jorge hopes to leave his daughter. It is a lesson that has challenged Jorge throughout his life, a shame for his own capacity for oppression. However, as he feels his “energy waning within him,” “convinced that the time he’s stolen between death and oblivion is coming to an end,” he finally entrusts Lourdes with the truth: It was him, his jealousy, his longing for unadulterated love from a woman who had loved before, that had separated Celia from her family (193). “After we were married,” Jorge begins,

I left [Celia] with my mother and sister. I knew what it would do to her. A part of me wanted to punish her. For the Spaniard. I tried to kill her, Lourdes. I wanted to kill her. I left on a long trip after you were born. I wanted to break her, may God

forgive me. When I returned, it was done. She held you out to me by one leg and told me she would not remember your name (195).

The story does not end, however, because next, Jorge sent Celia to an asylum. He “told the doctors to make her forget. They used electricity. They fed her pills.” (195). When he visited her, he remembers how Celia would tell her to “turn on [his] electric brooms,” how she would “laug[h] in [his] face,” how she would insist that “geometry would strangle nature” and that a friend of hers “murdered her husband” (195).

Celia is eventually released and prescribed a life “by the sea to complete her forgetting” (196). It is now, before he fully crosses over, that Jorge makes sure Lourdes know that Celia did not abandon her. “‘Your mother loved you,’ Jorge del Pino repeats urgently (196). Jorge leaves his daughter with one last bit of knowledge: her sister, named after Celia’s friend in asylum, the woman who murdered her husband, Felicia, was dead. “She was sad when she died,” Jorge explains, “[s]he spoke your name and mine” (196). Lourdes must return to Cuba, to her rape, to her loss, to her mother, and bring Pilar with her. In this final moment together, Jorge tells her that he knew “about the soldier,” that he had “known all these years,” but her mother “never knew” (196). When Lourdes asks who told him, he insists, nobody, he, simply, “just knew” (196).

Dreaming in Cuban is filled with troubling disconnections that are seemingly reconciled through sensorial bonds that are impossible to prove. For just as Jorge and Lourdes undertake the work of relation only in his death through a process of sharing that occurs, ostensibly, in Lourdes head, so too, do Pilar and Celia remain bonded through shared dreams; an inexplicable process of connection that would trouble the realist-driven reader. For unlike the characters in *The Inheritance of Loss*, whose embeddedness in

history and political movements is very much part of shared living conditions, the characters in *Dreaming in Cuban* engage in the work of relation most often in the unprovable realm of the psychic – through dreams and conversations with the dead and exiled. But regardless of whether the work of relation happens through conversation with others as we see in *The Inheritance of Loss* or psychically as in *Dreaming in Cuban*, it is still attempted. For Jorge leaves his daughter with one request – to relate to Celia, to “return and tell...her everything, tell her [he’s] sorry” (197).

Just as Lourdes struggles to relate to those around her, so, too, does Felicia. The only people to whom Felicia finds connection is her best friend, Herminia, and her son, Ivanito. With her son, the bond is formed out of a particular, if not peculiar, communicatory practice. Felicia and Ivanito regularly “play a game with colors as they walk...’Let’s speak in green,’ his mother says, and they talk about everything that makes them feel green. They do the same with blues and reds and yellows” (84). Their game of colors is based on the subjective experience of feeling a certain way around a color. Felicia and Ivanito relate to each other by sharing their felt experience of color, a process of relation that produces a comprehensive language, one that allows young Ivanito to ask his mother “‘If the grass were black, would the world be different?’” (84).

Though Felicia and her son are able to relate through this sensory practice, Felicia suffers from mental illness that leaves her unable to care for her children or herself for large swaths of time. Herminia believes Felicia’s instability stems from the syphilis she contracted from her first husband, her children’s father. That, or the near constant physical abuse she endured in their marriage. Regardless of reason, Felicia’s attempts to kill her husband and son during one of her episodes leaves the state to deem her “an

‘unfit mother’” (107). Ivanito is sent to boarding school where he longs for someone to connect with the way he had once done with his mother. It’s alluded that during this time Ivanito suffers from sexual abuse from his Russian teacher, a man who is later fired from the school based on student complaints of sexual misconduct. And though the certainty of Ivanito’s experience is never known, he lives out the rest of his life alone, longing for his mother and the opportunity to relate once again. In this way, Ivanito joins the rest of his family, longing to relate to others and being thwarted by oppression, violence, abuse, and misunderstanding.

If *Dreaming in Cuban* begins with a family tree, then the novel, with its character-based chapters filled with suppressed memories, traumas, and unvoiced desires, illustrates how the rootedness of filiation is a farce. Relatives require relation to maintain connection; biology and birth and names and place are not enough. As Glissant argues, the “myth of creation” that ties identity to a place or a territory, is just that, a myth. And when that myth is complicated by revolution and shifting nationalist practices as we see in the life of Celia and her children, place no longer provides stability and the myths of a legacy tied to place crumble. For what makes up the del Pino family is its parts, the different characters, their different beliefs and practices.

Much like the archipelago of Glissant’s relation, so too, does García reworld the del Pino family through the form of her novel. For each segment illustrates the relation between each character, their aches for closeness, the traumas that inhibit them, and, occasionally, the work they undertake to understand the differences in their family that attempt to keep them divided. But much like the islands in the Caribbean, there are oceans between these characters; distances that these characters can’t seem to cross,

arguably because they believe lineage is enough. But as *Dreaming in Cuban* makes clear, filiation does not beget relation. For relation, as Glissant makes clear, requires us to work through difference, to acknowledge the other and relate to them *particularly as they* maintain their differences from us. The del Pino family cannot do this relation work, at least not while living or through the spoken word. Instead, García infuses her novel with the potential for relation work – in the conversations Lourdes has with her dead father; in the dreams Celia shares with Pilar; in Ivanito’s wonderment about the world being different if the grass were black.

“The clandestine rites of the African magic,” or Afro-Cubans, Friendship, and the Healing of Relation

If the majority of *Dreaming in Cuban* is example of how an attachment to root identity can cripple a family, then Felicia and her friendship with Herminia offers the clearest instance of relation as an opportunity of reworlding a social system based on capitalist exploitation of difference and nationalist use of the ‘Other’ to construct exclusionary identity. Herminia holds an interesting place in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Not a del Pino, she doesn’t feature prominently in the text. In many ways, Herminia exists in shadow, mentioned by others, but rarely seen or heard from. Celia, for example, “runs into Herminia Delgado carrying baskets filled with crusty roots and ratoons and fresh, healing spices for Felicia” like “[a]niseed for hysteria, Sarsaparilla for the nerves and any remaining traces of syphilis” and “[r]iver fern and *espartillo* to ward off further evil” (90). Knowing that Herminia is going to help her daughter, Celia still stays away from Herminia. For though she “dabbles in *santería*’s harmless superstitions, she cannot bring

herself to trust the clandestine rites of the African magic” (90-1). Interestingly, Felicia does not share her mother’s anti-black racism. This we learn from Herminia herself.

Though Herminia regularly appears in passing as we see with Celia, she also receives her own chapter in the novel, one, notably, narrated in first person. In this chapter, we learn of Herminia and Felicia’s friendship, perhaps the only instance of unadulterated relation that is lived in shared time and space between two characters in all of *Dreaming in Cuban*. The chapter, entitled “God’s Will” and set in 1980 begins with the place where Felicia and Herminia met, “the beach when [they] were both six years old” (183). As Herminia explains, Felicia came up to Herminia and asked, “Will you save me?”...[h]er eyes...wide and curious” (183). Felicia responded with a simple “Sure,” not “realiz[ing] then what [her] promise would entail” (183).

Herminia goes on to explain how “Felicia’s parents were afraid of [her] father. He was *Babalawo*,” she explains, “a high priest of *santería*” (183). Felicia’s parents were not alone in their fears, Herminia continues. “The people in Santa Teresa del Mar told evil lies about my father,” she reports, saying that “he used to rip the heads off goats with his teeth and fillet blue-eyed babies before dawn” (184). Careful to fear the death of *blue-eyed babies*, the gossip around Herminia’s family was obviously based on their blackness just as much as their practice of *santería*. This became clearer to Herminia in school where she “got into fights” when the “other children shunned [her] and called [her] *bruja*” and “made fun of [her] hair, oiled and plaited in neat rows, and of [her] skin, black as [her] father’s” (184).

According to Herminia, “Felicia” was the only person who “defended” her, “for that” she would “always be grateful” (184). Not only did she defend her friend at school

and visit Herminia's family regularly against Felicia's parents' wishes, so, too, did Felicia support Herminia when her "oldest son died in Angola" (184). As Herminia recalls, "Felicia didn't leave my side for a month" (184). She "arranged for Joaquín's remains to be brought home for a decent burial, and then she stayed with me until I could laugh again at silly things" (184). Felicia and Herminia have a real relationship, one that their racial differences or Felicia's "stubbon[ess]" and choice to "sta[y] on the fringe of life because it was free of everyday malice" does not impede (184). And in describing this relation, one not based on roots or filiation, but work and care, Herminia becomes the only character in the novel that presents a picture of Felicia that is not tinged with her mental illness; a portrait of her friend that is full and contradictory and human.

For Herminia, Felicia's friendship, given their racial difference, brings a much larger history into *Dreaming in Cuban*, expanding the family saga of the del Pinos to include the complex racial hierarchies that made up Cuban society arguably since the colonial period, if not before. According to Herminia, "[f]or many years in Cuba, nobody spoke of the problem between blacks and whites. It was considered too disagreeable to discuss" (185). But Herminia's father made it clear to Herminia what it was like to be black in Cuba, telling her about "what happened to his father and his uncles during the Little War of 1912" (185). It was imperative to Herminia's father that she knew "how...men were hunted down day and night like animals" and "hung by their genitals from the lampposts in Guáimaro" (185). The Little War of 1912, also known as "the Armed Uprising of the Independents of Color – in Spanish," the Negro Rebellion, The Twelve, and the Little Race War of 1912, was the "war that killed [Herminia's] grandfather and great-uncles and thousands of other blacks," and is a moment in Cuban

history that garners “only a footnote in...history books” (185). This is why Herminia doesn’t trust what she reads, “only what [she can] see, what [she can] know with [her] heart” and “nothing more” (185).

Herminia does note that “[t]hings have gotten better under the revolution” (185). Before that, “when voting time came, the politicians would tell us we were all the same, one happy family,” but the lived reality told “another story” (185). “The whiter you were,” Herminia explains, “the better off you were” (185). But today, Herminia explains, “[t]here’s more respect” (185). Herminia has a job at the “battery factory,” where she’s worked for “almost twenty years now, since right after the revolution” and there she “supervise[s] forty-two women,” a job she considers “better than mopping floors or taking care of another woman’s children instead of [her] own” (185). The “men are still in charge,” however, “[f]ixing that,” Herminia notes, “is going to take a lot longer than twenty years” (185).

In a novel about the revolution, Herminia’s chapter reminds readers that filiation can be a tactic of oppression, limiting the stories and histories of oppression that sustain inequalities like those Herminia recounts. For before Herminia’s perspective is voiced, *Dreaming in Cuban* was at best deracinated, and at worst, anti-black in its erasure of the social hierarchy in Cuba. For unlike the uptake of what Glissant called ‘the plantation,’ the rigid, often violent, and regularly broken social rules that maintained social hierarchies, that infiltrates Kalimpong throughout the novel, *Dreaming in Cuban*’s uptake of revolution is abstract. For the novel presents revolution as the sum of its intimate interactions—the soldier who rapes the wife of land-owning elite, the woman enlisted into work of the revolution when she is deemed unfit to mother, the institutionalized wife

turned judge for the revolution who “looks out at the unrest” of her community and insists “that so much of Cuba’s success will depend on...[a] spirit of generosity,” and “[c]ommitments without strings,” aspects so “against human nature” (115).

But Herminia, and the story she tells, makes plain that the intimacies and struggles of relation faced by the del Pino family are part of a larger history of oppression. And she does so *in relation*. For it is in Herminia’s chapter that the narrative work of relation tests the diegetic power of the novel. For after recounting the war raged by the Independent Party of Color (a war that the US, perhaps unsurprisingly, stepped in to de-escalate, even though the Cuban army murdered Afro-Cuban military members), Herminia insists that she must “begin again. After all, this story is about Felicia, not me” (185). The rest of Herminia’s chapter pivots back to Felicia, who, according to Herminia, is the protagonist of her first-person narrated chapter. Herminia recounts Felicia’s return to Havana after “her disappearance in 1978,” and the “great eagerness” to which she came to santería (185). As Herminia notes, the ceremonies became “a kind of poetry” for Felicia “that connected her to larger worlds, worlds alive and infinite...Felicia surrendered” to the practice, “and found her fulfillment” (186).

Though Felicia gave herself over to santería, as Herminia explains, when she “returned to Palmas Street...neither her mother nor her children were there to greet her” (188). Felicia “was crestfallen,” becoming “certain that the gods were testing her” with this lack (188). Felicia could not overcome the pain of this absence, regularly asking Herminia if she had spoken to any of her family. Herminia had, of course. Her family was quite concerned, “frightened” that Felicia’s conversion was like when she lost her mind and tried to kill her husband and son, a time they all called the “summer of

coconuts” (188). Felicia would plead with Herminia to explain that she was different, that she “ha[d] clarity now,” that “even El Líder [was] initiated” (188). In this moment of loss, Felicia turns to Herminia, “h[olding] [Herminia’s] hands in hers” and speaks: ““You’ve been more than a sister to me, Herminia. You saved me, like you promised on the beach”” (188). As Felicia makes clear, Herminia has been *more than* a sister, and as such, she is revealed as another island in the archipelago of the del Pino family.

Pilar and Ivanito learn seek out Herminia’s perspective after Felicia’s death when they visit her home so that Pilar can “learn the truth about [Ivanito’s] mother, to learn the truth about herself” (231). When they arrive, Herminia “welcomes Pilar and [Ivanito] as if she’s been expecting” them (231). Herminia sits down with them both, and, taking Pilar’s hands in her own, Herminia tells them about Felicia “as a child, about her marriages to [Ivanito’s] father and to other men, about the secret ceremonies of her religion and, because Pilar insists on every detail, about [his] mother’s final rite, and her last months on Palmas Street” (231). After Herminia shares her stories with Pilar and Ivanito, she “guides Pilar to a back room lie with candles” where an “ebony statue of a female saint” sits in a corner by a “tureen on an altar crowded with apples and bananas and dishes of offerings [Ivanito] can’t identify” (231-2). Before they leave, Herminia “embraces Pilar” and then “draws [Ivanito] to them” where he “breathe[s] in the sweet, weary fragrance of [his] mother” (232).

This moment with Herminia is a final act of relation of the novel; the moment Pilar and Ivanito, two characters who so desperately attempt relation with their mothers, finally feel closeness, and it is with Herminia in *her* home, amongst *her* things. Herminia, her perspective and her stories, become the necessary information for Pilar and Ivanito to

go on and discover a life of relation: Pilar to realize she belongs in New York *more than* Cuba; Ivanito as he attempts to emigrate from Cuba during the Peruvian Embassy crisis. Arguably, then, it is Herminia's perspective that most dramatically reworlds the story of a transnational Cuban family in *Dreaming in Cuban*. Much like the role of Saeed Saeed in Biju's life in the US, Herminia's perspective expands the spatio-temporal landscape of the novel, identifying the role of anti-blackness in the work of relation required of the novel's characters. However, unlike Saeed Saeed, who pops in and out of Biju's life, Herminia is a constant for Felicia – she is “*more than a sister.*”

With the inclusion of Herminia, the archipelago of relations in *Dreaming in Cuban* grows more complicated, more indicative of plantation life and the contradictions its (violently) managed social hierarchy produced. This connection to the African diaspora, one that the del Pinos share, though they do not flaunt, provides another line on the family diagram, one that expands the geographical reach of the family's diasporic, exilic, and transnational dimensions.

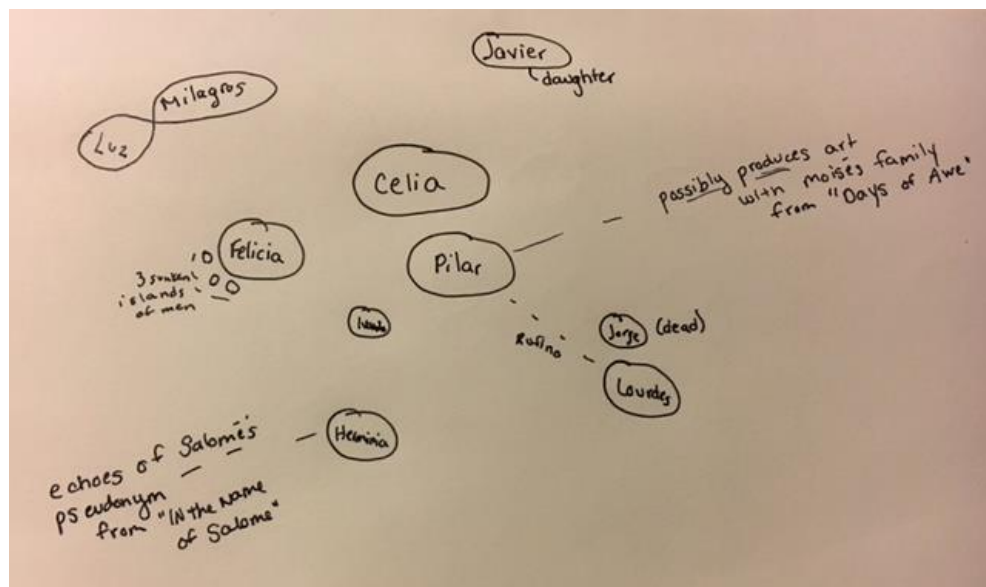


Figure 1.3: Relation in *Dreaming in Cuban*, Lauren Silber.

This reworlding of the del Pino family happens through the form of *Dreaming in Cuban*, particularly the way each chapter works with the other to produce a mapping of relation between characters. This new image not only represents the reality of the attachments and relationality between the characters in *Dreaming in Cuban*, but also challenges the anti-black racism necessary to uphold the linear family tree at the start of *Dreaming in Cuban*. Moreover, this image bears witness to the queer relation illustrated in the novel, including non-biological or filial relationships and attachments that challenge heteropatriarchal and capitalist notions of family.

Building my argument about emotional narrativity, the above readings explicate how Cristina García and Kiran Desai's use of the family, as narrative structure, combats US-and-Western-centric narratives of migration that uphold anti-black, heteropatriarchal capitalist ideologies of US immigration and belonging, exposing yet another way emotional narrativity challenges dominant ideologies that limit the potentiality of migrant identification. As my analysis shows, the form of the novels, their rhizomatic poetics of relation (to borrow from Glissant), suggest different understandings of the family and connectivity that transform the transnational family from pathology to be remedied to model of relationality; one that comes to terms with racial, gender, sexual, caste, and class violences in the world.

The differences between *Dreaming in Cuban* and *The Inheritance of Loss* are noteworthy, then. For though they both use the family saga as a literary structure to cohere the disparate stories that make up both novels and a form that eludes narrative closure by producing multiple vibrant threads of a seemingly singular story, they each

challenge the family differently. *Dreaming in Cuban* challenges the heteropatriarchal family unit that graces its opening pages by telling the story of people unable to relate across difference, trauma, and abuse. *The Inheritance of Loss* takes a different approach. Stretching our conception of the family to its edge through the concept of the household, Desai illustrates the class, caste, gender, religious, sexual, and ethno-racial differences that make up a family. And yet, both novels include black characters whose stories illustrate the need to address anti-black racism in immigrant communities if we are to reworld, and thus resist, the structures and discourses that oppress Latinx and Asian diasporic communities in the US and abroad. Thus, by reading these two novels together, I not only illuminate a similar technique of emotional narrativity deployed by authors concerned with different geopolitical events and transnational communities, but I also draw attention to the ways intimacies often dismissed as feminine or queer are central *both* to an understanding of the power dynamics of globalization *and* to a resistance to them.

CHAPTER 6

EPILOGUE

“TO LIVE THROUGH THE DAYS SOMETIMES YOU MOAN LIKE A DEER”:

CLAUDIA RANKINE’S *CITIZEN*, BLACKNESS, AND WAKE WORK

On October 1, 2014, *BOMB Magazine* published an interview between scholar-critic, Lauren Berlant and poet-teacher, Claudia Rankine. Rankine and Berlant’s relationship began, according to Berlant, after the two met “in a parking lot” after “a reading.” Berlant remembers going over to Rankine and saying “crazy fan things like, ‘I think we see the same thing.’” Rankine felt similarly. After reading one of Berlant’s books, she wrote to her describing how “[r]eading it was like weirdly hearing myself think.” Since then, Berlant writes, “Claudia and I have built a friendship,” consulting each other about tone, “about whether or not our observations show something,” and “how writing can allow us to amplify overwhelming scenes of ordinary violence while interrupting the sense of a fated stuckness.”

The interview centers around Rankine’s most recent, and highly celebrated, publication, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014). *Citizen* brings together prose poems, photography, and paintings with pieces about youtube characters like Hennessey Youngman created by Jayson Musson and the racially charged incidents surrounding Serena Williams and her successes, and ‘situation videos’ created with John Lucas about Hurricane Katrina, the murder of Trayvon Martin, the 2011 UK riots following the death of Mark Duggan, and the reaction to Zinedine Zidane’s headbutt during the 2006 FIFA World Cup to name a few. The link is the intimate. Or, put differently, micro-

aggressions. A prefix to represent scale, the micro could just as easily stand in for daily, or perhaps individual, or perhaps violence to one's being. The micro-aggression is the through line in *Citizen*, a genre-bending book that examines race, the body, memory, and language through the sensorial and experiential, the visual and the silent, the narrative and blank space. And the micro-aggression, as Rankine renders it, is always present, always remembered, and always historical.

As Berlant puts it in the opening of their *BOMB Magazine* interview, each element of *Citizen* "is like a commentary track on the bottom of a collective television screen where the ordinary of racism meets a collective nervous system's desire for events to be profoundly transformative." Berlant is deeply interested in the experience of *Citizen*, not as something pure or knowable as those interested in reader response might contend, but as something *in relation to*, something *like*. In this case, Berlant describes *Citizen* "as a kind of art gallery playing out the aesthetics of supremacist sterility, each segment being like a long, painfully white hall we're walking down, punctuated by stunning images of black intensity and alterity. And then come some moments of relieving care, not just with people but also in the very fact that an aesthetic encounter can make you feel that you have a world to breath in, after all. Or that you don't."

This encounter is helped along by Rankine's decisive use of the second person pronoun you, a striking turn from the expected I of a lyric poem. But that is precisely the point, and arguably, why Berlant contends that *Citizen* produces an experience of "an aesthetic encounter" that "can make you feel that you have a world to breath in," or "that you don't." Take for example an early prose poem of the text about a young person and their friend at the "Sts. Philip and James School on White Plains Road" (5). In the poem

the speaker narrates the experience of being told that “you smell good and/ have features more like a white person” (5). “Certain moments send adrenaline to the heart, dry out/ the tongue, and clog the lungs” the speaker continues in the second stanza, “Like thunder they drown/ you in sound, no, like lightening they strike you across the/ Larynx. Cough. After it happened I was at a loss for words” (7). The ability to slip inside the second person you, creates, as Berlant contends, “an aesthetic encounter,” that, depending on the reader, is rendered in closeness and proximity to the experience of heart pounding, can’t breathe, what do I say-ness, or a realization that though those sensory experiences might be known, never had the reader considered whether their physiological response to pain was “because [of] the ‘all black people look the same’/ moment, or because you are being confused with another/ after being so close to this other” (7).

When I taught *Citizen*, my primarily white classroom, was drawn to the second person pronoun. Many remarked that it was the *thing* in the text that made them stop. Barthes punctum, perhaps, though they didn’t use the term. For the vocal white students in my class, in the spring of 2015 when Black Lives Matter as a movement was not quite yet of obvious importance to the white, liberal youth of my New England university, read Rankine’s prose poetry, when they encountered the you, they were drawn into the *feelings* of the text only to realize they had, in fact, never known that kind of hurt. Recognition of privilege. Emerging white fragility. I, their cis-female, white teacher, guided them through this un-knowing of the world. The few students of color in my class sat silent. Undergoing an aesthetic encounter as well, I can imagine, though that classroom held little space for their sharing. Their silence spoke.

The question of hurt – where does hurt come from and where does it go when pushed away – is central to the text. In a prose poem about being told by a colleague that “his dean/ is making him hire a person of color when there are so/ many great writers out there,” the speaker parses out their reaction (10). “As usual,” the next stanza begins, “you drive straight through the moment with the/ expected backing off of what was previously said” (10). “It is not/ only that confrontation is headache-producing,” the speaker continues, “it is also/ that you have a destination that doesn’t include acting/ like this moment isn’t inhabitable, hasn’t happened be-/fore, and the before isn’t part of the now as the night/ darkens and the time shortens between where we are and /where we are going” (10). The moment, what we might call the micro-aggression where a colleague iterates their belief that ‘great writers’ are in fact not-person-of-color writers, recalls many more, creating an uninhabitable moment whereby the speaker can no longer act. The double negatives are perplexing but real: white supremacy becomes *not*-person of color, the destination does *not* “include acting,” and the moment is *not* “inhabitable.” It is in this moment that the speaker is “reminded that a/ friend once told you there exists the medical term—John/ Henryism—for people exposed to stresses stemming from/ racism” (11). “Sherman James, the researcher” found that people managing the stress of racism “achieve themselves to death trying to dodge/the buildup of erasure,” “the physiological costs were high” (11). The speaker hopes that “by sitting in silence” they “are/bucking the trend” (11).

Citizen is a text about John Henryism in many ways. About how people manage the stress of racism through achievements. Take, for example, the section on Serena Williams, or the well-traveled person whose miles paid for their great seat on the plane,

or the person in the nice neighborhood whose friend is babysitting for them when their neighbors call the cops on him. In many ways, to read the text through the pronoun you, to see this as the mode of aesthetic encounter, is to read this while not-black. For *Citizen* is about hurt and survival. It is a reckoning with the “unsettled feeling” that “keeps the body front and center” (8). It is a book about how “Americans battle between the ‘historical self’ and the ‘self self,’” moments when our usual interactions “as friends with mutual interest” and “compatible personalities” is confronted with “your historical selves, her white self and your black self, or/ your white self and her black self” that “arrive[s] with the full force/ of your American positioning” (14).

You is at the center of this reckoning. Rankine examines and walks around the meaning of “I” and “you” later in *Citizen*, while meditating on language. Beginning with a prose poem on Judith Butler who was asked “what makes language hurtful” (49). The speaker “can feel everyone lean in,” eager for Butler’s response (49). “Our very being exposes us/ to the address of another, she answers. We suffer from/ the condition of being addressable. Our emotional open-/ness, she adds, is carried by our addressability. Language/ navigates this” (49). Language, Butler announces, is what navigates our subjectivity, “our very being.” The next stanza ruminates on “the ambition of racist language,” words the speaker always assumed were meant “to denigrate and erase you as a person” (49). “After consid-/ering Butlers remarks,” however, the speaker “begin[s] to understand yourself/ as rendered hypervisible in the face of such language/ acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit/ all the ways that you are present. Your alertness, your/ openness, and your desire to engage actually demand/ your presence, your looking up, your talking back, and as insane as it is, saying please” (49).

As the speaker tries to articulate how “words work as release” for “a pulse in a neck, the/ shiftiness of the hands, and unconscious blink, the conver-/sations you have with your eyes,” they turn to the pronoun, I (69). According to the speaker, “sometimes ‘I’ is supposed to hold what is not there until/ it is,” “this makes the first person a symbol for something./ The pronoun barely holding the person together” (71). But the speaker is uncertain of the “power” attributed to I, as if it was “a monumental/ First person, a Brahmin first person” (73). Instead, the speaker notes one must “drag that first person out of the social death of history, then we’re kin” (72). Thus, the second person you. The speaker notes how “each body is a strange beach,” that “if you let in the excess emotion you will recall the/ Atlantic Ocean breaking on our heads” (73). The Atlantic slave trade, the drowned bodies, the people forced into slavery, the sea carries this, and “you” are the body to which the sea returns, wave after wave, the “strange beach.” The speaker makes clear that “the worst injury is feeling you don’t belong so much/ to you—” (146).

At the center of this you, then, is being second to I. In this moment of *Citizen*, Rankine connects language, as acts that can address us or not, and uses such theory to make sense of what it means to inhabit the you which is more kin than I. Between words and self are feelings, though the speaker is “afraid there is/ something you are missing, something obvious” (152). The speaker struggles with “A feel-/ing that feelings might be irrelevant if they point to one’s/ irrelevance” (152). For if we feel, we are. But what if what we are is you, not I? Again, and again, what does it mean to exist as a person seen as Other. What do these experiences feel like? Is it like the work of getting through the day, work that escapes in a “moan like” a “deer” or a “sigh” (59). Is “sighing” a “worrying exhale of an ache,” an “illness,” the expression of a not “free being” (60)?

And what about language? Can language save us? If we are an I, rather than a you, are we okay? Or is this yet another benchmark born out of an experience of not-being worth more as cargo than people, of not-being worth more dead than alive? The speaker stops the doubt: “Don’t be ridiculous./ None of the other black friends feel that way and how you/ feel is how you feel even if what you perceive isn’t tied to/ what is.../ What is? (152). The book ends noting that this inquiry into thought and feeling and language continues “until the vista includes only displacement/ of feeling back into the body, which gave birth to the feel-/ings that don’t sit comfortably inside the communal” (153). With this knowledge, “You smile dumbly at the world because you are still feel-/ing if only the feeling could be known and this brings on/ the moment you recognize as desire” (153).

Citizen ends with an image of J.M.W. Turner’s *The Slave Ship*; a side by side of the original and a zoomed in image that presents a blurry image of a limb or a body or a person, drowning. In her interview with Berlant in *BOMB Magazine*, Rankine explains that the “book ends with Turner’s *Slave Ship*, because it seemed funny that those trips across the Atlantic would have us disgorging still.” Rankine wonders, “maybe the disgorge is a form of storytelling.” One cannot help but think of Cristina Sharpe’s recent project *In the Wake*, when reading Rankine’s explanation of J.M.W. Turner’s *The Slave Ship* as the image that closes out her project. Rankine’s use of the you instead of I feels close to Sharpe’s argument “that rather than see[k] a resolution to blackness’s ongoing and irresolvable abject, one might approach Black being in the wake as a form of *consciousness*” (14). Much like Rankine, and arguably Berlant, so too, does Sharpe turn to “current quotidian disasters,” doing so “to ask what, if anything, survives the insistent

Black exclusion, this ontological negation” (14). Sharpe and Rankine depart in their archive. Rankine is quite clear that she “made a conscious decision to inhabit [her] own subjectivity” in *Citizen* “in the sense that the middle-class life [she] live[s], with [her] highly educated, professional, and privileged friends, remains as the backdrop for whatever is being foregrounded” in the text. Sharpe looks at “forms of Black expressive culture,” objects “that do not seek to explain or resolve the question of this exclusion in terms of assimilation, inclusion, or civil or human rights, but rather depict aesthetically the impossibility of such resolutions by representing the paradoxes of blackness” to which Sharpe calls “the wake” (14).

Much more can and should be said about Rankine’s *Citizen*, particularly how it renders the relation between language, sensation, hurt, race, and history through its poetics. However, I end this project with a brief flash of Rankine’s *Citizen*, her dialogue with Lauren Berlant, and its echoes of Cristina Sharpe’s idea of wake work, because together, these moments clarify what I’ve been working towards in *The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging*. Though this project focuses on Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic cultural production, so too, has it taken up texts that, as Sharpe explains, “do not seek to explain or resolve the question” of exclusion with terms like “assimilation, inclusion, or civil or human rights” (14). I began this project with the work of undocumented activists, work that was based on *feeling* rights, rather than civil or human rights. As each chapter has unfolded, I exposed how storytellers constructed fictional narratives of migration by utilizing the emotional work of belonging (a process, kin to, though importantly different from Sharpe’s wake work) as narrative technique. Whether it was narration or narrative objects, form or genre, each chapter compared texts

that used similar techniques of emotional narrativity to provide alternative stories of migration not bound by the terms set by assimilation, either as discourse, narrative form, or thematic or generic expectation. In this way, I, too, look at expressive culture as a site to where exclusion can be worked through aesthetically.

And I do this by looking at the *work* of un/belonging, or as Sharpe puts it, exclusion, for such work is founded on the historical disenfranchisement and exclusion of certain peoples of color as human. Like Rankine, I look to the feelings of everyday to understand this work. The ambivalence, the stress, the anxiety, the questioning. Whether internal and psychological or external and physiological, my project, like *Citizen*, sees *the felt* as the starting point for the spiraling out of questions about domination, inequality, and race in the United States. In this way, *The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging* has asked us to dramatically reorient our understanding of domination and inequality by looking at the *felt*, the *sensory*, the *experiential*, and how histories of hurt and survival live in the nervous system, how our nerves move from one body to the next, an inexplicable process that scholars of post-memory are likely more apt to explain than geneticists.

It is not lost on me that Rankine's *American Lyric*, carries with it the term so often equated with recognition and selfhood, citizen. Nor can I ignore that Rankine is, herself, an immigrant, born in Kingston, Jamaica, and arriving to New York, the Bronx, with her parents when she was seven. In these understated ways, her book makes sense to close out this project. Not only does it render the work of un/belonging in beautiful multi-modality, but, so too, does it center this work around the black, and in the case of Rankine, immigrant, experience. For although this dissertation is interested in

contemporary US racial politics, and though I feel it is important to resuscitate the cultural production of people of color not as legible in the black/white dichotomy of US racial formations, I do not want to make whiteness the center of this project. Whiteness is tricky to get rid of, however. For as the introduction of this project alluded, assimilation, the dominant narrative of Americanness and migration, has always projected a future sense of belonging by adopting whiteness as goal, whiteness as center. This is why it is important that this project begins and ends with the experiences of black Americans, making blackness the bookends for an investigation of contemporary US racial politics as they are spoken through the emotional narrative techniques of Asian and Latin Caribbean diasporic fiction. Juxtaposition can be a powerful beginning.

So, too, does this epilogue illuminate the work still left to be done. For one, it begins to illuminate how anti-blackness, and racial difference more generally, function in my arguments about emotional narrativity and popular US literatures marketed as ‘immigrant fiction.’ Unlike other comparative projects, work that use historical moments like the Spanish-American War to sustain their comparative work, this project stems from popular interest. And, as we know, popularity is complex, often driven by profit-hungry publishing houses and well-meaning white people (like those Herminia fears the most). Rankine’s *Citizen* offers a model of how to take the everyday and weave it into dialogue with the historical. And it does so, in many ways, through its final image. Perhaps *The Politics of Feeling and the Work of Belonging* needs its own final image, its own J.M.W. Turner’s *The Slave Ship*, to make clear what, precisely, or at least what, vaguely, reading these texts for their emotional narrativity *does* for our understanding of popular US immigrant fiction specifically, and the US multicultural literary canon more broadly.

But I leave you, my reader, only this epilogue—a final rumination on belonging, affect, race, and aesthetics that is an ache for more and a stubborn resistance to the closure expected at the end of a project.

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