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**BETWEEN COLONIALITY AND TRANSMODERNITY: LATINO/A FICTIONAL
RESPONSES TO U.S. INTERVENTIONISM IN LATIN AMERICA**

by

DOLLY R. TITTLE

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate School

of Wayne State University,

Detroit, Michigan

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

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2016

MAJOR: MODERN LANGUAGES (Spanish)

Approved By:

Advisor

Date

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my husband, Joaquín R. Tittle, whose love, support, and encouragement me impulsaron para llegar a la recta final. To mi hijo, Lucas, y mi hija, Luisa for inspiring me to work hard every day and for giving me many moments of true joy. And finally, to the memory of mi abuelo Benja who loved to study, and loved to learn, and had a book in his office for each question I had, including one of the novels in this study. Thank you for all the lessons you taught me, mi adorado abuelo.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Latinos/as in the U.S. are one of the fastest growing minority population. Their presence has had an influence on popular culture through the arts and the financial market. The murals of Diego Rivera displayed in San Francisco, Detroit, and New York City offer an illustration of society from his unique perspective. Latin music groups and pop artists like Shakira, Ricky Martin, and Marc Anthony have crossed over and made it to the top of the music charts. There is a growing number of radio and television broadcasting networks that produce Spanish-speaking shows in the U.S., while a growing number of shows on major U.S. networks feature Latino/a actors. The swell of Mexican restaurants and numerous supermarkets and businesses owned by Latinos/as have made and continue to make an imprint on the mainstream culture.

As the population of Latinos/as in the U.S. grows so does the mainstream media's antipathy towards this demographic segment of our population. Bewilderment about their presence permeates newscasts. To them, one day the U.S. was primarily composed of persons of white European descent and a sprinkling of African Americans, Native Americans and an assortment of other immigrants; and then, on the next day, there are signs everywhere in some unknown language (Spanish) gaining popularity and that pressing "2" for Spanish becomes an option for every automated communication. Yet, this increase in the Hispanic-origin population did not happen overnight and it certainly did not grow in a vacuum. I argue in this study that it is simply a case of cause and effect. The demographic expansion is due in great part to historical U.S. interventionism in the very same countries where these inhabitants came from. Thus, the history of U.S. interventionism in Latin America is directly connected to the influx of Latin Americans in the U.S.¹. Through interventionism an invitation to the U.S. was extended in both overt and covert

¹ The book *Harvest of empire* (2011) by Juan González addresses this connection.

ways. As a consequence of the policies created in Washington and the subsequent actions of U.S. military forces, sometimes operating in tandem with American multinational corporations, the inhabitants of the countries affected have become political refugees and/or economic migrants in the northern republic.

Literary contributions from Latino/a authors that speak to this legacy are vibrant. There is a wave of novels that, among other subjects, depict the migratory experiences of Latinos/as in the U.S. These novels describe the difficulties, ordeals, and complications that people face in adjusting to a new place they now call home. Paradigms shift as the Latino/a individual is not fully immersed in their new place and at the same time loses her/his place in the culture left behind. For many foreign-born Latinos/as, returning to their homeland is not an option. But for others it is a necessary way of life: accountability to the extended family continues; trips back and forth create a space between here and there where notions from both cultures are considered and often held in tension. In this space, languages shift and ideologies mesh. This study will focus on four novels that capture these thoughts, where new identities are in flux and creativity flourishes in the interstices. This literature offers important clues of the history that the U.S. shares with Latin America; through it, the conflicts, challenges, victories, and setbacks of their people is exposed as well as Latinos/as whose homeland has been the U.S. for generations, which is the case unique experience of Mexican Americans.

Authors and Synopsis of Novels

The four novels examined in this study are published in the United States by authors who represent three countries in Latin America: Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. While there are people from many other Latin American countries in the U.S., those originating from Mexico and Puerto Rico represent the largest two Latino/a groups. Dominicans are the top five group among Hispanic origin populations, according to the U.S. 2010 Census. Also, this study

will look at the history of U.S. interventionism in these countries to help set the context for understanding these literary works. Various historical events depicted in the novels will shed light into the eventual migration north of natives from those regions. The connection between U.S. interventionism and immigration is something that tends to be ignored and certainly not prominently highlighted in American mass media. As the analysis of these stories develops, this connection will become clearer.

The novels are presented in chronological order from the year they were published. The first novel, published in New York, is *The Americano* (1963) and not much has been written about it since it was released nor about the author Puerto Rican Enrique G. Matta (1884-1975). He is a native of Fajardo, Puerto Rico who received in 1912 his medical degree from Jefferson Medical College, in Philadelphia, PA. After many years of practicing medicine he turned to politics. First, he became mayor of his hometown, Fajardo, from 1926 to 1928. He was politically affiliated to the *Partido Republicano Puertorriqueño* (PRP), which sought annexation to the United States. Later, in 1928, he was elected to the Puerto Rican Senate, winning consecutive four year terms until 1944. After his retirement from medicine and politics, he published this novel. *The Americano* that was translated into Spanish and distributed to public school classrooms as part of the curriculum for seventh and eighth graders in the mid-1960s. In addition to this novel, according to the book jacket, he translated “Markham’s ‘Man With a Hoe,’” and an another poem entitled “Campesina,” both of which were contest prize winners. One of the characters in the novel, who is also a doctor, may personify his own political views.

The setting of *The Americano* takes place entirely in Puerto Rico. As one of the contrasts to the rest of the novels in this study, the main character of this story immigrates to Puerto Rico. He is an American man named Glenn Sumners, who begins business ventures in the agricultural

sector of the east coast of Puerto Rico in the beginning of the 20th century. While immersing himself in a culture of friendly, barefoot peasants, he meets a higher class young woman, Teresa, who is already engaged to be married to Ramon. The tension that is created by this new relationship is aggravated by the fact that this takes place shortly after the United States gains possession of the island in the aftermath of the Spanish American War of 1898. The undisclosed, omniscient narrator reveals how Glenn relates to the people and describes how some accept him and others reject him. Resistance towards Glenn Sumners is predictable as something expected from the people who are interacting with a foreigner. The discourse of progress is prevalent in the voice of some characters, while others, like Teresa, show skepticism. Glenn Sumner's conflict with Ramon increases until they fight over a dance with another girl, Pilar. They also fought a legal battle in court over a fire that Ramon incited in the Hacienda Vista Alegre. After Ramon's turbid actions were exposed, Teresa is persuaded to marry Glenn. She is wooed by him. They move to a larger town in Puerto Rico where they continued their pursuit of happiness and progress.

The Americano provides insight into U.S. interventionism in Puerto Rico from its very beginning. It demonstrates how some Puerto Ricans were both paradoxically skeptic of North Americans and at the same time eager for change from the Spanish colonial rule they had been experiencing for over four hundred years. This novel presents a point of view that sets it apart from the rest of the stories in this study because of the welcoming tone towards interventionism and little resistance to it that the writer weaves into the text. It also sets the stage for attitudes about interventionism that will be found in Puerto Rico later that century. The events presented in Matta's novel precede the posture found in characters represented in the next novel by Esmeralda Santiago, *América's Dream* (1996), to which we now turn.

Set towards the end of the 20th century. *América's Dream* was published in New York and is Santiago's first novel. She is best known for her autobiographical trilogy *When I Was Puerto Rican* (1994), *Almost a Woman* (1999), and *The Turkish Lover* (2004). In these novels she relates her childhood in Puerto Rico and her coming of age in New York City². She has published numerous articles and contributed to various anthologies. Santiago's second novel, *Conquistadora* (2011), tells the story of a Spaniard who idealizes Puerto Rico, and finds her idyllic notions disturbed.

América's Dream is the story of América González, who was working as a maid in a hotel in the island-municipality of Vieques, Puerto Rico³. Her main preoccupation is raising her teenage daughter, Rosalinda. Her daughter's father, Correa, who married someone else, is violent and physically abuses her on a regular basis. Hoping to escape from his brutality, she accepts a job offer as a live-in nanny in the state of New York.

After leaving her daughter behind at a relative's house in Fajardo, she starts her new life in the high end suburb of Westchester County, New York, as a nanny. Her struggles to build new relationships begin anew. Other nannies, who represent various Latin American countries, continually question her aspirations and their validity. As she begins to establish a romantic relationship with Dario, Correa locates her⁴. In a chilling and terrifying encounter, she confronts

² See Ismael Muñiz dissertation, "Bildungsroman..." where he compares Santiago's *When I was Puerto Rican* and Nicholasa Mohr's *Nilda*. Excerpts of her trilogy also appear in many anthologies including *Boricuas* (1995) by Roberto Santiago.

³ Vieques is part of the archipelago of Puerto Rico, located just 8 miles from the east coast town of Fajardo. See Ivan Musicant's book *The Banana Wars: A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama* (1990), for the U.S. military role in this island in the 1965 invasion of the Dominican Republic (364) and the Grenada conflict of 1983 (375).

⁴ See Alison Van Nyhuis "Negotiating Colonial Roots and Gendered Places" (2011) in which the author equates Correa's abuse of América to "the uneven distribution of power in Puerto Rico's political relationship with Spain and America citing Doris Sommer's 1991 work on nation and romance *Foundational Fictions*" (33). This thought is similar to one that I emphasize later when I am looking at Correa's violence and its signifying role in the colonial/world/system. She also points out in this article how América's feminist side inadvertently grows.

her unwanted past in a fight where Correa inadvertently meets his demise. After recovering from her ordeal that even attracted the local media, she finds a job in a Manhattan hotel. This job provides a salary and full benefits as a hotel housekeeper. She remains content, prepared not to move up, but to move on.

The Americano and *América's Dream* present two contrasting images of the impact of U.S. interventionism in Puerto Rico. The first novel portrayed an optimistic anticipation of progress brought by the U.S. to Puerto Rico. The second novel presents a lack of optimism in the promise of progress. There is a plateau when it comes to opportunities, more like a very low glass ceiling as far as América's professional aspirations is concerned. Politically for Puerto Rico, these novels display how hopes of freedom from the colonial grip of Spain did not bring about liberty; it was just a shift in masters. A materialistic, consumerist mindset combined with mediocre autonomy given to the local authority, clouded the people's concrete desires to establish a sovereign government in the island. The status quo or the idea of accepting the U.S. presence without neither working for statehood nor independence became the norm on the island by the end of the 20th century. Being the only Spanish speaking colony in the world became the proverbial elephant in the room. It was an embarrassment no one wanted to address because, after all, progress did come to Puerto Rico, and everyone seemingly had shoes. A person's or a nation's ideals were relegated to the end of the list while pragmatism became the mainstream's mindset.

The third literary work in this study is also published in New York. *Caramelo or Puro Cuento: A novel* (2002) is the second novel by Mexican American author Sandra Cisneros (1954). Her first novel, *The House on Mango Street* (1984), which relates the story of a young, Mexican-American woman growing up in the U.S., won her acclaim and has become a standard textbook in some states and a banned novel in places like Arizona where legislation against Mexican American

history was passed. Her collection of stories *Women Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) cleverly inverts traditional narratives as identities are explored across the border. *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* was translated into Spanish by Liliana Valenzuela⁵. This translated version has managed to insert into the language a number of expressions found in the Mexican American experience that are worth further linguistic exploration. Although the descriptions between *The House on Mango Street* and *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* may seem similar, the main difference between this novel and her first one is found in the back and forth family trips between Chicago and Mexico. The portrayal of the main character's family in *Caramelo's* account presents a semi-autobiographical narration. Like her main character, Celaya, Cisneros is the only female among her siblings, traveled back and forth from Chicago to Mexico, and lived in apartments similar to those described in the story. Yet this novel constantly dabbles with speculations, leaving the readers open to decide what is the truth and what is *Puro Cuento* – pure fiction⁶.

In *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, Sandra Cisneros main character, Celaya Reyes, is the first person narrator of the story. Her paternal grandmother plays a vital role in the narration. Celaya remembers growing up in Chicago and visiting Mexico every summer with all her family⁷. Her

⁵ We presented papers in the same panel at the XX International Conference of the Asociación Internacional de Literatura y Cultura Femenina Hispánica (AILCFH), University of Texas, Austin, October 2010. Before the panel started she was commenting on her presentation of *Caramelo* in Spain and how interesting it was to bring new idioms to the Spanish language that came from the English language written originally by a second generation Mexican American.

⁶ José D. Saldívar expounds on this truth versus fiction subject in his article "Transnationalism contested: on Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*". This subject is presented in the title and is questioned throughout the novel by the narrative voice. He is able to demonstrate how Cisneros from the beginning is comparing and contrasting truth with "healthy lies. If, in the course of my inventing, I have inadvertently stumbled on the truth, *perdónenme*" (Cisneros 1), in order to reflect Mexican culture in Mexico and the United States. Saldívar points out Cisneros' questioning of the official history and subtle suggestion that the truth is found in *puros cuentos* (178-179).

⁷ These travels are the focus of Juanita Heredia's work "Voyages South and North: The Politics of Transnational Gender Identity in *Caramelo* and *American Chica*." She Compares Cisneros' novel to *American Chica: Two Worlds, One Childhood*, a novel by Peruvian American Marie Arana. In this work she explores the "commonalities and differences across a pan-Latina literary landscape" (Heredia 341). She also delves "on the politics of gender roles and genealogy through travels" (Heredia 344).

mom, dad, six brothers and uncles, traveled to see their grandparents in Mexico City. The story of their ancestors is mixed in with the story of U.S. intervention in the Mexico and other parts of the world. Celaya is a descendant of men who have fought on both sides of the border: for and against the U.S., the same border that she crosses every summer to connect with her family and crosses back to continue her life.

The novel is divided in three parts. In the first part, she characterizes her grandmother as the antagonist of the family. She refers to her as the Awful Grandmother and certainly portrays her as an awful person. For example, Celaya recounts a memory of a terrible argument between her grandmother and her mother. Celaya's grandmother says to her mother with no qualms, "My son could've done a lot better than marrying a woman who can't even speak a proper Spanish" (Cisneros 85). These words did not improve the in-law relationship they had.

In the second part of the book, Soledad, the Awful Grandmother, helps Celaya narrate her story. In this part, the reader finds out about the grandmother's tragic upbringing and how her relationship begins with Celaya's grandfather. Celaya writes and her grandmother interrupts. The Awful Grandmother wants Celaya to write her story, the grandmother's story, in a way that would portray her as a desirable protagonist, "Don't you think we need a love scene here of Narciso and I together? ... Just something in the story to show how happy we were? ... really, I mean before he met the so-and-so?" (Cisneros 170-171). Celaya does not always comply.

In the third part of the novel Celaya focuses more on herself, on her own story. She starts with the day when she was born and ends with her present when she is fifteen years old. As she continues her account, the manner in which she began to write the story of her grandmother in the second part is revealed. She writes her grandmother's story after her grandmother has died. "That's when I jerk my eyes open and see her" (Cisneros 370). Clearly, in the passage she was

talking to her grandmother's ghost the whole time. After many supernatural apparitions, her grandmother begs Celaya to tell her side of story. She requests to have a voice through her granddaughter's account, in order to be forgiven and truly rest in peace. Throughout the story, the narrator offer important historical reports offer found in endnotes that informs the reader of the role of the U.S. in their history.

The fourth and final work of fiction in this study is the 2008 Pulitzer Prize and National Book Critics Circle Award winning novel by Junot Díaz (1968-), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Junot Díaz was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, and like his character, he immigrated to New Jersey with his immediate family. He graduated from Rutgers College in New Jersey and completed his MFA at Cornell University in New York. He is currently a Rudge and Nancy Allen Professor of Writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, MA. He also advocates for higher education for undocumented immigrants through the Freedom University in Georgia. He actively travels around the country and abroad promoting his work and offering talks. In a recent appearance, he boldly called attention to a subject that seems to be a priority for him: confronting the inequality of education found in the U.S.⁸

Like the authors mentioned above, it is believed that autobiographical characteristics are present in Yunior, one of the characters in his novel. Yunior first appears as a character in Junot Díaz's collection of short stories *Drown* (1996) and became a central character in his latest publication, a short story collection titled *This is How You Lose Her* (2012). It's a recurring character that serves as thread of consistencies in his works thus far.

⁸ This was at the People of Color of the National Association of Independent Schools Conference in Washington, D.C. in December 2013. My colleague Eglee Rodriguez attended his session and this is what she had to say, "Super preparado con fuertes convicciones. . . se tomó la libertad de hablar de la desigualdad que hay en nuestras escuelas, la falta de acceso a ciertos recursos, los estereotipos, etc."

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, two narrators tell the story of Oscar, an overweight nerd from Paterson, New Jersey. The first narrator, Yunior, introduces the concept of *fukú*, a curse that he believes has followed Oscar's family all the way from the Dominican Republic. *Zafa*, the counter spell, is what he hopes to achieve through his writing. The second narrator is Oscar's sister Lola. In each of the book's three parts, Yunior alternates with Lola as they narrate their own stories and that of Oscar's mother and maternal grandparents under the regime of Generalissimo Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Martínez. He is described as a ruler of "implacable ruthless brutality" (Díaz 2). This depiction of Dominican Republic's dictator from 1930 until his assassination in 1961 was part of an extensive explanation found in a footnote. The narration present ties between Trujillo's exploitative government and his training with the U.S. Marines as a result of U.S. interventionism in the Dominican Republic in 1916.

While Lola focuses her narration on her difficult relationship with her mother that took her from New Jersey to live in the Dominican Republic, Yunior focuses on his difficult relationship with Lola and his unintentional friendship with Oscar. As the book travels back and forth through time, a combination of extensive vocabulary in English, Spanish, and vernacular expletives in both languages – with a mix of Sci-Fi, Fantasy, and Comic book allusions – colors the narration from beginning to end. When Oscar finally rises above his fears and begins to express his love, right there in his parent's homeland, his life is taken in cold blood.

The novels by Cisneros and Díaz describe U.S. interventionism in both Mexico and the Dominican Republic. They both choose to add in the footnotes certain explanations of moments of U.S. occupation and military invasion in their home countries. This characteristic of the novel, that is to say, how their characters' histories are treated, will be further discussed in this study. Both authors also have elements of the supernatural that guide the narrators through the stories.

This literary trope will also be further discussed in this study. Their stories are full of humor and irony while they describe events that had inevitably shaped the outlook of Mexicans/Chicanos/as and Dominicans in the U.S.

A Brief History of U.S. Interventionism in Latin America

My goal in reviewing these four novels is to identify the influence and ways in which U.S. interventionism is portrayed, and to explore the corresponding strategies that characters use to accept or reject it. To that end, a brief look at the history of U.S. interventionism in Latin America is necessary and is the subject of this section. The focus will be specific to interventionism in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. In order to summarize an extensive history into something more concise, I will concentrate on four major doctrines developed and upheld by presidents of the United States throughout various periods in history. The way in which these doctrines directly or indirectly impacted these three countries will be further discussed in Chapter 2: *Historical U.S. Interventionism and its representations in the novels of Matta, Santiago, Cisneros, and Díaz*.

V. Shiv Kumar in his book, *US Interventionism in Latin America: Dominican Crisis and the OAS* (1987), mentions some of these doctrines. The first doctrine that is important to point out is the Monroe Doctrine. President James Monroe, the 5th President of the United States, declared that the United States, as opposed to Europe, should be the nation to intervene in other countries' affairs that share the same hemisphere. In Shiv Kumar's words, "As though guided by the spirit of Manifest Destiny, the Monroe Doctrine in 1823 warned all non-hemispheric Powers to keep off Latin America" (ix). This placed the United States in the position of a continental superpower. Two notable events took place between the first doctrine and the second one that I would like to present: the Mexican-American War and the Spanish-American War. The Mexican American War ended with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), in which the U.S. acquired a great portion of

Mexican territory. The U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico stemmed from the Treaty of Paris (1898), in which the island, among several other territories, was ceded by Spain. These events are relevant to this study and may have reinforced the doctrine that follows.

Shortly after he was elected in 1904, President Theodore Roosevelt upheld the Monroe Doctrine with what has been called the Roosevelt Corollary. I would like to emphasize this second doctrine because it marks a time – after the Spanish American War of 1898, and the assassination of President McKinley in 1901 – where the United States affirmed their commanding position in the hemisphere. Restating it in Shiv Kumar’s words, this Corollary allows for “assigning the role of a hemispheric gendarme to the United States... [facilitating]... various US interventions in the Caribbean and in Mexico” (ix). By the time his distant relative President Franklin Delano Roosevelt is in office, the potency of the United States was well established.

A third important doctrine of that era, but one that served the purpose of *softening* the US approach to Latin America was put in place. After wars and economic depression plagued the world, President Roosevelt (FDR) was able to launch in 1933 the Good Neighbor Policy. This happened after the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924, which is relevant to this work. The Good Neighbor Policy was adopted in an effort to withdraw from overt military activity in the region. The U.S. military intervention hiatus in the Dominican Republic coincided with the period General Rafael Leónidas Trujillo was in power. His rise to power is something that Junot Díaz’s narrator explains in the many historical remarks he offers in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. During the 1930s and 1940s Puerto Rico still had governors appointed by Washington and Mexico was recovering from an economic depression. The OAS (The Charter of the Organization of American States) was born in the late 1940s. “Although by his Good Neighbour Policy he put an end to the gross forms of direct intervention of the earlier

years, he showed that he was willing enough to accommodate all forms of indirect intervention and to support military juntas and undemocratic regimes if they would go along with US objectives” (Shiv Kumar ix). Nevertheless, the Roosevelt foreign policy initiative was a welcoming sign, an acknowledgement of the idea that some parts of Latin America (such as the Caribbean islands and Central America) are located in U.S. backyard and that an amiable relationship would conceivably benefit all parties.

The fourth and final doctrine that I would like to highlight is the Johnson Doctrine⁹, which directly impacted the Dominican Republic. President Lyndon B. Johnson, who was in office for most of the 1960s, was focused on maintaining the U.S. as a world power; this confidence was shaken after the Kennedy assassination in 1963. One of the challenges facing the U.S. was the growing threat of communism in various countries, especially neighboring Cuba. “On 28 April 1965 the US President, Lyndon B. Johnson, made a dramatic announcement from the White House, saying that he had ordered a contingent of four hundred US marines to land at once in the capital city of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo. In less than four days thereafter there came another announcement that as many as 14,000 US marines had landed in Santo Domingo” (Shiv Kumar 1). The significance of this move is the noticeable contradiction to the Good Neighbor Policy that has been prevalent. The military force of the United States was once again overt. From the Monroe Doctrine and its Roosevelt Corollary, through the Good Neighbor Policy years to the Johnson Doctrine, the United States’ military interventions did not cease. The United States, for instance, brought down Ramon Grau San Martin’s Government in Cuba during the 1930s to install the much-despised dictatorial regime of Fulgencio Batista” (Shiv Kumar 112). Records show U.S. intervention in Panama (1903), Honduras (1903, 1907, 1911, 1912, 1919, 1924

⁹ Also see Yates 1 and Musicant 364 for more information on the Johnson Doctrine.

and 1925), Nicaragua (1912-1933), Haiti, (1915-34), Veracruz, Mexico (1914, 1916, 1917), Playa Girón, Cuba (1961-failed), Grenada (1983) and Panama (1989-90), just to mention some in the 20th century. Besides the military interventions mentioned above, there were also many others in the form of commerce and representations of a growing market that promoted progress. The movement of U.S. interventionism, simply put, became ubiquitous.

The impact of U.S. interventionism in other countries is no longer a matter that is only felt abroad. As the population of the U.S. increases, the ramifications of its interventionism become most apparent in the influx of immigrants precisely from countries that have been affected by U.S. intervention, or military occupation. The purpose of this dissertation is to glean from the selected novels the ways in which its characters have been affected by U.S. interventionism positively and negatively, their response to it, and how in turn these factors can influence the mainstream culture of the U.S. mainland.

U.S. Interventionism, Strategies of Decolonization, and the Role of Language

There are three main aspects that I will explore in the novels that I have selected. The first concerns U.S. interventionism in the home countries of the novels' protagonists: Mexico, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. I am interested in these particular countries because, as mentioned above, in addition to being the background of the characters in the novels selected, these countries also have a large number of their nationals living abroad in the United States mainland as either economic migrants or political refugees, or both. Once they are in the U.S., their social status is relegated to the lowest rungs of the socioeconomic ladder¹⁰. Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel and fellow postcolonialists Nelson Maldonado-Torres and José David Saldívar explain that "...In New York's racial/ethnic hierarchy, Mexicans, Dominicans,

¹⁰ See Baker especially Chapter 9 "Immigrant Incorporation into U.S. Economy" pp. 151.

Puerto Ricans and African Americans share the bottom of the hierarchy... [as opposed to other ethnic groups that]...experience upward social mobility very similar to the ‘immigrant experience’ of early century European immigrants” (12). The three authors link racial discrimination factors to this situation. They postulate a shift from biological racism to cultural racism that operates to keep Latinos/as from ascending in status. Biological racism fosters discrimination on the basis of the color of one’s nonwhite skin, whereas cultural racism focuses on the ethnic background that nonwhites share as natives of Latin America. The authors conclude that “Cultural racism became the hegemonic racist discourse in the core of the capitalist world-economy” (Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres and Saldívar 13). They offered examples of the rhetoric related to this discourse that either depicts or makes Latinos/as see themselves as “...’lazy,’ ‘unassimilated,’ ‘uneducated,’ ...” (Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres and Saldívar 13) to name a few derogatory descriptions. The United States had intervened in these countries before while these immigration patterns became established. In my work, I will provide a historical context for these events as they are represented in the novels. It is important to note that in some cases those interventions are idealized, criticized, trivialized, or strikingly ignored. I will examine the causes and implications of the various approaches.

The second attribute to be examined relates to how the characters in the novels attempt to achieve decolonization. As Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, and Saldívar indicate, “Decolonization has been traditionally used to characterize the transition from colonial administrations to the formation of independent states in peripheral regions of the world-economy. [...] However as the work of Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (1993, 1998, 2000) has shown with his ‘coloniality of power’ perspective, we still live in a colonial world and we need to break away from the narrow ways of thinking about colonial relations, in order to accomplish the

unfinished and incomplete twentieth-century dream of decolonization” (6). In other words, and following Anibal Quijano’s formulation, I will argue that although the characters in the novels do not live in a traditional colonial society, they do live in a society permeated by the “coloniality of power.” This expression was created by Quijano in order to describe how in some post-colonial countries, colonial structures and assumptions are in place because they have been internalized by people’s acceptance of hegemonic powers. The above-mentioned examples of cultural racism point out a few of the many ways of thinking incorporated into current institutions and policies that have been internalized through the discourse of the dominant class. It may seem incongruous that characters living in the United States would have to aspire for ways to achieve independence, yet their “peripheral” reality positions these individuals into a state of requiring such effort.

Finally, the third characteristic of the novels that I will explore is their use of words or phrases rich in metaphors or symbolism that are borrowed from the vernacular English or Spanish languages in order to convey a specific meaning or to elicit a specific response from readers. They are predominantly written in English with a use of Spanish that falls into the various categories of the spectrum established by Lourdes Torres in her article “In the Contact Zone: Code-switching Strategies by Latino/Latina Writers.” In this study she explores the various ways in which writers incorporate Spanish into literature that may be published for a primarily English reading audience. These strategies range from “easily accessed, transparent, or cushioned Spanish” (Torres 79), to Spanish that would “gratify the bilingual reader” (83), to what she calls “radical bilingualism” (86). “Radical bilingualism” presents the Spanish language by the code-switching from English to Spanish and vice versa generated in conversations, in the narrator’s thoughts, and in the historical endnotes provided in the novels. What may be surprising to the reader is that the code-switching is not always presented using italics or other marks that may warn them of the switch.

Instead it flows through the narration adding more than just color to the text, but also nuances from each cultural group represented. In the U.S., Latinos/as are generally lumped into one big group. In reality, each group is part of or can trace its ethnic roots to a particular country. The authors in these novels portray some clear distinctions that highlight the particular cultural background or nationality that the character's represent. From loan words to semantic calqued phrases, using the highest forms of Standard English and its vernacular in the same sentence, mixed with Mexican, Dominican or Puerto Rican colloquialisms, no italics to mark the code-switching, and rarely a translation, the authors of the selected novels launch into a pattern of sustained code-switching. This code-switching represents the kaleidoscope of Latino/a culture in the U.S. in ways that intentionally inserts their heritage culture into their current one.

Transmodern Project, Border Thinking, and the Novels

This methodological approach of this study will be primarily framed around the works of Argentinean thinkers Enrique Dussel and Walter Dignolo. Although each chapter will have its designated theoretical framework that would fit the specific subject investigated, these two thinkers' contributions will be present throughout this study. Particularly, I will focus on what I call *transmodern* literature¹¹. This literature has characteristics of or relate to transmodernity, as outlined by Enrique Dussel; it also has much in common with the term border thinking that was coined by Walter Dignolo.

To Enrique Dussel, transmodernity stems from a critique of the concept of modernity. He criticizes the version of modernity that adheres to Euro-centrism, "for it indicates intra-European phenomena as the starting point of modernity and explains its later development without making recourse to anything outside of Europe" (Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism 469-470). In other

¹¹ The novel *The Americano* serves as an antithesis and therefore, is not considered as an example of transmodern literature.

words, this notion of Euro-centrism positions Europe at the heart of modernity, and disregards the contributions of, the “Turco-Muslim World, China, Central Asian steppes (Mongolian), Pacific Ocean cultures, Aztec, Maya, Inca, Chibcha, etc.” (Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism 469). In a similar vein, Walter Mignolo emphasize the importance of local histories in Latin America and highlights the influences of non-European ideas. The above.-mentioned societies have become peripheral to the movement of history as seen through European lenses.

Moreover, modernity according to Dussel, negates “a world history in an empirical sense before 1492” (Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism 470) implying that any civilization antedating the Columbian era is considered to be pre-modern, thus, making a straight connection between modernity and colonization. Dussel simply states that “Modernity really began in 1492,” (Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism 474) another point of agreement he has with Mignolo. He directly links modernity with *coloniality*. *Coloniality of power* is the term coined by Peruvian scholar Aníbal Quijano that explores the unequal power relations inherent in the colonizer/colonized relationship¹². In other words, for Dussel the Euro-centric category of “modernity” with its emphasis on only one intra-European line of historical development and “progress” simply conceals, yet also ideologically justifies, Europe’s emergence as a global hegemonic colonial power. Mignolo also sees coloniality as the “darker side of modernity” in his book *The Darker Side of Renaissance* (2003). Having another side to consider creates a need for that other side’s history and own point of view to be taken into account.

Dussel explains that the goal is not just to idealize and affirm a pre-modern history, or to oppose modernity or to even unreasonably reject it. Taking any of these positions exclusively would create untenable dichotomous positions. So instead of thinking from polarized positions,

¹² See page 15. This will be further elaborated in Chapter 2.

Dussel calls “the transmodern project” (Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism 474) the effort to include all of the positions and perspectives of those on the periphery that were always part of modernity’s underside, coloniality, but who were erased from Eurocentric accounts.

In his article “Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation,” Dussel offers a strategy for the realization of this project. First, he argues that it is important to acknowledge the position of not being in the center of modernity but in the cultural exteriority. Second, he calls for an internal critique of traditionally accepted values ignored by modernity. Third, he assigns special importance to the critiques of those living in bi-cultural borders. Fourth, he realizes that it takes time for those three important steps to be taken in order to accomplish this. To arrive at the goal of affirming the worth of “one’s own cultural tradition” (Transmodernity and Interculturality 49) there is a need for time to resist, mature, and accumulate forces. Dussel has called his system a “liberation philosophy” (Underside of Modernity 7). That philosophy proposes that all spheres of human endeavor—from the political sphere (8-9), to the erotic (9-10), pedagogy (10-11), religion (11) to an ecological dimension (13) are part of historical systems that always operate through the exclusion of some. In the case of European modernity, the cultures that were colonized by Europe have been excluded from the privileges of rationality, and often, their full “humanity.” Thinking from those exclusions, attempting to incorporate those subjectivities that have been relegated to the margins of any given system, would be an important component of what Dussel calls the project of transmodernity, which would lead to the liberation of all people.

Dussel’s transmodernity perspective is similar to Walter Dignolo’s border thinking in that it recognizes those who have been subordinated by European modernity and its Eurocentric history. The outcome of Dignolo’s border thinking is decolonization, which is analogous to

transmodernity, and culminates in liberation. Border thinking is a point of view that comes from a specific location that agrees with Dussel's views of being in the exterior. As Mignolo explains, the borders "are not discrete entities but rather moments of a continuum in colonial expansion and in changes of national imperial hegemonies" (*Local Histories/Global Designs* 33). Hence, there is a conflict between "universal values" and local histories. After giving various examples of how world views or epistemologies and empires collide, Mignolo stresses that internal borders and external borders are important in order "to locate, [...], the emergence of border thinking" (*Local Histories* 65). The interior and exterior borders are terms that refer to the world views that are in conflict within the modern/colonial world system. The modern/colonial world system consists of a capitalistic movement situated in a historical position that surfaced from the 1500's and that takes account of the colonial relations of power and inequalities between Europe and Latin America, in which the island of Puerto Rico was included. The internal borders reflect "(conflicts between empires within the same world view) and external borders [reflect] (world views in collision)" (8). The border is always a specific ideological location and border thinking continually looks in two directions (*Local Histories* 5).

It is important to give consideration to the notion that all thinking has a "thinking from" (*Local Histories* 5) somewhere, which means that there is no such thing as an unadulterated or pure point of view. This thought opposes the universality of European thinking (*Local Histories/Global Designs* 66, 88). Thinking from "dichotomous concepts" (*Local Histories* 85) is an acknowledgement of the inequalities created by colonization. This dichotomy reveals two distinct point of views, one from those in power (colonizers) and the one from those subjugated (colonized). But it is important to note that the location of border thinking is not one sided that reflects only the view opposite from those in a dominant position. Just like Dussel, Mignolo

proposes a movement away from dichotomous positions by taking notions from the internal and external borders and the particular histories that influence the local to construct “a perspective of subalternity” (45). For Mignolo, this ultimately results in decolonization (45), while for Dussel, it results in liberation. To summarize, border thinking is an alternative to colonial mentality that implies and tries to incorporate other forms of knowledge. It avoids idealizing one point of view over the other; it does not assume the border is between two equal partners or acquiesce the superiority of one side over the other. Border thinking fosters a critical view with regards to both cultures—that of the colonizer and the colonized--where those who have been silenced affirm their right to respond.

Because Mignolo does not believe that there is just one secure path to achieve decolonization, he has proposed various options in his book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011). I am interested primarily in two: the decolonial option and the spiritual option. Mignolo parts from Peruvian Anibal Quijano’s concept of coloniality of power. Quijano’s term refers to the way power operates in places where orthodox forms of colonial domination no longer exist, but where individuals, mentalities, and institutions operate on the basis of essentialist colonial categories of class and race. Mignolo offers the decolonial option as “the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist” (*Darker Side of Western* 54). In other words, the hegemonic rationale is exposed giving room for creativity and inclusiveness of a variety of cultures. It is an epistemological effort in which Western dominant values are appropriated “in order to then de-chain from the imperial designs” (*Darker Side of Western* 82) as ownership of governing values is taken and the ingenuity of incorporating other values simultaneously is provided. This will be explored specifically in the novels by Matta and Santiago. In their novels, the context of colonial

power relations will be exposed. This is especially so in Santiago's novel, where characters move from the Antillean homeland to mainland with strong ties in the homeland creating a third symbolic location that often functions as a space for potential decolonization: the *border*.

The spiritual option, according to Mignolo, "advocates decolonizing religion to liberate spirituality [. . . , which] offers the contribution of opening up horizons of life that have been kept hostage (that is, colonized) by modernity, capitalism, and the belief in the superiority of Western civilization" (*Darker Side of Western* 62). Mignolo suggests that in some ways this option creates a detachment from modernity. He goes on explaining, "It is an-other spirituality, a decolonial spirituality that is not only confronting modernity but also proposing to delink from it" (*Darker Side of Western* 63). Yet I do not necessarily see in all cases a disconnection from modernity but an inclusion of some of its ideals in it. Therefore, the spiritual option allows for incorporation of "pre-modern" ideals into contemporary situations, which may or not exclude modern thoughts. Spirituality becomes then an acceptable way to understand one's reality in order to assert decolonizing positions. There will be a chapter of this thesis dedicated to this subject. I find that in two of the novels – those by Díaz and Cisneros -- there is a strong content and special sensitivity to this theme.

The theories mentioned above will be useful when studying the four novels that are the focus of this work. *América's Dream* by Esmeralda Santiago, *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* by Sandra Cisneros, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz are all written in voices whose position in the dominant culture surrounding them has the potential of drowning them, yet even if for a *brief* moment, they become the subjects and agents of their own destinies. *The Americano* by Enrique Matta, on the other hand, offers an interesting perspective that almost becomes an antithesis to the stories narrated in the other novels. It is the oldest of the four novels and it is set

in Puerto Rico at the beginning of the 20th century. In its desperate desire for decolonization, it accepts with some skepticism the U.S. model as a suitable alternative to Spain's colonialism, which lasted until 1898. The title character, the *Americano*, is given full subjectivity and agency in the novel and, in the end, he prevails. The dominant cultural context of that time in Puerto Rico operated on two planes. The island's government was taken over by the United States, which dominated the direction that the people of the island were expected to follow. There was also a local dominant social class, which was a select minority, who belonged to the local aristocracy who was enamored with all things Spain: people, culture, traditions, etc. One side, the North American invaders, imposed the law of the land; the other side, the ruling patriciate, ruled the social life of the island. Matta's book represents on one hand the sentiment of those who were not graced by the local Hispanophile elites. They became admirers of the *Americano*, the one who symbolizes the progress and prosperity that Spain had not been able to deliver. On the other hand, the novel's setting portrays *hacendados* or landowners as the privileged class with all the rights, economic stability, and even the law on their side, and unaffected by the arrival of the *Americano*. They are all Puerto Ricans trying to internalize, assimilate, visualize, and eventually accept or reject a future under the new North American imperial regime.

In his essay *1898*, which forms a part of his book *Caribeños* (2002), Puerto Rican novelist Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá describes these two positions mentioned above, as he narrates the sentiments of both sides of his family. Upon the arrival of North Americans in Puerto Rico, his maternal side lost its place in their social class while his paternal side experienced opportunities that allowed for upward mobility. He refers to these positions as the two sides of the colonial condition "*resentimiento y agradecimiento*" (212), resentment and gratitude. This is seen in the novel's characters. For example, those in power showed their resentment to the *Americano* while

his new friends, who were called peasants, helped him with gratitude. These sides, especially the resentment one are best explained by the late Latino/a studies scholar Juan Flores in his work *The Insular Vision: Pedreira and the Puerto Rican Misère*. To understand the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States, Flores dissects the work of Puerto Rican essayist Antonio Pedreira's, *Insularismo: Ensayos de interpretación puertorriqueña*, which was originally published in 1934. For Flores, it is important to understand the history of Puerto Ricans in the island as it was taught to them in order to begin to understand the changing cultural identity of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. mainland. Pedreira's work has been greatly influential in the collective history of the Puerto Ricans in the island. According to Flores, Pedreira viewed North American intervention as a disruption to the intellectual development of the few thinkers of the island. The claim exposes Pedreira's assertion that only a select minority who were following their Spanish ancestral ways were capable of developing intellectual abilities. Pedreira then "calls upon Puerto Ricans to uphold the legacy of Christian spirituality and elitist grace inherited from its patrimonial Spanish past" (Flores 23). This is important because during the publication of Enrique Matta's novel, this sentiment was still prevalent among Puerto Rico's cultural elite and was barely contested. This cultural alliance with Spain is also shared by the Mexicans as well as the Dominicans who are featured in the novels studied here. Flores contends that it is important to respond to Pedreira's work and not ignore it. *Insularismo* has influenced the national identity of the people of Puerto Rico. There is a need to glean from the perspective that is already found in the collective psyche and to contrast it with events from the "turn-of-the-century period (1890-1920), which saw the incipient organization and artistic expression of the proletariat, as an axis of Puerto Rican cultural development..." (56), referring among other things to the rise in worker's unions and labor reforms. In other words, the cultural belief system of rejecting the United States in order to uphold

aristocratic Spanish values did not always match the reality of the people or represented all groups. Matta portrayed this in his novel when he writes, "... while the peasants esteemed him, the landowners looked upon him as a menace" (Matta 54). Although upholding Spanish aristocratic values serve as distant background to the other three novels, it is within this context that Enrique Matta's novel *The Americano* is framed. In this regard, Matta's novel is different from, and offers a contrast to, the other three novels.

In sum, the notions advanced by Enrique Dussel and Walter Mignolo will be beneficial in the analysis of novels, which offer examples of transmodern literature. Transmodern literature is what I am calling novels that present characters who do not derive from a position of power or who are not representative of the dominant culture yet assert some type of decolonizing strategy to usurp their position of oppression. The location of all of the characters in the novels in this study is important because they all are at the border of two cultures, where they contend with exclusion from the privileges the dominant culture enjoys, but may be aware enough to assert their perspective and bring forth empowering strategies. These strategies will be explained in detail as they will be central to the chapters in this project. I will also draw upon other theorists for each specific novel; I will briefly introduce those thinkers in my description of each chapter in the next section. My goal is to firmly use Dussel and Mignolo's concepts of transmodernity and border thinking as a starting point and incorporate theories that would specifically contribute to shedding light on the ultimate objective of liberation and decolonization in the characters of the four novels in this study.

Thesis Overview

This study is comprised of six chapters that begin with an introduction, followed by four chapters that include the body of this work and finally, a conclusion. As mentioned earlier, the novels studied here were published in the United States and feature characters that are confronted

with two cultures and two languages: English and Spanish. In the second chapter, the historical aspects of this contact will be examined. This section traces U.S. involvement in Puerto Rico, México, and the Dominican Republic and how it came to exert its influence on the cultures of those Latin American countries. I will also examine how interventionism opened the gates to an outpouring of immigrants from those points to the continental U.S. In the second part of the second chapter, I will contrast the representation of this history in the novels and how the characters portraying the various cultures that are portrayed respond to those historical developments.

The third chapter will look at the use of spirituality as a strategy of decolonization used in specifically in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. I will focus on how these two novels offer alternatives to non-Eurocentric, that is grassroots cosmologies (from Mexico and the Dominican Republic, respectively) in their attempt to give voice to world views and perspectives that have been excluded from the normative standards of Western “modernity.” While the theoretical aspect of this chapter will center on Walter Mignolo’s spiritual option, U.S. Latino/a theological and syncretistic views will also be considered. Gloria Anzaldúa’s notions of spiritual mestizaje and Theresa Delgadillo’s elaboration of this subject found in her book *Spiritual Mestizaje* (2011) will be taken into account as well.

The fourth chapter will focus on *The Americano América’s Dream*. I will concentrate in strategies of decolonization that are found in both texts. Puerto Rico’s political status fits well within Walter Mignolo’s modern/colonial/world system as mentioned above. I will look into the issues of parity with the U.S. as proposed by Ramón Grosfoguel in his book *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (2003). I will also probe references to violence as a strategy for decolonization as articulated by the Martinique-born psychiatrist Frantz Fanon in *Los*

condenados de la Tierra/ Wretched of the Earth (1963). These will serve as a point of departure in order to deal with characters who struggle with a state of political subjugation.

The fifth chapter will look at the language used in the novels as a decolonizing strategy. All four novels are written in English with various levels of Spanish woven into the texts. In *The Americano* for example, Spanish is used to give local color to the narration, while in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* there is extensive code-switching from one language to the other, exposing in the narration the bilingual/bicultural experience of the characters. These variations in the use of the Spanish language in a mostly English narrative serve as a metaphor of the Latino/a experience in the U.S. It is important to keep in mind that they are written from the perspective of the marginalized within the U.S. who are regularly confronted with racism and discrimination. The language utilized in each novel will serve as the focus of this chapter where traces of mimicry, in the Homi Bhabha sense of the word, are found. Mimicry functions as resistance because it operates between being civilized and being dominated by the colonizer as well as by creating a gap to distance oneself from the colonizer. The colonized appropriates the colonizer's ideas and make them their own. As characters move back and forth between homeland and mainland, they create a third symbolic location that often functions as a space for potential decolonization: the *border*. In that border space between languages and cultures, colonial subjects display resistance and anti-assimilation strategies, at the same time that they subvert essentialist notions of loyalty to either the dominant class or the oppressed. I will demonstrate how the use of both English and Spanish in the novels, linguistically known as code-switching, is a strategy of decolonization in the way it discards the hierarchical structures that have been imposed on Mexicans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans as subjects belonging to internally (in the case of Chicanos/as) and externally colonized or intervened nations.

In conclusion, I maintain that the history of U.S. interventionism in Latin America, and a longer history of colonialism or neocolonialism has led to “global designs” (Mignolo, *Local Histories* 17). Through the exploration of decolonizing strategies – including the use of language as a response to this history found in a specific location –, I show how transmodern literature affirms and validates a culture in motion in the United States, which continually exchanges influences from the homeland to the mainland and vice versa. In the novels *The Americano*, *América’s Dream*, *Caramelo o Puro Cuento*, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the authors craft stories that cast characters that are constantly in contact with two cultures and two languages. Moreover, those languages and cultures have come into contact as a result of colonial and neocolonial practices and institutions. The characters in these novels are undeniably part of two worlds. Like many others, the authors above use English and Spanish to create stories about the unique position of diasporic Latinos/as in the United States. The stories and subjects that appear in these novels may not conform to the mainstream, but they are already and integral part of U.S. society and history. Inasmuch as these novels afford a space of expression to those often excluded and marginalized voices, perspectives and histories, they constitute compelling examples of transmodern literature. Nelson Maldonado-Torres describes Dussel’s concept of transmodernity as “a decolonial temporal and spatial horizon that involves the critical appropriation of elements of Western modernity along with the opening to multiple conceptions of knowledge and of the critical voices in them. It also involves the recognition and the effort to do away with the hierarchical relations in which these knowledges find themselves locally and globally” (5). Characters like América, Celaya, and Beli, and to a lesser extent Teresa, find moments in which elements, like language, are appropriated and various forms of knowledge, like spiritual responses, are incorporated in order to allow for decolonial moments to occur in the

narration. As mentioned above, violence and spirituality are two ways that are utilized by the characters. Another way is through the re-writing of their history. In Cisneros' and Díaz's novels this becomes their highest form of decolonization and liberation. Code-switching, on the other hand, maximizes expressions that discard the hierarchical relations that had previously entrapped them, and thus becomes a decolonial option. Through those diverse strategies, the texts trace history and complex consequences of U.S. interventionism in Latin America that range from economic displacement, political oppression of those who oppose American hegemony, and the mass emigration to search for better opportunities in the "North", and articulate possible responses and alternatives to the colonial frame that has for too long dominated that relations between the Latin American homelands and the imperial mainland/metropolis.

The novels bring us narratives charged with a history of oppression, submission, and resistance. They convey characters that are confronted with loss of prestige, inequality, alienation, and denigration. These characters seemingly conform while they re-invent themselves – taking advantage of certain benefits of forming a part of the colonial embrace. All of these attributes are depicted through a style of writing that includes the use of English and Spanish in several proportion that are strategically deployed. Thus, not only in their content but also in their very stylistic and linguistic features, these novels reflect and confront the history of U.S. interventionism in Latin America. These particular texts debunk the traditional rags to riches story of U.S. immigration history and replace it with a nuanced picture of how Latinos/as in the end of the 20th century and beginning of the 21st have dealt with North American interventionism in their homelands and how they have accepted or resisted the dominant culture from within the U.S. itself. It is for these reasons that I have selected these novels as the basis for their critical assessment. These novels not only authenticate Latinos/as reality through their bilingual performance but also

explore those places in which creativity and diverse strategies emerge. From spirituality to the use of violence, the characters struggle to find their own voice in a position in society that seeks to silence and marginalize them.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORICAL U.S. INTERVENTIONISM AND ITS REPRESENTATIONS IN THE NOVELS OF MATTA, SANTIAGO, CISNEROS, AND DÍAZ

U.S. interventionism is a common theme in the novels examined in this study. Each novel deals with a country whose history has been significantly marked by the United States' military intervention, and those historical events have a great impact on the novels' characters. The characters' homelands are Puerto Rico for the novels, *The Americano* and *América's Dream* respectively; Mexico for *Caramelo or Puro Cuento: A Novel* (2002); and the Dominican Republic for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. The history that these novels highlight, whose origins can be traced back to the 19th century, has directly affected not only the inhabitants of those countries, but also the lives of the many Puerto Ricans, Mexicans and Dominicans residing in the U.S. mainland. These texts cover a timeline from the beginning of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st.

The main goal in this chapter is to trace (or discuss) the history of U.S. interventionism in these countries, in order to provide an adequate background to its impact as narrated in the novels. This will be done by identifying recorded historical events and comparing and contrasting them with the way each author depicts them in their novels. The narrative devices the novels use in their depiction of this history are part of their strategies for articulating a critique of U.S. interventionism. More specifically, by injecting the history of how these events shaped their countries' and their ancestor's lives, these writers try to develop strategies of decolonization or liberation that also become an important salient element in the literature written by Latinos/as in the U.S.

As explained in the Introduction, my use of these terms draws upon ideas developed by Argentinean scholars Walter Dignolo and Enrique Dussel. While Dignolo did not coin the term decolonization, his path-marking literary production has further developed this subject. He

explains in the preface of his book, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011), that “there is a tradition of decolonial thought that goes back to C. L. R. James, Aimé Césaire, and Frantz Fanon, emerging long before French poststructuralism and postmodernism that made the idea of postcolonialism and postcoloniality possible. [He argues that postcoloniality and decoloniality are] complementary trajectories with similar goals of social transformation. . . . the aims of the decolonial option . . . is not to eliminate the difference but to decolonize the logic of coloniality that translated differences into values” (xxvii). These differences refer to ways of knowledge that did not originate in Europe or from Western thoughts. The logic of coloniality establishes a hierarchy that considers non-European forms of knowledge invalid. The challenge is found in changing this logic that has been deemed universal because of its European point of departure.

Both and Dussel maintain that modernity, in its traditional Eurocentric formulation, is tightly connected to colonialism. This allows for an unequal global order based on an oppressive relationship between the colonizers and colonized. They argue for the incorporation of non-European forms of knowledge as well as the experiences of those in the periphery that modernity has all but erased. Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano adds to this argument the concept of *coloniality of power* in which race is also a factor in the marred relationship of power. Quijano’s concept refers to places where orthodox forms of colonial domination no longer exist, but where individuals, mentalities, and institutions continue to operate on the basis of essentialist colonial categories. Our contention is that the terms described above are helpful in describing what the characters in these novels are experiencing. When they cast the history of Latinos/as caught up in the web of U.S. hegemonic power, the portrayal becomes a way to achieve liberation from a colonial or neocolonial state of mind, in which they are found even while residing in the U.S. mainland. I argue that as incongruent as it may seem to have characters living in the United States

with a need to aspire for ways to achieve liberation, the conditions in which they find themselves, as a result of said interventions, requires such effort. It will become evident that the re-writing of their history from their point of view allows for a long awaited sense of acknowledgement of this reality. Through the telling of their stories, underrepresented voices flourish.

U.S. Interventionism and the Four Doctrines

As mentioned previously, U.S. interventionism in Latin America began shortly after the birth of the United States as a country. As the U.S. expanded its territory the spirit of Manifest Destiny¹³ became gradually cemented. The leadership of this country strongly believed in their mission of expansion and land owning and created governmental policies accordingly. These policies inspired doctrines that defined the way various Presidents would govern and therefore, shape the direction of U.S. foreign policy. I would like to frame the history of U.S. interventionism around four U.S. doctrines that strongly marked the presidency of four notable heads of the United States and led the way for many others that followed them. These policies justified U.S. interventionism in Latin America and had a direct impact in the countries from where the characters of the novels in this study originated. These doctrines set the tone for the way the U.S. foreign policy towards Latin American countries was conceived and carried out with notions that continue to guide the government of this country to this day. The Presidents and their doctrines are the following: President James Monroe (1758-1831) and what is known as the Monroe Doctrine; President Theodore (Teddy) Roosevelt (1858-1919) and the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine; President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) (1882-1945) and the Good Neighbor Policy; and finally, President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) (1902-1973) and the Johnson

¹³ This is the belief that began in the 19th century that the U.S. must expand and bring their form of democracy to other countries especially in the same hemisphere.

Corollary. I believe these doctrines serve as the political background to the historical invasions in Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, specifically, which will shape important events in the lives of the characters of the novels mentioned above. I will present each policy and the direct impact that it has had in the countries mentioned above.

In his book *Harvest of Empire* (2000), Juan Gonzalez, presents an account of the history of U.S. interventionism in Latin America and how it eventually shaped the migratory experiences of Latinos/as in this country. The section “Roots (Las Raíces),” compellingly demonstrates how the idea of expansion towards Latin America was in the founding fathers’ agenda as they envisioned the growth of this country. In a letter “Jefferson wrote to James Monroe in 1801, [he says,] ‘it is impossible not to look forward to distant times, when our rapid multiplication will expand beyond those limits, and cover the whole northern if not the southern continent’” (Gonzalez 32). This portion of this letter evidences the way of thinking that influenced the Monroe Doctrine. The principles of government articulated back then literally put the countries in this hemisphere on notice that they can anticipate direct involvement from the United States in the near future. And in fact, that warning became a reality. The Monroe Doctrine contributed to the rise of the United States of America’s expansion into Latin American territories in the nineteenth century.

Military historian Lawrence Yates, who has documented various U.S. military interventions in Latin America, affirms the importance of the Monroe Doctrine. He writes:

“In 1823, President James Monroe had informed the European powers that the Western Hemisphere was closed to their colonial ambitions and ‘alien’ political systems. Over the next 140 years, American statesmen would define U.S. interests in Latin America in terms of security, economics, politics, and regional unity, with circumstances dictating the specific issue or emphasis of the moment. . . . The means for achieving this goal included diplomacy, economic leverage, and, when necessary, the deployment of American troops” (Yates 1-2).

President Monroe made it clear to the leaders in Europe that the U.S. would not accept their intervention in the affairs of in countries adjacent to or within the sphere of influence of the North American republic. His directive made it customary for the U.S. to keep an eye on the political and economic affairs of countries nearby¹⁴. They maintained a presence diplomatically and also militarily.

Subsequent Presidents followed those standards that became eventually the normative rule for U.S, foreign policy in Latin America. According to V. Shiv Kumar, in his book *US Interventionism in Latin America: Dominican Crisis and the OAS* (1987), “the United States intervened several times ostensibly to protect its ‘rights and interests’ in the Western Hemisphere” (Shiv Kumar 109-110). These interventions supported the era of filibusters, a word used in the 19th century to describe mercenary Americans who either began or assisted in insurrections in Latin America through numerous invasions. In *Harvest of Empire*, Juan Gonzalez records nineteen filibusters in the period between 1801 and 1860 throughout regions of Latin America that at the time were still considered Spanish colonies (37-38). These belligerent acts against the budding nations of the region were intertwined with what I would call the *bildungsroman* or coming of age of this country. Interventionism has gone hand in hand with the growth of the U.S. as a political and economic world super power. As a young country, the U.S. developed principles that would clearly define the expansionist character of the nation. Ideals of freedom and liberty became mantras that would guide North American actions toward Latin American countries. At the same time U.S. military intervention made some Latin American countries dependent on American aid. Encouraged by these results, the United States continued their territorial expansion.

¹⁴ Just recently (September 2, 2013), there have been allegations of the U.S. National Security Agency (NSA) spying on President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil and President Enrique Peña Nieto of Mexico.

The Monroe Doctrine greatly influenced two 19th century hemispheric events-- the Mexican-American war (Mexico) and the Spanish American war (Puerto Rico)--that significantly changed the history of two of the countries featured in the novels examined here:. After the Monroe Doctrine was issued overt interventions followed, which deeply affected the history of the characters that appear in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, *The Americano* and *América's Dream*; indirectly, it also influenced the characters in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. This impact will be explored below after the accounts of these two pivotal wars have been described in some detail.

The Monroe Doctrine and Mexico

Significant U.S. expansionism in Latin America started with the Mexican American War (1846- 1848). Mexico, a nation home to great indigenous civilizations, was conquered by Spain in the 16th century. After Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1810, this nation was recognized as a great empire¹⁵. In the colonial period, the territories of Mexico that were included within the Viceroyalty of New Spain expanded as far southeast as Costa Rica and as far northwest as California. Panama was part of Colombia at that time, while the region that was north east of California was not yet part of the United States. From early on, there were complex relations between the U.S. and independent Mexico, as well as internal conflicts in the newly free nation. In the book *Mexico and Mexicans in the Making of the United States* (2012), John Tutino points out that, “The northernmost zones of Mexican North America, meanwhile, engaged peoples and trades from the expansive United States in ways that proved both profitable and disruptive. [...] When Mexico abolished slavery (long unimportant as a labor system there) in 1829, Texas struggled for an accommodation” (65). The slavery issue created a great riff between the northern

¹⁵ Mexico became an empire only briefly under the monarchical rule of Agustín de Iturbide, 1822-1823; thereafter, it took on a republican form of government.

territories of Mexico, mainly Texas, which became dependent on African slavery for its economy, and the southern regions. This issue also caused Anglo-controlled Texas to break away from Mexico and later to seek annexation to the United States. During the 1840s, “Mining revived, new textile industries flourished, cultivation remained strong in Mesoamerican communities and among northern tenant and *rancheros*, while commercial estate production remained limited and profits uncertain. [...] The United States was seventy years an independent nation, with a burgeoning northern industrial society and a booming southern cotton and slave economy linked to British industrialization. Mexico was but twenty-five years a nation, still devising a regime and seeking a national economy (like the United States around 1800)” (Tutino 67). Tutino’s demonstrates that while the U.S. economy was growing, American interests began coveting Mexican’s lands and raw materials. Extensive trading between Mexico’s northern territories and the U.S., a decentralized political organization in the region and the fact that the Mexican borderlands were not as greatly populated as the rest of the country contributed to the Anglo victory during the Mexican American War.

This war ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), in which the U.S. acquired a great portion of the Mexican national territory. Following the accord, the United States paid Mexico 15 million dollars for the land they gained. In his book *México y Estados Unidos* (1917), Miguel Rebolledo recapitulates the aftermath of Mexico’s military defeat: “Los Estados Unidos aumentaron el suyo en más de 1.300,000 kilómetros cuadrados, de los cuales se formaron los Estados de California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona y Nuevo México y una porción de Wyoming y Colorado. (1) [...]...la suma de 15.000,000 de dólares, que naturalmente, no alcanzaron ni para cubrir los gastos de la Guerra. [...] Esos millones fueron despilfarrados rápidamente por nuestros famélicos gobiernos...” (31-32). In sum, the \$15 million was not only

too small to cover their war losses but fell in the hands of a Mexican governmental leadership that did not administer it correctly. Rebolledo points the finger mostly at “el Gobierno del nefasto Santa-Anna” (Rebolledo 32), or President Antonio López de Santa Anna who was in power during this period.

Another territory that Rebolledo mentions includes an archipelago off the coast of San Diego. These islands, “San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Bárbara, Santa Cruz, San Nicolás, Santa Catarina y San Clemente,” (Rebolledo 32) were also part of Mexico but not stipulated as ceded in the Treaty of Hidalgo yet somehow became incorporated into the United States. Well aware of the acquisitions of Alaska in 1867, Hawaii, the Samoa islands, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Guam, and Cuba, in 1898, and Panama in 1903, Rebolledo ties this land-grabbing to the Monroe Doctrine, while expressing conflicting thoughts of the intention of this doctrine and its result for Mexico and neighboring countries to the South (Rebolledo 33). This doctrine served as a double edge sword in that on one hand it created an umbrella of protection from potential European re-colonializing attempts and on the other it maintained the countries in the Americas in submission to the U.S.: “He dicho que la doctrina Monroe nos protege contra las grandes potencias; pero nos somete a una especie de tutela” (Rebolledo 36). This remarks on the self-imposed guardianship of the U.S. over Mexico. Rebolledo wrote the above passage before the U.S. joined European forces after it entered World War I.

Coloniality of Power in the U.S.

When the Mexican American War erupted (1846-1848) it also created an internal conflict in the U.S. that continues to bear consequences today. Susan S. Baker dedicates sections of her book *Understanding Mainland Puerto Rican Poverty* (2002) to tracing the different paths that various Latino/a immigrant groups took in order to arrive to the United States. She traces the Mexican’s journey starting from the Mexican American War. Specifically, she remarks that “when

the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed ... [it] added more than a million square miles to the United States. Residents of this land included about 80,000 Mexicans... The Mexicans who stayed in the United States after the war were treated as colonized people” (Baker 16). These individuals all of a sudden changed “location,” in the sense conceptualized by Mignolo. Unexpectedly, they found themselves in the “border” of two countries and two cultures. They did not physically move, but what they knew as their country had now become a different nation. As Mignolo explains, the borders “are not discrete entities but rather moments of a continuum in colonial expansion and in changes of national imperial hegemonies” (*Local Histories* 33). In this case, the colonial expansion was done by the U.S. and “American” hegemony maintained Mexican inferiority. This begins to shape a process in which Mexicans, or Chicanos as many would be self-identified later on, viewed themselves in relation to their conquerors in a manner that is best described by the term coloniality of power. As indicated above, this term coined by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano refers to colonial structures internalized by a group of people’s acceptance of hegemonic powers (“Coloniality of Power, Ethnocentrism” 533). Practices, policies, discourses, and institutions were created to maintain this unequal relationship between the rooted Mexican residents and their invading Anglo leaders. A system that supports this thought was created and today residents struggle to overcome it. Minority groups in the U.S., especially Latinos/as, still wrestle with the legacy of colonialism, whether imposed overseas or internally as in the Mexican case at hand, well into the present day.

The coloniality of power begins with the classification of people by race based on the colonizer/colonized relation. The colonizer or conqueror implements social categorization based on “supposed differential biological structures” (Quijano 534). The purpose is to concretely establish domination. “Historically, this meant a new way of legitimizing the already old ideas

and practices of relations of superiority/inferiority between dominant and dominated. From the sixteenth century on, this principle has proven to be the most effective and long-lasting instrument of social domination, . . . So the conquered and dominated peoples were situated in a natural position of inferiority and, as a result their phenotypic traits as well as their cultural features were considered inferior” (Quijano 535). In other words, the racial subordinate condition of the colonized is the deciding factor in his/her inferiority status as a human being. Thus, the establishment of this power relation in which the distinguishing factor is one’s biological features, whether they can be empirically ascertained or are socially constructed, became the norm in social relations that transcended into political and economic relations as well. As Quijano points out, this norm was instituted in the sixteenth century when the New World was first conquered by the Iberians. Nations policies are shaped around the notion of these power relations where there is a clear distinction of dominant/dominated positions. Quijano calls that colonial categorization “a mental category of modernity” (534).

In the economic realm, the introduction of capitalism and market driven economies continue to follow this pattern. Quijano rejects the Eurocentric idea that slavery and serfdom were “precapital” developments but instead emphasizes that “Slavery, in America, was deliberately established and organized as a commodity in order to produce goods for the world market and to serve the purposes and needs of capitalism” (550). Therefore, once domination based on race was established, the racist mentality shaped the labor relations impacting all nonwhites that provided the backbone of the economic system that controls the world today.

Hence, the European colonization of the Americas had a negative impact on the rich history of the pre-Columbian civilizations. Like Quijano points out, “they found a great number of different peoples, each with its own history, language, discoveries and cultural products, memory

and identity. The most developed and sophisticated of them were the Aztecs, Mayas, Chimus, Aymaras, Incas, Chibchas, and so on. Three hundred years later, all of them had become merged into a single identity: Indians. This new identity was racial, colonial, and negative. The same happened with the peoples forcefully brought from Africa as slaves: Ashantis, Yorubas, Zulus, Congos, Bacongos, and others. In the span of three hundred years, all of them were Negroes or blacks” (551-552). The characters of the novels in this study descend not only from European ancestors but also from some of these other groups that were abruptly labeled as the two categorizations above and subjected to mistreatment because the weight of a history of coloniality of power is on their shoulders. The need for decolonization has been created by this history. Throughout the novels in this study we will find many instances of liberation, or attempts at liberation, from the coloniality of power.

Today in the United States, the coloniality of power resurfaces as debates about immigration reform are being held in Washington, D.C. Asserting the right to be in this country is especially central for Latino/a newcomers whose history in this land is entwined with past choices made by the very same government that is once again making decisions for them. After the Mexican American War, when the northern part of Mexico was acquired by the U.S., these conquered individuals became at once immigrants in their homeland. This created a quagmire for a group of people who resided, until 1848, legally in this land as subjects of Mexico. These residents were born in one nation: Mexico, speaking Spanish and were all of a sudden living in a foreign land without ever having moved anywhere. As Chicanos often say, they did not cross the border, but rather the border cross them!! During their transition from being part of Mexico to being part of the United States, as Juan Gonzalez chronicles, Mexicans who had been living in Texas, for example, prior to the war were “routinely cheated out of their land,” (100) while

experiencing despicable violence against them. Gonzalez tells about an unrepentant 1855 correspondent for the *Gavelston Weekly News* who narrated with no qualms the mass lynching of various Mexicans in chilling detail. This practice, “Lynching [,] continued into the early 1900’s” (Gonzalez 100).

Meanwhile, by the second half of the 19th century, France’s growing empire led to an expansionist wave that brought them to Mexico. According to Mexican Naval Engineer, Miguel Rebolledo, the United States was not only aware of this situation but motivated by the Monroe Doctrine, became involved in aiding Mexico especially with soldiers and weapons to fight against France. Rebolledo is not impressed with the North American participation in this conflict. He credits Mexican efforts as the reason why the French retreated, “La ayuda prestada a México por los Estados Unidos durante la intervención francesa, fue nula en sus principios, y se hizo sentir más tarde cuando ya Napoleón había comprendido la imposibilidad de proseguir su aventura, y casi se alegró de ceder en apariencia, ante las protestas de Mr. Seward¹⁶, encontrando en ellas un pretexto plausible para su retirada” (36). As I interpret the manner in which Rebolledo presents this text, Napoleonic forces were already prepared to leave Mexico, and not forced out by American aide. Mexican forces, on the other hand, under the direction of Benito Juárez had already overthrown Emperor Maximiliano, asserting their power in the area. The visibility of the U.S. presence, though, was unquestionably becoming more and more real to Western Hemispheric powers in Europe, as well as in Latin America, shaping the political atmosphere surrounding these countries.

¹⁶ William Henry Seward was the Secretary of State for the United States government between the years 1861 and 1869. Originally appointed by President Lincoln, he also served under his successor Andrew Johnson.

Historical Events Presented in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*

Some of the historical events mentioned above are depicted in Cisneros' novel, *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*. The first person narrator is the voice of protagonist Celaya, a Mexican American teenager who relates the story of her grandparents in Mexico in the chapter titled "So Here My History Begins for Your Good Understanding and My Poor Telling" (Cisneros 91). Although it is chapter 21, it is the first chapter of the second part of the novel. This second part of the novel narrates the life of Celaya's "Awful Grandmother." For the first time, she has a name, Soledad, and her story is intended to introduce redeeming qualities to a character that is central to the family and not afraid of causing discord. Caramelo in this novel refers to a *rebozo* or shawl that her great-grandparents were known for making, "the cloth a beautiful blend of toffee, licorice, and vanilla stripes flecked with black and white, which is why they call this design a *caramelo*" (Cisneros 94). She details her grandmother's origin as "the daughter of famed *reboceros* from Santa María del Río, San Luis Potosí, where the finest shawls in all the Republic come from..." (Cisneros 92). This shawl, *caramelo*, not only represents the history of this particular family in this story but the narrator points out the value of this shawl for a well-recognized historical figure, the "crazed empress Carlota" (Cisneros 92). The narrator puts in the picture a nonfictional character and her relation to the shawl, "...it was said when the crazed ex-empress Carlota was presented with one in her prison-castle in Belgium, she sniffed the cloth and joyously announced, -- Today we leave for Mexico" (Cisneros 92). In a melodramatic tone, the importance of the shawl is raised from a product that provided the means for the livelihood of Celaya's grandmother's parents, to the significance it had for a wealthy, royal family that governed Mexico, and who associates the shawl with the whole country.

This shawl also represents the heterogeneity of the Mexican culture. Celaya, the narrative voice, explains its origins: "...no one remembers whether it arrived from the east, from the

macramé of Arabia through Spain, or from the west from the blue-sky bay of Acapulco where galleons bobbed weighted down with the fine porcelain, lacquerware, and expensive silk of Manila and China. Perhaps, as is often the case with things Mexican, it came from neither and both.” (Cisneros 92-93). Historical accounts are introduced in the text around the presentation of the origins of an item, the *caramelo* shawl, which the author chooses as an ethnographic symbol. As it is evident by these quotes, the narrator offers the reader more explanations in the notes on both the history of Mexico and the history of the shawl in Mexico. Both seem to be embroidered together.

At the end of the chapter two lengthy notes are found. The narrative voice of Celaya begins this sideline narration by describing Carlota, “*The doomed empress Charlotte was the daughter of King Leopold of Belgium, wife to the well-meaning but foolish Austrian, the Archduke Maximilian of Hapsburg. Emperor Maximiliano and Empress Carlota were installed as rulers of Mexico in 1864 by disgruntled Mexican conservatives and clergy who believed foreign intervention would stabilize Mexico after the disastrous years of Santa Anna, who, as we recall, gave away half of Mexico to the United States. [Maximiliano’s and Carlota’s dominion was short-lived due to lack of local and international support.] Carlota left for Europe to seek Napoleon III’s assistance...He refused to help her....Meanwhile back in Mexico, Maximiliano was executed by firing squad¹⁷ outside of Querétaro in 1866....I forgot to mention, Maximiliano was ousted by none other than Benito Juárez, the only pure-blooded Indian to rule Mexico. For a Hollywood version of the aforementioned, see Juarez, John Huston’s 1939 film with the inestimable Bette Davis playing – who else –the madwoman”* (Cisneros 96). The narrative voice goes from mentioning Carlota in

¹⁷ See Edouard Manet’s painting *Execution of Emperor Maximilian (1868)* for a visual representation. Although according to Mexican historian Rodrigo Borja Torres author of *Crónica de un México que nunca fue* (2011), there is also a theory that denies that incident because both Benito Juarez and the Emperor Maximilian were Masons. Masons cannot kill each other based on their code.

the chapter in relation to the *rebozo* or shawl, to adding an extensive note that describes various foreign interventions in Mexico. There is a bitter attitude that describes the Mexican local feeling regarding the U.S. intervention that resulted in the loss of the North of Mexico compounded with a disdain for the then President of Mexico, Antonio López de Santa Anna. Around that time the conservatives' answer to their demise, as stated in the notes, was a self-imposed European monarchy that would carry the interests of an aristocratic minority. The presence of the French following Napoleonic ambitions was received with the same contempt. All of this resulting in the Juarez led execution of the Emperor that was a message sent especially to European world powers about Mexican resistance to intervention. Benito Juarez in the text is mentioned with a sense of pride. He had the valor to stand up to the crown. Miguel Rebolledo who writes about the U.S. intervention in Mexico of 1846 with regret and almost shame states,

“El Señor Juárez carecía de recursos y su ejército tenía que hacer frente a la reacción. Toca a nuestros historiadores aclarar este misterio. Para mí, la explicación es ésta: El ejército que combatió en 47 fue el ejército pretoriano de Santa-Anna, carente de ideales, de entusiasmo y de lealtad. El que peleó contra los franceses fue el entonces nuevo y victorioso ejército de la Reforma, lleno de entusiasmo y de fe en la causa que defendía” (102).

Rebolledo puts the weight of the defeats and triumphs of Mexico on the leadership of that country. Mexico's loss against the U.S. was not so much about the U.S. military abilities or strategic capabilities but about the guidance and commitment toward their ideals that the leaders failed to provide. On the other hand, Benito Juarez was able to lead with fervor and the government of France was never able to fully obtain sovereignty in Mexico.

Cisneros captures this same sense of scorn towards one leader, Santa-Anna, and pride for another, Juarez. While both are Mexican, the former represents an elite of European descent, the latter Mexican indigenous strength. This is significant as she brings to this story a strong sense of self awareness of Mexico as a nation and its position in the world. This presents the Mexican

identity as full of tensions rooted in a history that had previously established hierarchy by race and full of battles against that hierarchy. This history is continued in the other notes offered at the end of the chapter, also related to the history of the shawl.

“The rebozo was born in Mexico, but like all mestizos, it came from everywhere. It evolved from the cloths Indian women used to carry their babies, borrowed its knotted fringe from Spanish shawls, and was influenced by the silk embroideries from the imperial court of China exported to Manila, then Acapulco, via the Spanish galleons. During the colonial period, mestizo women were prohibited by statutes dictated by the Spanish Crown to dress like Indians, and since they had no means to buy clothing like the Spaniards’, they began to weave cloth on the indigenous looms creating a long and narrow shawl that slowly was shaped by foreign influences. ...” (Cisneros 96).

Narrating the history of the shawl sheds light into the historical background of Mexicans. Nonchalantly, the history depicting the ancestry of the characters in this novel is intertwined with historical events through a symbolic garment. The shawl represents a mixture of cultures. It emerges from the civilization that was originally in the land, ultimately mixed into one group called Indians, combined with the contact with other nations. This is important to mention because it reflects on the various influences over Mexican culture during its formation. The history of the country is symbolized in a shawl that has endured conquests, wars, triumphs, failures, like the Mexican people, and thus captures their indelibility.

Caramelo or Puro Cuento and Transmodern Literature

The history portrayed above has been part of a discussion on a notable event: the Mexican-American War that I believe was founded on the Monroe Doctrine. Before I go any further presenting another notable event that occurred at the end of the 19th century as an example of historical U.S. interventionism, it is fundamental to show how the way Cisneros’ novel deals with those events makes it an illustration of *transmodern* literature. The term transmodern was defined in Chapter 1: Introduction as the notion that Argentinean Enrique Dussel developed after his critique of the concept of modernity. Dussel explains that modernity, as traditionally defined, is

centered in Europe and excludes other non-European epistemologies. The transmodern project seeks to include those thoughts and perspectives that are found in the exteriority or periphery of a Eurocentric society.

As formulated by Puerto Rican sociologist Ramón Grosfoguel, transmodernity moves away from “western universal thought.” He traces this notion of western universal thought as originating with the French philosopher Descartes, with whom “a self-generated subject without any spatial-temporal location within global power relations [that] inaugurates the epistemological myth of Eurocentered modernity” (“Decolonizing Western Uni-versalism” 89). This self-generated subject is therefore abstract and provided by the hegemony for all to accept. In order for transmodernity to occur, multiple points of view must emerge from locations away from of those in power. But this location must not be so isolated that it would be insulated from external ideas.

Grosfoguel turns from Descartes to “Afro-Caribbean thinker Aimé Césaire . . . [who] points out that decolonizing ideas are neither provincial nor universal (“Decolonizing Western Uni-versalism” 95) but “decolonization instead means the affirmation of concrete universal into which all particulars are deposited” (“Decolonizing Western Uni-versalism” 96). In other words, the Eurocentric thought has become abstract and assumed universal. In reality, it is one of many other cosmologies that can be incorporated and that is able to influence individuals found in the margins. Grosfoguel asks in his article, “What would represent today a Césairian concrete-universalist project of decolonization?” (“Decolonizing Western Uni-versalism” 96) I would argue that the telling of history from a peripheral geopolitical location especially using a tangible symbol like the *caramelo* shawl serves as an excellent illustration. This would follow Grosfoguel’s thoughts, anchored in Enrique Dussel’s theory of the *transmodern* project, which seeks the “concretization

at the level of a political project ... [that] come from critical thinkers of each culture in dialogue with other cultures” (“Decolonizing Western Uni-versalism” 97).

Cisneros’ character Celaya tells the story of her family as she offers her take on the history of Mexico through the origins and value of a shawl. She uses a symbol to link history, economy, and politics discursively taking into consideration a specific location: the border. This character writes from the United States where she is found at the periphery of the culture. In her narration, Mexico, its history, and relation to other world powers are the subject matter, not just the object of U.S. intervention. Celaya exercises ownership of her story. The history of Mexico has been told in the United States in a different way or not told at all. This omission makes it difficult to become part of the collective historical consciousness of the citizens in the U.S. The victory over Mexico tends to emphasize the racist discourse pointed out by Quijano and his notion of coloniality of power. This is what Grosfoguel places it in the “abstract epistemic universalism . . . Another way of saying this is: epistemic racism [that] is inherent to modern Western philosophy (“Decolonizing Western Uni-versalism” 94). This discourse forms a point of contention for those in the border like the characters in Cisneros’ novel. They live in a country that breaths victory and power, that offers liberty and the pursuit of happiness at the expense of a country’s shame and defeat.

Aside from political failures, for John Tutino, however, it is important to bring to the foreground Mexican’s economic contributions to their Northern neighbor. He argues that for the most part historical accounts credit the economic development of the U.S. on the freedom of commerce of their British colonial North and the plantation slavery of their British colonial South (Tutino 67, 69). This was the primordial interest for the acquisition of Texas, their thriving cotton production made possible by slave labor. The land that was acquired after the Mexican American

War (1848) not only came with an already diverse population that consisted of Asian, Indigenous, African and Spanish ethnic groups who provided valuable workforce, but also came with rich economic resources and a system ingrained with a history of capitalism. “The mining and grazing economies of the mountain and intermountain West and the agrarian capitalism of Texas and California developed as extensions and adaptations of the commercial capitalism of Hispanic North America, newly taken over by Anglo-Americans as eager to claim the profits as to deny the Spanish and Mexican roots of the economies and societies they ruled” (Tutino 71). The economic advancement for the U.S. became evident in a country that a little over a decade later would undergo a costly Civil War. The young country of Mexico, struggling politically, had been working on the establishment of an economy that exceedingly boosted the U.S. financial system. According to American historian Benjamin Keen, “Between 1880 and 1900, a combination of economic and intellectual developments sharpened interest in the United States in Latin America and its history. [...] In this period United States capital began to flow into the Caribbean and Mexico; by 1900 North American investments in Mexico alone had reached \$500 million” (218)¹⁸. These investments came with a sense of superiority and a great regard for the growing economic bottom line. For the U.S., the Mexican American War was an opening that further encouraged U.S. interventionism in Mexico.

These other interventions are also recorded in Cisneros’ novel. This is done through a conversation Celaya has with her grandmother about what to include in the story her grandmother

¹⁸ Keen suggests a look at Bernard Moses’ *The Railway Revolution in Mexico* (1895) for ways in which U.S. interventionism affected Mexico’s political and economic development. I found that Moses, among other things, offered statistics on the increase of population in the United States and also remarked on an interesting conflict between the U.S. and Mexico about who is doing things right. “The people of the United States are so absolutely sure that their ways are the only proper ways that they have not made the advancement in Spanish American trade they might have made if they have been more disposed to adapt themselves and their work to the conditions and practices of other nations” (Moses 42). A few lines later and maybe remembering who his readers were, he continues, “...we know they [Mexico] are wrong and we [U.S.] are right...” (Moses 42).

wants to say through her. Celaya thinks it is important to mention that Soledad arrived at the Reyes' household around the time when President/Dictator Porfirio Diaz was celebrating the centennial of Mexico's independence (Cisneros 124) during which prosperity for the nation and patriotism was the predominant discourse. Her grandmother, Soledad, was the cook in the Reyes family. Celaya constructs political connections between the system in Mexico, the hegemonic thought, and her family's trail from Mexico to the U.S. "Who could believe the petty violence in the countryside would mean anything to a girl in a kitchen? Hadn't the dictator-president, Don Porfirio, established order and progress, elected himself eight times for the good of the nation, and civilized the Mexicans so that they were the envy of other nations, so that boys like Narciso dreamed patriotic dreams of defending Mexico against U.S. invaders and dying an honorable death...like the 'child heroes' of Chapultepec, young military cadets who threw themselves off the ramparts of this Mexico City castle rather than surrender to the advancing American troops in 1847. He could not know that by 1914 the Marines would again invade Mexico, and once again in 1916. By then Narciso Reyes would be involved in his own U.S. invasion by immigrating to Chicago. But now *I'm* getting ahead of the story" (Cisneros 125).

Narciso, before becoming Soledad's husband and Celaya's grandfather, would see the horrors of war in Mexico in the ten days when the Madero and Huertas' rift paralyzed the city. "Instead of the fighting they dreamed of, defending their country now they were witnessing Mexicans fighting against Mexicans" (Cisneros 128), a horrific experience. As a young cadet, he had to check the cadavers, including women and children, found in the streets for any identification and then burn them. Memories of these days would haunt him forever. There was a moment when he was almost executed by firearms because of a whim of some soldiers. Just as he would have been killed by someone's meaningless impulse, he was saved by the most trivial reason, "as Divine

Providence would have it, at that very moment an officer passed by. [...] Let him go. I know this boy. His father and I visit the same barber” (Cisneros 130). The danger he was in led to his mother’s decision to send him to his uncle’s in Chicago. Meanwhile, Soledad was left to witness the atrocious effects of the Mexican Revolution all around her, unbelievable scenes of death and despair, juxtaposed with the magnificence of Zapata¹⁹ and his “beautiful horse” roaming the streets of the capital (Cisneros 135). Eventually, Marines would invade the port of Veracruz, as was mentioned above, leading to a time when young boys were recruited to fight for the country. This historical event is shameful to Mexicans according to Rebolledo who remarks on the minimal resistance and lack of preparation of Mexican soldiers. “Causa pena y vergüenza el recordar los acontecimientos de Veracruz en abril del 1914, cuando un puñado de 1,500 marinos pudo desembarcar el primer día fácilmente, y el segundo día lo hicieron otros tantos en las mismas condiciones, porque la guarnición federal que allí había evacuó la plaza, siguiendo órdenes de su cobarde comandante” (Rebolledo 105-106). The manner in which he relates this historical event depicts his utter disgust of the military leaders for withdrawing from the city instead of defending it with bravery and courage.

At the time this event was taking place in Mexico, the character of the novel, Narciso had already safely arrived to the United States. This is the reason given for his lack of participation in the invasions mentioned above. In another extensive explanation found in the endnotes of chapter 28 titled, “Nothing but Story,” the narrator states, “The invasion at Veracruz, the invasion sent to capture Villa. This was when the Mexicans began to name their dogs after Wilson,*” the President of the United States who sanctioned this U.S. intervention. As indicated by the asterisks, the

¹⁹ Emiliano Zapata, el caudillo del sur, was the commander of the South during the Mexican Revolution that began in opposition of the government of Porfirio Díaz and was extended for a decade to come. Pancho Villa was the commander of the North and both originated from Mexican rural zones and became heroes of the Revolution.

narrator refers readers to an elaborate explanation of why Mexicans called their dogs, “Wilson.” She explains how, first President Wilson supported President Huerta’s coup d’état against President Madero. Then he was against President Huerta and supplied arms to Pancho Villa so that he could revolt against him. Finally, he decides to pursue Villa, unsuccessfully, “*Wilson withdrew the forces in January of 1917, \$130 million later*” (Cisneros 136). This cycle reflects on a pattern that we have seen with the United States government that tends to support tyrants, then the opposition, and then is back against the opposition at the same time as the U.S. economy is drained.

The narrative voice through the text refuses to ignore the political environment that shaped the lives of its characters by continuously referring the reader to extended explanations about their history in the endnotes of the chapter. This history greatly interconnects these two neighboring countries creating sometimes indistinct divisions between them. Beginning with the Mexican American, “the histories of Mexico and the United States have been inseparable, even as their states have promoted nationalist cultures that proclaim fundamental differences” (Tutino 77). Cisneros provides a taste of this connection in her story as her narrator relates her heritage and relation to both nations. Although these last events mentioned are found in the 20th century (invasions of Mexico in 1914 and 1917), it’s a history that reflects an interventionism that represent a brutal investment in world power, which stimulated more interventionism, causing a cycle that continues to endure.

The Monroe Doctrine and Puerto Rico

The second notable event that happened between the Monroe Doctrine and its corollary (the Roosevelt Corollary, which will be discussed below), is the 1898 Spanish American War. This war showcases the U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico, which directly pertains to this study. As mentioned before, U.S. financial investments in Mexico and the Caribbean were flowing in the

latter part of the 19th century. Prior to this war, the United States coveted territories like Cuba and Puerto Rico. These countries were still part of Spain in spite of their efforts to gain independence. The “mysterious explosion of the USS *Maine*²⁰, together with the prowar fever created by Hearst²¹ and other expansionist publishers, convinced President McKinley to seek a declaration of war from Congress” (Gonzalez 56).

This invasion was welcomed by some Puerto Ricans who thought of this as an opportunity to be liberated from Spain and a possible path to becoming an independent nation. Powerful members of the island’s elite, headed by hacendados and merchants, hoped to increase their wealth by securing greater access to the North American market to which most of them had already been connected. Instead, the Treaty of Paris “that formally ended the war gave the United States direct control not only of Cuba but also over Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines” (Gonzalez 57). This event began the bifurcation of Puerto Rico’s history.

The U.S. occupation amounted to a second conquest of the island. Previously inhabited by Taíno/Arawak people, in 1493, Puerto Rico was invaded by the Spaniards who turned it into a colony. While many Latin American countries freed themselves during the Independence Wars from 1810 to 1825, Puerto Rico, like Cuba, remained under Iberian domination. The attaining of self-determination by the thirteen colonies of British North America after 1776 was not ignored

²⁰ “Officially the *Maine* was simply making a ‘friendly visit,’ but no one in Cuba took that explanation seriously. . . . For three weeks she lay quietly at anchor in Havana. Then, on the night of February 15, 1898, she was torn apart by a tremendous explosion. More than 250 American sailors perished. News of the disaster electrified the United States. All assumed that Spain was responsible, and when the navy issued a report blaming the disaster on ‘an external explosion,’ their assumptions turned to certainty.” (Kinzer 36).

²¹ “William Randolph Hearst, the owner of *The New York Journal* and a string of other newspapers across the country, have been attracting readers for months with vivid denunciations of Spanish colonialists. . . . The moment Hearst heard about the sinking of the *Maine*, he recognized it as a great opportunity . . . he filled page after page with mendacious ‘scoops,’ fabricated interviews with unnamed government officials, and declarations that the battleship had been ‘destroyed by treachery’ and ‘split in two by an enemy’s secret infernal machine.’” (Kinzer 36-37). “The Hearst family, whose newspapers and magazines routinely lauded [Mexico’s dictator Porfirio] Díaz, owned a ranch with a million cattle in Chihuahua” (Gonzalez 52). This partiality of the media and its ties to the economic market influencing the government sadly is all too familiar today.

by Latin American leaders who were fighting for their independence from Spain. Some leaders saw their success as a threat; others as an example to emulate. Simón Bolívar, the great Liberator, had great hopes for a united America. He wrote about it in the letter from Jamaica in 1815. Bolívar expresses in this letter his dreams of an America that would be the largest nation on earth, “Yo deseo más que otro alguno ver formarse en América la más grande nación del mundo, menos por su extensión y riquezas que por su libertad y gloria...” (Bolívar 51). Yet this dream did not include the United States and Haiti. He stated in another letter that their condition of foreigner and mixed ethnicity did not suffice. “Los americanos del Norte y los de Haití, por sólo ser extranjeros, tienen el carácter de heterogéneos para nosotros. Por lo mismo, jamás seré de la opinión de que los convidemos para nuestros arreglos americanos. – *Carta a Santander*, 30 de mayo de 1825” (Bolívar 53).

He harbored special animosity toward the North Americans due to his belief that the strength of the U.S. and the weakness of the other countries would only put them in danger of misery in the name of liberty, “Este es en mi concepto el mayor peligro que hay en mezclar a una nación tan fuerte con otras débiles. . . . Los Estados Unidos parecen destinados por la Providencia para plagar la América de miserias a nombre de la libertad – *Carta al Encargado de Negocios inglés, coronel Patricio Campbell*, 5 de agosto de 1829” (Bolívar 53). Bolívar’s dreams were similar to those of the U.S. forefathers, in that he assumed a powerful nation should be limited to the people who shared the same Hispanicized background. The exclusion of the United States was of no great consequence to this country. The political ambitions of the North American expansionists had an explicit economic agenda that would target most countries in the long run, but would perpetuate the exclusion of those who are not part of the dominant culture.

Towards the end of the 19th century, some dreaded the rising power of the United States, while others viewed the North American republic as a forward-looking nation that had successfully broken away from the grip of European colonization to become a continental super power. Cuba's José Martí, who like Bolívar also had dreams of unifying the Spanish speaking countries, was also suspicious of the United States' rise to power in the region. Unlike Bolívar, whose ideas of Spanish American unity still betrayed Eurocentric biases, Martí explicitly defended the idea of a united Spanish America that embraced its multiplicity of cultures, ethnicities, and even languages. In an essay where he exalts ideas over weapons, he calls for peace among Spanish American countries, and for unity. He reminds readers of the importance of knowing themselves, their unique qualities, and their history: "...America began enduring and still endures the wary task of reconciling the discordant and hostile elements it inherited from its perverse, despotic colonizer with the imported forms and ideas that have, in their lack of local reality, delayed the advent of a logical form of government" (Martí 285). In his view, the imposition of Eurocentric philosophies without taking into consideration indigenous ways hindered the ability of Latin Americans to successfully rule themselves. Jose Martí urged everyone to pursue ideas of social conciliation and multicultural inclusion through studying the sciences, economics, becoming orators, dramatists, poets, polishing their prose, even learning the native languages, "The rulers of Indian republics are learning Indian languages" (287). He not only encouraged fulfillment of these goals but believed that everyone had innate abilities to prosper and make meaningful contributions to society.

Martí's ideas are analogous to Enrique Dussel's route for liberation, and Walter Mignolo's notion of border thinking. Dussel proposes in his article "Europe, Modernity and Eurocentrism" that all spheres of human endeavor—from the political sphere (8-9), to the erotic (9-10), pedagogy (10-11), religion (11) to an ecological dimension (13) are part of historical systems that always

operate through the exclusion of some. In the case of European modernity, the cultures that were colonized by Europe have been excluded from the privileges of rationality, and often, their full “humanity.” Thinking from those exclusions, attempting to incorporate those subjectivities that have been relegated to the margins of any given system, would be an important aspect of what Dussel would call the project of transmodernity, whose ultimate purpose is collective liberation.

Walter Mignolo focuses on the location where these ideas are produced, what he calls the border, which does not need to be a literal physical frontier, but rather refers to an intellectual location that does not operate from the colonial assumptions of the dominant culture, nor strives for complete isolation. The successful production of ideas from this location is a decolonizing strategy. When we view Martí’s thought through the theoretical lenses of Dussel’s and Mignolo’s concepts, it is evident that the Cuban’s classic text, *Our America*, called for liberation and decolonization. Like a prophet, he anticipated U.S. intervention, “The hour is near when she [Spanish America] will be approached by an enterprising and forceful nation that will demand intimate relations with her, though it does not know her and disdains her” (Martí 288). The way to overcome is “that her neighbor comes to know her . . . But when he knows her, he will remove his hands from her in respect” (Martí 288). Unlike Simón Bolívar, he denounced racism, “There is no racial hatred, because there are no races. . . . The soul equal and eternal emanates from bodies that are diverse in form and color” (Martí 288). He continues to promote the value of ideas turned into action, “To think is to serve” (Martí 289). And he stirs readers away from discriminating against “the continent’s light-skinned nation [the U.S.] simply because it does not speak our language or share our view of what home life should be or resemble us in its political failings, which are different from ours, or because it does not think highly of quick-tempered, swarthy men or look with charity, from its still uncertain eminence, upon those less favored by

history who, in heroic stages, are climbing the road that republics travel” (Martí 289). He ended his essay, *Our America*, with the same enthusiastic call to unity in which he began.

The comparison between these two important Latin American thinkers and freedom fighters, Bolívar and Martí, reveals the same passion for unity of the Spanish speaking countries as well as changes in attitude towards the United States. There is no blind acceptance or naïve openness to this country by Latin Americans, but there is a sense of assertiveness implied in the handling of a relationship with the U.S., even if it is a forced one. Instead of an enemy the United States is viewed as a potential ally. By the time the war against Spain erupted, the U.S. seemed to be a power that could help with liberation from the Spanish yoke. For example, according to Puerto Rican historian Luis Antonio Cardona, “Puerto Ricans exiled in New York City sought freedom for their island through the American effort. Some participated in the war planning strategy providing data on harbors and topography. They hoped that American military action would bring Puerto Rico annexation, autonomy or independence. Cuba and Puerto Rico passed from one power to another as dictated by the Treaty of Paris” (49). It was utterly disappointing when this alliance was ignored as the U.S. took possession of the island, leaving the Puerto Ricans with no choice in the matter.

Prior to 1898 Puerto Rican separatists, Ramón Emeterio Betances, Segundo Ruíz Belvis, and José Francisco Basora met in New York City in 1865 and “formed the Comité Revolucionario de Puerto Rico (Puerto Rican Revolutionary Committee) and began to plan the armed insurrection of September 23, 1868, later known as the *Grito de Lares* (Lares Revolt)” (Stavans, Anthology 228). The shout for freedom is still remembered by the people of Puerto Rico as the most striking attempt to become independent from Spain. This independence was not achieved that day but the struggle continued. “Political leaders of Puerto Rico after a prolonged struggle succeeded, just

before the [Spanish American] war, in securing autonomy. The [Autonomy] Charter [that was issued late November 1897] guaranteed individual rights [and established a bicameral legislature]. It went into effect on Wednesday, February 9, 1898 and lasted until the North American invasion of Monday, July 25, 1898” (Cardona 57). The Spanish American War was a great set back to the independence movement.

As a result of the occupation, Puerto Rico lost ground on its quest for self-determination. By dissolving the insular cabinet, the American invasion adversely impacted its political organization. The genesis of the island’s political factionalism thus began to form. It is not difficult to compare that to a mental disorder. Born out of recurrent colonialism, the subject of the island’s political status has become a sort of psychological disorder that Puerto Ricans have had to endure, just as Franz Fanon had pointed out in *Wretched of the Earth*. The imposed contradictions of who Puerto Ricans are as members of a colonized nation has affected their relationship with each other, with the surrounding Caribbean islands, with Spanish speaking Latin American countries, and with the rest of the world. As war booty, the island became a territorial possession of the United States. “The political status of Puerto Rico was unclear. They were not Spanish subjects; they were not Americans and not foreigners. They were a people without a homeland, within their homeland, and without a name of their own” (Cardona 70). Military governors appointed by the American president in Washington, D.C. between 1898 and 1900 ruled the island. Puerto Ricans were not able to choose their local leaders, or have any basic political rights. One of the biggest changes that the U.S. imposed in Puerto Rico after their invasion was banning the Spanish language from being used in government offices and schools. English became the language of education, and of other official Americanizing institutions. Important political

matters were conducted in a foreign language for a majority of people who were blindsided by this turn of events.

Military governors were not uncommon to Puerto Rico under the Spanish rule, when the appointment of men of war as colonial administrators had become normalized. The people, however, rejected this imposition as demonstrated by the 1868 separatist movement mentioned earlier. There was however a sense of familiarity to the Spanish government that was lacking with the new U.S. military government largely due to the language barrier. The military regime that started with General Nelson A. Miles lasted two years. In 1898, the United States acquisition of Puerto Rico also put the U.S. Congress in a conundrum about how to properly rule the inhabitants of the occupied land under its flag. Written by Nobel Peace Prize winner Elihu Root, and named after its sponsor, Joseph B. Foraker, a senator from Ohio, the Foraker Act ended military rule in favor of civilian or non-military appointees. “Congress passed the Foraker Act, which declared the island a U.S. territory and authorized the president to appoint its civilian governor and top administrators. The new law permitted islanders their own House of Delegates, but it reserved for Congress the right to annul any laws those delegates passed. It assigned trade, treaty, postal, sanitary, and military powers to the federal government and it gave the island only one nonvoting delegate in Congress. In many ways, the Foraker Act gave Puerto Ricans less self-government than they had enjoyed under Spain” (Gonzalez 60). Some of these non-military North American governors who were appointed by Washington to rule the island, like some of their military predecessors, also governed Cuba and the Philippines before or after their tenure in Puerto Rico. In Puerto Rico, they began to change the transform or destroy native ways by slowly implementing North American holidays, policies, and tariffs. , For the most part, these anglicizing or americanizing developments were accompanied by the rapid introduction of the English language.

It wasn't until the mid-twentieth century when the government in the island had a greater autonomy over local affairs. "A civil government came into existence; and fifty-four years later self-government came about on Friday, July 25, 1952. This government was under the leadership of Puerto Rico's first elected Governor Luis Muñoz Marín, (1898-1980) the son of Luis Muñoz Rivera," the Prime Minister of the island right before it was invaded by the U.S. (Cardona 57-58). After half a century of U.S. appointed leadership, and of resisting the English language, Puerto Ricans were able to vote for their governor and return to the official use of Spanish, yet they also continued the endless quest for making sense of their colonial status.

The Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and Puerto Rico

The Monroe Doctrine set the course for U.S. involvement in Latin America. Three more doctrines or foreign policy declarations toward Latin America are pertinent to this study: two are overt and one is covert. The covert one falls chronologically in between the other two. These are the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Johnson Corollary. These governmental pronouncements had a great impact in Latin America, fostering the rule of intervention with or without the consent of all North American constituents. But it was appealing to expansionists within the government, as well as to investors. During the 20th century, and after the U.S. seized Northern Mexico and Puerto Rico, President Theodore Roosevelt continued to push for interventionism in Latin America through what is called the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine. Even before he became president of the United States, he fought under President McKinley in the Spanish American war that wrested Puerto Rico, the Philippines and Guam from Spain. After McKinley's assassination, President Theodore Roosevelt saw fit to highlight the Monroe doctrine with his corollary, setting the tone of U.S. foreign policy at the beginning of the 20th century, and placing the North American republic as one of the most powerful nations on Earth. According to the historian Ivan Musicant, with the Roosevelt Corollary "... the

United States could militarily and unilaterally intervene in any regional state where the political, economic, or social conditions invited a European protective response in force” (3), which reinforced President Monroe’s quest for a U.S. hemispheric position of dominance. The Roosevelt sequel was conveniently adopted shortly after the 1898 Spanish American War, whose negative consequences for the political history of Puerto Rico, Cuba, the Philippines, and Guam are well documented.

It is important to point out that in 1917, U.S. citizenship was given (or imposed according to some) to all who were born in Puerto Rico. This citizenship was granted conveniently. The U.S. Constitution allowed military drafts only for U.S. citizens. Many Puerto Ricans were immediately drafted for the war effort. This citizenship added concerns to the issue of the status because while some of the responsibilities were immediately enforced, the rights were still unclear to many. Though they became American citizens, a status coveted today by many, the political privileges of Puerto Ricans continue to be a hotly debated issue because of the discrepancies in rights and responsibilities when compared with U.S. mainland citizens. U.S. citizenship did not create equality. The relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico became perpetually that of colonizer and colonized. It created an occupying force in power, the U.S., and a subjugated group, Puerto Ricans that had the choice to embrace or to resist that power. At times these options for the colonized group seemed limited, sometimes exhausting. After more than a century of being colonized by the U.S., Puerto Ricans of various political persuasions have learned to adjust to various roles within their relationship.

These historical events play an important role in the novels *The Americano* and *América’s Dream*, and in the way the characters in those texts define and explore their political positions as Puerto Ricans. This maneuvering places them in the periphery of power in relation to their

colonizers. In the novels, various narrators speak from the side of the colonized and tell their history as they remember it. Some embrace it, some resent it, and others try to discard it from their lives. Embracing, resenting and casting it off are the strongest positions that I find in the depiction of history in these novels. The first two positions are found strongly in *The Americano*. The third one is prevalent in *América's Dream*.

Historical Events Presented in *The Americano*

The Americano is the story of a former North American military man, Glenn Summers, who returns to Puerto Rico as a civilian with the intention of buying land and with hopes of prospering in business. In contrast with the other novels, Glenn, the main character, personifies the United States message of progress. He has been to Puerto Rico before as a soldier, and now he is there as an individual who wants to prosper. "It had been five long years since he had left the island after serving with the occupation forces of the American Army following the Spanish-American War. . . . Glenn wondered how easily the Puerto Ricans would accept the Americans. No doubt there would be resentment on the part of the natives who were of Spanish descent. That was understandable. But just how deep had the roots of resentment grown?" (Matta 1-2). These lines set the tone and premise of the book. Resistance was to be expected. Puerto Rico had just been ceded to the U.S.; some things were changing in the island and others remained the same. The chief change was economic. Merchants accustomed or expected to maximizing profits were greatly affected by the arrival of the new Anglo investors. North American companies were becoming dominant and the structure of society as they knew it was in jeopardy.

Glenn is presented as an amiable, likable character. He is advised by his friend to relocate in the east of Puerto Rico where there was land available for purchase and not too well developed (Matta 3-4). He wanted to grow fruits and that area sounded appealing. Glenn is the type of person who would rather get along with everyone. At the same time, he is not afraid to stand up for what

he believes. He has the right combination of chivalrous gentleness that exemplifies a stereotypical fairy tale hero. He is a well-meaning American who is expected to find opposition from the Spanish-descended natives. Weren't all natives of Spanish descent? The author makes distinctions among Puerto Ricans and divides them in two groups. He calls Spanish descendants those who belonged to the higher social classes and who were part of the Puerto Rican aristocracy. He called those who inhabit the countryside *campesinos*, peasants. Racialization begins with the description of Sumners and his, "aware[ness] of his dissimilarity to the Puerto Rican natives. His hair was blond; his skin was light. He stood six feet tall, and his bones were big. He walked with confidence. About the only thing he had in common with these people was his good command of the Spanish language" (Matta 5). He made sure to be well dressed especially to please the locals at the advice of one of his friends who told him how important that was in their society. His good looks were only topped by the fact that he also spoke Spanish well. Glenn also carried cash and was very generous with it. For example, at a pharmacy he met a man who was carrying his sick child in his arm. This man was begging the pharmacist for the medicine that he needed for his son but could not afford. The following image of the worried father is provided: "a sturdy mulatto . . . The big, muscular man was barefoot, and he wore muddy, threadbare trousers that hit him half way between the ankles and knees" (Matta 14). Glenn Sumners had no trouble handing out the amount of money needed for this medicine to the pharmacist. "Without hesitation, Glenn withdrew his billfold and opened it. He flipped through several bills and removed a ten. He handed it to the peasant" (Matta 15). His generosity immediately boosted his approval rate and placed him in a position above the peasant. Glenn is light skinned, the peasant is mulatto²², another description to continue picturing what the haves and the have nots look like.

²² A person of mixed white and black ancestry.

The town doctor is introduced as a “man possessed [with] all the charm of a Spanish nobleman” (Matta 22). Matta, who was also a doctor, inserts in the narration a character that resembles him in real life and who also believed to share with him the same ideas of acceptance of the U.S. and the hope of progress for all. [Suggestion: there is a recent book by Raul Mayo Santana, Annette B. Ramirez de Arellano and Jose G. Rigaud-Perez, titled *A Sojourn in Tropical Medicine* (2008) that you find useful to understand the role of U.S. doctors in PR in the 1920s). While doing this he establishes in his narration hegemonic categorization of people in the social stratification system. The poorer the individual was, the darker the skin became. This is no coincidence. The Spanish had already established that racial/social order when they brought captives from Africa to be exploited as slaves in the island. Matta just continues the trend, and perpetuates an idea—the supposed inferiority of blacks—that has been accepted in the island for hundreds of years. This is an example of how the coloniality of power, as defined by Quijano, operates: something as concrete as the physical aspect of an individual delineates his or her role in society and especially within the colonizer/colonized relationship.

Taking Quijano’s concept of coloniality as his point of departure, Mignolo defines the “decolonial option” as “the analytic task of unveiling the logic of coloniality and the prospective task of contributing to build a world in which many worlds will coexist” (*Darker side of Western* 54). In other words, the hegemonic rationale is exposed, thus making room for creativity and inclusiveness of a variety of cultures. It is an epistemological effort in which Western dominant values are appropriated “in order to then de-chain [them] from the imperial designs” (*Darker Side of Western* 82) as ownership of governing values is taken and ingenuity of incorporating other values simultaneously is provided. Although the account Matta offers in his story exposes hegemonic values and hierarchies of race, it does not do so from a decolonizing position. In his

eager manner to expose the condition of poverty and the disenfranchisement of an underprivileged class, he takes for granted the Western dominant value of race and almost embraces it, thus, affirming a hegemonic discourse of social constructed racial differences and hierarchies.

The history of the U.S. invasion is brought to the forefront in the first page of the novel. The omniscient narrator exposes Glenn Summers' perspective. The narrative voice portrays benevolent intentions on his part that can later justify his actions. Another perspective on this history is found in conversations that represent the side of landowners. Matta voices the position of the Puerto Rican elite in relation to the U.S. invasion of 1898. As the *Americano* is sitting on trial, his enemy's lawyer brings up his participation in the American Army of Liberation. "Liberation?" queried Carlos Porrata, "You mean an army of occupation that came, saw and conquered, don't you? Like that of Julius Caesar when he crossed the Rubicon" (Matta 177). The North American position is quickly exposed by the Spanish descent landowner who is economically suffering the consequences of this invasion. This voice of indignation, however, did not represent the voices of the poorest people of Puerto Rico who were still under a feudal system. The people who were underrepresented were still left behind in post-1898 Puerto Rico. Their exasperation with their circumstance did not seem to matter. This is where the *Americano's* rhetoric resonates with this community as he firmly answers, "But Glenn protested. 'I don't think you could call ours an army of occupation. We were sent here to free the Puerto Rican people'" (Matta 177), a thought that persists in the justification of current 21st century invasions. In fact, under a flagpole at the World War II Memorial in Washington, D.C. the following words are inscribed, "Americans came to liberate, not to conquer; to restore freedom, and to end tyranny." As the lives of soldiers from all states who died in World War II, including, Puerto Rico, are honored, these words reverberate as a validation of their sacrifice. This prevailing idea rationalizes

intervention as a necessity to world order. The benefits of this intervention present the possibilities of advancing the cause of the marginalized. Nevertheless, the greater benefit seems to always be on the side of the perpetrator who maintains his power.

In Puerto Rico, according to Matta's text, the group that most energetically resisted the arrival of the *Americano* was the Creole patriciate, the social class that controlled the land and businesses. They would argue about the importance of keeping their culture intact, especially the Spanish language, and their traditions. Sadly, some of these traditions were dependent on maintaining a lower class of individuals without hopes of prosperity. These last individuals, *campesinos*, or peasants as Matta called them, on the other hand, welcomed the *Americano*. He represented a new system that could perhaps offer them opportunities that their last lower class upbringing or skin color made prohibitive. An important American value that resonated with them was the discourse of social advancement above one's condition based on hard work, regardless of the illustriousness, or lack thereof, of one's family of origin. The way society was established made it difficult, if not impossible, for the "values of equal opportunity and upward mobility" (Obama 22) to be fulfilled. The *campesinos* longed for this elusive opportunity. Unfortunately for many, their hard work did not accomplish much, since the opportunities had been reserved for or had been gobbled up by, a select group of people. Around this time, "With declining opportunities on the island, Puerto Ricans began to migrate to the mainland, where employment opportunities were increasing. Between 1914 and 1930, this outmigration involved 3.4 percent of the 1930 population and became a kind of a safety valve for relieving the island's chronic unemployment. Much of this exodus was in response to contract labor recruitment" (Baker 37). This wave is one of the many cycles of migration that the population of the island goes through as a result of their relationship with the United States.

Matta presents a picture of Puerto Rican polarization with respect to the American intervention at the beginning of the century. When this book was published in 1963, a Spanish version of the novel was given to the 7th and 8th grade students as a historical novel in the Spanish public school classes. Retired Philadelphia librarian, Magna Díaz recalls reading it “en el Barrio Rincón de Cidra,” a remote town on the island. She remembers the discussion in class about the consensus of the hatred Puerto Ricans felt toward Spaniards at the beginning of the 20th century. She also recalls discussions about Americans not being well received when they first got there, but not being turned away either. I was interested in finding out how that feeling had changed towards the end of the 20th century. She didn’t feel it was a prevalent issue. She knew Americans that were treated as foreigners even though they have made a living on the island. The hatred toward Spaniards was irrelevant at that point. She was born in New York City and was back in Cidra with her mother and sister after her parents’ divorce. In order to blend in with her schoolmates, she hid the fact that she was fluent in English by never speaking it in public. She would only speak it at home with her sister where she felt comfortable. She did not want to be treated as an outsider. The importance of Magna’s story is twofold. Firstly, this subject will be explored further in chapter five where language will be highlighted. Secondly, it highlights the emphasis on the part of the public schools of Puerto Rico in the sixties to maintain the discussion about the root of the island’s muddled political status. It had been over a decade since the island became the *Estado Libre Asociado* or Commonwealth²³ of Puerto Rico, an ambiguous arrangement where Puerto Rico asserts its political ties to the United States. While the island is not a state, it has its own constitution under the U.S. constitution and an elected governor that heads the executive branch

²³ Although the States of Kentucky, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia are also officially called Commonwealths, their full absorption into the American federated republic stands in stark contrast to the unincorporated territory of PR.

of the government and the military, which is a division of the U.S. Army, the Puerto Rico National Guard. The ambiguity of being a state that is free and associated, using the literal translation of the term in Spanish, has been at the center of political discussions in many forums including the Middle School classroom in Puerto Rico. Children were made aware of the conundrum as well as the options that would lead out of it: statehood, independence, or maintaining the status quo. The novel by Matta presented a message of acceptance of the U.S. presence, with an emphasis on the notion that progress was possible under American rule. In terms of the island's political status, the novel subtly seems to favor annexation.

Historical Events Presented in *América's Dream*

From the beginning of the 20th century to a brief stop in the sixties, when Matta's book was published, we move now to the late 20th century portrayal of the history of U.S. interventionism in Esmeralda Santiago's first novel, *América's Dream*. Santiago's characters take history for granted and with a lack of action toward the political status of the island, thus exuding conformity. The U.S. invasion is portrayed in the character of Don Irving who owns the hotel where América works in Vieques, "He has never learned Spanish and speaks as if it didn't matter, as if it were the person he's talking to who has to make sense of what he's saying" (Santiago 36). América resents the U.S. military intervention linguistically, by calling attention to its negative impact on the Spanish language. Her emphasis on this chapter is on the stability of the American as the owner of the hotel, the ownership of a space, and of a language on the island-municipality of Vieques, Puerto Rico. This island off the east coast of the Puerto Rican mainland is mostly owned by the U.S. Navy. Until recently, naval training was held on its shores, a practice that began in the 1940s. In the novel, the U.S. Navy base in Vieques is simply a given reality (17). It is part of a passive acceptance towards U.S. interventionism that in its omission is present throughout the novel. The history that has shaped the character of this woman named América goes back to ancestors who

have been maids in the hotel. Her present economic and social situation is in the foreground of this story. The seemingly imperceptible past weighs on this character subliminally. América carries her history as a dormant trauma.

Mexican essayist and performance artist, Guillermo Gómez Peña, has dedicated much of his work to exploring the identity issues of bicultural individuals, especially those who share the Mexican and the North American culture. In his essay “Warrior for Gringostroika,” he attempts to elucidate the source behind some of the cultural maladies experienced by Latinos/as in the U.S. He maintains in both his written work and artistic performances how some in the United States are damaged by a distorted history while ignoring at the same time its origins. As he explains: “The social and ethnic fabric of the United States is filled with interstitial wounds, invisible to those who didn’t experience the historical events that generated them, or who are victimized by historical amnesia” (Gómez Peña 47). Just as Gómez Peña indicates, there are those like América, in Esmeralda Santiago’s work, who daily disregard or take for granted a history that could very well be responsible for her present situation.

The novel begins with her living in Vieques, where she shares a small house with her mother and teenage daughter. She works for *el Americano*, who is also her mother’s lover, and she is physically abused by her own lover and father of her child who is married to somebody else. América may be a personification of America, or at least of Latinos/as in “America” (as marked by the accent in her name), with their hardships and struggles. Her lover, Correa, epitomizes tyranny as he cruelly hurts her, practicing “the taking of América whenever and however he wants her” (Santiago 109), as he abruptly possesses and abuses her. In her ignorance of her own story and her conformism, América delays actions that could have helped her situation. Eventually, she moves to New York and explores opportunities but continues to work as a maid. It could be argued

that she chooses the path of least resistance. In a dialogue with other maids from other Latin American countries she reveals her bicultural ambiguity, “But I’m not Americana,’ América protests, ‘I’m Viequense, Puerto Rican I mean. It’s just that Puerto Ricans have citizenship. . . . ‘No, I’m Puerto Rican, but I’m a citizen. It means we don’t need permission to live and work here.’ . . . A legal social security card, which she has taken for granted, turns out to be as coveted as a green card, which she’s heard about but has never seen” (Santiago 218-219). While her friend is finding out that América’s social security is real, making her status legal, América discovers her position, a privileged status. Yet, she doesn’t know how to tell her history, she just knows who she is, a Puerto Rican who has always been a U.S. citizen. That has never meant that she should have very big aspirations.

It is my contention that América’s limitations are not imposed by her legal status but by the coloniality of power. This is the internalization of a “power relation . . . informed by a colonial/racist culture that privileges Europeans/Euro-Americans/whites over non-Europeans even when colonial administrations have almost ceased to exist” (Grosfoguel “Colonial Subjects” 172). As she positions herself in the colonial/world system, she incorporates a set of values that automatically restricts her, sharing the imaginary of the dominant class. Once she is made aware of her privileged status in comparison with her other Latina colleagues, it is up to her to decide how her history will impact her decisions because her friends are “amazed that she, an American citizen, would work as a maid” (Santiago 219). Her daughter, her mother, and her lover are left behind in Puerto Rico. “Rosalinda’s sullenness and rebellion, Ester’s drinking, Correa’s beatings. Is that all they are to me? Not people but problems? . . . I’m going to worry about myself from now on, about what I want and what I need” (Santiago 231). This revelation leads her to choices that demonstrate her ambitions. Her goal, however, is not to follow the dream of prosperity and

upward mobility mentioned above. After an altercation that fatally and permanently ended her relationship with Correa, América moves to the Bronx. She works as a maid in a big hotel where she receives medical insurance and a decent salary (Santiago 322). Her contentment is a result of her agency, “she fought for her life . . . she has a right to live that life as she chooses” (Santiago 325.) When given the chance to live her life any way she wants, América, a character in the border of two cultures, may not go in the direction that her ambitious colleagues have in mind. She chooses to work less hours for a higher salary than the one she had before. She chooses what would give her peace of mind. It surpasses the expectations of all. As a fictional character, América symbolizes an individual at the end of the 20th century whose life has been shaped in many ways by the impact of policies like the Monroe Doctrine and the Roosevelt Corollary, and who eventually experiences liberation defined and acted out in her own terms. Like her, many individuals, in their home countries and subsequently the United States, search for liberation after their lives have been defined, against their best interests, by U.S. interventionism.

The Good Neighbor Policy and the Dominican Republic

The history of U.S. interventionism continues during the 1930s, an era when, paradoxically, the predominant North American foreign policy was not to intervene. This is when the Good Neighbor Policy that was advocated by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR), came into place. The objective was to cease military interventions in Latin American under the principle that it was just not appropriate neighborly behavior. The OAS (The Charter of the Organization of American States) was born during this period as well. Shiv Kumar comments about FDR, “Although by his Good Neighbour Policy he put an end to the gross forms of direct intervention of the earlier years, he showed that he was willing enough to accommodate all forms of indirect intervention and to support military juntas and undemocratic regimes if they would go along with US objectives” (ix). Nevertheless, it was a sign of progress in the relationship. An

amiable opportunity to level the playing field between the U.S. and Latin America is presented with a good relationship that was expected to benefit the two parties.

The Good Neighbor policy had tried to soften the tensions that the Roosevelt Corollary had caused in the hemisphere. As Musicant wrote in his book *The Banana Wars*²⁴: *A History of United States Military Intervention in Latin America from the Spanish-American War to the Invasion of Panama* (1990), “The most controversial and indefensible motivation for the Banana Wars was dollar diplomacy, the economic stepchild of the Roosevelt Corollary. Begun, at least officially, during the Taft administration, and carried through by Wilson, Harding, and Coolidge, it was used to foster economic stability through the infusion of American capital, often combined with high-handed diplomatic coercion, into the empire” (3). Taft’s dollar diplomacy was the other side of the coin, so to speak, of military interventionism that justified many invasions in many countries by U.S. presidents that wanted to emulate Theodore Roosevelt’s legacy. President Roosevelt paved the way for his successors to follow when on January 21, 1905 “The United States undertook the collection of the Dominican customs revenues, disbursing forty-five percent to the republic for ongoing expenses. The remainder went toward adjusting the debt” (Musicant 244). This intervention puts the Dominican Republic under the authority of a country that they had previously tried to join. , In the last third of the 19th century, the U.S. government rejected a proposal by the Dominican Republic that sought its annexation to the North American republic. According to Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons, “...the Dominican leaders sought to annex the country to the United States and negotiated an annexation treaty that was barely defeated in the U.S. Senate

²⁴ This term refers to a period overtly started when the Roosevelt Corollary began that continued covertly through FDR’s Good Neighbor Policy. It marked a series of U.S. invasions in Latin American countries that were derogatorily called Banana Republics because of their economic and political relation to the U.S. based on a single export product. The product was profitable to foreign enterprises but of no significant positive benefit to the local working-class and peasants. “In their military and naval aspects, the founding and policing of this Central American and Caribbean realm, de facto and de jure, are colloquially termed the Banana Wars” (Musicant 1).

in 1871. Had the U.S. Senate approved that treaty, the Dominican Republic would have entered the Union much before Utah, Oregon, Alaska, and Hawaii, and would have opened the way for the annexation of Cuba and Puerto Rico” (10). Instead the U.S. government under President Teddy Roosevelt “took control of the Dominican Custom Service in 1904 and enforced a lien on the nation’s external revenue, its primary source of income” (Roorda 13-14). Endorsed by the Roosevelt Corollary, the United States made its presence known in the Dominican Republic.

The history of the Dominican Republic has similarities with that of Puerto Rico’s, where. There is a history of U.S. interventionism as well as a statehood movement. The failed treaty of annexation happened after the country had overcome conflicts with nearby Haiti. There has been a long history of strife between both countries that share the island of Hispaniola. Conflict had taken place with their largest colonizer, Spain and then with their neighbor’s largest colonizer, France. Dominicans had to incessantly fight for their sovereignty. Battling their neighbor, Haiti, created a long term animosity toward each other, mostly rooted in racial prejudice. The Dominican Republic fought Spain, France, and Haiti and after being temporarily annexed to Spain for a second time they finally gained independence. They proved to be a resilient people who struggled for their autonomy from 1492 to 1869. Unlike Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic fought for independence and won it. But economically the Caribbean republic was increasingly building a mounting debt. Due to its insolvency, the country found itself with no option but to accept the U.S. supremacy imposed without any say in the situation. “And, in exchange for allowing the Dominican government to use an additional \$1,200,000 in unsold bonds from the loan of 1907, the United States made [President] Bordas accept the appointment of a U.S. comptroller to supervise public expenditures” (Pons 310-311). This action allowed the U.S. to be in control of Dominican finances while getting more involved in other aspects of this country’s organization.

As mentioned before, subsequent U.S. heads of state that came after Teddy Roosevelt followed his intervention mandate. “They carried out an agenda of infrastructural and organizational programs that, along with similar Wilsonian colonial projects in Haiti and Veracruz, Mexico, defined a kind of Progressive imperialism...” (Roorda 17), which is the position they assumed in the Dominican Republic.

From 1916 to 1924 and then in 1965²⁵, the U.S. invaded the Dominican Republic. The military invasion of the Dominican Republic during the beginning of the 20th century was justified on economic grounds. It was also seen “as a corollary to previous U.S. interventions in Panamá, Mexico, Nicaragua, and Haiti” (Pons 10), where they were present for nineteen years (Roorda 16). The government of the Dominican Republic was in debt to many European nations. This was a threat to the United States because they feared intervention from other countries in order to collect what was due to them. The U.S. did not want any other competing power to intervene in this hemisphere. Therefore, it behooved them to assume the debt and be in control of the Dominican Republic, as opposed to a European country having that control. This was done by the U.S. military. They took over and created regulations of their finances. On November 1916, President Wilson gave the order to Captain Harry S. Knapp “to officially proclaim military occupation of the Dominican Republic” (Pons 320). The military presence in the republic spun other structural reconfigurations. For example, there were basic public resources missing from their infrastructure. To fulfill the immediate needs of their armed forces, they began the construction of roads and highways, the postal system was improved, and more schools were built (Pons 336). These improvements, added value and benefited Dominicans, although some remained incomplete.

²⁵ During the mid-sixties, the reasons were part of the political paranoia that the U.S. was suffering as remnants of the red scare were still lingering through popular culture. This will be explained further when the second invasion is addressed below.

Notwithstanding, the main reason to intervene supposedly was to aid the Dominicans in their economic situation. To accomplish this goal, they discouraged local business owners' production and helped themselves with the sale of their land to foreign investors. "By the end of the military occupation, the sugar industry²⁶ controlled some 438,000 acres of agricultural land which functioned as autonomous enclaves virtually independent from the government" (Pons 337). In other words, the foreign investors ruled the land, while locals received no access to it nor profited from it in any way. To make matters worse for the local economy, the U.S. intervention created a "marked taste for the consumption of U.S. goods" (Pons 338). The superiority of the American products was emphasized. The possibilities for local businesses to succeed diminished. If anything was going economically well, it was certainly not for the Dominicans who were not able to reap any benefit from the use of their land. Their land was potentially lucrative, as were its productions, but the profits were going elsewhere.

Another significant occurrence during those years was the implementation of a local U.S. trained military body. "The Marines also recruited and trained Dominican soldiers to form the constabulary force envisioned by Woodrow Wilson, although during his administration the Guardia Nacional²⁷, as it was called, remained a relatively undisciplined force with no commissioned Dominican officers" (Roorda 18). Scholars agree that the U.S. did not seem satisfied with the group of soldiers and felt that they were underperforming. Nevertheless, the decision to create a national guard would negatively affect the Dominicans for decades after the U.S. left. One of its trainees was "Rafael Trujillo, a towering figure in Dominican and Caribbean history who used the modernized Dominican military to seize power in 1930 and act as a dictator

²⁶Similar to Puerto Rico at the beginning of the 20th century where U.S. sugar growers owned a great portion of the land.

²⁷ The same name is given to the military force in Puerto Rico that exist today under the U.S. Army.

for thirty-one years, maintaining one of the most durable regimes of the twentieth century” (Roorda 21). The already unstable government of the Dominican Republic was weakened by the U.S. intervention. Its political situation did not improve. By the time the U.S. military occupation came to a close on July 1, 1924 (Pons 335), the Dominican government remained feeble. They were in more debt than they were before. This time they owed more to the U.S., putting them in a “juridical position of a protectorate, as established by the Dominican-American conventions of 1907 and 1924. ... Dominicans had learned that the center of political power in the Caribbean was in Washington . . . the exercise of sovereignty would be understood by Dominican leaders as always conditioned by U.S. foreign policy” (Pons 339). American political supremacy became conventional.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy was in place for much of the period leading to the last U.S. military significant invasion of the Dominican Republic. “Between 1933 and 1965, United States forces played no role in active combat or pacification in Central America or the Caribbean basin” (Musicant 363). The idea was to maintain diplomatic relationships, reject notions of imperialism, and seek non-military relations with the Latin American countries. The Good Neighbor Policy was adopted in an effort to withdraw from overt military activity in the region as mentioned above. The U.S. military intervention hiatus coincided with the period when U. S. Marine trained General Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, one of the worst dictators in history, was in power in the Dominican Republic. On the one hand, the Good Neighbor policy seemed like a step in the right direction. It promoted the idea that it was in the best interest of the U.S. to have good relationships with Latin America. After all, it is located in the U.S. “backyard”, where an amiable association beneficial to everyone involved was desirable. However, the amiable relationship from the U.S. side tended to be with heads of states, like Trujillo

in the Dominican Republic, Batista in Cuba, Somoza in Nicaragua, Jorge Ubico Castañeda in Guatemala, Maximiliano Hernández Martínez in El Salvador, and Tiburcio Carías Andino in Honduras (González 76), who were severely oppressing their people. “The mid-1930s and the 1940s thus became the heyday of *los jefes*. ... What seemed to unite them all was their ability to curry favor with Uncle Sam, first as allies against fascism during World War II, then as dependable anti-Communists in the late 1940s and 1950s” (Gonzalez 76). They maintained a form of government that pleased Washington. It kept order and their population was under control. It also pleased U.S. investors. These investors had a tendency to hold hands with policy makers as they closely watched governmental moves and managed their organizations for profit. “Between 1950 and 1967, for instance, new U.S. investment in Latin America totaled less than \$4 billion, but profits were nearly \$13 billion” (Gonzalez 77). The relationship between the U.S. and these oppressive governments was a multimillion operation. It encouraged the advancement of one country at the expense of many others.

The Johnson Doctrine and the Dominican Republic

These events lead into the fourth and final doctrine: the Johnson Doctrine. It impacted the Dominican Republic directly because it justified the second invasion of the U.S. in that country, as it mentioned above. After President Trujillo was assassinated in a U.S. backed operation in 1961, the political stability of this country became questionable. From the perspective of the U.S. the new political efforts by Dominicans to restore their nation after Trujillo’s corrupt years were not trustworthy. During that same year, the CIA “organized the failed Bay of Pigs invasion in Cuba. Four years later, the marines invaded the Dominican Republic again, just as rebels loyal to the democratically elected president Juan Bosch were about to defeat a group of generals who had ousted Bosch in a coup two years before” (Gonzalez 77).

President Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) was focused on keeping the country together following the 1963 Kennedy assassination. His presidency, like Teddy Roosevelt's, began abruptly, and in turmoil. One of the challenges facing the U.S. at the time was the growing threat of the communist expansion as the Soviet Union's power was rising. The proximity of the Dominican Republic to Cuba was a great concern. "In late April 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered U.S. marines and Army paratroopers into the Dominican Republic in America's first armed intervention in a Latin American country in three decades. LBJ insisted that the operation was necessary to prevent the establishment of another Communist country, a 'second Cuba,' in the Western Hemisphere" (Yates 1). The war in Vietnam was going in full force with thousands of Marines sent overseas²⁸. But in the Dominican Republic the concern was the unrest caused by the opponents of the military junta that was in power. This junta overthrew the first democratic president elected without the U.S., Juan Bosch, forcing him into exile. Juan Bosch, who was a liberal seeking to reform the government and provide for its constituency, was a menace to Johnson because of his unwillingness to support American (U.S.) economic policies. The growing opposition and threat of reinstating Bosch was at the root of the conflict. The Dominican Republic government's disputes "reflected Lyndon Johnson's obsessive fear of the spread of Castro-style communism; it was incorrectly assumed, mainly through highly inaccurate embassy reports, that Bosch was a Castro-supporting communist" (Musicant 363). It was important for President Johnson to bring order to his backyard and remind everyone of the command and authority of the United States. It was time for drastic changes, time to annul the Good Neighbor Policy, and become the irrevocable leaders of the West. "The U.S. occupation then paved the way for Joaquín Balaguer, a longtime aide of assassinated dictator Trujillo, to capture power during elections that followed in 1966. . .

²⁸ A number that increased dramatically by the end of that year and that included Dominicans that were recruited during this U.S. occupation.

. To diffuse the postelection crisis, U.S. officials hastily facilitated the mass exodus to the United States of the very revolutionaries our government had helped crush” (Gonzalez 118). The people of the Dominican Republic had no choice but to accept a new form of Trujillo style government with Joaquín Balaguer or take the offer to flee.

Historical Events Presented in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*

The history of U.S. interventionism in the Dominican Republic presented in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is mostly embedded in reference notes found along the narration. In this novel, the protagonist, Oscar, is a young overweight Dominican American who lives in Patterson, New Jersey. His story is narrated by his sister Lola and her ex-boyfriend, Yunior, by alternating chapters with their narrative voices, starting with Yunior’s voice. This story is intertwined with the history of the Dominican Republic especially under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo. It goes back and forth from island to mainland, untangling historical events that have had a direct impact in the character’s family. These events are mentioned in both an informative and ironic tone. For example, the U.S. invasion of the beginning of the 20th century is recalled to explain when the use of a word that mixes English and Spanish, *pariguayo*, appeared in Dominican Spanish. This is mentioned in an endnote that explains, “. . . the First American Occupation of the DR, which ran from 1916 to 1924. (You didn’t know we were occupied twice in the twentieth century? Don’t worry, when you have kids they won’t know the U.S. occupied Iraq either)” (19). The language developed through the various contacts with the U.S. will be explored in chapter 5. For now, what’s relevant to our purposes is the notion that this history is virtually unknown by many, especially U.S. readers. The narrative voice ironically assumes that an intervention like this one would be forgotten and that therefore it is imperative to make it known. It would be hard to believe that current interventions in the Middle East would be forgotten in the future as the text

suggests about the Iraq war, yet that lack of knowledge about the Dominican Republic's history may prove the contrary.

At the start of the novel, on the second page of the first chapter, the narrative voice launches into an incessant description of the dictator that plagued the Dominican Republic. It starts with "For those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history: . . . " (Diaz 2) assuming that if anyone knows this history, it was very brief. His description, however is nothing but brief,

"...Trujillo, one of the twentieth century's most infamous dictators, ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961 with an implacable ruthless brutality. A portly, sadistic, pig-eyed mulato who bleached his skin, wore platform shoes, and had a fondness for Napoleon-era haberdashery, Trujillo (also known as El Jefe, the Failed Cattle Thief, and Fuckface) came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social, and economic life through a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror; treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master. . . . He was our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future Dictator, a personaje so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up. . . . Famous for changing ALL THE NAMES of ALL THE LANDMARKS . . . to honor himself . . . for making ill monopolies out of every slice of the national patrimony . . . for building one of the largest militaries in the hemisphere . . . for fucking every hot girl in sight, even the wives of his subordinates . . . for expecting, no, *insisting* on absolute veneration from his pueblo (tellingly, the national slogan was 'Dios y Trujillo'; for running the country like it was a Marine boot camp; for stripping friends and allies of their positions and prosperities . . . for his almost *supernatural* abilities. Outstanding accomplishments include: the 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community; one of the longest, most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating U.S.-backed dictators, so you know this was a hard-earned victory, the chilenos and the argentinos are still appealing); the creation of the first modern kleptocracy (Trujillo was Mobutu before Mobutu was Mobutu); the systematic bribing of American senators; and, last but not least, the forging of the Dominican peoples into a modern state (did what his Marine trainers, during the Occupation, were unable to do)" (Díaz 2-3).

The description above offers a number of characteristics of Trujillo in crescendo or progression: from a narcissist violent offender, to the anti-hero or villain of a fantasy, to being almost mystically immortal. These three categories show an evolution of his personality from a psychologically damaged human being to a god of evil. This powerful superiority is established

in the first paragraph above and leads readers to a discussion of the dictatorial activities that defined his tenure as president. All of it is neatly tied to relationship with the United States. According to the Diaz's narrative, the U.S. is a country that supports dictatorships in Latin America. The text also mentions how the U.S. has occupied the Dominican Republic and used the Marines to train Trujillo.

The length of this historical reference cited above, its accusatory tone, and the position of this information in the novel is pertinent to our analysis of Diaz's storyline. The narrative voice wants to make sure this history takes a little more than "two seconds." It is important for the narrator to give detailed explanations so that there is an awareness of the burden this history has been to the Dominican people. It is also important that it is supported by references to verifiable historical events like the genocide of Haitians-- "Trujillo's skillfully handling of Dominican foreign relations allowed him to perpetrate his genocide of Haitians resident in the Dominican Republic in 1937 without serious diplomatic damage ..." (Roorda 4).

Additionally, in 1939 "Senator Theodore Green and Representatives Hamilton Fish, Robert Mouton, and Matthew Merritt traveled with an entourage of reporters from the AP, UPI, and INS wire services, Paramount News newsreel, NBC radio, the magazines *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*, and the *New York World Telegram*. They returned with the view that the Dominican Republic under Trujillo was a 'fine little republic' [giving opportunity to use] "...another of Trujillo's tactics in cultivating allies: bribery. . . . Fish received \$25,000 in 'oil speculation' money from Trujillo, who had hired a 'protégé' of Fish, George Djamgaroff, to be 'Director of Propaganda' in the United States for \$50,000 (a sum he may have split with Fish)" (Roorda 113-114). The strategy of bribery while supporting campaigns in Washington to seek out approval for

his operation is key factor to understanding Trujillo's manipulative behavior during his years in power.

The tone of the narrative voice in Díaz's text vehemently charges Trujillo with felonious activities against his own people. It is almost audible in its emphasis, and in fact it recurs to many slang expressions that capture the jargon of Latin and African American youth from poor neighborhoods. After years of censorship from the government and after the self-imposed silence of families who would rather not speak about the Trujillo era, this endnote clarification of the history of the Dominican Republic screams volumes.

The fact that this denunciation of U.S. interventionism appears in a footnote becomes central to the argument of writing history as a strategy of decolonization. A voice that is located in the United States denounces both the history of its homeland and its connection with the new land of residence, in this case the new "American" metropolis. This is a voice that is not in the mainstream of either culture but denounces, proclaims, and instructs while telling history from an important geopolitical location. Díaz's novel provides an example of a location that is not isolated but maintains contact with surrounding cultures. It is important to "glean from both the dominant and dominated cultures to create knowledge. This generation of ideas may serve as an example of "The philosophy of liberation [that] can only come from the critical thinkers of each culture in dialogue with other cultures" (Grosfoguel "Trasmodernity" 97), like the case of the Dominican Republic and the United States in Diaz's novel.

Re-Writing History: A Strategy of Decolonization

All of the foreign policies mentioned above significantly affected Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. The Monroe Doctrine and its Roosevelt Corollary encouraged military intervention. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy fortified the government of President Trujillo for thirty one years, as well as other dictatorships and

interventions while demanding that a U.S. born governor and English only be imposed in Puerto Rico. And finally, the Johnson Doctrine not only re-established military intervention as the norm once again but also propelled one of the largest diasporas in the history of the Dominican Republic.

Since the characters and narrators of the novels studied here have an awareness of U.S. interventionism, we next take a look at the history of Mexico, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, its portrayal in the novels, and analyze some of the implications of that portrayal. I argue that the way this history is told can be called *transmodern* literature because they expose through this act moments of decolonization. The act of writing itself is a strategy that provides those instances in which their history is told from a specific point of view, the border of two cultures. In the case of *The Americano*, the narrator welcomes U.S. intervention, yet the setting in the beginning of the 20th century explains the desire of using this intervention as an alternative for the former Spanish government. The contrast found in this story will be further analyzed in Chapter 4.

Transmodern literature offers insights into a part of history that in the name of liberty has created oppression, in the name of progress has enslaved individuals, and in the name of nature has contributed to racism. Some narrators do not want to lose focus on their story so they choose to offer some of the historical accounts in the notes. This is seen in the case of Sandra Cisneros' and Junot Díaz's novels. But I believe that this seemingly imperceptive mode of writing achieves more than just offering additional information on historical accounts. It draws the reader into an intimate look of what these historical accounts have done to their respective country and people. It offers in detail, and often with expletives, a close description of the oppressors of their nations. It does not favor one country over the other (U.S./Mexico or U.S./Dominican Republic). It evokes

the aspects of each that they cherish as well as the despicable acts that have crushed paths and aspirations for improvement.

Enrique Matta, on the other hand, renders the history of U.S. interventionism in a narration that includes the North American point of view. A rhetoric of liberation and freedom that as mentioned above is central to military language that justifies invasions. He takes the reader back to a time in history when the U.S. represented hope for Puerto Ricans who desperately wanted to change their political situation. To support his theme of progress through the affiliation to the U.S., Matta gives arguments opposing Spain or the status quo that it promoted. The eagerness to decolonize from Spain throws Puerto Ricans in a trap that was not expected. “Few imagined then that the island would remain a U.S. possession for the entire twentieth century, or that it would become the most important colony in our own country’s history (Gonzalez 60). The writing of this history indicates the setting in which Puerto Ricans were found at the beginning of the 20th century. Matta’s narrator was concerned with a society with values that were perpetuating Eurocentric notions of race and class. Individuals in the margins were being oppressed. The narrative voice portrayed Sumners as the alternative to this system. The project of liberation, however, is transformed into a political morass.

Esmeralda Santiago’s omission of some historical accounts denotes the acceptance of a colonial state of mind analogous to the condition of the 20th century Puerto Rican. With limited progress the lack of ambitions is paralyzing. “Nearly 45 percent of Puerto Rican households have an annual income below the poverty level. Median income was \$14,412 in 2005, only a third of what it was for U.S. households. . . . Puerto Ricans, even though they are American citizens, have no voting representation in Congress and thus pay no federal taxes. Meanwhile, the island’s homicide, drug addiction, and AIDS rates rival the worst of any state of the union, and so many

residents have had to emigrate that more than half of all Puerto Ricans now live in the continental United States (Gonzalez 278). The narrator in Santiago's novel shows some discomfort and criticism in the depiction of U.S. interventionism. Yet the border location of the character does not completely condemn or absolve either side.

These examples of *transmodern* literature are so because the history is written from the border, a location of exteriority that takes into consideration epistemologies that were excluded from the Eurocentric project of modernity without negating modernity's contributions. It gives subjectivity to voices that have been shaped by this history of U.S. interventionism and have achieved moments of liberation in spite of it. Other strategies of decolonization will be explored in the pages ahead. For now, it is important to keep the historical accounts that are presented in this chapter as background to the decolonizing strategies that will be examined later on. Interventionism has proven necessary for world powers to retain their position of dominance. I particularly appreciate the way Ramón Grosfoguel explains it: "During the last 520 years of the 'European/Euro-North-American capitalist/patriarchal modern/colonial world system' we went from 'convert to Christianity or I'll kill you' in the 16th century, to 'civilize or I'll kill you' in the 18th and 19th centuries, to 'develop or I'll kill you' in the 20th century, and more recently, the 'democratize or I'll kill you' at the beginning of the 21st century" ("Decolonizing Western Universalism" 97). In the name of the acceptable *pensée du jour*, territorial expansion maintained the wealth of nations already in power, as people internalized values that shaped who they were within a system that denied equal rights to all.

While the dominant nations impose their values, the dominated questioned themselves. Was it wrong to have a different cosmology and different belief? Were their traditions, language, and culture less valuable? Will they always lack resources to advance? Is there only one way to

govern a country or one form of government that can fulfill everyone's needs? These external influences force internal examinations and self-reflective actions. The reaction to assimilate or resist these kinds of impositions is there. But decolonization is not an option that simply takes one side over the other. That would create a dichotomous position. The dominated class has an option to incorporate thoughts that range from a way of governing, a religion, or a way of doing business in order to create their own epistemology.

These novels present characters that are found in a specific location in the border where they question decisions made by their leaders, the established racial hierarchy, and the notions of progress brought to them. The third person narrator of *Matta* presents progress as an inevitable movement that Santiago's narrator demonstrates can be stalled. The first person narrators that Cisneros and Díaz present use writing as an act that contribute to decolonizing and liberating efforts. In this chapter these ideas have been observed as they collaborate or contend with U.S. interventionism.

According to the 2010 U.S. Census, Hispanic or Latinos/as account for 50.5 million or 16% of the U.S. population. Out of the many reasons an individual may have for this movement North, Juan Flores indicates that there is a correlation between migration and the history of interventionism mentioned above. They "migrated here for both political and economic reasons, in part because of the U.S. intervention in their homelands" (Flores 199). This diaspora will be mentioned in more detail in the following chapters. Harmful U.S. foreign policies are the background for the contact created with Latin American countries and that triggered the immigration of their inhabitants in this country.

It will be noted that as time goes by, the pain of those who have been traumatized by a history of interventionism, which Gómez Peña describes, dissipates in some levels, for some

characters. The works of the authors examined here have presented history in a variety of ways. But if history does not touch a life personally, it is meaningless. Their diverse styles reveal how the history of interventionism has affected their characters, which has lead them to their respective decolonizing ways. When history is re-written, the narrative voices recover ownership tacitly allowing underrepresented members of society to be liberated.

CHAPTER 3: COSMOLOGIES AND SPIRITUALITY: A TRANSMODERN RESPONSE TO U.S. INTERVENTIONISM IN *CARAMELO OR PURO CUENTO* AND *THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO*

U.S. interventionism in Latin America during the past century has left an imprint in the affected countries where there has been direct, significant contact. As the previous chapter demonstrated, it is a history that altered the direction in which countries were moving. U.S. interventionism directly affected the sociopolitical and socioeconomic situation of the people in these countries and thus, the characters examined in this study. This chapter will explore these characters' coping mechanisms through their spirituality. The formation of their spirituality and religious cosmologies in their specific cultures will be investigated, including the role spiritual practices have played in responding to domination. The focus will be on *Caramelo or Puro Cuento: A novel*, which presents characters with a connection to Mexico; and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, which portrays characters related to the Dominican Republic. They have been selected specifically in this chapter because they share several important concerns. For example, one that will be emphasized in this chapter points to their roles in fostering spiritual decolonization. I intend to shed light on the trajectory of a colonial Christianity and its encounters with indigenous and African belief systems in Spanish America. Special emphasis will be placed on the encounter of those particularly Spanish American (Mexican and Dominican) syncretistic beliefs with North American traditions as they journey into the United States. Where there is oppression, moments of liberation at the spiritual level will be explored.

The main characters in both novels are young people who find themselves between two cultures and two languages: English and Spanish. They need to be able to function in between these worlds in order to survive. As they come of age, their historical backgrounds, the re-writing

of their stories, the role of violence²⁹, their use of language³⁰, and the spiritual notions of their specific upbringing as cosmological guide lead to actions that can be viewed as examples of strategies of decolonization. Spirituality as a strategy of decolonization will be explored in the next section. Afterwards, the terms religion and spirituality will be defined in order to understand the larger contextual environment that surrounds indirectly the characters in the novel. This will include a look into the concept of damnation or curse as it pertains specifically to Díaz's narration. Also, spirituality as it has been expressed by Latinos/as in the U.S. will be exposed, and finally, each novels' portrayal of spirituality will be analyzed.

Spiritual Decolonization and Liberation

Both novels, Cisneros' *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* and Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, present a spiritual dimension to the decolonial endeavor. In both works, the characters are positioned in the periphery of the U.S. society and have experienced marginality and oppression. Underneath and against the imposed views by the dominant class in both stories, a religious syncretism that is manifest in the characters' everyday lives stands out. For example, in Cisneros' novel, it is seen through the relation with the Virgin of Guadalupe and Tonantzín, the Aztec goddess. In Díaz's novel, he exposes Yoruba notions found in the mention of Oyá, while the strong belief in the power of the curse, fukú, explains tragedies from the personal to political, embodied by General Trujillo, which are all related to each other³¹. Both novels bring back the belief in the contact with ancestors that have passed on and ultimately, they demonstrate the religious amalgamation found in their particular cultures. In their representation of spiritual

²⁹ The role of violence will be further develop in Chapter 4 with specific focus on the novels by Matta and Santiago.

³⁰ Their state in between English and Spanish and how they handle this bilingualism will be explore in more depth in Chapter 5, which will also include the other two novels in this thesis.

³¹ For an in-depth study about the portrayal and characterization of Trujillo in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in comparison to Vargas Llosa's *Feast of the Goat* see Víctor Figueroa's article *Disseminating "El Chivo"*.

resistance, both novels highlight ideas found in the margins and not necessarily those accepted by the dominant class. These ideas are developed in the United States where the characters are located due to the revolving door migratory system established by U.S. interventionism. The characters' perspective, I propose, purports liberation of religious thoughts outside the parameters of the mainstream.

In this chapter, spirituality is highlighted as an important aspect to decolonization. In *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011), the Argentinean scholar, Walter D. Mignolo refers to what he calls "the spiritual option" among decolonial strategies. This option is linked to the attempt to liberate the realm of spiritual ideas and beliefs from the oppressive impositions of modernity/coloniality, and to the deployment of spirituality as a tool that may assist in the liberation of other realms. As explained earlier in the introduction, this consist of "decolonizing religion to liberate spirituality . . . which offers the contribution of opening up horizons of life that have been kept hostage (that is, colonized) by modernity, capitalism, and the belief in the superiority of Western civilization" (*Darker Side of Western* 62). Therefore, it questions the superiority of Western beliefs, religious or otherwise, which a colonial perspective automatically assumes in an essentialist manner. Although the characters in the novels are found in the United States, they operate under what Aníbal Quijano calls the *coloniality of power*, a mentality based on essentialist colonial categories of class and race.

Mignolo suggests that in some ways the spiritual option creates a detachment from modernity or a refusal to connect to modern thoughts when it is utilized. Yet I do not necessarily see in these cases a disconnection from modernity but an inclusion of some of its principles. Therefore, the spiritual option allows for the incorporation of pre-modern notions, like the inclusion of Aztec goddesses or revering ancestors, even talking to them, a practice that is still

prevalent in Latin American cultures like that of the Garífunas of Nicaragua³² or Honduras³³ and the incorporation of spiritual ideals that remain mainstream within modernity, like notions from popular Catholicism. These notions blended into contemporary situations may or may not exclude modern thoughts, and may or may not conflict with traditional modern ideas. The important point is that the validity of many of these “pre-modern” notions has been denied and at best kept in the margins in the modern/colonial world. That is why the attempt to give a voice and a space to those excluded ideas, which occurs in the peripheries of the dominant culture, may be regarded as a decolonial use of spirituality.

In both novels, the action that allows for the pursual and expression of the decolonizing potential of spirituality is the process of writing. Celaya, in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, writes her grandmother’s story with her help as she appears to her post-mortem. Yunió, in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, writes Oscar’s story after he has been executed. Spirituality then serves as a catalytic agent in the formation of one’s own story that incorporates supernatural notions in the continuous learning process of living and surviving on the borders.

As mentioned above, in *Caramelo* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the characters are found on the border of two cultures. I would like to emphasize the term border because this location is important to the analysis of their distinct and creative ways of handling the situations in which they find themselves. Mignolo defines the border as any specific location from which one may engage in the task of “displacing hegemonic forms of knowledge into the perspective of the subaltern” (Mignolo “Local Histories” 12). In other words, the precise location

³² See *El culto a los ancestros: en la cosmovisión de los Garífunas de Nicaragua* (1994) por José Idiáquez.

³³ Many have emigrated to the U.S. and experience marginalization from both the U.S. dominant class and the U.S. Latinos (<http://www.npr.org/2015/01/23/379420599/garifuna-a-u-s-honduran-story>).

in which the characters are found becomes a significant point of departure that allows them to accept or reject the values of the mainstream culture. Above all, this location, the border between two cultures, is a space where the perspective of those in the periphery of the dominant culture is expressed.

The “border” locations of the characters in *Caramelo* are mostly found in Chicago, Illinois; San Antonio, Texas; and Mexico City, Mexico. Chicago, a metropolis in the Midwest of the U.S. is the main character’s birthplace. San Antonio, where she later moves and Mexico City, where she visits regularly, are cities that were once part of the Aztec civilization [San Antonio is part of what Chicanos/as call Aztlan, but the Aztec empire did not stretch that north into modern-day Texas] and later Spanish colonial territories. Their history and architecture are constant reminders of these cultural influences. The characters in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are generally located in Patterson, New Jersey; New Brunswick, New Jersey; and Baní, Dominican Republic. Patterson is one of the most populated cities in New Jersey with a large concentration of Hispanics where the main character grows up and lives most of his life until he goes to college in New Brunswick. Baní is located west of the capital of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo in the southern coast of the country. Its name is a reminder of the Taíno culture that once populated the area before the Spaniards arrived in 1492. Although these characters’ locations are not colonies of the United States, their position may be described as colonial. In order to address this paradox, Quijano’s term *coloniality of power* is used to better describe their condition. As mentioned above, this term refers to a social structure and system of values that construct a hierarchical system of power based on essentialist categories, among which race has played a fundamental role. Within such a system, non-Europeans are regarded as inherently inferior and this allows for, and

ideologically justifies, their social, political and economic subordination. In Latin America, this has mostly affected people of indigenous (or mestizo) and African (or mulatto) descent.

Latinos/as in the U.S. occupy spaces dominated by the coloniality of power, which permeates many spheres of their lives, both public and private. Among those, religion and spirituality is particularly important, because religious beliefs often give expression to deeply held cultural and communal values. In the novels discussed in this chapter, we find attempts to decolonize spirituality and attempts to use spirituality as a tool to resist coloniality.

Religion, Spirituality, and the Curse

The concepts in the title of this section will be evaluated as important foundations that lead to the examination of how the characters arrive at their spiritual positions. First, religion presupposes a system of beliefs in a god, gods, or some other metaphysical reality. The word religion brings to mind images from all over the world: Hinduism in India, Buddhism in East Asia, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle East, and Christianity in “the West” (Europe, Australia, and the Americas.) These world religions come in various forms and shapes from the fundamentalist to the secular. Their iconic figures have influenced the arts and architecture. Their dogmas has swayed the way people dress, eat, and keep their local traditions. They are often intertwined with culture to such a degree that it is difficult to separate one from the other.

In the larger spectrum of the world where the characters of the novels in this study are found, religion is a word charged with political connotations that become quickly divisive. Historically, in the name of religion, wars have been fought and many people have been hurt and oppressed. Most recently, “Especially in the post-Cold War world, religion, generally linked to passionate nationalism, appears to be a major factor in many of the planet’s tragic conflicts” (Ellwood and McGraw 2). It is hard to distinguish in the U.S., and abroad, the separation line between religion and nationalism. In countries where the government is overtly tied to the tenets

of Islam, as for example, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, or Morocco, this is expected. However, is not uncommon for some Christians and nationalists of countries that have a separation of church and state, like France, Great Britain, and the U.S., to, discriminate against Muslims. This type of Christianity is highly mixed with exclusivist traditions and nationalism and misses the principles of love and compassion on which the religion was founded.

In the United States, where the characters of the novels in this study reside, the subject of religion is shunned in social conversations. It is considered something personal, not objective, and even irrelevant when logic is being applied. Yet avoiding or ignoring something does not erase it from reality. Over the past two hundred years many of the world confrontations that have led to tragedy have religious justifications. President Bill Clinton describes two examples of this in the introduction to Madeleine Albright's book *The Mighty and the Almighty: Reflections on America, God, and World Affairs* (2006): "In the Balkans, Slobodan Milošević talked much about defending Christian Europe, but his real interest was in using religion and extreme divisiveness to fortify his hold on power. Osama bin Laden poses as a defender of Islam, but his willingness to murder innocents, including Muslims, is not a fair reading of the Quran and is disloyal to the tenets of that faith" (xi). These two deceased, infamous world figures are not the only ones who have stood on their religious foundation to affirm their power-driven decisions. Both the Spanish colonizers, who inflicted pain in the Americas in the 16th century, and U.S. President McKinley, who in the eve of the 20th century used Christianization as a motivation to invade the Philippines³⁴, are examples of a world history deeply rooted on violence and domination justified by religion.

³⁴ In his book *Overthrow* (2006), Kinzer chronicles the events related to the Spanish American War of 1898. He mentions McKinley's deliberation process on whether to just take possession of "enough territory in the Philippines to build a naval base at Manila" (47) or the whole archipelago and how his religious belief system influenced his decision. "In three and a half torturous years of war, 4,374 American soldiers were killed, more than ten times the toll in Cuba. About sixteen thousand guerillas and at least twenty thousand civilians were also killed. Filipinos remember those years as some of the bloodiest in their history. Americans quickly forgot that the war ever happened" (Kinzer 55).

Religion, in general, has three forms of expressions according to sociologist of religion, Joachim Wach (1898-1955): theoretical, practical, and sociological (Ellwood and McGraw 7). These three forms are described in a table labeled “Fundamental Features of Religions” where the theoretical form holds the views that explains broad questions about existence, “How the universe is set up. . . . What the ultimate source and ground of all thing is. . . . Where it all came from. . . . Where it is going. . . . Where we came from. . . . Where we are going. . . . How we know this and how we are helped to get from here to our ultimate destiny” (23). The practical form of religious expression focuses on “what is expected of Humans: Worship, Practices, Behavior . . .” (23). The sociological form of expression gives attention to “how the religion is set up to preserve and implement its teaching and practice; what kind of leadership it has; how it interacts with the larger society” (23). These three forms of expression summarize the general expectations that are found in religion: what it is expected from the deity, from the human, and from the culture at large. These expressions neatly frame the components of religion. Yet, the characters in this study who are found in the margins do not have a neatly packed three step religious process though which they can make sense of their environment. Instead, religion serves as the foundation and expression of an amalgamation of belief systems, specifically, the mixture of Christianity with Indigenous and African beliefs.

In 1492, the Spaniards unified their kingdom by expelling the Muslim, Jewish, and non-Catholic population from their country. As they set out to explore and colonize, they brought that zealous mission of spreading their notions of the Christian religion to the Americas with the same intolerant fervor. According to Enrique Dussel, Christianity was introduced to the Americas in the most contradictory way. “In brief the Indians were victimized in the name of an innocent victim [Jesus,] and for the sake of universal rights. . . . After the Spanish had discovered the geographical

space and conquered bodies geopolitically, as Foucault would say, they needed to control native imagery by replacing it with a new religious world view” (Dussel “Invention” 50). These ideals were interpreted by missionaries but enforced by soldiers, often working in tandem.

The work of colonization was to encompass all areas of life and required full submission from the colonized. From the physical to the ethereal, the colonizers made every effort to impose ideals as they ruled the land. As Dussel suggests, the language difference was a barrier in this effort but furthermore, it was the Spaniards lack of desire to reason with the indigenous people that drove them to an easier route to fulfill their *tabula rasa* mandate: violence (Dussel “Invention” 53-55). The natives had a belief system that followed a logic that they wanted to compare and contrast with the new concepts introduced. They were open to discussion, as Dussel describes it, but the Spaniards were not only impatient, but also lacked the desire to sharpen their apologetic skills in order to peacefully convey their thoughts, at least in the initial stages of the conquest. The riches before their eyes and the imminent urge for power was more of a driving force. Instead, their approach aligned with Ramón Grosfoguel’s depiction mentioned in the previous chapter of justifications for domination and subjugation. Grosfoguel points out that a Eurocentric mindset that decides the best religion or form of government that non-European countries should have, directs their world domination efforts (“Decolonizing Western Universalism” 97). The mentality *du siècle* corresponding to sixteenth-century Spaniards led them to the brutal genocide of many. The ruthlessness of the conquerors reduced the opportunities for any sensible dialogue about religion. The colonized seemingly had no choice but to accept the enforced way of thinking or to die at the hands of their tormentors³⁵.

³⁵ It is important to highlight that these critical remarks about the Spanish conquest, including the use of religion as a justification for violence, echoes voices dating back to the early days of the conquest, like those of Antonio de Montesinos and Bartolomé de las Casas who in spite of their limitations laid out radical critiques of the ideological justifications for the violent destruction of indigenous cultures and lives.

But something else came out from this clash. As a form of survival disguised as surrender, the colonized group incorporated outward notions taken from Christianity. As a form of resistance, they maintained their beliefs and masked them with the new one. “The new syncretistic, hybrid, predominantly mestizo culture was born neither from a freely entered alliance nor from steady cultural synthesis, but from the originary trauma of being dominated. Popular creativity shaped this mixed religion contrary to all the intentions of European missionaries” (Dussel “Invention” 55). The Spaniards’ goal was to erase previous native belief systems. Instead of successfully removing them, a new culture with a new form of faith that combined what was already in place with the forced one, was created. A system of belief is born of those colonized, in a subjugated condition of oppression. As the Spaniards expanded their conquest, the propagation of a unique Latin America’s form of popular Christianity continued to mix in with surviving local traditions.

The account of the introduction and development of the Christian church in Latin America mentioned above is an abbreviated version of a complex history that varies from country to country. Thus, various forms of spirituality were born from the different forms of syncretism of belief systems. This resulted in unique forms of faith depending on the geographical area. For example, the result of the violent enforcement of religion in Mexico resulted in a form of spirituality that differs from that formed of similar events in the Dominican Republic. In this last country, the African descent population and their spiritual background contributed to that difference. The novels selected for this chapter will elucidate examples of this contrast.

The second concept examined in this section is spirituality. The term spirituality like religion has its own set of presumptions that can also have their set of negative or positive connotations. It is a term that assumes a supernatural connection to deities, beings, or persons from an intangible world. Anita De Luna in her article “Popular Religion and Spirituality” uses

the term “to refer to those religious experiences and practices that draw us outside of ourselves to the transcendent” (106). Just a definition like this one may stir either negative or positive feelings depending on an individual’s inclination towards spirituality. I choose to talk about spirituality in this work, which should not be confused with spiritualism³⁶, because spirituality is a term that fits both mainstream religions as well as other belief systems. Often, the term spirituality is also used to refer to a way to bring meaning beyond quotidian trivialities while avoiding the formal features, rituals or dogmas of official religions.

The violent confrontation that brought the Christian religion to America did not diminish the desire for spirituality. Instead, a type of syncretism was able to mask the zeal of people who were forced to believe what their conquerors insisted. From this syncretism and from those traditions passed down generation to generation, various forms of spirituality emerged. Even though the term syncretism includes the combination of more than one belief, it often supposes that it happens in a neutral context. But the context in this study is found within a hierarchical system where the dominant class gets to decide what the dominated believe. This is why the term spirituality is a better fit to describe the belief system of the characters in this study. In the 21st century, traces from Mexican and Dominican beliefs that originated centuries ago can be found in the novels by Cisneros and Díaz. These will serve as basis for the formation of the way spirituality is expressed by Latinos/as in the United States.

Various theologians have looked into the spiritual life of Latinos/as in the U.S., which is a group as widely diverse as its population. The notion that all Hispanics are Catholic continues to dominate the popular culture. This generalization stems from the fact that the majority of Latinos/as self-identify this way. According to the Pew Hispanic Research, “more than three-in-

³⁶ This term refers to more often than not to the communication with the dead. This will be discussed in this chapter as well but I would like it to be subsumed in the more encompassing term: spirituality.

five (62%) say this is their religious affiliation” (Taylor 35). However, in actual practice the spiritual ideas and attitudes of these populations often differ, sometimes in significant ways, from orthodox Catholic beliefs, even when they originate in that religion. The characters that will be analyzed in the following pages are descendants of immigrants from Mexico and the Dominican Republic. As they inherit their respective cultures, they also develop a sense of spirituality proper to their experiences, which corresponds to their specific locations and circumstances (particularly, for the purposes of this study, their colonized situation). It is important to note that according to the article from the Pew Hispanic Research, “Overall, religiosity is highest among immigrant Latinos/as and lowest among those who are third generation” (Taylor 35). This is another reason to shift the focus from religion to spirituality, keeping religion in the background of this work. Spirituality better describes the position of the characters toward their belief systems. For example, characters like Celaya, the narrator of Cisneros’ *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, and third generation character like, Isis, Oscar’s niece in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, who represent future generations in that story.

Another important component of the many religious beliefs reflected in the works analyzed here is the curse. The opposite of praise or blessing, a curse is a malediction that a person receives from a supernatural power. The person under a curse is powerless; only another supernatural power can rid an individual from the curse. Therefore, the curse represents a negative, less attractive side of religion that thwarts believers and encourages skeptics. This idea has been viable in both mainstream as well as indigenous traditions. For example, in the book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible, the fall of men is followed by a curse. According to the third chapter of this first book, there were three characters involved in the event where the fall took place: the snake (representing the Evil One), the woman, and the man. They were cursed in the order in which they

were involved in their act of disobedience to God. First, the snake was cursed with an “enmity” between it, the woman, and her offspring. Second, the woman is cursed with “painful labor” when giving birth. Finally, the man is cursed with “painful toil” when working the ground. Therefore, the concept of the curse has long been part of worldviews or cosmologies since the earliest recorded time. In the Bible, the supernatural power of Christ liberates humanity from the curse. Other Western belief systems like Greek or Roman mythology adhere to the concept that gods who are unpredictable and have many of the same characteristics as humans in their temperament or disposition may respond to mortals in anger and curse them in various ways, as opposed to a cause and effect scenario like the one posed in Genesis.

In African religions, like the Yoruba, while a curse is a well-accepted notion, there is a departure from a monotheistic foundation to one that has many deities or orishas. Yoruba beliefs have had a significant impact in the Caribbean, where they were propagated mainly through syncretistic systems such as Santería, which is practiced in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic. “Unlike the God of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, the orishas are morally ambivalent – more like humans, or like the gods of Greek and Roman myth. In Santería there is not one being to personify the ideal good. . . . They can be tender and loving; they can also willingly bring about great suffering” (De La Torre 47-50).

The Afro-Cuban writer, Heriberto Feraudy Espino provides an example of a curse found in the Yoruba religion. He relates a story from the Oyó Empire where one of the kings, Awole, before ending his life, cursed his people by wishing slavery on them.

“Cuéntase que antes de poner fin a su vida, Awole salió al patio del palacio con el rostro ceñudo y decidido, llevando en sus manos un plato de barro y tres flechas, se detuvo de pronto e hinchando el pecho disparó una flecha hacia el norte, otra al sur y la otra hacia el oeste a la vez que gritaba: ‘que mis maldiciones caigan sobre ustedes por vuestra deslealtad y desobediencia, por ello deseo que sus hijos los desobedezcan... y que sean todos ustedes

llevados como esclavos hacia las diferentes direcciones en que disparé mis flechas’.” (Feraudy 41).

As indicated above, Awole cursed his people’s disloyalty and disobedience by wishing them to be taken as slaves in the north, south, and west. Years of war followed this account.

This example of a curse based on Yoruba beliefs is important when we remember that Yoruba culture, as indicated above, had an important impact in the Caribbean, where it was intertwined with the tradition of Catholicism imposed by slave owners. The concept of the spell is emphasized in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, where the curse affects the characters’ spirituality. The concept of the supernatural is attached to malevolent forces and the impotence that humans experience against them. This sense of powerlessness is found in the culture of the Dominican Republic under the tyranny of General Trujillo, and Díaz’s novel represents him as a the manifestation of a curse and the maximum expression of evil.

In sum, then, religion is like a large vessel that serves as the overarching home of spirituality, but it cannot contain it. In the hands of dehumanizing agents religion has been a site of oppression and colonial domination in Spanish America and the Caribbean, as well as a site of resistance and anti-colonial struggles. In the novels studied here religious practices range from formal institutional forms to fluid popular beliefs in curses and miraculous interventions. Throughout all of these manifestations, spirituality as a search for meaning, and as struggle for liberation from oppressive circumstance, recurs as a dominant theme in the texts. The characters’ spiritual search always takes place within, and often as a challenge to, the marginal positions to which they have been relegated by the dominant culture. In their spiritual struggle, the characters always position themselves as subjects in what we might best call, with Mignolo, the border.

Latino/a Spirituality in the U.S. and Spiritual Mestizaje

Because the characters are exploring their circumstances in the United States, it is important to take a look at how Latinos/as function spiritually in that country. Many U.S. Latino/a theologians have emphasized the importance of location in the formation of theological concepts, and in the individual understanding and expression of spirituality. These Christian theologians understand the history of the Catholic Church and Protestants³⁷ alike, but their emphasis is not so much on how the leaders of the church propagate ideas and dogmas, but on looking at the people and their relationship to the actual Christian belief system. For example, if Christianity is represented in a diagram of an organizational chart where there is a leader at the top who holds the message of the gospel, what the masses receive in the bottom are diluted versions. Latino/a theologians attempt to shift the focus from the bottom up. This way they are able to concentrate on looking at the masses, their location, the relevance of this message to them, and the way they make use of it in a day-to-day basis. Of course, the masses in this case are the Latinos/as in the U.S. The location is one of marginality in a country where they are not part of the dominant class and often purposely excluded from it.

Scholars and theologians like Connecticut born Puerto Rican Edwin David Aponte, Cuban born Miguel A. De La Torre, Guatemalan-Canadian Néstor Medina, and the late Cuban Ada María Isasi-Díaz (1943-2012) among others, explore how Latinos/as engage in spirituality in the United States. There are a few points of convergence or of general agreement among these academics. One is that Latinos/as, as a large group, represent a culture that is not homogenous. This is why Aponte and De La Torre argue for a need for “cultural competence [which] entails working toward effective cross-cultural communication, engagement with real communities, and a deeper

³⁷ Term used to describe non-Catholic Christians.

involvement with multiple bodies of knowledge and behavior” (7). Any attempt to engage with Latinos/as must take into account their border position between at least two cultures. This is relevant here because the border position of the novels examined thus far reveal how Latino/a spirituality is shaped while challenging notions of cultural competence that stress folkloric elements.

A focus on those cultures and traditions precludes an approach that imposes on them the theoretical frames on which traditional theology may have been founded. This is the second point of agreement that the approaches of these theologians tend to have in common. They all opt for focusing on the bottom of the chart described above and delve into practical aspects of faith, “recognizing that all theologies arise out of some particular cultural context, *teología en conjunto* with its intentional emphasis on the value of cooperative relational work and commitment to community seeks to add its voice to wider discussions, all the while trying to be faithful to the perspective and experiences of the diverse Hispanic or Latino/a communities in the United States” (Aponte and De La Torre 7). Becoming community oriented derives from the reality of the culture that Hispanics share in the U.S. This cultural context is found in “people’s reality of oppression, marginalization, and praxis of resistance” (Medina ix). This idea that there are communities on the margins of society that relate to each other, which are often perceived as one but which are, in fact, quite varied cannot be disregarded when looking into the novels in this study, where we can see the specific idiosyncrasies from the cultures they represent: Mexican and Dominican.

As these theologians acknowledge the location of marginality of Latinos/as in the U.S. and the diverse population that they represent, they give special attention to the actual reality that is being lived out by this community and its relation to spirituality, “Spirituality, therefore, has to do with a reflective life, one in which we take time to be conscious of our motives and of the forces

that move us or paralyze us” (Isasi-Díaz *La Lucha Continues* 26). These forces can be rooted not only in the spiritual realm but in the environment in which the individual is found. One of the aspects Ada María Isasi-Díaz likes to emphasize is the role of spirituality in the quotidian; this is the category of “*lo cotidiano* as the main site for struggle, as the site that reveals oppression at the same time it illumines the preferred future” (Isasi-Díaz *La Lucha Continues* 17). Her point of departure is the struggle Latinos/as in the U.S. face on a daily basis. She encounters “people who believe so strongly that the divine is with them and walks with them daily. This belief sustains their daily struggles for survival” (Isasi-Díaz *La Lucha Continues* 27). Looking at the daily struggles is pertinent to the characters in this study – as it will be shown below.

In particular, the struggles of Latinas, as opposed to their male counterparts, are at the center of Isasi-Díaz’s work. She has developed a *mujerista* theology, using this term in order to make a distinction between her point of view and feminist European notions. Isasi-Díaz takes the reality lived by these Hispanic women and turns to a Christian perspective that maintains that “justice is a constitutive element of the Gospel message” (Isasi-Díaz *La Lucha Continues* 1) and therefore an integral part of a viable Christian faith. As mentioned before, the point of contention is a society where European born notions are valued higher than indigenous ones, and the faith spread by Europeans, Christianity, has been made palatable to the taste and customs of those in the mainstream, not those on the border.

Outside the spiritual context, *mestizaje* alludes to the mixing of races and cultures that characterizes the great majority of individuals in Latin America whose heritage comes from the union of Spanish, African, and indigenous peoples, among others. Another term for this would be *mulataje* but in this work I will maintain the term *mestizaje* as it is used in spiritual context and tends to challenge the hegemonic thought. In the context of spirituality, according to Aponte and

De La Torre, the emphasis on *mestizaje* originated with the theologian Virgilio Elizondo, and “is representative of the border reality that characterizes the Latino/a experience of being people ‘in between’” (18). When looking for a model within the Christian faith, they turn to “A Galilean, Jesus [who] was not born at the center of Jewish life and society . . . but on the border” (Aponte and De La Torre 19), which facilitates the idea of solidarity among those in the fringes of the centers of power. The connection of *mestizaje* to that biblical context is appealing to a Latino/a culture that can relate to the constant contact with many cultures within any looming empire, similar to the case Jesus encountered two thousand years ago. The term spiritual *mestizaje* also refers to the mix of religious ideas that are part of the cultural legacy of Latinos/as in the U.S., and which include Christianity (with its own history before the conquest of the Americas), Indigenous and African elements, and other religious influences absorbed in the United States.

The late Chicana author and theorist, Gloria Anzaldúa calls the amalgamation of spiritual notions mentioned above, spiritual *mestizaje*, “where I take from all different cultures—for instance, from the cultures of Latin America, the people of color, and also the Europeans. [...] With the spiritual *mestizaje* there is a component of folk Catholicism in it. [...] ...as it has a lot of indigenous elements in there” (239). Just like she combines English and Spanish when speaking and writing as a result of living on the border of two cultures, Anzaldúa also blends components of religious aspects represented in those cultures.

Theresa Delgadillo expands on this concept in her book *Spiritual Mestizaje: Religion, Gender, Race, and Nation in Contemporary Chicana Narrative* (2011). In Delgadillo’s work, spirituality is examined as a *saber del margen*, a form of knowledge that represents the reality found in marginalized individuals. This marginalization resembles the one encountered by the characters in the novels. As explained above, during the process of colonization, the spirituality

of Native Americans, Africans and their mixed descendants of Latin America was also targeted. In the past few centuries, it has been defined by hegemonic powers that promote either secularity, or a politically acceptable form of spirituality. This either/or approach does not fit the way the characters in *Caramelo* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* obtain and express their views on the metaphysical.

According to Delgado, “Spirituality denotes, on one hand, a connection to the sacred, a recognition of worlds or realities beyond those immediately visible and respect for the sacred knowledge that these bring and, on the other hand, a way of being in the world, a language of communication and interrelation embodying this understanding and one’s response to it” (Delgado 4). This definition adequately expresses how spirituality is exercised by the characters of these novels. It provides a way to transform their present conditions parting from a non-Eurocentric perspective. The geography may not be exactly the same for all characters but their circumstances, as a result of not only colonization by Spain but also U.S. intervention, put them in a specific location: the border between two cultures. The main characters of Cisneros’ and Díaz’s novels, who are constantly traveling from the United States to Mexico or the Dominican Republic, skillfully function maneuver between the two cultures.

As it was mentioned in the Introduction, Enrique Dussel offers a model of transmodernity in his description of what liberation entails for an individual who is found on the periphery of society. Walter Dignolo refers to border thinking, an alternative to the colonial mentality, which implies other forms of knowledge. Both Enrique Dussel and Walter Dignolo agree that the term “modern” has consistently been deployed with Eurocentric connotations that exclude non-European forms of thought. Among possible forms of knowledge that have been excluded or suppressed by dominant Western thought, marginal religious discourses may play a significant

role. Even concepts such as “the curse,” whose usefulness may not be immediately evident, may be deployed by colonized subjects in order to highlight, and therefore begin to handle, negative aspects of their historical situation. In this chapter, the religion that is emphasized is Christianity, since that is the religion that predominates in the novels. The spirituality that will be examined blends notions from Christianity with beliefs that have been excluded by both official Christian churches and secular modernity, but which remain culturally and politically significant for many Mexicans and Dominicans. In the novels, we see a progression that may seem like it is breaking away from Christianity, yet accommodating some of its values. That affirmation, which does not exclude the incorporation of other beliefs, asserts the position of these texts on the border.

Spirituality in Cisneros’ Novel: Blended Beliefs in Mexico, Inherited Trauma, and In-Betweenness

Sandra Cisneros in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento: a novel* (2002), relates the story of a Mexican American family. In this section, as various parts of the novel are described, there will be a close look into the main character’s spirituality as it is influenced by the beliefs of her ancestors and her environment. The main character, Celaya, who is also the first person narrator, conveys the story of her upbringing, and her family. This novel is divided in three main parts. Each part reveals the three important aspects that impact her spirituality. First, the blending of Aztec and Catholic beliefs in a specific location, Tepeyac, accentuates her spiritual mestizaje. Second, her secular environment at home in the United States. Third, in this section one could draw parallels between her grandmother’s in-between state, not alive, not completely gone, and Celaya’s own in-between experiences as an adolescent managing two cultures. These experiences that share the same location, Tepeyac, ultimately lead her to faith and family.

The three main parts of the novel revolve around the life of her grandmother, a woman who in the first part of the novel is presented as a terrible person, an antagonist. Celaya refers to her as

the Awful Grandmother, an older lady who lacks patience for nonsense. In the second part of the novel the Awful Grandmother has a name: Soledad. She is revealed to be a woman whose options and possibilities were greatly limited when her mother's life was cut short. It is in this part that Celaya begins overtly writing her grandmother's story and offering insights into the circumstances that led her to eventually become an Awful Grandmother. The third part of the novel is where Celaya bares her own story. She examines her circumstances as she discusses and debates with her grandmother. Celaya's spiritual development is exposed through these conversations.

The second part of the novel marks the story of Celaya's ancestors as they share stories that illustrate their rich indigenous background. The narration begins with a one sentence paragraph (Cisneros 91) dictated by the spirit of her dead grandmother, a factor that is not revealed until a few chapters before the end of the novel (Cisneros 409). This paragraph describes how this character intertwines history, and her own story, with pre-modern spiritual notions in a bilingual language.

Once in the land of *los nopales*, before all the dogs were named after Woodrow Wilson, during that epoch when people still danced *el chotís*, *el cancán*, and *el vals* to a *violín*, *violoncelo*, and *salterio*, at the nose of a hill where a goddess appeared to an Indian, in that city founded when a serpent-devouring eagle perched on a cactus, beyond the twin volcanoes that were once prince and princess, under the sky and on the earth lived the woman Soledad and the man Narciso (Cisneros 91).

This paragraph demonstrates the ways in which U.S. interventionism, Spanish cultural influence, spiritual notions, the formation of Mexico, and the legend of the twin volcanoes, which pre-dates the 15th century of the Common Era, are all part of the story that will lead to a woman's journey

and legacy in the 21st century. This paragraph, at the beginning of the second part of the novel, serves as a link that connects directly with the beginning of the novel and the third part. The connection to the beginning of the novel is found when Celaya narrates a trip to Mexico City to visit her grandparents, including her Little Grandfather, Narciso, who tells her a story passed down through oral tradition about descendants of the Aztec monarchy.

Popocatépetl and Iztaccíhuatl . . . the families of Izta and Popo hated each other, they had to keep their love a secret. But then something happened, I forget what, except I know he killed her. And then watched her die, he was so overcome with the beauty he knelt down and wept. And then they both turned into volcanoes. And there they are . . . One lying down, and one hunched over watching her. There. That's how you know it's true (Cisneros 57).

This story makes an impression on Celaya as her grandfather explains to her “. . . that's how Mexicans love, I suppose” (Cisneros 57). By linking her grandparents' love story (and therefore, her own personal story) to a pre-conquest myth that is also grounded in the topography of a land that would eventually be conquered by the Spaniards, and suffer U.S. interventions, Celaya performs a multilayered identity construction process that characterizes many Latinos/as in the U.S. An essential aspect of that process is the incorporation the spiritual dimensions and perspectives of those previous cultures (here, the myth of the Aztec volcanoes/lovers), which are adapted to the spiritual needs of the new space and situation in the U.S. (as experienced, in this case, by Celaya).

The opening paragraph of the second part of the novel also connects to the third part through its mention of the images shown in the emblem of the Mexican flag where the serpent is devoured by an eagle. This image has its roots in the story of the foundation of Mexico City by the Aztecs. Gloria Anzaldúa offers this interpretation of the image: “The eagle symbolizes the spirit (as the sun, the father); the serpent symbolizes the soul (as the earth, the mother). . . . The symbolic sacrifice of the serpent to the ‘higher’ masculine powers indicate that the patriarchal

order had already vanquished the feminine and matriarchal order in pre-Columbian America” (27). The idea that the snake symbolizes a goddess that was eventually defeated by the Aztec empire is incorporated into Cisneros story in the title of Part Three, “The Eagle and the Serpent or My Mother and My Father” (Cisneros 233). However, Anazaldúa’s reading is inverted, because Celaya sees her mother who was born in the United States as the eagle and her dad who was born in Mexico as the serpent. She explains how she thought “the eagle and the serpent on the Mexican flag were the United States and Mexico fighting. And then, for an even longer time afterward, I thought of the eagle and the serpent as the story of Mother and Father” (Cisneros 235). Once again the progression and blending of the two countries are illustrated in the associations made within a family that is spread between both of them and whose members (particularly younger members like Celaya) have ties to both. Moreover, and of great significance of our topic, whether the eagle devouring the serpent invokes the Aztecs conquering the valley of Mexico, patriarchal culture overcoming matriarchal culture, or the U.S. eagle forcefully taking over about half of the Mexican territory (to which we might add, the conquest of Mexico by Spain), what is clear is that the “blending” of cultures that Celaya incarnates is imbricated in a long history of conquest and dispossession. The fact that Celaya participates in two cultures does not erase the fact that her location is marked by coloniality, as it is the result of violent interventions.

The quote above, “at the nose of a hill where a goddess appeared to an Indian,” explicitly presents a spiritual pre-modern notion in her mention of the goddess appearing to the Indian (Cisneros 91). One of the most important and fascinating stories of religious appropriation is found in the well-known story of the apparition of the Virgin of Guadalupe to a young indigenous man, Juan Diego. He described her appearance, not as the white matriarch that Europeans had long depicted but as a darker skinned woman similar to him. She talked to him about her son, Jesus,

and about goodness and compassion. It was at this place and moment when the Catholic faith became Mexican, not European. Images of the Virgin were erected and venerated in Mexico and all around the world. Yet Celaya does not mention at that particular moment the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is venerated as a holy mother in the Catholic faith. She mentions a *goddess*. That is certainly contrary to the dogma of the church, so the question becomes who is this goddess who met the Indian? The answer lies in the syncretistic nature of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which includes elements of a goddess from the Aztec pantheon, from a religion that the Spanish conquest did its best to eliminate. At the end of the novel, Cisneros renders a *Chronology* with a list of important events starting with the year 1519 and ending with the year of publication of the novel 2002. In this last year she offers the following information:

“2002 - Pope John Paul II canonizes Juan Diego as a saint despite controversy over whether Juan Diego ever existed. Some state that he was simply a story told to the Indians in order to convert them from their devotion to Tonantzín, the Aztec fertility goddess” (Cisneros 439).

This note further exposes the pervasiveness of a belief in a goddess who is interchangeable with Mary, thus giving a fluidity to Catholic notions and pre-modern beliefs. The difficulty with this assertion is the lack of historical documents that would support the idea that Tonantzín is in fact the goddess that Juan Diego encountered³⁸. Louise Burkhart states that the Nahua people believed in the Virgin Mary before the legend of Guadalupe appeared in the mid-1600s. In other words, the story of Juan Diego is not the reason the indigenous believed in the Virgin but it is the result of the evangelization by Catholic missionaries who were able to immerse themselves in Nahua culture. Burkhart explains that the Virgin’s characteristic of compassion, “a penitential

³⁸ In contrast, see Stafford Poole’s *Guadalupan Controversies* that traces the origins of the Mexican devotion to the Virgin of Guadalupe to the works of Spanish missionaries in Mexico Luis Laso De La Vega’s 1649 *Nican Mopohua*, a Nahuatl narration about the Virgin’s apparition and Miguel Sánchez’s Baroque publication of 1648. Poole questions if one account was based on the other or vice versa (4) and lists all the literature that he could find that links this story to Spanish missionaries and not to a previous Nahua tradition.

behavior” unites her with humans like her and becomes a connection to the divine (149). The result is forgiveness of sins, liberation from demons, improved health, and rewards in the afterlife, compelling reasons that allowed the Virgin Mary to be incorporated into Nahuatl’s devotional lives (Burkhart 150).

Cisneros may have erroneously implied that the indigenous people maintained their pre-Columbian beliefs and disguised them with a cult to Guadalupe³⁹. But what she so importantly maintains is the prevalence of the Virgin’s national importance in Mexican culture. In an earlier book *Our Lady of Guadalupe*, Stafford Poole highlights how Guadalupe as a national symbol has been appropriated by even opposing parties.

“For Hidalgo and his ragtag army Indians bent on revenge for centuries of oppression, as for Emiliano Zapatas *sureños* fighting for land and liberty, Guadalupe symbolized liberation and native rights. For other Guadalupe has had various meanings: indigenism, religious syncretism, respect for cultural autonomy, the struggle for human dignity, or conversely submission and subjugation, whether of Indians or women. Most frequently Guadalupe is associated with *mexicanidad*” (Poole, “Our Lady,” 4).

Whether Guadalupe is an invention to validate Catholicism or to disguise Aztecs beliefs, it is certainly a symbol formed in the border of two cultures. A painting of la Virgen de Guadalupe in Celaya’s house is a reminder of this encounter where native notions and European’s meet. “This Guadalupe [was] purchased from a Villita vendor in front of the very hill where the Indian Madonna made her miraculous apparition, . . . ascended into heavens via Aeroméxico, descended, and was delivered to our crowded Chicago flat several years ago, and, at the Grandmother’s request, hung above Father and Mother’s bed” (Cisneros 312-313). The juxtaposition “Indian Madonna” is an example of the blended spirituality that Celaya has inherited.

³⁹ According to Gloria Anzaldúa, “her name was *María Coatlalopeuh*. *Coatl* is the Nahuatl word for serpent. *Lopeuh* means ‘the one who has dominion over serpents.’ . . . Because *Coatlalopeuh* was homophonous to the Spanish *Guadalupe*, the Spanish identified her with the dark Virgin, *Guadalupe*, patroness of West Central Spain.

As Anzaldúa indicates, “Today, la *Virgen de Guadalupe* is the single most potent religious, political and cultural image of the Chicano/*mexicano*. She, like my race, is a synthesis of the old world and the new, of the religion and culture of the two races in our psyche, the conquerors and the conquered” (Anzaldúa 52). Thus, the Virgin of Guadalupe, like not only blends European and Mexican religious notions but also manages to blend religion and culture in a way that is hard to untangle.⁴⁰ Celaya, a twentieth century teenager, receives this image as a legacy of her culture and she acknowledges it as such, even though that acknowledgement does not necessarily entail spiritual devotion to the Virgin, it provides a sense of identity and closeness with her Mexican heritage.

Moreover, as Anzaldúa’s words also emphasizes that the Virgin of Guadalupe has not only served as a synthesizing symbol for Mexicans, but also as an emblem of cultural and political resistance, a rousing call to arms that has led the way in many battles, from its use by Miguel Hidalgo, as mentioned above, in the early independence movement to César Chávez’s United Farm Workers marches. Thus, the Virgin of Guadalupe elicits not simply cultural identity among Mexicans and Chicanos, but also political resistance to multiple forms of imperial interventionism and colonial domination. This was true among indigenous people in Mexico who were converted to Catholicism by Spanish conquerors, and among Chicanos and other Latinos/as who still inhabit spaces marked by coloniality in the U.S. The Guadalupe image invokes a continuity of struggles, while at the same time acquiring different meanings and connotations depending on the specific space, and the specific struggle, in which it is deployed.

⁴⁰ More about the Virgin of Guadalupe as a cultural icon can be seen in Néstor Medina’s book *Mestizaje: (re)mapping Race, Culture, And Faith In Latina/o Catholicism* (2009) and about the Virgin’s role in the experience of Latinos in the U.S. is found in Aponte, Edwin David and Miguel A. De La Torre, eds. *Handbook of Latina/o Theologies* (2006).

In the second part of the novel, Celaya does not write the story of her grandmother alone, she writes it with the help from the spirit of her dead grandmother. This communication between the dead and the living is in itself an important tradition that marks the distance between Celaya and the mainstream beliefs of the society in which she lives. In actuality, there is a belief among U.S. Hispanas/Latinas, according to Isasi-Díaz that praying to specifically one's dead *abuelita* or *La Virgen de Guadalupe*, among other saints, will give you access to God because "they share in the divine as *alteri Christi* – other Christs" ("La Lucha Continues" 259). But this is not how Celaya and her grandmother communicate. Celaya does not pray to her grandmother in order to access God. She does not appear to need to receive and be granted any help or approval from God. In contrast, Celaya is there to help the dead.

Once again, the character of Celaya goes beyond the religious traditions of the modern era into pre-Columbian beliefs. Originally, the Aztecs had a celebration dedicated to the goddess of the underworld, Mictecacihuatl, held to make peace with the eventuality of death. As part of the colonization, Spaniards moved this celebration to the second day of November, to align with All Hallows Eve and All Saints Day. The mention of the goddess is removed, even though she remains in the symbol of the skeleton still used on that day. The result of the blended Aztec celebration to the modern Day of the Dead is an important tradition where there is a visible mix of cultures and a tangible solidarity and commitment from those alive to those who have passed on is affirmed.

As Celaya writes, her grandmother continuously interrupts her. Her grandmother attempts to make Celaya write a more palatable story, one that would portray her as a desirable protagonist. Celaya does not always comply but continues her recording of her story in a back and forth dialogue with her grandmother. "Don't you think we need a love scene here of Narciso and I together? ... Just something in the story to show how happy we were? ... really, I mean before he

met the so-and-so?" (Cisneros 170-171), are examples of some of her grandmother's interjections in the story.

Celaya's communication with her dead grandmother emphasizes a way to examine reality highly influenced by a cosmology in which reaching out to one's ancestors functions as a fundamental aspect. This is significant because the lens through which reality is perceived shifts from the dominant categories of mainstream society to a marginal point of view located in what we might call, with Mignolo, the border. Celaya's ability to communicate with her dead grandmother could be related to what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as *la facultad*.

"*La facultad* is the capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface. . . . Those who are pounced on the most have it strongest – the females, the homosexuals of all races, the dark skinned, the outcast, the persecuted, the marginalized, the foreign. . . . The shift in perception deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul)" (Anzaldúa 60-61).

Anzaldúa claims that this is more prominent and better developed in those who are ostracized from society. Those who have been oppressed are prone to grow this extra sense and are inclined to perceive the world in more than one dimension. Clearly, part of what Anzaldúa means here is that what the "facultad" is able to see is *precisely* those deep structures of inequality, exclusion and exploitation that remain "invisible" in everyday society, because they have been normalized by dominant power structures. Celaya fits Anzaldúa's description of a person with *la facultad* as a young woman who is constantly treated as a foreigner in her native land, the United States of America. In order to negotiate her sense of self, she must go beyond the European prescribed reason or institutionalized belief systems that have failed her.

Through the contact with her dead Grandmother, Celaya is able to narrate stories that begin before she was born and end with her birth. Her narrative strategy emphasizes the significance of

her ancestral history and its impact on her own memory. Taking the spiritual context aside, this can be seen as an example of what Marianne Hirsh would call post-memory. Post-memory are “...inherited memories...by our ancestors [of]...events [that] happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present” (Hirsch 5)⁴¹. One of the important aspects of the post-memory is its relation to inherited trauma. A group of individuals who have experienced traumatic events passes those stories to future generations with the same or similar intensity and emotion that were felt when the events occurred. Acknowledging the pain and hurt of the stories that shaped people’s lives helps those persons in deciphering how they arrived at the place they are and why. The history of Mexican Americans who became foreigners in their own land as a result of the war with the U.S. in the 19th century points to a people who in the 21st century live with the remnants of this hereditary ordeal. Celaya explains how this part of the story that she is writing happened when she “was dirt . . . Before my time. . . . Here is how I imagine the stories happened, then. When I was sparkling and twirling and somersaulting happily in the air” (Cisneros 89). When she describes her painless, happy non-existence when she was dirt in the air, she is able to detach for a moment from the reality of the historic burden she carries when she is alive. As she constructs her-self, she cannot leave the memories of her ancestors behind.

Hirsh sees post-memory as a consequence of trauma (6). This is important to this work because the point that I want to convey is that Celaya’s traumatic history, like the history of those ancestors to who she gives voice through her writing, is not simply individual or even family

⁴¹ Taken from her book *The Generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture after the Holocaust* (2012), “To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. This is, I believe, the structure of post-memory and the process of its generation” (5).

trauma. It is a trauma closely linked to the history of U.S. interventionism in Mexico⁴². In her text, she mentions how her family⁴³ “moved up north to that horrible country with its barbarian ways,” referring to the U.S., as she introduces her grandmother’s story “Before my Awful Grandmother became awful, before she became my father’s mother” (Cisneros 91). The story of how her grandparents met and began their lives together informs her perspective on how spiritual traditions, war, death, and political instability can affect future generations.

In the chapter titled *A Godless Woman My Mother*, she describes that in her family she had the freedom to “believe or not believe whatever the nuns and priests teach us at school” (Cisneros 311). The value instilled in her by her mother at home was to observe and choose the parts of religion that suit her reality. This is important because this reality is lived in the U.S. The American culture presents that freedom to choose as one of its core values. This value is adopted by Celaya’s U.S. born mother who has passed down not only her Mexican heritage but her interpretation of how to use this heritage within a culture that portrays itself as less restrictive and more permissive in reference to religion. The presumed contrast would be with Mexico’s more prescriptive Catholic discourse, which is voiced regularly by her Grandmother. Celaya confronts this rhetoric in the U.S. where she operates in an almost totally secular environment. However, as we will see below, the irony is that it is the U.S., the “freer” country, the one that places Celaya and other Chicanos in positions of social and economic marginality. As a result of those conditions, these Mexican Americans may use their freedom to choose once again the Catholic faith that they associate with pride and dignity in their identities as Mexicans. But those Catholic beliefs, assumed

⁴² Chapter 2 discusses the historical intervention of U.S. in Mexico. Throughout the novels it is evident that U.S. interventionism opens the door for the influx of immigrants in the U.S. from the same countries that they invaded in the first place.

⁴³ For example, it is explained in the novel that the U.S. invasion in 1914 was the greatest push for her grandfather, Narciso, to go to Chicago in order to save his life (Cisneros 134).

and displayed in the context of political and cultural battles in the U.S., take a different meaning than Catholicism as practiced in Mexico.

Most of Celaya's Catholic knowledge comes from the school she attends in Chicago. Her experiences there lead her to associate the images and symbols of this faith with intolerance and animosity. Celaya divulges how the nuns hit their students with wood crucifix when she mentions, "...what sticks is the stick God stinging across the palm of our hands" (311). Within her upbringing in the U.S., where the Catholic faith is not as mainstream as Protestantism, her notion of God is tainted by the use of this important symbol of the faith as a tool for discipline. Another way she has experienced God in school is, "every month when we pay our tuition late, the horrible God of shame" (311). According to this statement, the Catholic school, as an institution representing God dispenses shame instead of grace to those families who can barely afford tuition. This shame turns into blatant discrimination in her experience with the Catholic school in San Antonio, Texas.

However, this picture gets complicated when the family moves to Texas and her parents insist that she would attend a Catholic school that they clearly could not afford. In order to get the school to lower the tuition for them, her father appeals to the priest claiming how good a Catholic he is, to which Celaya as the narrator clarifies, "Not true. Father never goes to church" (Cisneros 319). He also appeals to his roots as a Mexican by mentioning the Virgen of Guadalupe in order to prove that he is really telling the truth. He believes that Mexican and Catholic are synonymous and he presents his arguments to the priest as such. Later, "At home, all through dinner Father brags,--You see, you just have to haggle" (Cisneros 320). This conversation exposes her father's nonchalant spirituality. His notion of Catholicism is more like a patrimony that he can utilize to his advantage, in this case to negotiate a school better than the public schools in the area. Their

economic situation requires such negotiations. But equally important, Celaya's father's attitude also reveal how the value and significance of religion and spirituality are always fluid. It is not simply a case of Mexicans that are attached to their Catholic roots, but rather of subjects of historical colonial exclusions that recur to religion in their need to respond to concrete situations—in this case, the need to afford a good school for Celaya.

To help them afford the school, the priest is able to find various jobs for her brothers. Celaya was also offered a job as a housekeeper's assistant in order to offset the cost of school (Cisneros 320). All of a sudden, she has to do a work that she is not even expected to do at home, plus she has to ride the bus home from work by herself at dark. Her first and only day in this job is a terrible experience. When she protests at home she is told not to worry, she won't have to do this work again. Her parents tell her to let the priest know that she is not allowed to do this work, "Doesn't he realize we are Mexican? You tell him I refuse to allow you that maid's job. You don't ever have to go back there" (Cisneros 322). Here, Mexican traditional values about the place of a young girl in the household are displayed, like the father's Catholicism before, in an attempt to respond to an exploitative situation.

Realizing that she is Mexican is part of the conundrum that Celaya faces. In her home this means pride in a culture that comes from ancient civilizations that survived invasions and wars and that still stand strong. Outside her home Celaya finds herself in a situation similar to the one her Grandmother experienced when she moved to Chicago where she was not welcomed in the circles where she aspired to be. Being Mexican then has two different meanings. The standards and the pride of being Mexican at home do not match the economic situation of her family and the stereotypical discrimination she faces outside the home. In that regard, one might argue that as a

younger character, she is more keenly aware than her father of the prejudices that surround Mexicanness, however proclaimed, within the U.S.

As the only girl and youngest child of seven, Celaya grows up moving from apartment to apartment in various rental spaces in Chicago. “There’s never anywhere we’ve lived that’s had enough bedrooms for all of us” (Cisneros 301). She does not have her own space. Sometimes she has to share the bed or couch or cot with her brothers. “We’ve slept just about everywhere except the floor, which Father forbids. – Sleeping on the floor, like going barefoot, is low class, he says. Then adds, -- Do you want people to think we’re poor?” (Cisneros 301). She is told that they are not poor, she is taught that there are lower classes than hers and she is made aware of the prejudices her family has against others. For example, her Grandmother points out how Mexican Americans including her own grandchildren do not speak correct Spanish by using a derogatory term, *pochos*⁴⁴, to describe them. “With their *pochos* Spanish nobody will understand what they’re saying” (Cisneros 257)⁴⁵. Her grandmother makes a distinction between Mexicans from Mexico who would be in a higher social class in relation to Mexican Americans based on their ability to express themselves in Spanish. Her Grandmother also openly discriminates against African Americans, “...the Jackson Five [poster] had to go to make room for the Grandmother, who couldn’t understand why anyone would want pictures of *negros*” (Cisneros 288). Mexican Americans and African Americans are less than desirable people group in the eyes of the Grandmother who in this novel, dead or alive, continuously represents the attitudes of Mexican elites (including strict Catholic orthodoxy in religious matters).

⁴⁴ “Words distorted by English are known as anglicism or *pochismos*. The *pochos* is an anglicized Mexican or American of Mexican origins who speaks Spanish with an accent characteristic of North Americans and who distorts and reconstructs the language according to the influence of English” (Anzaldúa 78).

⁴⁵ Chapter 5 of this thesis will expand on this topic looking at the use of bilingualism from various angles, for example, the Grandmother’s point of view, “They mumbled in their atrocious *pochos* Spanish with English words minced in” (Cisneros 290).

On the other hand, it is also by observing her Grandmother that Celaya realizes the prejudice against her. When her grandmother moved to Chicago, Celaya was able to witness her grandmother's shock in realizing that in that part of the United States there is no prestige in being Mexican.

“Something happened when they crossed the border. Instead of being treated like the royalty they were, they were after all Mexicans, they were treated like Mexicans, which was something that altogether startled the Grandmother. In the neighborhoods she could afford, she couldn't stand being associated with these low-class Mexicans, but in the neighborhoods she couldn't, her neighbors couldn't stand being associated with her” (Cisneros 289).

This places her family in sociopolitical situation that restrict them from fully being accepted or highly regarded in the mainstream society. When the family moves to San Antonio, Texas, she hopes for better living arrangements and other opportunities. This does not materialize. Her Grandmother is living with them at this time. In Texas, her Grandmother is given the bedroom that would have belonged to Celaya. She ponders, “To tell the truth, nobody knows what I want, and I hardly know myself. A bathroom where I can soak in the tub and not have to come out when somebody's banging the door. A lock on my door. A door. A room. A bed” (Cisneros 315).

The examples above reveal in concrete ways Celaya's marginalized socioeconomic and sociopolitical position in the larger U.S society and even Mexico where she would be in the margins of society as well. Celaya spends her teenage years trying to see where she fits in these systems. And it is in these attempts that spirituality begins to play an important role for her, as it does for many of her people. Her communication with her dead Grandmother gives her purpose. As she helps her grandmother, her grandmother is able to vindicate herself and become understood the way she was not able to be while she was alive. Throughout this interaction, Celaya transcends a world of materiality and finds significance through the contact with a spirit that is neither here nor there. Her Grandmother says in more than one occasion, “I'm in the middle of nowhere! *Soy*

una ánima sola" (Cisneros 406) or "I'm here, neither alive nor dead" (407). This state of in-betweenness resonates with Celaya's stage in life but it also reflects her state in between cultures. Moreover, the practice of talking to and assisting one's dead ancestors ties Celaya to ancestral Mexican traditions (as exemplified even to this day in the rituals of the Day of the Dead), thus giving her a sense of belonging that has important political dimensions.

As Celaya tells her Grandmother's story she gets to cross over the boundaries of life/death as well. And most compelling, the act of writing her grandmother's story is the clarity she needs to write her own, "Your story *is* my story" (Cisneros 172). Because Celaya has been in the periphery of society, this spiritual encounter with her grandmother becomes a viable option, and alternate route that avoids the basic mainstream choices for understanding one's situation: reason or religion. Celaya instead opts for faith and family. As she learns her Grandmother's story through their dialog, she is made aware of parts of her story that she ought not to repeat. This becomes explicit in matters of love and relationships.

In the third part of the novel, Celaya is her present age of 15, and tells her own story, which is intertwined with her grandmother's. As she shares her account, the reason that stimulated her to write her grandmother's story is revealed. As mentioned above, it is not necessarily something she was seeking to do. An encounter with her grandmother's spirit after she has died prompts her to write her story. Following many supernatural apparitions, her grandmother convinces her to tell her story in order to be forgiven and truly rest, "You'll tell my story, won't you Celaya? So that I'll be understood? So that I'll be forgiven?" (Cisneros 408). In this conversation, she pleads as well as counsels Celaya. She finds a connection to the past through co-authoring her grandmother's story after her grandmother has passed away. However, there is a distinction between inheriting the memory of her grandmother, which may be the case of many second and

third generation Mexican Americans in the U.S. In Celaya's case she achieves her account by believing that she can see her dead grandmother. As indicated above, that belief in communication with dead ancestors is anchored in religious traditions that go against the orthodoxy of her Mexican Catholic tradition, and do not belong in the secular worldview of her modern American milieu. In this context, Celaya, who has been raised with Catholic notions through the schools she attended, is able to establish her own form of spirituality. The examples below will disclose the combination of secular and Catholic environment where Celaya is situated.

Celaya values symbols of cultural importance that remind her of having faith. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is passed down to her by her grandmother as symbol of cultural importance and faith. Celaya's skepticism is exposed in the account of a significant event in her life that combines Catholic notions with her experience. This event takes place in the scene after she finally has sexual relations with her boyfriend Ernesto. Instead of this act bringing them together, he breaks up with her. Ernesto, feeling a strong sense of guilt, repents being with her after he goes to mass, and confesses to a priest what he has done. The location of this incident is Mexico City. While he is in mass laying his guilt and remorse to the priest, she is in her hotel room alone. There, she has a conversation with a little plaster angel that hangs in the wall who is the same little angel found in a picture under the Virgen de Guadalupe (384-385). The angel talks to her, "Then he begins with his you-oughts and you-shoulds, and that's when I get really mad" (385). She argues back and forth with the angel until she throws her sandal at him to finally quiet him down (385). When Ernesto returns from mass, he tells her that following the advice of the priest he will not marry her because they have differing values. Ernesto says, "Sex is for procreation only. The Church says so. And we're not married yet. And the fact is, I can't marry you; you're not even Catholic" (Cisneros 386). Celaya responds, "It's your ma, right? ... Your

ma and that twisted religion that thinks everything's evil (386) ... the little angel on top of the bed seems to smirk and is full of it" (387). Celaya rejects the idea that her actions were evil as he accused her. She does not believe she did anything wrong, which does not imply a total rejection of religious values, since she certainly has her own way of acknowledging a spiritual dimension. Ernesto realizes that his values are different than Celaya's, conveniently after he has had sex with her. But this indictment of her lack of religious righteousness places her in a space in between belief systems where she does not accept the authority of the Catholic Church but does not discard the possibility of the supernatural in her life. The thought of rejecting certain dogmas but allowing the possibility of spiritual realm might be defined as agnosticism, and thus is not necessarily uncommon in contemporary thought. However, given Celaya's marginal position in both Mexican and U.S. mainstream societies, and the links that text establishes between her personal experience and the historical experience of subaltern and dispossessed Mexicans all the way from the Spanish conquest, through the Mexican-American War, to the precarious situation of many contemporary Mexican Americans, it is also possible to regard her flexible spiritual attitude as an attempt to relate to society through *transmodern* lenses. There is an incorporation of modern values with pre-modern ideas instead of a polarizing rejection of either.

After Celaya's disastrous encounter with her first lover and thinking through the situation, she learns to appreciate faith as a liberating force. "I didn't expect *this*. I mean the faith. I mixed up the Pope with *this*, with all *this*, this light, *this* energy, *this* love. The religion part can go out the window. But I didn't realize about the strength and power of *la fe*. What a goof I've been!" (Cisneros 388-389). In this scene where she is Mexico City wearing her grandmother's *caramelo rebozo*, she observes the people crying out to God outside the cathedral and realizes that everyone has needs and that every life affects other lives, as they all become intertwined just like her

grandmother's shawl. At the hotel she has a dream where she is in Tepeyac. Tepeyac is the location where the pre-Colombian Aztec goddess Tonantzín was worshipped. It is also the place where the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego. In her dream she sees a dark night with stars "in the shape of a woman, into the shape of the Virgin. La Virgen de Guadalupe made up of stars!" (Cisneros 390). When she wakes up from this dream that is located in a symbolic place that represents an important aspect of Mexican cultural spirituality, her thoughts are full of conviction. She had a strong conviction of the importance of family. "*Always remember, Lala, the family comes first—la familia* (Cisneros 390). These thoughts guide her to action by humbly calling her parents and asking for help.

Celaya compares her great grandmother's death to an unfinished *rebozo* or shawl that she was making. This *caramelo rebozo* becomes one of the few items her Awful Grandmother is able to inherit before she was given away as a little girl by her father (Cisneros 95). The notes at the end of that particular chapter revisit the history of the shawl⁴⁶ as an expression of *mestizaje*, since it starts in Mexico and has "*foreign influences. The quintessential Mexican rebozo is the rebozo de bolita, whose spotted design imitates a snakeskin, an animal venerated by the Indians in pre-Columbian times*" (Cisneros 96), reiterating the mix of races and indigenous spiritual connections. Although the burden of narrating her grandmother's story almost displaces the telling of Celaya's own story, ultimately she displays her agency by accepting the responsibility of placing her own life within that larger narrative.

⁴⁶ The title of the book *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* in part refers to the shawl, *caramelo rebozo*. I have provided in Chapter 2 more information on the history of the shawl and how it symbolizes the many cultures that constitute the people of Mexico as presented in Cisneros' novel. *Caramelo* is another word for candy, it also refers to the skin color of Celaya's illegitimate half-sister, Candelaria (Cisneros 37). Also Saldívar offers his useful insights on the symbolism of the shawl in his article, "Transnationalism contested: on Sandra Cisneros's *The House on Mango Street* and *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*," mentioned above.

The final location in this account is the U.S., where the individuals in the periphery of the dominant culture must take from here and there concepts that will form and reform their spiritual values in order to cope with their condition of marginalization. As Celaya reconciles indigenous values, maintaining Aztec traditions of contact with the dead, in this case her grandmother, she shapes her spirituality in a way that reject hegemonic notions and asserts her right to affirm her mainstream unbelief. The outcome is a combination of faith and family at the center of her spirituality. Her liberation comes from the act of writing the story. This act creates a keen awareness of the interlaced between the past and the present that like her grandmother's *caramelo rebozo* is still unfinished.

Spirituality in Díaz's Novel: Caribbean Curse and Counter-spell

The characters and historical events presented in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* move between North America and the Caribbean. As with *Caramelo*, the spirituality in this novel is found in the context of a culture formed by violence and colonization. Most of the indigenous population of the Dominican Republic were annihilated by the Spaniards who brought with them Catholicism and African slaves. The African people who were enslaved also had their own set of beliefs. The merging of these two people groups created the background to the spirituality that will be examined in this section, in particular the notion of the curse. Viewing situations from a perspective where a curse is a causal explanation for the conditions of the characters reveals a resistance to paradigms imposed by colonization first from Spain in the 15th century and later the dominant models felt through various U.S. invasions in the 20th century. The curse, or *fukú*, the predominant force in this novel, according to the narrator, has affected the Dominican Republic as well as the family of the main characters. The attempt of those characters to explain their circumstances through supernatural notions that go beyond what they can see or feel may be regarded as a coping mechanism in the slavery culture mentioned above. Here one might

remember Anzaldúa's description of "la facultad" quoted above, describing a faculty developed by marginalized people to see patterns and causes that remain "invisible" within an oppressive system. In the Dominican Republic, after slavery was abolished, oppression continued well into the twentieth century under the government of General Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. Those who escaped Trujillo's regime by fleeing to the United States encountered other forms of marginalization in the mainland.

Junot Díaz presents – primarily through the perspective of Yuniór, a first person narrator, details of the lives of a family from the Dominican Republic that has moved to Paterson, New Jersey. This family consists of Oscar, the overweight studious protagonist; Lola, his sister, who is also a narrator; and Beli, their mother. Yuniór, who was Lola's boyfriend and Oscar's roommate in college, introduces this story by explaining that this family has been under a curse for as long as he has known them. This curse not only affected this family but his whole country of origin, the Dominican Republic, through the tyrannical government of General Rafael Trujillo. Thus, this point of departure serves as a dual function in Díaz's narrative, on the one hand it provides a metaphor of the despotic control the U.S. sanctioned Trujillo government had over the country, on the other hand, it offers a supernatural explanation based on traditional spiritual beliefs from the Dominican Republic, which shifts the focus from helplessness in the face of an oppressive government to ethereal powers that seem in control. I argue that this shift in the understanding of the inexplicable makes room for liberation and transformation.

In the novel, each character has had an encounter with the "curse." In this section, the parallels between the political environment and the way the members of this family function in this environment will be explored. The novel opens with Yuniór's presentation of fukú, which sets the frame for the story. As Yuniór states, "fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind;

specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. . . . Trujillo was the Curse's servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was *tight*" (Díaz, 1-3). Yuniór will trace Oscar's family tree back to the Dominican Republic to demonstrate how generations that include Oscar's mom, Beli, and even her father, Abelard, have been affected. This is presented as the cause for the events that follow each member of the family to the United States. Oscar's and Lola's experiences are tragic. Both the cause of tragedy and survival are determined by powers beyond reason. Although the notion of "fukú," may appear as simply fatalistic at first, in fact the concept achieves two things. First, it explains reality by framing it in a concept associated with marginal beliefs held by an oppressed population. To that degree, even if only precariously, it constitutes an act of resistance to the explanatory models that dominant authorities would use to explain Dominican reality, models that would be based on the narratives of "progress" and the civilizing mission for the West (incarnated by Spain first, then by the U.S.), which follow the logic of the coloniality of power. Second, the notion of the curse automatically introduces the idea of counter-spell, which in the novel receives the Dominican name of *zafa*. Throughout the text, Yuniór will demonstrate various ways of *zafa*. An important one, which also ties this novel to *Caramelo*, is the act of writing the story. Other counter-spells are found in prayer and amulets. *Zafa* symbolizes the hope for change and for a future.

The word *fukú* is a familiar term in the Dominican Republic. Jan Lundius in his book, *The Great Power of God in San Juan Valley*⁴⁷ (1995), defines *fukú* as "Contagious and malign force which may cause anything from bad luck, to death of the 'infected' person and people who have come in contact with him/her" (382). As mentioned above, in many mainstream religions'

⁴⁷ Lundius writes in this book about Olivorio Mateo, a "strange and mysterious 'Messiah,'" (19) who in the 1910s and through the first U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic was active in protecting, healing, and fighting for the Dominican people who in turn followed him and became *Olivoristas* or believers of Olivorio's divinity.

scriptures, the notion of a curse has been recorded and is well accepted by those who believe in these holy books. To the secular in general, this concept is a laughable fiction and is quickly dismissed. In the United States curses are mostly mentioned in sports where superstitious behavior by athletes and fans alike are part of the fun. But there is also a segment of the population that while not so religious, is not completely dismissive of this idea.

In the novel, Yuniór emphasizes that knowledge of the curse is something that is shared by inhabitants of the Caribbean islands. Yuniór shares with the reader about a thread he posted in an online forum on the topic of *fukú*, and how he is surprised by the results: “And not just from Dómos. The Puertorocks want to talk about *fufus*, and the Haitians have some shit just like it. There are a zillion of these *fukú* stories. . . . As I’m sure you’ve guessed by now, I have *fukú* story too” (Díaz 6). In these phrase, the narrator highlights the pan-Caribbean dimension of his story. As a matter of fact, the very beginning of the story ties the curse to historical creation of the Caribbean in the modern sense:

They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Taino, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, *fukú*—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World. Also called the *fukú* of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims; despite “discovering” the New World the Admiral died miserable and syphilitic, hearing (*dique*) divine voices. (1)⁴⁸

The curse, then, is intimately linked to the region’s colonial history, whose damaging effects throughout centuries have fostered a sense of doom and powerlessness in the people. In the Dominican Republic, the curse will find its main manifestation in the malignant figure of Rafael

⁴⁸ *Fukus Americanus* is also the name of play based on Díaz’s novel that “move retrospectively and proleptically in search of origins and causes of the *fukú americanus* curse; they attempt to geologically uncover scientific patterns that for the De Leóns and Yuniór—the *damnés* of Santo Domingo and New Jersey—seem like a fate condemning them to solitude” (Saldívar, “Trans-Americanity”, 210).

Trujillo. However, and paradoxically, the notion of “fukú” contains within itself a germ of resistance, as indicated above. It signifies a reframing of an oppressive history in terms of the spiritual beliefs of the oppressed.

In his exploration of the concept of fukú in the Dominican Republic, Lundius indicates that “rural life in some Dominican communities had convinced me that the famed ‘magical realism’ of Latin American authors like Gabriel García Márquez was not so ‘magical’ after all, but in fact a fairly accurate description of everyday life and lore in Caribbean villages” (Lundius 19). This is to say that the empirical in the Caribbean often gleams from a perspective of reality that includes the unseen world and forces beyond the natural. Numerous works of literature suggest that there is an alternative reality lived in the Caribbean. Authors like Alejo Carpentier called it *lo real maravilloso*. Although all of these concepts, whether it be the curse, the magical or the marvelous, may easily become stereotypical and Eurocentric, they remain useful inasmuch as they attempt to describe the efforts of those who continuously live under the control of various European nations and the U.S to conceptualize, first, their own oppression, and then to *imagine* alternative realities and exits to their predicament. The narrative voice presents the Dominican reality by extracting the popular concept of the curse and bringing it to the forefront of the novel. This concept is commonly maintained in the background of the culture.

Before deciding to call this story a “fukú story,” Yuniór wonders if Oscar with his love of fantasy would object to this designation. He asserts about Oscar, “He was a hardcore sci-fi and fantasy man, believed that that was the kind of story we were all living in. He’d ask” What more sci-fi than the Santo Domingo? What more fantasy than the Antilles? But now that I know how it all turns out, I have to ask in turn: What more fukú?” (Díaz 6). Whether it is seen through the science fiction point of view, which is where many of the metaphors in this novel are found, or

from a point of view that acknowledges a spiritual realm, the insistence on using the term *fukú* offers an explanation to the intolerable persistence of violence in the Dominican Republic and the region. Although in recent years science fiction has become increasingly prestigious as a genre, traditionally it has also been a *marginal* genre, and in the novel Oscar's love for it is linked to his position as an outsider, as a "nerd." Saldívar points to transmodernity when the subject of the curse emerges, an "attempt to represent radical alternatives; rather, it is simply Oscar's imperative to imagine alternative" ("Trans-Americanity" 211).

Thus, again it is significant that it becomes the lens through which Oscar chooses to view not only his own personal experience, but that of the Caribbean's violent history. Even if that reframing does not manage to significantly change the material realities of the region or Oscar's life (for example, the tragic ending of his life), it allows the victim to choose the *meaning* of his situation. Meaning, traditionally, has been a realm associated with spirituality.

The narration evolves with a series of misfortunes that have marked Oscar's family both physically and figuratively. This is especially true in the character of Beli, his mom, who endures the costs of a government that destroys her family. She has scars from being mistreated early in her life as an orphan (Díaz 80), a direct consequence of Trujillo's intervention in her family, and a scar on her back (Díaz 51) from being beaten by Trujillo affiliates, later as a young woman. These symbols speak volumes of the regime and the past that she bears. They become physical signs of her wounded story.

When it comes to describing Beli's resilience, the narrator again turns to a spiritual perspective, in this case, the world of *Santería*, the syncretistic religion developed by African slaves who were forced to hide their religious beliefs under the guise of Catholic figures. Yuniór compares Beli to a Yoruba goddess, "Beli, clearly: one of those Oyá-souls, always turning, allergic

to tranquilidad” (Díaz 79). According to Heriberto Feraudy Espino, Oyá is one of the wives of Shangó the god of lightning and thunder (178, 186). Miguel A. De la Torre in his book *Santería: the beliefs and rituals of a growing religion in America* (2004), says that “Oyá remained as Changó’s⁴⁹ mistress” (65). Both scholars agree that Oyá is the goddess of storms and tornados and has an intimate relationship with Changó, the most powerful god. Beli, who has survived unimaginable abuse and tragedy, cannot fathom tranquility, so like Oyá she is prone to be involved in storms, tornadoes, and attracted to thunder. A goddess is not a victim. A goddess has power. The inversion of these roles, goddess/victim, gives control to someone who has been in helpless situations again and again. Overturning these roles is attainable through a worldview that subverts colonial ideas of religiosity, and draws from Yoruba spiritual notions in order to provide understanding. This understanding leads to liberation from the colonial dichotomy found in the colonizer/colonized relationship. To adjudicate the cause of the storms in her life and her endurance to her spirit is a way of displacing the source of her maladies from an authoritative government, opening up her possibilities of deliverance.

With respect to *Santería* (2004), Miguel De La Torre describes Oyá as an *orisha* who is also intertwined with the Catholic Virgin of Candelaria, the black virgin that appeared in Tenerife, Islas Canarias. While the most revered image of the Virgin in the Dominican Republic is La Virgen de Altagracia, these two divinities are seen as one by neighboring Cuba, which has been influenced by the Yoruba religion as well. This is significant because the blending of figures influences the sense of self and cosmologies or worldviews of the region as well as the characters of the novel. De la Torre who insists that syncretism is a Eurocentric term to categorize Santería as impure (7), admires the clever ways in which the people adapt their beliefs to function under

⁴⁹ While there is an obvious difference in the spelling, it is still the same god and a common knowledge deity to those residents of the Caribbean islands.

domination, “In reality, the disguising of African gods in the clothes of Catholic saints was a very shrewd maneuver on the slave’s part. . . . The masking of the orishas behind Catholic saints continues to this day . . .” (8). By recalling Oyá, or by mentioning the Ogún energy (Díaz 14), Díaz effortlessly rescues religious notions of the Dominican Republic that arrive from Africa centuries ago, and reveals through this twenty-first century narrative how these voices still resound.

Beli’s main oppression is a direct result of General Trujillo’s administration. First, with the destruction of her family, which started with the arrest of her father Dr. Abelard Cabral. The Trujillo regime hurt Beli later in life through the relationship she had with “El Gangster.” This character, who was her lover, unbeknownst to her, turned out to be the husband of Trujillo’s sister. Beli who became pregnant by him, was brutally beaten and left for dead in a sugar cane field⁵⁰. It is in this scene that a mysterious creature approaches her, a mongoose, which gives her strength, tells her that the baby she is carrying is dead but that she will have a boy and a girl in the future (Díaz 149). The future boy and girl are Oscar and Lola. That mysterious mongoose, which does not belong to any specific cosmology and seems to bridge the worlds of spirituality and science fiction, appears several times in the novel in order to provide consolation to members of the Cabral family, operating as a guardian angel of sorts. The narrator, who often makes clarifications in footnotes, explains the African origins of the mongoose, its migration from India to the Caribbean, and its purpose, “an enemy of kingly chariots, chains, and hierarchies. Believed to be an ally of Man. Many Watchers suspect that the Mongoose arrived to our world from another, but to date no evidence of such a migration has been unearthed” (Díaz 151). Once again, at moments of utter hopelessness, the text recurs to a spiritual realm in order to anchor the possibilities of a better

⁵⁰ The sugar cane fields are symbol of U.S. intervention in the establishment of plantations that displaced people and created indentured servants. Both Beli and Oscar are beaten and left for dead in sugar cane fields.

future. Whether taken literally or allegorically, those instances vividly illustrate moments in which the overwhelming logic of an oppressive system offers no viable, reasonable or otherwise realistic possibility of release. And yet, in spite of and against all evidence, hope must be preserved, In those circumstances, as in many aspects the historical experience of the Caribbean, the hope for a better future can only appear as illogical, even arbitrary, utterly unjustified by logical thought. It is in that predicament that the language of spirituality, whether incarnated in a curse that might be overturned, the orishas of Yoruba religion, or simply an unexplainable mystical mongoose, provides a vehicle to articulate that always receding horizon of possible liberation.

Beli's aunt, La Inca, who raises her after she lost her family is instrumental in her survival. "La Inca knew in her ironclad heart that the girl was funtoosh, that the Doom of the Cabrals had managed to infiltrate . . ." (Díaz 143). In a scene when Beli is abducted by her lover the Gangster's minions, La Inca listens to a voice that says to her, "*You must save her*, her husband's spirit said, *or no one else will*" (Díaz 144). La Inca heard from her deceased husband and turned to "La Virgen de Altagracia and prayed. We postmodern plátanos tend to dismiss the Catholic devotion of our Viejas as atavistic, an embarrassing throwback to the olden days, but it's exactly at these moments, when all hope has vanished, when the end draws near, that prayer has dominion" (Díaz 144). In this scene, the curse, the voices of the dead, and Catholic notions of prayer to the Virgin all come together to shape the spiritual background that will accompany the narrator of this story into the United States. The result is what the narrator calls the counterspell to fukú, zafa.

As mentioned above, the narrator describes the dictator General Trujillo as a medium of fukú, the curse. This idea that he has superpower is widespread in the Dominican Republic. Lundius describes how Trujillo insisted on being the source credited to all provisions in his country, "Religion and political charisma tend to be very close to one another in Dominican

politics, a fact that was epitomized in the megalomaniac rule of Rafael Trujillo, often celebrated as a living God” (370). He required public acknowledgment by his citizens of his self-appointed greater-than-all role. They would hang pictures of him in prominent places in their houses and signs that would give honor and favor to him⁵¹. Nothing could be above him, hence the curse that would befall on those who would oppose him. Pertinent to this study is the fact that Trujillo’s authoritative position stems from his U.S. military training resulting from the U.S. military occupation of the Dominican Republic at the beginning of the 20th century. This adds a new dimension to the curse.⁵² While the curse would be an explanation for a circumstance caused by an unreasonable event, the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic at the beginning of the 20th century certainly changed the direction in which the country was heading to align with U.S. interests.

Many years later, when Oscar returns to New Jersey after being badly beaten in the Dominican Republic, unable to speak, he gives Yuniór a note with his only possible explanation, “He wrote out the word for me: *fukú*” (Díaz 306). Yuniór, as the narrator, was hesitant to call this story a *fukú* story. He wondered as mentioned above if Oscar would approved of this designation. When Oscar is in college and attempts suicide, he says to Yuniór, “It was the curse that made me do it, you know. I don’t believe in that shit, Oscar. That’s our parents’ shit. It’s ours too, he said” (Díaz 194). There is a suggestion that this curse is an anachronism, but its persistence throughout the history as presented in the text. Although Yuniór hesitates to recur to the curse as an

⁵¹ There has been a tendency/tradition in Latin American countries to hang pictures of their rulers as well as pictures of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Virgin, among other imagery of local icons. The difference with Trujillo’s picture was that it was imposed by him and was to supersede all others.

⁵² According to Frank Moya Pons’ *The Dominican Republic : A National History* (2010), “In April 1917, the Dominican National Guard was instituted [by the U.S. military government that was currently ruling the nation] with the aim of creating a body of native troops that could control revolutionary movements once the marines had left. At the beginning of May, the guard’s leaders and commanders were chosen from among the U.S. marine officers so that recruits would be trained according to the rules of the U.S. Marine Corps and thus be an extension of that body. [...] Among these new recruits was Rafael Trujillo...” (323).

“explanation” for the Dominican experience, we know that in private he has doubts, and that in fact it will become the main frame of his narrative. As indicated above, it becomes a means to handle a sense of impotence and powerlessness created by centuries of political subjugation.

However, Lola, Oscar’s sister, disagrees with the curse being the cause for their misfortunes. She would rather call it, “Life” (Díaz 210). Lola is the other narrative voice in Díaz’s novel. Although her strength will lead her to reject the curse as a valid frame for her life, she is also linked to the spiritual realm in the text. She tells about her life in Paterson as well as her fourteen months in the Dominican Republic. She professes to have “a feeling” while she was growing up in Paterson, “*For as long as you’ve been alive you’ve had bruja ways. . . . That was before Santo Domingo, before you knew about the Great Power of God*” (Díaz 53). Throughout Lola’s narration, she alludes to this feeling. There is a period of time when there is a hiatus of this strong feeling. It is after she is raped at the age of 8 (Díaz 56). The way her mother handles this event is by banning any conversation about the subject. Her imposed silence quenches that feeling. It also greatly damages her relationship with her mother.

Silence plays an almost palpable role in the mother/daughter relationship of Beli and Lola. This relationship, as Lola portrays it, can be compared to Gloria Anzaldúa’s depiction of how silence is deep-rooted in the traditional rearing of Hispanic women “well-bred girls don’t answer back” (76). Lola in her pre-teen years avoids being called a *malcriada*. Anzaldúa questions the representation of silence in popular refrains like “en boca cerrada no entran moscas” (76) because it illustrates an approval of silence in general. In Puerto Rico the refrain in the feminine diminutive, “Calladita te ves más bonita”, narrows this saying so that it only applies to women. Other traditional adjectives, as Anzaldúa points out, ridicule women speaking as “hocicona, repelona, chismosa . . . I’ve never heard them applied to men” (76). For Beli and Lola, silence

principally functions as an agent of censorship, a censorship that has been imposed by a tradition entrenched in dictatorship. If Trujillo can be compared to a medium of the curse, then silence can be connected with the demon of censorship that only serves to oppress. In this context, censorship has a trickled down effect that covers what Trujillo did to the Dominican Republic, which is analogous to what men did to Beli: burn, beat, use; what the attacker did to Lola: disgrace, shame, abuse; what Beli did to Lola, exploit, neglect, censor; and, results in Lola going from repression to trauma to rage. Thus, it is not surprising that Lola's *spiritual* power is described as existing in direct opposition to the oppressive powers that attempt to silence her.

When Lola is 12 years old, she confesses, "I got that feeling the scary witchy one" (Díaz 57) again. This is when she finds out that her mother is sick with cancer. This feeling seems to appear in order to warn her about big changes in her life. Her relationship with her mother at this point has deteriorated so much that the news of her cancer brings out the rebellious in Lola. After a number of altercations with her mother, Lola runs away. When she is found, her mother remedies the situation by sending her to the Dominican Republic to live with her *abuela*, La Inca. This is when the feeling returns. Lola struggles to identify what causes it until she finally has a moment when La Inca shows her pictures, "Old photos, the kind I'd never see in my house. Photos of my mother when she was young and of other people" (Díaz 74). This link to her past has been missing from her life. Before this moment, she has been covered by an overwhelming cloak of silence.

In contrast, the feeling that Lola experiences happens right before her mother's story is revealed by La Inca. Therefore, there is a connection between this feeling and a revelation. Whether it is revealing something that will happen or something that has already happened that has been kept secret, the feeling challenges the silence. Like Anzaldúa's *facultad*, Lola's spiritual gift allows her to see the invisible—in this case, the repressed lines of continuity between the

violence of Caribbean history (as incarnated mainly, but not exclusively, by Trujillo), and the violence in her own family household (as incarnated mainly, but not exclusively, by Beli). She acknowledges her mother's suffering, ". . . she had survived being abandoned by my father, she had come from Santo Domingo all by herself and as a young girl she claimed to have been beaten, set on fire, left for dead" (60). The adult Lola realizes the circumstances of the past shape the person. As she reflects on her experiences she comes to this realization, "But if these years have taught me anything it is this: you can never run away. Not ever. The only way out is in" (209). Lola is the only character in this novel to seem to be able to overcome her obstacles. She fulfills her many dreams through her successful college career at Rutgers. She never neglects her brother. She puts an end to a relationship where her lover, Yunió, the other narrator, cheated. She becomes a mother and a wife. Thus, in the text she presents the only hope of reversing the cycle her mother began. However, and this is the point that I want to highlight, her success does not come exclusively from her professional success or her strong personality—both of which are characteristics that would be valued in mainstream circles of her society. Her success is tied to her spiritual insight, an intuitive wisdom that allows her to take ownership of even the most terrifying aspects of her, and her nation's, history: "Ten million Trujillos is all we are" (324), she states. In preparing the way for her own daughter, she does not pay attention to her material comfort only, but also to her spiritual safety: "Lola's not stupid; she made both my mother and La Inca the girl's [her daughter's] *madrina*. Powerful wards indeed" (Díaz 329-330). Lola does not overtly demonstrate her belief in the curse or the power of prayer or other supernatural events. But this does not deny that she shares the belief in the power of *zafa* or a counter-spell.

In spite of the pervasive emphasis on *fukú* or the curse in this novel, there is also a clear insistence on the idea that, against all odds, the curse can be overcome. The narrator explains how

there was “only one surefire counterspell that would keep you and your family safe. Not surprisingly, it was a word. A simple word (followed usually by a vigorous crossing of index fingers). Zafa” (Díaz 7). This word that in Spanish means free, saved, and without harm, can be the way out of a curse. In fact, the power is not in the actual word zafa—zafa is the result of the use of words.

There are two important uses of words that become zafa in this novel. One is prayer and the other one is the written word. First, La Inca’s words of prayer were her best expression of zafa. “Through the numinous power of prayer La Inca saved the girl’s life, laid an A-plus zafa on the Cabral family fukú” (Díaz 155). Here one need not put too much emphasis on the question of whether Díaz is in fact literally celebrating the power of prayer, interesting as that question may be, and important as actual religious beliefs have been indeed in the lives of oppressed masses in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Equally important is the notion that La Inca’s words, her prayer, articulate the need and capacity to hope against all hope, to imagine an opening in an oppressive situation that presents itself as not only insurmountable, but also as justified (as Trujillo’s violence presented itself, and as colonial violence has always portrayed itself. In that regard, La Inca’s prayer may constitute an example of the decolonial spiritual option that Mignolo refers to—a spirituality from the margins that is deeply imbricated in responding to the coloniality of power, and which is itself a result of that response.

The other important use of words as zafa comes through the creation of narratives that reveal or bear witness to the repressive effects of colonial violence on the lives of individuals and society at large in the Dominican Republic and the Caribbean. Abelard, Beli’s dad, attempts to write a book about Trujillo, in which he speculates that the roots of the dictator’s power might be supernatural (the curse); thus, the writing of those words (which Trujillo manages to stop) is an

attempted zafa. In the same way, Oscar who is killed in a sugar cane field in the Dominican Republic is able to send a final letter to Yuniór. The narrator rescues Oscar's writings, which, in addition to his own, he hopes will assist in providing zafa for the next generation. That next generation is personified in the character of Lola's daughter. Her name is Isis, the name of an Egyptian goddess. The final demonstration of zafa is found in the necklace that she wears. This amulet with "three azabaches: the one that Oscar wore as a baby, the one that Lola wore as a baby, and the one that Beli was given by La Inca upon reaching Sanctuary [represents] Powerful elder magic" (Díaz 329). This necklace, which also incorporates beliefs of Spanish and African origin, shields her from fukú, the curse.⁵³ Yuniór expresses his hope for the future through what he predicts Lola's girl will do. "And maybe, just maybe, if she's as smart and as brave as I'm expecting she'll be, she'll take all we've done and all we've learned and add her own insights and she'll put an end to it" (Díaz 330-331). His intention from the beginning of the book to the end is to find a way for this story not to be repeated, "Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell" (Díaz 7), zafa a protection from fukú. Thus, in spite of its sometimes overwhelming presence in the novel, fukú, in conjunction with its alternative, zafa, provides expression for a border spiritual perspective that responds to the concrete historical experience of colonial dispossession that Dominicans have endured, and still attempt to fully overcome.

To conclude this chapter, in these novels spirituality is developed by recovering the memory of the narrators' ancestors, merging Catholic with non-Catholic beliefs, and integrating these into their current environment in order to confront, resist, and face their particular circumstances. Spirituality has been presented as the merging of beliefs that these characters have

⁵³ The tradition of the *azabache* amulet came via the Arabic influence in the Spaniards who came to the "new world".

obtained from their particular colonial history, which incorporates indigenous, African, and European elements. These beliefs traveled to the United States, a country that boasts separation from Europe and offers religious freedom, but cannot escape an overt alignment with European thought that among other things positions their ideas as superior. The characters in this study are the descendants of people who have experienced U.S. interventionism and now reside in the U.S., and who masterfully adapt their spiritual cultural influence to their current situation. Isasi-Díaz explains, “In Latin American philosophical tradition, which is one of our conversation partners, ‘reality’ is the central preoccupation in contrast to the overriding European philosophical preoccupation with ‘the truth.’ Because the reality of Hispanas/Latinas and of two-thirds of the world is one of poverty, *mujerista* theology opts to stand with that vast majority of humanity and to privilege the hermeneutics of the poor and the oppressed” (Isasi-Díaz “Hispanic Women” x-xi). In other words, reality becomes the principal concern, a perspective that serves as the point of departure and opens up a variety of epistemologies that help to interpret life.

The characters presented in these novels, who share in common the same dominant culture, resist some of its traditional religious values, and secular considerations, in order to create a cosmology that emphasizes their “reality,” that is to say, their experiences from the margins. The inclusion and acknowledgment of something outside the palpable, something spiritual, may be regarded a 21st century “transmodern” response because it includes pre-modern notions, modern ideas, and it is produced in a position of marginalization. With this inclusion of notions, the presumed universality of values propagated by the dominant culture is put into question, allowing a decolonizing opportunity for characters like Celaya and Yuniór.

The Honorable Sonia Sotomayor, first Hispanic U.S. Supreme Court Justice, describes in her book *My Beloved World* (2013) her upbringing in the Bronx, New York. Like the characters

in the novel, she narrates her life as an impoverished girl growing up in a public housing development (now named after her) in New York City. One of her strongest influences was her grandmother. She was an *espiritista*⁵⁴ who saw a gift in her. This gift, like the *facultad* that Anzaldúa mentions, is something that she was not allowed to develop. “Any desire my grandmother might have had to develop what she believed to be my ‘gift’ was trumped by my mother’s threat to remove me from the influence of what she saw as superstition and *brujería*” (Sotomayor 43). Sotomayor, though, finds it compelling to mention this in her story about how she came of age in New York. Her *reality* and the contact with spiritual powers were intertwined. Thus, she constitutes an interesting example of the realities that Cisneros and Diaz are trying to describe in their novels.

Cisneros presents a character, Celaya, who was the only who could see, talk, and interact with her dead grandmother. Díaz presents a character, Lola, who has a feeling that guide her. Díaz’s character Yunion also gave an explanation and a solution to an oppressive political and economic situation that is bigger than any government—he presents it in terms of a curse with the possibilities of a counter-spell. By using these beliefs to describe the reality of their characters, these authors illustrate the way spirituality has been an important aspect of resistance to a dominant culture in a space where *coloniality of power* exists. Evidently, religion and spirituality are not only means of resistance, but they have been fundamental in the struggles of many Latino/a

⁵⁴ “As we lay there, my mind would rehearse what [my cousin] Charlie had told us: how Abuelito and Gallego call the spirits to ask them questions; how they were not evil but they were powerful, and you had to develop your own powers if you wanted their help; how Abuelita’s spirit guide was called Madamita Sandorí and spoke with a Jamaican accent. . . . I knew that Abuelita used her magic on the side of good. She used it for healing and for protecting the people she love. Of course I understood that a person with a talent for engaging the spirit world could equally put it to work for darker ends—*brujería*, or witchcraft. In Abuelita’s building, one of the neighbors was known to put curses on people. I was forbidden to go near her door on penalty of getting smacked, which was something Abuelita had never done, so I knew she meant it” (Sotomayor 24). Sotomayor explained the experience and how her cousin would say, “how do they expect us to sleep with a house full of spirits” (25).

populations in the U.S. When spiritual practices incorporate cultural elements (such as ancestral indigenous and African beliefs) that are marginalized from mainstream society, and when those composite spiritual practices become a tool and an epistemological frame to transform the lives of oppressed populations and foster the work of liberation, one may describe those practices as a “spiritual option” within decolonial struggles. The role of spirituality in the novels by Diaz and Cisneros points in that direction.

CHAPTER 4: FROM A SENSE OF DISQUIET TO VIOLENCE: THE “CHAOS WORLD” IN *THE AMERICANO* AND *AMÉRICA’S DREAM*

Written by Puerto Rican authors Enrique Matta (1884-1975) and Esmeralda Santiago (1948-), respectively, *The Americano* and *América’s Dream* deal with the effects of U.S. interventionism on the island. To recapitulate, the first novel is set at the beginning of the 20th century; the second at the end of the 20th century. The setting of the Matta novel is shortly after the 1898 Spanish-American War, which marked the invasion of the United States in Puerto Rico. After the occupation of the island, the United States set up a military government. Thus, the novel portrays a historical moment when Puerto Rican culture is placed for the first time in relationship with the U.S. The debate about the political status begins. Contrasting views are offered: one is to accept “progress” through U.S. intervention, the other is to adhere to the status quo represented by Spain’s colonial government. The option of being an independent country does not exist and is therefore omitted in these novels.

The characters in Matta’s story are facing the U.S. military presence for the first time, and therefore the discussions about whether the involvement of the U.S. in Puerto Rico is beneficial to the island or not is new for them, although throughout the 20th century it would come to dominate Puerto Rican politics, sometimes by excluding other important issues. However, Matta’s novel is published in 1963, a moment when Puerto Rico has re-defined its relation to the U.S. through the creation of the “Estado Libre Asociado” in 1952, a status that for some represented an innovative way of retaining economic and political links to the U.S. while preserving Puerto Rico’s cultural identity, just as for others it simply represented the formalization of Puerto Rico’s colonial subordination to U.S. interests. Although the novel takes place in Puerto Rico shortly after 1898, one must regard its ideological debates as Matta’s commentary on Puerto Rico’s political fate in the early 1960s. The new debate in *The Americano* is represented by the various positions the

characters play. For example, the naiveté of the main female character, Teresa, who is confronted with thoughts about “progress” as an alternative to the present system is contrasted to the stubbornness of Ramon, her fiancée, who fights for the status quo. These characters both represent how the Puerto Rican oligarchy was confronted with this debate. Ramon’s character represents that upper segment (societal elite) of the island who were threatened socially and economically by the “American ways.” The character of Glen Sumners, the *Americano*, is a vivid literary example of how the figure of the American in Puerto Rico is perceived and constructed by the local population. Another important character in this novel is Pilar, who is the perpetual mistress, a position I argue is an allegorical figure of the island. Finally, the doctor, who tries to be impartial, encourages both the *Americano* and the community to look at the bright future a relationship with the U.S. has in store. The doctor represents the position of the author, who was also a medical doctor and local politician.

By the time the events in Esmeralda Santiago’s novel *América’s Dream* take place, the attitude of anticipation about the progress the U.S. would bring to Puerto Rico has blended into the monotony of conformism. The debate about the political status of the island has become stale because it never changed. Puerto Rico is still a colony of the U.S. América, the main character, has conformed to an imposed system that accepts the permanent presence of Americans in Puerto Rico. Her boss, Don Irving, is an old *Americano* who owns the hotel where she works and who is also her mother’s lover. She has accepted his superiority as a matter of fact. He symbolizes the American who lives on the island but is only partially integrated in everyday life. He is always a foreigner and also a permanent provider. However, América is aloof to the politics around her. Her great preoccupation is the violence she is experiencing from her lover, Correa, who oppresses her and threatens her liberty. América’s and Correa’s relationship speak to the plague of domestic

violence experienced on the island. Thus, she represents those in society that do not feel they can impact or change their political status since their daily lives are overwhelmed with real, physical struggles.

Comparing these two novels may provide insight into two specific points of view that build on each other: the rhetoric of progress that is found in *The Americano* and the sense of conformism with colonialism represented in *América's Dream*. These novels illustrate the beginning and end of a century during which the figure of the North American is constructed in Puerto Rico's cultural imaginary. Both novels also demonstrate the formation and acceptance of Puerto Ricans as positioned below North Americans and therefore the creation and consolidation of a permanent unequal social structure. In this chapter the subject construction will be examined: from the idealization of U.S. interventionism to one of the social evils it has supported: violence. The violence begins as a threat with the U.S. military invasion in 1898, which is directly related to the war between the United States and Spain, the Spanish-American war. The Americans who entered the island were ready to use any act of violence necessary to obtain their goal. Yet, it was hardly necessary, "most Puerto Ricans greeted his [General Nelson Miles] arrival and rejoiced at his promise to end Spanish colonialism" (Gonzalez 60). This violence that finds multiple manifestations in society throughout the 20th century gets lost under the narrative of the Americans as purveyors of progress. Violence is found in both novels and it will be explored as a symptom of disquiet in a chaos world. This term will be explained further in the next section. A synopsis of the economic and the military development in Puerto Rico will be explored as background to how U.S. interventionism has affected its residents. The analysis of each novel is presented and the various political ideologies on the island will be examined. Ultimately, it is impossible to deny the American influence on the island and the influx of Puerto Ricans in the U.S. as a result.

Throughout this chapter it will be evident that a pattern of behaviors that support the notion of coloniality of power are strongly developed in Puerto Rico during the 20th century revealed by the characters in these novels. The characters' actions raises the questions: are they being passive or resistant, are they conforming or choosing to be content? The historical context and the plot of the novels make the answers to these questions difficult to unravel, illustrating the complexity of the relationship between the U.S. and Puerto Rico.

Strategic Location: Borders Formation

Puerto Rico's geographical location has made it easy for conquerors, travelers, and merchants to settle there. Puerto Rico was inhabited by the Taínos, an Arawak indigenous people, when Christopher Columbus arrived on the island in 1493 during his second trip to America. Since then, the culture has been formed by the mixture of races born from this interaction, particularly the Taínos, the Spanish, and the Africans. These three particular races are identified as the main components of Puerto Rican identity. But more than five hundred years later, this identity cannot be so simplistically defined. Puerto Rico's place in the Caribbean and the contact with surrounding islands as well as larger countries, like the United States, brings together even more diverse components to its culture. The blend of cultures and the continuous contact with other nations, as well as the location in which the island is found, cannot simply be defined by these three races anymore. This is why Martinican novelist, poet, and playwright Édouard Glissant's notions of Caribbean identity are useful to describe the Puerto Rican culture, even though there are limitations to his concepts.

Édouard Glissant emphasizes the plurality of cultures in the Caribbean. He describes these cultures as having hybrid identities that cannot and should not be clearly defined. There are too many variations within the mixture of black, white, native, and South Eastern Asian cultures that are found in the Caribbean archipelago; defining it would only attempt to minimize its richness.

Glissant uses the term “chaos world” to describe a coming together of cultures that remains heterogeneous (“Poetics” 82). Because these cultures are not static or predictable, a model that would predict their outcome would not be beneficial nor accurate. He proposes an idea of culture not based on revolt or resistance but on “relationship” (Glissant “Poetics” 145), as opposed to total assimilation and linear Eurocentric thought that moves into a defined direction, possibly away from other non-European accounts of history.

Glissant’s concept of relation was developed from Einstein’s theory of relativity creating a “simple connection between Relativity and the principle of the relative” (“Poetics” 133-134). This connection based on movement unifies science and culture. Through scientific research, results are predicted. The difficulty arises when predicting becomes a way of imposing a model. This would go against Glissant’s ideas of maintaining multiple identities. An important aspect to emphasize is that not one culture has more value than the other. He defines the relative or cultural relativism by presenting the idea that each human culture has its own milieu becoming equivalent to every other in the ensemble (“Poetics” 134). In this way, no culture would be above the other.

The limitations to this non-hierarchical system are that it is somewhat located in a utopia⁵⁵. The reality is that Puerto Rico is in a hierarchical relationship with the United States. Puerto Rico is not the only country in the same hemisphere that is economically dependent on the United States. Many countries have an economic relationship with the U.S. that impacts their policy making and business practices⁵⁶. But Puerto Rico’s political ties as a Commonwealth of the U.S. surpass the dependency other countries may experience. It establishes the bottom-most position within the hierarchy. In political terms the island has had its own Constitution since July 25, 1952. This

⁵⁵ I believe Glissant implicitly expresses his awareness of this unrealistic utopia at the end of his article (179).

⁵⁶ For example, Panamá, El Salvador, and Ecuador are dollarized; Chile is an integral part of NAFTA; Argentina’s high dependence on U.S. export and import market continuously threatens their local currency.

government document is used to enforce the local legal system. Puerto Rico's future as a state of the union, however, is in the hands of the U.S. Congress. In other words, Puerto Rico's political autonomy is subject to the supreme authority of the U.S. Congress.

On the economic side, Puerto Rico's dependency on the United States is unquestionable. The United States is a member of the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. Puerto Rico, subsumed by the U.S. is powerless when it comes to their own economic interest⁵⁷. It is worth mentioning how this economic hierarchy came to be as part of the reasoning behind the subject construction of the American on the island. This will be discussed further below. Once the political and economic hierarchy is instituted, the chaos world concept is useful because it incorporates past histories and relates them into the unequal relationship that the U.S. and Puerto Rico have.

As it has been mentioned in previous chapters, Argentinean Enrique Dussel exposes his concern with individuals and groups that are found on the exterior of the dominant class. In this chapter this is pertinent especially when focused on those "who live in misery in the peripheral world, where capitalism, more than socialism, has utterly failed" (Dussel "Underside" 13). The development of this position in the exteriority comes via the U.S. intervention in Puerto Rico where their military and economic presence affected individuals who resemble the characters of the novels in this study. Their position is at the exterior of those in power. The center comes from the Eurocentric worldview that has been carried on within the U.S. In the 20th century, the subject construction of the American as the powerful proprietor develops. As Puerto Ricans are pushed

⁵⁷ The island is presently in a financial conundrum. The debt surpasses the ability to maintain a functioning budget. Bankruptcy is a Federal government program that may not apply to the island because it is not a state, even though that program applies to individuals. They are currently compared to Greece and Detroit, yet the island is neither its own country nor a city of the U.S.

to the margins, they begin to see themselves as sometimes grateful, sometimes begrudgingly subservient of the mighty North.

From U.S. Economic Reform to Financial Devastation

An important factor in the perception that Puerto Ricans had of the U.S. and of Americans in Puerto Rico was the U.S. economic plan for the island. This was facilitated by its military ruling and presence through the 20th century. Starting in 1898, Puerto Rico experienced the beginning stages of an economic transformation. Puerto Rico's geographical location was identified as having potential for agricultural expansion, as a source of cheap manual labor, and – even better for the U.S. – as a piece of property with tax exemptions where manufacturing could thrive. For the first 19 years of the U.S.-Puerto Rico relationship, Puerto Ricans were not citizens. The island was a possession of the U.S. and its population (even to this day) did not enjoy equality with other fellow citizens. The agricultural exploitation by the U.S. promptly became manifest. The population had to adjust to an economic hierarchy that displaced some of the Spanish aristocracy⁵⁸ with U.S. military rulers and landowners.

“Before the U.S. takeover, Puerto Rico's economy was diversified with four basic export crops –tobacco, cattle, coffee and sugar (Rodriguez 1989, 11). U.S. business interests quickly changed this to a sugar-crop economy controlled primarily by U.S. absentee owners. . . . Coffee, which had been Puerto Rico's number one crop during the late 1890's, fell victim to unfavorable tariff rates, a hurricane, and U.S. intervention to thwart efforts for coffee plantation mortgage extensions” (Baker 34-35).

The U.S. economic expansion on the island served these invisible owners who were ever present around the island yet seldom an integrated part of the local community. The rural life began to change forcing numerous families to the cities, where they all they found was

⁵⁸ Puerto Rican author Rosario Ferré, conveys the difficult adjustments the Spanish descent Puerto Rican aristocracy had to make when the economic power shift from their sugar plantations to American's, in her turn of the century novel *Maldito Amor* (1981).

unemployment. Eventually, the poverty encountered in the cities drove many off the island. First, there were thousands of Puerto Ricans sent to Hawaii. “Between 1900 and 1901, more than five thousand Puerto Ricans were transported to Hawaii in a dozen shiploads under contract to the Hawaii Sugar Planters Association” (Gonzalez 62), where there is still a strong Puerto Rican presence. Then there were the manufacturing opportunities advertised on the east coast of the states that became another viable option. It seems that the economic structure of the island, which consisted of U.S. companies that benefitted from “low wages, a tax-free environment to set up their factories, and duty-free export to the mainland” (Gonzalez 63) opened the doors as an entry for foreign investors and as an exit to people who “far outnumbered the new jobs the economy was creating” (Gonzalez 63). The flawed economy forced a mass diaspora in the 1950’s to the United States. This created a revolving door of migration where leaving the island or returning to it was highly economically motivated. As the island became quickly industrialized, prices went up but wages were kept down.

“Unfortunately, the large Puerto Rican working class base was particularly vulnerable to ‘double exploitation,’ meaning that as consumers of U.S. goods, they paid 25 percent more than North Americans but as workers producing manufactured goods, they were paid 1/3 to 1/2 the wages of North American workers (Peoples Press 1977, 101). Puerto Rico’s minimum wage was not raised to the level of that of the United States until January 1, 1981” (Baker 40-41).

The latest U.S. Census of 2010, reported another mass exodus of Puerto Ricans to the U.S. confirming that the business trends that began at the beginning of the 20th century continue. The economy continues to support the high price/low wage model and companies have taken this model to other countries driving the Puerto Rican labor force into the U.S. mainland once again, looking for other opportunities.

Living among the Military

The island was also seen by the U.S. at first as a strategic military location. As mentioned in the second chapter, it was a priority for the United States to establish themselves as the political power in its hemisphere, as opposed to Europe. A military presence in the Caribbean would assure the effectiveness of this position, with ships, planes, convoys of soldiers ready to deploy at a moment's notice. Military commanders and Washington-appointed governors ruled the island for half of the 20th century. During this time, Puerto Ricans were regularly drafted and later recruited to join the U.S. Armed Forces. Puerto Ricans have not missed a war since 1917. Military bases were built in all cardinal points of the island.

The largest military base was located on the east coast of Puerto Rico. Land from the municipality of Ceiba was taken to develop the U.S. Naval Base, Roosevelt Roads. This Naval Base was 8 miles from Vieques, the island from where the main character of *América's Dream* comes. Luquillo, Fajardo, Ceiba, and the islands of Vieques and Culebra are the municipalities on Puerto Rico's east coast. Luquillo was the setting of the other novel, *The Americano*. These towns were highly exposed to the military operations of the Naval Base.

The east coast of Puerto Rico was filled with Americans. Some worked on the military base as service men or women, some worked in civilian positions. Many of these workers lived outside the base, while many Puerto Ricans worked on the base. The incentive of a federal paycheck, which was always above the local minimum wage, and healthcare, and other benefits⁵⁹, brought to the area top-notch workers looking for opportunities on the island. Many Americans, who would not choose to live in military housing or would not qualify for that because of their civilian status, would comfortably live in one of the towns mentioned above. They knew that

⁵⁹ Benefits like sick leave, comp time, vacation, holidays, pension plans, etc.

inside the base, which was guarded by military police twenty four hours a day, anything they needed in a safe environment could be found. There were schools, hospitals, gas stations, affordable retail, plus the peace of mind of knowing that the Puerto Ricans on the base had gone through a screening process and were adequately given permission to be there. This description is useful to illustrate the daily contact and interaction that existed between Americans and Puerto Ricans towards the end of the century.

Roosevelt Roads Naval Base was located in Ceiba, Puerto Rico. This was the nearest point to Vieques, where land, maritime, as well as, air training for the Navy was routinely carried out for many years. This training included the use of live ammunition near populated areas – populated by Puerto Ricans.

“Up to 3,400 bombs per month have been tested on this 52-square-mile island [Vieques] of approximately 9,000 residents, not counting the numerous rounds of shells depleted with uranium and the napalm they have also been exposed to. The island suffers from cancer rates up to 24 percent higher than that in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico reported that the Navy was found to be in full violation of a 1983 agreement to demilitarize, decontaminate, and restore the island to its residents” (Pérez y González 138).

The bombs were heard especially loud in Vieques and Ceiba, where the sound was extremely potent. This happened at any time of the day and night. The complaints of the residents of the bordering areas were ignored or not taken seriously into consideration. This changed after the tragic death of David Sanes Rodriguez on April 19, 1999, when active protest began.

“... a thirty-five-year-old civilian security guard, was on patrol near an observation post adjacent to the U.S. naval bombing range in Vieques, Puerto Rico when a pair of U.S. F-18 jets on a routine training mission missed their targets and dropped two five-hundred-pound bombs near his post, killing Sanes and wounding four others. . . . Vieques [turned] into a worldwide symbol of resistance to colonialism while at the same time deepening a rift between Pentagon chiefs and the Clinton White House” (Gonzalez 292).

The death of a civilian was the proverbial last drop that overflowed the cup of unfulfilled expectations regarding this situation. Protests reached the eyes and ears of politicians and

celebrities in the United States who supported the people from Puerto Rico. Robert Kennedy, Jr., Edward James Olmos, along with local celebrities, were arrested in solidarity. In 2003, President Bush signed the order and the Naval Base Roosevelt Roads was closed. It left hundreds unemployed and an economic gap that both the local government and private sector are still working to resolve. While people were happy to receive a steady federal income, the purpose of the base seemed to have escaped the population in the area. It was there for one main objective, to train military personnel with live ammunition. When the bombs stopped booming, so did that economy. This contributed to the diaspora mentioned above. The revolving door opened again sending Puerto Ricans back to the states to look for jobs, this time mostly to Florida⁶⁰.

Enrique Matta's *The Americano*

In the novel *The Americano*, the author exposes the desire on the part of some to oppose the power of a Puerto Rican oligarchy of Spanish descent, which had dominated society and excluded poor sectors of the population over centuries of Spanish colonial rule. The premise of this story is found in that sentiment, begun in the 19th century when many nations in Latin America were becoming independent from Spain. The people of Puerto Rico saw in the United States an ally that would help them become independent from Spain. In the opening decades of the 20th century, Puerto Ricans were wrestling with U.S. interventionism as a possible way to break away from Spanish imposed aristocratic values, which had become nationally accepted. These ideas ranged from the way business was done to the way justice was imparted. Enrique Matta's novel

⁶⁰ According to a recent Pew Research written by D'Vera Cohn, et al, "The South—particularly Florida—has been the top regional destination in recent years for Puerto Ricans moving from the island to the mainland and for Puerto Ricans relocating from other regions within the U.S."

explores these ideas through their personification in various characters. It is in this novel that the subject construction of the *Americano* is presented⁶¹.

The characters of Matta's novel, as mentioned above, bring to life the various points of view that are found on the island when an American arrives with the intention of settling in among them. Glenn Sumners, the *Americano*, attractively personified progress (Matta 24). Ramon Perez, a landowner, and his friends, represents, as the book jacket says, "the established hierarchy." His father owns most of the land and he is in line to continue to lord over the area. His position allows him privilege and he does not need the *Americano* to interfere. Teresa Mendez, who is engaged to Ramon, finds herself in the dilemma of staying on the course that has been laid out for her or venturing with the promising unknown. The character of the doctor, who I insist is the author's alter-ego, explains to Glen Sumners about the Puerto Ricans who are of Spanish descent,

"[They]...have controlled the commercial life of this community for years. Long before your people got possession of the island. They continue to enjoy that privilege. They grease the palms of official agents and make them toe the mark. They control the local elections by contributing heavily to the campaign fund. They have the only bank in the vicinity. In short, nothing can be done around here without the Perez stamp of approval" (Matta 23).

The doctor finds in the arrival of the *Americano* an opportunity for new points of view to be considered. U.S. interventionism, therefore, seems like a viable option for the long-standing conflict with the Spanish way of living. The author tries to show American impartiality when the *Americano*, aware of his weighing position, says in another dialogue, "Just be careful that none of my American ideas influence you against your own" (Matta 85), knowing very well that they already had.

⁶¹ This idealization of the North Americans' presence in Puerto Rico takes a different role by the end of the 20th century. This is best reflected in the novel by Esmeralda Santiago, *América's Dream* (1996).

The *Americano* marries Teresa. They move to a distant town after Glenn's successful sale of his property, El Toronjal. "The sugar company had been generous with him in buying El Toronjal, and he was able to acquire a much larger plantation" (Matta 191). This move confronts the inevitability of change in Teresa's life, which brings her unease. She says to him, "'Still I can't help feeling sad when I think that to make progress we must upset homes, scatter families and bury so many customs and traditions,' complained Teresa" (Matta 193). She thinks about herself and the distance she will have between her new home and her immediate family, but also of the cost of progress to the people around her, which he explains, "Growth and development must often disregard sentiment" (Matta 192). Glen Sumners obtains the material progress that is longed for by many. In Puerto Rico he found access to opportunities that perhaps were not within his reach in the U.S. mainland. He is able to buy land that he is planning to develop through agriculture. This land was available to him, but not to everyone else who believed in the rhetoric of progress. The masses that saw his progress with hope did not advance but remained the same. Yet they were grateful to the employment he gave them, "Word soon got around that he paid well and treated his workers like they were human. Nearly every peon for miles around wished to work for the *Americano*" (Matta 54). The notion of his superiority begins.

By marrying the *Americano*, Teresa attempts to escape from the limitations that the more traditional Spanish colonial frame imposes on her. The beginning of the twentieth century was no different than centuries past for women. It provided women with limited options. The novel clearly presents Teresa's choice of Sumners and the American culture that he represents and her rejection of a marriage to Perez as a movement toward making a new beginning of her own. She rejects the socially exclusive path that was designed for her through the Perez-Mendez marriage, disregarding centuries of lineage building.

In Puerto Rico, as in many other Latin American countries as well as the U.S., there has been a tradition to exalt a genealogical line that can be traced to Europe. Matrimonial unions are carefully constructed to preserve this custom. At the same time, the U.S. is regarded by the inheritors of old Spanish colonial values as the country of progress and the future. Through Teresa's decision to be united to Glenn, the ideological preferences in Matta's text are clearly indicated. This is particularly visible when the novel describes her father's support of her decision: ". . . Don Luis Mendez had pledged his word of honor to accept Ramon Perez as his son-in-law in the near future. To permit the *Americano* to woo and win his daughter, the father would have to break his pledge—an act unheard of among gentlemen of social standing" (Matta 181). At this time in Puerto Rican history the social order was being challenged as "Americans values" were beginning to be inserted in the culture.

Breaking the traditional classism on the island was something that those who were in privileged position resented at the same time that the masses welcomed it. Puerto Rican author Edgardo Rodríguez Juliá recalls how one of his grandfathers was thrilled with the opportunities tied to good moral values that Americans brought to the island. He writes about the relationship of his grandfather with his American mentor,

"Era su oportunidad de mejorar. Así lo intuyó. La invasión norteamericana no sería el *trauma* del desclasamiento, como lo fue para mi otro abuelo, sino la promesa contenida en todas las crisis sociales.[...] Y Mr. Harris era el prototipo del americano bueno, pulcro — esto es muy importante, como veremos—y protestante. Era un misionero que lo mismo traía la ética de la salvación que el espíritu de superación. Mi abuelo paterno iría asumiendo, como algo natural, aquella ética de la disciplina y el trabajo" (Rodríguez Juliá 201-202).

Rodríguez Juliá's paternal grandfather can represent a great majority of Puerto Rican men who did not come from a prominent family, like his maternal grandfather. Not having a prominent family limits the opportunities for progress. While this author's maternal grandfather found his

security in the social class to which he belonged, regular folks saw the insertion of Americans in the Puerto Rican culture and their message of discipline and hard work as a real opportunity to achieve what was once denied to them.

This message, which is evident in Matta's novel was appealing to many, including the author's alter-ego: the local medical doctor. In a conversation with Teresa's father he says in an optimistic tone, "The American people have started us toward a new course of life. Our ideas are changing. Customs, quite old, are being scrapped. In the minds of working people a rebirth is taking place and, in spite of our opposition, the younger generation is heading away from us" (Matta 128). Once again this statement portrays the willingness to look forward to a way of thinking that would leave behind the traditional Spanish customs in the island. Teresa Mendez is unintentionally contributing to the subject construction of the *Americano* as a symbol of progress.

There is another phenomenon happening simultaneously. The *Americano*, a new superior subject is an almost anonymous subject. Although the American in the novel is named Glenn Summers, his individual identity or biography has little importance. As the title of the novel suggest, Summers is simply the "Americano," that is to say an American, one of many Americans. It is his American-ness that gives him his superior status. And the essentialist superiority obeys a colonial logic. Rodríguez Juliá explains it like this, "El pitiyanquismo necio es la lealtad del colonizado a su propio sentido de inferioridad, a su desubicación geográfica e insuficiencia, a su mal manejo de los símbolos patrios ante un mundo cambiante, a su colonialismo interiorizado, esa sombra inescapable, y que lo define" (207). This phrase refers to the term Luis Lloréns Torres, Puerto Rican poet, coined in a poem *pitiyanqui* (petite Yankee), or in late 20th century's term, small wannabes, in relation to those enamored with all things American. Rodríguez Juliá points out the condition of not only internalizing inferiority, insufficiency, and displacement, but also admiring

and showing loyalty to those who are the cause of that condition. What is interesting about this is the fact that Glenn Summers, or Mr. Harris mentioned above, or any other American for that matter, is not able to completely penetrate the established social hierarchy built with Spanish oligarchy last names that were not as common as *Rodríguez* but were more exclusive like *Juliá*. Names like Harris, Smith, Reed, Tittle, to name a few English names, marked those who bore them as not part of the traditional local, social structure. However, those American names point to a new elite, not based on traditional aristocratic values, but on the economic might of modern capitalist developmentalism. The *Americanos* in Puerto Rico could afford to ignore and even challenge the “backward” ways of the island’s traditional elites, because their own privilege and power comes wrapped in a rhetoric of progress that would become the unquestioned dominant value of Puerto Rico (and the rest of the world) in the twentieth century.

Teresa, in her eagerness to delink from the patterns established by her ancestry of Spanish descent ignores other factors that are crucial to the subject formation. This is to take into consideration gender and race. As a white woman, Teresa, is able to advance her position by marrying an *Americano*. Although she remains subordinate to him and her need to advance by marrying is a clear sign of gender limitation, the fact is that even this particular albeit limited way of advancement is not available to all women equally. The other main female character in the novel is Pilar, who is presented without a last name, an indication of her low social status. She is Ramón’s official mistress, and he makes sure the *Americano* knows not to interfere with her or Teresa. Ramón explains to Glenn, “My friend, you still have much to learn about our customs. It is common practice for one of my social standing to have a mistress – even more than one” (Matta 81). Pilar, as physically desirable as she is, has no option but to be a permanent mistress, much like Puerto Rico is to the United States, not a State (wife) or independent (single woman)

yet always available. Pilar's beauty, her talent as a singer, and her overall good disposition are not enough for her to be taken seriously. Both Ramon and Glenn have erotic desires for her. Her description is exotic and racialized. Her "lips were big and thick and heavily painted" (75) and she had "firm, well-developed, olive-colored breasts" (Matta 76-77). She is wanted as a forbidden fruit and used for entertainment, very much like the island. Moreover, Pilar joins the ranks of many other desirable "mulatas" in Caribbean and Puerto Rican literature, who become colonial objects of Eurocentric white desire: figures reaching as far back as Cecilia Valdés in the homonymous novel by the Cuban Cirilo Villaverde (1882), the enticing mulata in poems like "Plena del menéalo" by Luis Palés Matos (*Tuntún* 1950), and up to characters like Gloria in Rosario Ferré's well known *Maldito Amor* (1981).

Pilar's character has accepted her inferiority and is ready to justify her condition. For example, she is mistreated by her lover, Ramon, yet her reaction is that of someone who has internalized this as normal, one who has accepted her fate. She says, "It is nothing. . . . he slapped me with the back of his hand. His ring must have cut me" (Matta 82). Another example is found in a conversation with Glenn. She says, "'I wish I was as pretty as Teresa Mendez, then maybe you would love me instead of her,' she said in a pouting manner" (Matta 77). Pilar believes that Teresa's "light skin . . . [and the] queenly manner in which she carried herself" (Matta, 41) are the definition of beauty and exceed anything she could ever be. Glenn Summers, on the other hand, as attracted as he is to Pilar, also chooses Teresa. Teresa represents the image of an ideal woman, too virtuous to be described as erotically desirable. She is revered in the position of the future mother of a new generation that would carry the mandate of progress of "better civilization" (Matta 128). Both Teresa and Pilar represent the Other, except Pilar's character is charged with notions

of race and class that exclude her from agency in any political movement. Marta I. Cruz-Janzen explains this further,

“In Spanish, country of origin becomes *madre patria*, combining female and male symbolism. Literally, *madre patria* becomes mother of the fatherland, ultimately, mother of the nation. In this context, nationalism and patriotism, without diminishing national patriarchy, legitimize women as bearers and nurturers of powerful men and nations. A complete national identity requires a mother. However, this powerful national icon cannot be the Black or African woman. The Latinegra cannot be the representative of the national icon of motherhood because of what she historically represents to the nation – slavery and misogyny.” (Jiménez 289).

Therefore, Pilar can only show admiration for Teresa because she is the one who has the possibilities that Pilar cannot access. Her character emphasizes how a racial hierarchy is supported by the coloniality of power, where notions that were originally imposed by the colonizer/colonized relation become normalized and naturalized throughout society, and internalized by individuals at different points of the power structure, thus, preserving hegemonic values of white race supremacy.

It is up to Teresa to make the decision that would determine the direction that future generations will follow. Teresa, in a higher class position, is allowed to at least doubt and question. She becomes the voice of uncertainty as she inquires, “Why must it be so? Asked Teresa, still somewhat skeptical” (Matta 193) as Glen offered explanations about progress. Her skepticism is her moment of agency that demonstrates the conscientious choice she has to make of leaving one tradition in hopes that a new one will be “for the betterment of the island” (Matta 192). Unfortunately this progress continues to be connected to colonialism (Grosfoguel “Colonial Subjects” 7), a condition that keeps the native U.S. citizens of the island in the periphery. *The Americano* offers a taste of the environment in Puerto Rico in the early 1900s. This novel demonstrates the societal hierarchies that existed prior to American involvement in Puerto Rico and how the subject of the *Americano* is constructed as the Puerto Rican inferiority develops. The

novel presents a picture of the sense of eagerness of some to accept American ideologies, the sense of resistance of some because this change would affect their social status, and the sense of overall skepticism while moving forward to an inevitable relationship that would last for more than a century to come.

Esmeralda Santiago's *América's Dream*

Esmeralda Santiago's first novel *América's Dream* in contrast to *The Americano* takes place at the end of the 20th century. At this time, almost a hundred years since the U.S. took possession of the island of Puerto Rico and with a similar setting in the East coast, Americans are everywhere. The rural life that was portrayed in *The Americano* is not the norm since, by this time, agriculture has ceased to be the main source of income on the island. The lack of jobs in the agricultural sector was caused in part by the saturation of the land after sugar plantations ended their operations. The idea of free trade emerges in the 20th century and because Puerto Rico is part of the U.S., the island serves as a natural extension of U.S. economic expansion.

“The whole island was turned into a virtual free trade zone, thanks to a little-known loophole in the Internal Revenue Service Code – called Section 936 in its last incarnation – which exempted from federal taxes the income of U.S. subsidiaries” (Gonzalez 255).

Puerto Ricans were offered jobs in these factories. These factory jobs could not completely replace the employment needs of all the people who worked in agriculture. They did not alleviate the unemployment issue and many Puerto Ricans kept moving to the United States main land as an option. The free trade that started in Puerto Rico moved to other places in the Caribbean and Latin America where “federal labor and environmental laws [did not protect] factory workers’ health and safety and their right to unionize” (Gonzalez 256). As González also points out, being part of the U.S. meant that the tariffs in Puerto Rico were regulated by the federal government and were therefore higher than the ones they would find in other countries. Some factories stayed while others eventually found homes elsewhere.

The economic environment surrounding Esmeralda Santiago's novel is portrayed in the text through characters who have internalized a colonial discourse of inferiority and conformity. The novel brings to life the character of América González, a woman who works for an *americano*, the owner of a hotel in Vieques, PR. The relationship with Don Irving, the owner of the hotel is to some degree paternalistic. He is not only the owner of the hotel, but he is also her mother's lover. He functions as their provider, since their job and source of income comes from him. He is in some ways also a protector, although the fact that he is advanced in age poses not the slightest threat to Correa, América's lover. She is not married to Correa, her fourteen year old daughter's father. His name, which means belt in Spanish, is a clue to this character's violent nature. América's daughter, Rosalinda, is at risk of becoming one of many generations of single teenage moms. Rosalinda's relocation to another town, even though it happens against her mother's wish, becomes América's opportunity to run away from the brutality of her lover who regularly rapes and beats her, "the taking of América whenever and however he wants her" (Santiago 109). The *americano*, who is a symbol of superiority, advises América to leave, "He leans toward her, lowers his voice confidentially. 'It might be good for you to get away from here. You know what I mean.' He looks vaguely out the window. . . . It makes her nervous to have him so close, so fatherlike" (Santiago 116-117). Vieques, as mentioned above, was mostly a Naval Base where the U.S. conducted their military training. The part of the island that was left to the people of Vieques provided very limited economic opportunities. Leaving Vieques is always a viable choice for residents who would like economic stability or even dream of advancement because there are just not enough opportunities on the island. In her case, in addition to any economic reasons that she may have, she needed to flee for her life.

América accepts a job as a live-in nanny in a North American home in affluent West Chester County, New York. She becomes the housekeeper of the Leverett family and caregiver of their two young children, three year old Meghan and seven year old Kyle. América meets the Leverett's for the first time when they are on vacation at "La Casa del Francés," the hotel in Vieques. Upon their return from vacation, the need for a new housekeeper arises. They remember their children's fondness for América, a feeling that was mutual. With Don Irving's recommendation, the Leverett's make the offer that changes América's life. This is her opportunity to escape her attacker. Unfortunately, a few months pass and Correa follows her there. In this final assault, after he stabs her,

"she uses her last bit of strength to kick him hard in the one place she knows she can hurt him, between his hairy legs. He doubles over with a groan, and she kicks him again, connects against his lowered face this time, and he turns and falls. There's a crack, like a twig breaking, as Correa's head bounces against the angled edge of the granite coffee table. She watches him fall, then lie there, still. Oh, he's so still. Her back against the wall, she slides down down down down, and there are voices, Meghan and Kyle crying and a man shouting "Police!" and Correa is so still, so quiet. Her chest burns and she can't breathe. Correa is so still, and the house is full of people, men in heavy shoes and I can't breathe I can't breathe I can't breathe" (Santiago 318).

Correa is killed accidentally and in self-defense. This ordeal happened at the house where she was working. Consequently, she loses her job as a nanny. The tragedy makes for sensationalism in the news, which generates a lot of attention from the media, family, and friends. On the other hand, she is surprised by all the circumstances. Her fight for survival shows agency. She ultimately obtains liberation albeit unintentionally. This creates some confusion for América. She is able to break the cycle of abuse yet her violent act puzzles her. This is not the first time she has had to fight him back, in order to survive one of his beatings. Altercations in the past caused her to be in pain for many days. In a chapter titled, "I could kill him" (Santiago 87), she thinks of

many ways of ridding herself from her abuse, especially when she still has to provide dinner for him. While she tends to him and serve him food, murdering thoughts offer different scenarios.

“rat poison” [in his food] . . . Clorox-lace rice . . . She wonders if any of Ester’s [her mother’s] herbs and spices are poisonous. . . . Would I have to stab him . . . ?” (Santiago 91), “Maybe I can hire a hit man to shoot him like that woman in the United States who was having an affair with her minister. . . . Maybe while he’s sleeping I can bash his head in with a bat. Or I can set the bed on fire. I can set the whole room on fire, and he would suffocate in that windowless room he built for me. . . . I could push him off the Esperanza dock, she thinks. I could lace his coffee with sleeping pills. I could fix the brakes on his Jeep” (Santiago 92).

She thinks these ideas as some funny, some absurd, but definitely something that could not be done in Vieques “where everyone knows everyone else” (Santiago 92). For the most part, she does not believe, her freedom from her attacker could have come from any of her actions. But América’s character’s violent act is, in the end, her only way out from her abuser’s hand. “What happened” (Santiago 319) is the title of the chapter that follows the scene where she kills him and the first question she asks when she regains consciousness in the hospital. She finds out in the hospital about his passing. Up to that point, Correa’s death eludes her. But because of his demise, she has the potential to rethink how to live her life. This denotes the complexity of a character who experiences oppression, becomes free but may not be able to assimilate her actions as an act of agency because she has internalized her inferiority in relation to him, “I let him because he is a man. . . . He’s bigger, and stronger, and he frightens me” (Santiago 114).

She is also not able to transfer this inadvertent agency to other areas of her life. Mainly because something of which she is aware as an uneducated non-white woman is her invisibility to the dominant Anglo Saxon society that surrounds and employs her.

“She notices how they look right past and pretend not to see her. She feels herself there, solid as always, but they look through her, as if she were a part of the strange landscape into which they have run away from their everyday lives. Those who do see her, smile guardedly, then slide their gaze away quickly, ashamed, it seems, to have noticed her” (Santiago 30).

Eventually, she ends up working as a maid in a big hotel in the city. Her economic situation does not flourish but does become stable. She does not seem to have greater aspirations.

This lack of aspiration may be regarded as symptomatic of the condition of dependency that at the end of the 20th century Puerto Ricans have been living for so long. When América moves to the U.S. mainland, she meets fellow nannies at the children's playdates. In these encounters, she is confronted by the other nannies who expose a part of her identity that she has never pondered, her legal American-ness. As a Puerto Rican, América is automatically a U.S. citizen. Just like anyone who was born in Kansas or Maine, she did not ask to be an American, she just happen to be born in a place where American citizens are born. However, the legal dimensions of her identity are not part of América's self-identification; from her point of view, she is Viequense, first, then Puerto Rican (Santiago 218). The fact that she is a U.S. citizen is inconsequential and it certainly has no impact in her economic status except that it allowed for fluid mobility to New York. América is not aware of the importance or the access that this mobility affords. It is not until she meets her counterparts in the United States that she finds out the vicissitudes they endure to come to this country. Her friend Adela asks her, "So your social is real?" "Yes, I got it when I was born." A legal social security card, which she has taken for granted, turns out to be as coveted as a green card, which she's heard about but has never seen" (Santiago 218-219)⁶². The novel portrays the legal status of Puerto Ricans as a social limbo. Although they regularly interact with other "Latinos/as" in the U.S. with whom they share linguistic and cultural traits, histories, and customs, they have no knowledge of the hardships other Latin Americans go through from the moment they leave their countries until their arrival in the United States. Moreover, they do not feel American, a sentiment that is reinforced by the way in which they are

⁶² See Mary Pat, "so Your Social is Real?" Vernacular Theorists and Economic Transformation."

treated and regarded by mainstream Americans: they are treated as foreigners, not as fellow citizens, and automatically joined the colored minority group, the lowest social strata in the United States.

In the chapter titled *Las empleadas*, Santiago brings to light the system in which some Latin women in the U.S. find themselves. Once in the United States, América meets women that have limited opportunities because they are not American citizens. The women portrayed in the novel are from Guatemala, El Salvador, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic. Back home they worked as a nurse, a bank teller, a school teacher, and a telephone operator. No one was a maid. Now, they are nannies and they clean houses because that is one of the few options they have in the United States.

“They all have one thing in common. They’ve entered the United States illegally, and they’re amazed that she [América], an American citizen, would work as a maid. ‘I don’t mind the work I do,’ América tells them, and they seem horrified, as if her American citizenship entitles her to aspire to greater things. ‘I like taking care of a house, and I like children.’ [. . .] ‘It’s a job like any other,’ América says, ‘There’s no shame in it’”(Santiago 219).

It is in New York where América has to think about this side of her identity, something she did not know could have some value. In Puerto Rico, her life consisted of a daily combat with her lover. She knew enough to flee from that situation as soon as she could. Her job at the hotel in Vieques kept her motivated. The hotel called, *La Casa del Francés*⁶³ is a place she has known all her life.

“La Casa changed hands many times, and each time, one of Marguerite’s descendants, a woman with a child and no husband, appeared at the back door claiming to be the housekeeper. [. . .] América is the daughter of the great-great-great-granddaughter of the resourceful Marguerite.

⁶³ This was a historical site in Vieques that was burned in 2005 and is in plans for reconstruction. Santiago has two versions of América’s history at the hotel. The first one indicates that “She and Ester were the first maids to work at the place,” (Santiago 36) since Don Irving bought it, with no mention of previous generations working there like the account on page 77.

She thinks about this history as she polishes the tiles the women in her family have polished for more than a hundred years. [. . .] I'm not ashamed of being a maid. It's housework, women's work, nothing to be ashamed of" (Santiago 77).

She belongs to generations of women who stayed in the area and worked at the hotel. According to the story the furthest she had been was Fajardo, which is just 8 miles northwest of Vieques. She had taken her profession and her social status as a given.

Thus, América's life in Vieques exemplifies the complexity and multi-layered character of identity. The dominant dimensions of América's identity in Vieques are her *gendered* self, her "place" as a woman, which has been clearly defined and limited for generations; her *class*, which pre-determines the means of livelihood to which she will have access; and a narrow *regional geography*, which even in a small island like Puerto Rico can have a strong impact on collective mentalities, and which in América's case keeps her within the limits of the most visibly militarized part of the island. Within that context, América's broader Puerto Rican-ness, and beyond that her legal status as a U.S. citizen, remain distant abstractions with little impact on her day to day live experience.

It is in the conversation with the other *empleadas* in New York that she is placed in a position of privilege that she was not aware she had. U.S. citizenship is not something that is particularly promoted nor hidden in Puerto Rico, it is just a matter of fact. Being a U.S. citizen did not change the everyday lives of generations of women in América's family before her. Finding value in the privilege of citizenship is difficult when it did not particularly advance her social status nor change her education.

U.S. intervention where she lived, in the island of Vieques, was mostly part of the scenery. Interaction with Americans was part of her daily life. There were three main areas in which she had contact with Americans. The first part of her life where she interacted with an American was

at her work. The owner of the hotel, an American, Don Irving, as mentioned above, had a paternalistic role in her life. According to América's description of him, Don Irving resembled the Mexican actor Anthony Quinn (Santiago 35). He was also her mother Ester's lover. After living together for a few months, she left him, but they "get together from time to time, always in his casita because Ester won't share her own bed with anyone" (Santiago 36). This couple is older and creates a relationship in their own terms. They have each other on an as-needed-basis, but they maintain separate residences, and to an extent their independence from one another. It is an ambiguous relationship, much like the *Estado Libre Asociado*, the political status Puerto Rico and the United States enjoy. It also reveals how the subject construction of the *Americano* is seen at the end of the 20th century.

In Matta's *The Americano*, it was with great anticipation that the figure of the young, brave American with high moral values, and a strong hard working ethic was welcomed by almost everyone. The exception was the local oligarchy, which saw the *Americano* as direct competition. In Santiago's novel, however, Don Irving does not seem like the type who would be a threat to the elite, although this group is not highlighted in this novel. The admiration that the *peasant* groups had for the *Americano* in Matta's novel turns into a blasé attitude in Santiago's narration. This attitude is mainly fueled by disinterest and apathy. Ester's character, as one of the representatives of the Puerto Rican peasantry, shows little excitement in her relationship with Don Irving. She does not seem to be impressed with him or his ways. He, on the other hand, does not go out of his way to either please or avoid her. He also shows little concern for his property. For example, he does the minimum required maintenance on the hotel. "The furniture is nothing to look at, odd pieces Don Irving has found who knows where and places wherever there is a need. Ester says that when she was a child, there were still magnificent Colonial-style furnishings in the house, but

they were taken away by the last owner” (Santiago 79). This statement indicates his poor standards. His work ethic is mediocre. Don Irving is presented as old and what he is able to provide is also shabby. He provokes in Ester a sense of nostalgia.

Another way Americans are seen in the novel are as tourists. Tourist is almost a metonymy of American in Puerto Rico. In the novel, these tourists are found in the hotel or driving to the beaches. Physically, the tourist “wore bright clothes” and “the women were too skinny and the men too pale⁶⁴, and as mentioned above, [. . .] she [América] notices how they look right past and pretend not to see her” (Santiago 30). There were enough Americans around to where a distinction between them and the rest of the Puerto Ricans, herself included, could be clearly established. And lastly, Americans are also present as military personnel who would drive there in and out of “the gates of Camp Garcia, the naval base” (Santiago 17). They flew their jets, traveled by water in vessels as small as Coast Guard boats and as big as aircraft carriers. The familiarity with Americans did not diminish their superiority. However, from Matta’s novel to Santiago’s text they have lost their messianic aura.

Still, América feels appreciation for Don Irving. After all, he is both her mother’s and her employer. Yet, she is especially appreciative to him because he spoke once to Correa about his behavior towards América. “It didn’t change Correa much, but América has always been grateful to him for trying” (Santiago 36). However, her appreciation is connected to the sense of inferiority that could be linked to the colonized/colonizer relationship that exists between them.

América experiences a relationship with Americans in Puerto Rico that clearly denotes a separation of race, class and economic status, and language. Her interaction with them is literally as their servant, not their equal. As mentioned above, the tourists at the hotel feel more comfortable

⁶⁴ This description includes Puerto Rican tourists who come to the hotel. I chose not to mention that in this corpus to emphasize her view of North American.

by treating her as invisible. Some, like Don Irving, knows of her oppression and makes a gesture to help her. Don Irving and América worked side by side with the unspoken understanding that she is beneath him.

Therefore, it comes as a surprise in New York when she is told by her fellow *empleadas* that she is also an American. This vague relationship with Americans and her new location in the U.S. causes América to think about her dreams and challenges her to ponder if she should want more for her life than to be a maid.

“Maybe, América thinks the next day as she vacuums the downstairs rugs, Adela is right. I’m not ambitious enough. All those women, living in fear of being sent back to their countries, have big dreams for themselves. I don’t. Did I have dreams as a child? Did I ever want anything more than what I had? I wanted my own home, but every woman wants that. I wanted a husband and children, nice furniture, a car. That didn’t work out. I wanted to be taken care of. The whine of the vacuum cleaner is like a lament. That’s all I ever wanted, to be taken care of.” (Santiago, 220)

In this paragraph América reveals various things about herself. First, she shows her internalization of the so called American dream of owning material goods: a house, furniture, a car. Second, she displays a mentality of dependency that the novel presents as analogous to the long term relationship Puerto Rico has had to the United States and that is intertwined with gender roles. América’s desire “to be taken care of” matches Doreen Mattingly’s observations in her article “Making Maids,” in which she states that, “women . . . have been (and continue to be) viewed generally as economic dependents” (Mattingly 62)⁶⁵. This systematic view of the place of women in society is combined to the general dependency the island has on the United States. Much like América, it seems that Puerto Ricans struggled for a century to show resistance and

⁶⁵ In this article Doreen J. Mattingly argues against the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). “Although the intent of the law was to limit illegal immigration, there is no substantial evidence that it has been successful in doing so, with the law possibly having the ironic consequence of promoting undocumented immigration of women.” As they limited the opportunities for men they also “added indirect pressure on immigrant women to work, intensifying women’s need for jobs in domestic service” (Mattingly 75-76).

opposition in an environment that mostly accepted the relationship with the U.S. Whether that vision of Puerto Rico's relation to the U.S. is accurate has been challenged by critics like María Acosta Cruz, who in her book *Dream Nation* (2014) suggests, following the lead of previous thinkers like Ramón Grosfoguel, that the insistence of Puerto Ricans on maintaining the relation to the U.S. does not necessarily imply a dependent mentality but, on the contrary, the desire to participate in the benefits and privileges that association with the U.S. brings. Acosta Cruz's position may also be challenged on several levels but it is certainly the case that inasmuch as Santiago attempts to represent Puerto Rico's complex relation to the U.S. simply through the image of a *passive woman*, her choice of symbol is open to criticism. On the other hand, the characterization of Puerto Rico as passive and docile, qualities that are automatically construed as feminine, has a long history in Puerto Rican literature, and it finds its best known expression in the essay "El puertorriqueño dócil"/"The Docile Puerto Rican" (1976), by the well-known Puerto Rican writer René Marqués. In her novel, Santiago seems caught between her appropriation of that convenient symbol for U.S.-Puerto Rico colonial relations, and a more concrete critique of the subordinate position of actual women in Puerto Rican society.

América understands the inequality between men and women but her ideas about their roles are distorted⁶⁶ and, sadly, informed by the reality she lives. The patterns of behavior she has experienced uphold ideas of male supremacy that she knows are false but are hard from which to break. Unfortunately, these ideas are too ingrained in her society for her to effectively challenge them. When her daughter wants to run away with her boyfriend at fourteen she is aware of the double standards: "If Rosalinda were a boy, she would be calling him a man. [. . .] It is expected

⁶⁶ She even goes so far, after a moment of self-reflection on being a woman to say, "¡Ay, Dios mío! I'm going crazy. I sound like those feminists that tell every woman to have an abortion and every man to clean house" (Santiago 114).

that boys will be men, but girls are never supposed to be women. Girls are supposed to go directly from girlhood to married motherhood with no stops in between,” (Santiago 113). América exposes in this statement the servitude path that she sees as the way of life for women. This is not what she wants for her daughter but it is not clear if she knows what an alternative would look like.

Meeting women in the U.S. from other Latin American countries who had previous professions to their current job as *empleadas*, who do not see cleaning as a career, make América think about her life. She sees incongruences between her so called privilege as an American citizen and her reality as a maid. Up to that point, her work is not something negative in her life. Her relationship with her lover was so crippling that it kept her constantly finding ways to just survive. Her new location in the U.S. propels her to consider something that has never really mattered before: her legal status on American soil. Her friends challenge her to aspire to greater things. However, América, whose eyes are opened to other professional options, defends her chosen occupation, and rejects the idea of social advancement through the pursuit of a different career path.

América’s conscious choice is on the surface a form of conformism. It could be the result of her condition of coexistence with Americans in Puerto Rico that created a sense of permanent sub-servitude, an internalization of American grandiosity versus Puerto Rican inferiority. Or it could be a form of an-*other* kind of thinking on the border of these two cultures, an act of not striving to follow the prescribed American dream. She is not like them. She does not compete with them or revolt against them. Yet she has been able to incorporate some of the key American cultural values, which is a potentially *transmodern* response, as she negotiates the cultures that influence her life. In the end, she appropriates what fits her best, which is the idea that “she has a

right to live that life as she chooses. It is, after all, her life, and she's the one in the middle of it" (Santiago 325).

Is América choosing her life in the end, or conforming to what society has chosen for her? As readers we do not know, and that ambiguity could be regarded as a strength of the text, for it does not attempt to give clear-cut answers to questions that to a large degree depend on subjective individual perspectives. A more productive line of questioning might be: if América in fact chose to pursue a different path, some professional training for instance, would her U.S. citizenship and her society provide her the tools that she would need to do so? According to Grosfoguel, "Migrants do not arrive to an empty or neutral space. Rather, migrants arrive to metropolitan spaces that are already 'polluted' by a colonial history, a colonial imaginary, colonial knowledges, a racial/ethnic hierarchy linked to a history of empire" (Grosfoguel, et al "Latin@s" 8). Given her class, gender, and ethnicity, it seems at best unlikely or difficult and thus one might suspect that even as she affirms her right to choose, América may be more entangled in the realities of coloniality than she (or the friends who insist on her privileged position) is aware of.

The Role of Violence

A recurrent theme in both novels is the issue of violence against women. In the novel *The Americano*, it is almost as if the author wanted to give local color by displaying the normalcy of aggressive treatment of certain types of women. The virtuous and most desirable Teresa was not a recipient of this violence, although this is not to say that she would be totally exempt from it. One can speculate that had she not married the Americano she would have fallen victim of this abuse. On the other hand, Pilar, who due to her darker skin and poor origin occupies an inferior position in a society organized around colonial categories, is the victim of Ramón's violence as his lover. Thus, she suffers violence as a result of her gender, her ethnicity, and her class, a phenomenon that sociologist Blanca Ramos has explained in the case of many Latinas:

“Through time, Latinas have experienced oppression as a result of racism and sexism. Latinas have endured a subordinate status because of the presumption of male superiority predicated on the ideology of sexism, as has occurred for centuries with women in patriarchal societies. The persistent, negative effects of sexism continue to shape the lives of Latinas today. The social inequalities Latinas face as women overlay racial discrimination and ethnic prejudice. This double oppression is clearly illustrated by the exploitation suffered by Latinas in the labor force” (Ramos, et al, 212).

This pattern of subordination and position of inferiority in a patriarchal society is perpetuated throughout the 20th century. In *América's Dream*, América's relationship with Correa is demeaning, shameful, and exhausting. Examples of his mistreatment are found in an early chapter titled *A fuerza de puños*, where the narrator describes the morning after a beating (Santiago 26). We also see his violence in an incident where he beats her in front of her daughter and hurls insults while she is down (Santiago 85). His state of mind only changes where he strikes, it does not change the fact that he will hurt her, “he hits her in the face if he's drunk, or in her abdomen and back if he isn't” (Santiago 106). The rapes are described in one occasion as “the taking of América whenever and however he wants her” (Santiago 109). América's seems trapped in a vicious cycle. The last description of rape happens in New York where Correa follows her. He does that in order to maintain his dominance over her. At that point of the story, América has begun in New York a healthy relationship with another man, Dario. Correa, who was married and had other children, had never in fifteen years allowed América to have a relationship with anyone else. América, much like Pilar, is trapped in a permanent mistress relationship.

The patterns of aggression in which these characters find themselves are situated in a colonial system that was expanded through violence. In *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), Frantz Fanon attempts to offer an explanation for the development of systemic violence in colonial societies. When Jean Paul Sartre wrote the preface for this book, he emphasized how the colonizer tries to justify violence toward the colonized on the basis of a rationalized superior point of view

in which the colonized are not even considered human beings. The inequality between the colonizer and colonized is established based on racial discrimination, which justifies violent acts against the colonized. The justification comes from the negation of humanity to people of color. In this sense any aggressive form of discrimination is rationalized.

Fanon starts the first chapter of his book talking about violence as a means to break away from oppression. He also mentions how violence has been the language in which the colonizer communicates with the colonized, who has been denied a sense of humanity and justice within the colonial system. “All he [the colonized] has ever seen on his land is that he can be arrested, beaten, and starved with impunity; and no sermonizer on morals, no priest has ever stepped in to bear the blows in his place or share his bread” (Fanon 9). In other words, inequality was established through violent mistreatment, which the colonized had to endure without the help of colonial intellectuals or the church. Once the colonized recognizes they are as human as the colonizer (Fanon 9-10), the desire to be equal to or even better than the colonizer rises.

“The colonized subject will first train this aggressiveness sedimented in his muscles against his own people. This is the period when black turns on black . . . the colonized subject is presumed guilty. . . . But deep down the colonized subject acknowledges no authority. . . . The colonized subject is a persecuted man who is forever dreaming of becoming the persecutor” (Fanon 15-16).

Violence becomes an option in order to shift and possibly invert the balance of power. As described by Fanon, the colonial order generates a cycle of violence that begins with the unequal relationship between those in power and the subjugated and which moves toward even greater violence as those who are its victims seek to reclaim their humanity. The difficulties are found when these internalized behaviors are directed to their own. Fanon offers an explanation for the root of the systemic violence and also give examples of how this has affected the European⁶⁷.

⁶⁷ In the chapter “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” Fanon presents five cases of psychological disorders. The fifth case is a French policeman who seeks psychiatric help because after he gets home from work he becomes

Through the unequal relationship that has been established by colonization, individuals fall into destructive patterns that perpetuate oppressive behavior. According to Fanon, since violence is the first contact between the colonizer and the colonized, and it is also the way in which law is enforced through police, then it is also a viable form for organized groups to rebel against their oppressors. According to Gonzalez, “in the 1930s and 1940s, Puerto Rico became notorious as the poorhouse of the Caribbean and as a hotbed for strikes and anti-American violence” (Gonzalez 62). However, these attempts on the part of organized groups to revolt have been thwarted. For example, a peaceful march from the Nationalist Party in 1937 in Ponce, Puerto Rico, turned to be “the biggest massacre in Puerto Rican history” (Gonzalez 85). The Nationalist Party represented a minority of Puerto Ricans. Their leader don Pedro Albizu Campos has been arrested before the march on charges of sedition and served ten years in federal prison (Gonzalez 86). The arrest of their leader and the demise in Ponce discouraged many to participate in events that would liberate the island from the U.S. political imposition, even if at a time when the governors of the Puerto Rico were Americanos appointed in Washington. When Albizu Campos was released from prison in 1947, the U.S. government appointed the first Puerto Rican governor in the island, Jesús T. Piñero and three years later Puerto Rico would have their first gubernatorial elections and elect their first Puerto Rican governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. These events happened before the novels in this study were written. The novels do not include historical or fictional events that would promote or imply that Puerto Ricans would need to be freed from the U.S. In its place, they present the

aggressive towards his wife and children. His job is to torture Algerians patriots and he is seeking a way to continue his job without feeling so guilty. “As he had no intention of giving up his job as a torturer (this would make no sense since he would then have to resign) he asked me in plain language to help him torture Algerian patriots without having a guilty conscience, without any behavioral problems, and with a total peace of mind” (Fanon 198-199).

U.S. as the alternative to Spanish domination in *The Americano* and as the place of refuge from domestic violence in *América's Dream*. The U.S. is an important option to these characters.

The frustration and discomfort Puerto Ricans have with their political status has not disappeared and neither has the violence. The novels, nevertheless, present an attitude towards the United States of compliance and a view of violence as a matter of local idiosyncrasy. I believe this island's peculiarity called domestic violence emerges as an agent that represents the condition of a group of individuals incorporated in an entire system of unequal power relationship. Thus, domestic violence in the novels is the manifestation of a larger unresolved problem.

In the novels by Matta and Santiago, both Pilar and América are victims of the pedantic macho who asserts his superiority by maintaining their lover's inferiority through force. This statement reveals the identity construction of the accepted colonized male behavior. He who has been dominated will in turn dominate those deemed beneath him. The attributes listed above by definition implies that the opposite behavior is expected of a woman, placing her at the absolute bottom of the hierarchical structure of society.

Sociologists agree that this sociocultural context works to the detriment of Latinas.

“The sociopolitical history of Latinos greatly affects the lives of contemporary Latinas. [. . .] through the relocation of borders for Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans in the nineteenth century or immigration for all other subgroups from the early twentieth century until now. These events initiated the ongoing experiences of prejudice, inequality, and racism” (Ramos, et al. 211).

In other words, the oppression that women like Pilar and América endure is constructed in an environment where the sociopolitical context was formed in an uneven power structure. Furthermore, and as I mentioned earlier in this chapter, Pilar's and América's characters who represent perpetual mistresses, are a reminder of Puerto Rico's long standing status and relationship with the United States. When Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States in

1898, the value was found in the land. The people became possession with no voice in political or economic matters. In 1917, around the time the United States decided to become involved in World War I, Puerto Ricans were granted the U.S. citizenship, which gave the U.S. the right to draft men for World War I, the first of several major wars to follow. Puerto Rico could be left alone or used as needed but never equally recognized, never elevated. “On one occasion Puerto Rican leaders sent this message to Congress: ‘. . . Who are we? What are we? . . . Are we citizens or are we subjects?’ (Wagenheim and Jiménez de Wagenheim 1996:111). These questions continue to loom in the minds of Puerto Ricans today” (Pérez y González 29). While these questions are sometimes denied and sometimes ignored, they never really disappear.

Fanon’s views elucidate the history of violence and how it affects both the colonizer and the colonized. Notwithstanding, violence in these two novels is not presented as the collective movement to protest inequality. It is instead a reminder of a political structure that masks instability on the island. The colonial system imposed centuries ago first by Spain and then by the U.S. are still in place today. It has been internalized by its people, it permeates their society on the island, and travels with them into the U.S. mainland.

Seeking Parity

The Americano and *América’s Dream* portray the condition of coloniality that Puerto Ricans have experienced under the reign of the United States for over a century. These novels also show a progression of ideology that promised a better standard of living but that eventually stagnates into an environment of conformity. The shifts in ideology did not happen in a vacuum. Two factors were working simultaneously from the beginning: the suppression of the people’s right to choose, vote, and dissent; and the advancement of American interests (military and economic) on the island. Washington-appointed governors that ruled the island without the consent of its people criminalized the actions of leaders like Pedro Albizu Campos for standing up

for their political convictions. Albizu Campos and others were removed from society through imprisonment. Censorship is promoted through the government, and “the 1948-1957 *Ley de la Mordaza* or Gag Law, which prohibited speech, press, or public assembly favoring independence and eventually made membership in a nationalist group unlawful” (Pérez y González 31) – as mentioned above, greatly discourages any activity that would question the U.S. government’s authority in Puerto Rico. On the other hand, there was a great need for an infrastructure that would support the U.S. military and economic advancement.

“The United States improved health conditions by virtually eliminating smallpox and yellow fever through the use of vaccinations. . . . [Other diseases like malaria and hookworm were spreading as well.] It was discovered in 1901 that hookworms enter the body through the soles of the feet . . . ‘the American tariff raised the price of shoes so that only one fourth of the 1930 population had ever worn a pair’ (Christopoulos 1974:132). Other U.S. contributions included increased miles of paved roads, improved communication systems, and the construction of more schools, which significantly improved literacy on the island” (Pérez y González 28).

At a very slow pace and indirectly, Puerto Ricans begin to benefit from U.S. occupation while an awareness of their lack of basic necessities to ensure proper health and economic sustenance for the people was increasing. During the late 1930s, American landowners had used most of the land for sugar plantations paying low wages and allowing little cultivation of other crops. In 1938, a new political party was formed by, among others, Luis Muñoz Marín; it was called the “Partido Popular Democrático [PPD] (Popular Democratic Party) or the Populares, which attempted to redress the social and economic woes plaguing the island before striving for independence. . . . The United States . . . pressured Muñoz Marín to dismantle them and the party’s stance for independence” (Pérez y González 31-32). The focus of this political party was to redistribute the land so that Puerto Ricans could own, live, and cultivate crops in small lots, hence their slogan *Pan, Tierra, Libertad* (Bread, Land, and Liberty). Due to American pressure the ideals of *Libertad* (independence) were set aside in order to put all efforts in creating an infrastructure

beyond U.S. interest that would benefit the rural and urban areas alike. This political party won the first Puerto Rican elections in 1949 and was in place when the island in 1952 became a Commonwealth of the U.S. or *Estado Libre Asociado* as it is known in Puerto Rico. The platform of this party has been to maintain a relationship with the United States that would allow some local autonomy in Puerto Rico following their own Constitution, “which prompted the United States to request that Puerto Rico be taken off the United Nations’ list of protected territories; this request was granted” (Pérez y González 33). The UN General Assembly issued the first of many resolutions of decolonization in 1953. This has been challenged by the UN Special Committee on Decolonization in the 1990s (Pérez y González 33), bringing this debate to this international venue. While the United States contends that Puerto Rico as a territory should be considered as part of the U.S. in the UN, many groups debate the meaning of decolonization and what does this really mean for the island. The latest debate recorded in the United Nations website was in June 2014 where numerous organizations’ from Puerto Rico and other nation’s main argument was once again Puerto Rico’s political status⁶⁸.

In 1968, the Partido Nuevo Progresista (PNP) was formed to foment annexation to the United States. Even though this political party was founded during the second half of the 20th century, the ideals of annexation were not new. Puerto Rican leaders like Santiago Iglesias Pantín (1872-1939) and Luisa Capetillo (1879-1922), whose political backgrounds were socialist, saw annexation to the United States as an opportunity to obtain rights for the labor workers through unions that would protect them. It was important for them that the working class not be neglected as they accused the Puerto Rican aristocracy of doing (Gonzalez 61). Other leaders, like Dr. José

⁶⁸ Many organizations with opposing views were united in a specific request to the United States, the immediate release of political prisoners Oscar López Rivera and Norberto Gonzalez Claudio “political prisoners serving sentences in the United States for cases relating to the struggle for Puerto Rican independence” (United Nations Meeting Coverages and Press Release 2014).

Celso Barbosa (1857-1921), one of the founding members of the Puerto Rican Republican Party⁶⁹ and Dr. Julio Henna (1848-1924), were passionate about Puerto Rico's independence from Spain. Both⁷⁰ studied in the United States and saw that there were opportunities under the U.S. government that would grant benefits to all, not just a few.

On the other hand, there are numerous documentations of the U.S. government not acknowledging Puerto Ricans as competent to self-govern⁷¹. Through government policies and political repression they would convince the majority of the public to set aside the idea of independence. The idea of independence is one of the great predicaments in this work since it has been established that even countries who have obtained their independence from Spain, like Mexico and the Dominican Republic, through their experience with Spanish colonialism and through U.S. interventionism have not overcome and still maintain attributes of colonial mentality.

Grosfoguel explains it in the following way:

“Although Quijano uses the concept of ‘global coloniality’ to refer to the condition of ‘independence without decolonization’ in Latin America since the nineteenth century, one can use this term to designate the regime of power dominant today in the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system. Global coloniality as opposed to global colonialism, is now the dominant form of core-periphery relationships in the capitalist world-economy. Core powers and transnational corporations exploit and dominate the periphery without the expense of colonial administrations. Thus, ‘independence’ is no longer a subversive solution from the point of view of imperial elites because there is no real ‘independence’ or ‘sovereignty’ in the periphery of the modern/colonial/capitalist world-system. . . . ‘statehood’ has become the new ‘subversive’” (Grosfoguel “Colonial Subjects” 6-7).

⁶⁹ Founded in 1899 and joined the GOP in 1903. Their greatest hurdle is convincing the U.S. Republican Party that Puerto Rico should be the 51st State of the Union. See article “National Review Speaks Out Against Statehood-A Rebuttal by Attorney, Oreste Ramos, Jr.” republicanpartyofpuertorico.gop

⁷⁰ Dr. Celso Barbosa graduated from the University of Michigan Medical School in 1888 and Dr. Julio Henna graduated from Columbia University in New York in 1872.

⁷¹ See Gonzalez's *Harvest of Empire* (2000), Baker's *Understanding Mainland Puerto Rican Poverty* (2002), González y Pérez's *Puerto Ricans In the United States* (2000), Cardona's *A History of Puerto Ricans in the United States of America* (1990), among others.

Countries that were able to fight for independence and succeeded are so entrenched maneuvering the ways of the world market that they lose their sovereignty in order to comply with the demands of the capitalist world-system. For Puerto Rico and their Commonwealth status, a plea for statehood would finally extend the long awaited equality to their citizens. This would also shake the U.S. economically and culturally with the inclusion of a mostly poor Spanish speaking non-white group.

As the idea of independence takes a step back, the strongest opposing views in Puerto Rican politics from the second half of the 20th century until today are the pro-annexation (PNP) to the United States movement versus the pro-Estado Libre Asociado (PPD), the group who supports the commonwealth status that Puerto Rico has had since the 1950s. This debate matches the ideas found in the two novels. The tone heard in the first novel is that which welcomes the *Americano* features the voice of those who would want annexation (PNP). The second novel parallels the thoughts of those who would not want to be another state in the union but do not wish to part relationship either (PPD). Both are seeking parity with the United States, albeit each in their own way. The pro-annexation group would argue that they are the ones seeking parity since they want the same full rights and benefits that the rest of the U.S. citizens enjoy while the other group wants to have parity in their own terms without giving up some national patrimony. This is all to demonstrate how the status debate shifted from dichotomous position to these two lateral thoughts that do not deny nor oppose the presence of the U.S. on the island. The novels portrayal of factors like race, gender, and class demonstrate the complexity of relationships in Puerto Rico and with the U.S. that affect go beyond dichotomous positions. For example, women like Pilar has less advantages than women like Teresa, because of race and class issues. Likewise, men like Correa,

Ramon, don Irving, and the Americano, also represent the power based on race and the 'freedom's' their gender affords.

The colonial difference is the notion that Mignolo uses to establish a difference between the colonized and the colonizer as well as a construction of the colonized as inferior. Puerto Rico's status as a colony of Spain changed in 1898 when it became a colony of the U.S. Its inferiority as a colonized people continued. After over a century of relationship with the U.S., Puerto Ricans continue to be perceived as immigrants in this country establishing a complex relationship with North American, and inciting a desire for equality with other U.S. citizens. The novels explored in this chapter portrayed the tension of the imposed administrations as the characters express themselves from their particular locations.

Because Puerto Rico was already colonized for four hundred years prior to the arrival of the U.S., its identity as a colony was well cemented in its population. From that position new forms of knowledge are created. In Aníbal Quijano's work "Modernity, Identity, and Utopia in Latin America," he presents the concept of "rearticulating two cultural heritages" (154) as a form of liberation and decolonization. The United States has joined the cultural heritage of those on the island of Puerto Rico. The appropriation and re-articulation of the ideology of progress, hard-working ethic, individual choice, and justice has taken a different form. In América's case there is still a question looming, did she choose another job as a maid to not fall into the trap of capitalism or has she internalized her inferiority in a way that allows no ability for her to aspire for more? I believe there is a little of both in her character. América's dream is not to acquire more things, become richer, and gain social status. Instead it is to be content and to conform. The colonized stage for Puerto Ricans has not changed. However, even from this status a reconciliation of

conflicting ideas is realized such that the identity of the colonized is successfully transformed into their own definition of self-fulfillment.

CHAPTER 5: BILINGUAL LITERATURE: A DECOLONIAL RESPONSE TO U.S. INTERVENTIONISM

Bilingual literature⁷² gives voice to a perspective that is found within the United States, as well as in U.S. territories. As U.S. military, political, and economic expansion reached the countries represented in this study, so did the English language. For authors to present their work of literature in two languages simultaneously is a bold move. It opens up a space that may serve to unify two languages and two cultures on one hand, and to show resistance and anti-assimilation on the other. Each author uses their chosen combination of English and Spanish language as a tool to convey a political message behind the makeup of their individual characters. Thus, bilingual literature will be presented as a response to the history of U.S. interventionism by highlighting how the use of language varies depending on the form of government in which the characters are found. Beginning with an explanation of how language could be considered a strategy for decolonial response, this chapter will offer a summary of bilingual literature in the United States and an examination of how linguistic styles are used through the narrations and dialogs to reveal the experiences found in the characters of the novels in this study.

The characters in the novels are a concise representation of a growing group in the U.S. mostly called Latinos/as. Latinos/as in the U.S. comprise the second largest minority group⁷³. Ironically, the growth of this population seems to have taken the rest of the U.S. population by

⁷² For the purpose of this study, bilingual literature will refer to the use of English and Spanish.

⁷³ “The U.S. Census Bureau announced Asians were the nation's fastest-growing race or ethnic group in 2012. Their population rose by 530,000, or 2.9 percent, in the preceding year, to 18.9 million, according to Census Bureau annual population estimates. More than 60 percent of this growth in the Asian population came from international migration. By comparison, the Hispanic population grew by 2.2 percent, or more than 1.1 million, to just over 53 million in 2012. The Hispanic population growth was fueled primarily by natural increase (births minus deaths), which accounted for 76 percent of Hispanic population change. Hispanics remain our nation's second largest race or ethnic group (behind non-Hispanic whites), representing about 17 percent of the total population.” <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/population/cb13-112.html>

surprise even though it was not an overnight event. The influx in immigration of Latinos in the U.S. is not a coincidental wave of migration but it has roots in a history of U.S. interventionism. Currently, the Latino/a population is the fastest growing minority group in the United States. Latinos in the U.S. contribute to the economy, politics, science, arts, culture, and more. The production of literary work by U.S. Latinos is worth examining within the context of the historical U.S. interventionism, taking into special consideration the styles of language used with an emphasis on English as the primary language combined with generous doses of Spanish.

The novels by Esmeralda Santiago, Sandra Cisneros, and Junot Díaz portray characters who reside in the United States and go back and forth to their respective heritage lands. They mix English and Spanish allowing their characters to become agents of a bilingual discourse. Enrique Matta, on the other hand, subverts the canon of his times, which is to write completely in Spanish, and publishes a novel in English with characters who reside in Puerto Rico. Bearing in mind the time and setting of these novels, the use of English and Spanish will be explored throughout this chapter. I will provide examples of how bilingual literature responds to U.S. interventionism and becomes a strategy of decolonization.

Considering a Decolonial Response

Decolonization is usually connected to the act of independence of one country from another that has previously ruled it and the foundation of a new independent state. It assumes that freedom, separation, and detachment are accomplished. But for Latinos/as in the U.S. and even for countries like Puerto Rico, the relationship with the colonizer is more complex and requires a broader understanding of decolonizing practices. A major aspect of colonization is the establishment of inequitable hierarchies and the overpowering of groups of people or countries through the imposition of various forms of “knowledge.” This imposition of knowledge refers to ideas ingrained in colonization that sustain a well-established societal order, usually based on racial

prejudices and where the non-white immigrant is found at the bottom. Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, and Saldívar explain,

“Thus, many migrants from the formally ‘independent’ Caribbean, Central American and South American countries become ‘colonial immigrants’ in the United States, even though they are not directly colonized by the metropolis to which they migrate and they have class backgrounds that are higher than the ‘colonial migrants’ that are part of the colonial/racial subjects of empire. However, it is important to mention that many of these migrants arrived to the United States as part of direct U.S. military interventions, such as Dominicans, or as part of U.S. indirect military interventions in support of military dictators such as Guatemalans and Salvadoreans (Grosfoguel 2003)” (Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, Saldívar 9-10).

The predicament of independence mentioned in my previous chapter related to migration is exposed here. Namely, persons from countries that are not directly colonized by the United States are treated as such once they are in the U.S. mainland. In as much as decolonization is a response to the dichotomous relationship of a colonizer and the colonized, it is important that it challenges the hierarchy imposed and offers an-other form of knowledge.

The point of departure is the uneven power relationship that forces some individuals or whole segments of the population into the margins of society. Decolonization may refer to any act that enables an individual or group to achieve a degree of liberation even if only momentarily, from that uneven power structure. Even if those moments are temporary, they contribute to the overall questioning and challenge of the unequal power structure.

One may describe the colonial hierarchy at work in the U.S. in terms of what Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano calls the *coloniality of power*. Quijano’s concept, mentioned in previous chapters, refers to places where orthodox forms of colonial domination may no longer exist, but where individuals, mentalities, and institutions continue to operate on the basis of essentialist colonial categories. As mentioned above, Latinos/as in the U.S. contribute to the

economy and other areas of society but are mostly found (and kept by mainstream society) at the margins.

One of the essentialist colonial categories is the classification of people by race. Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, and Saldívar point out that there has been a modification in mainstream society where biological racism is disguised with cultural racism, “It is not an accident that in London, Amsterdam, Paris and New York, colonial Caribbean minorities share the bottom of the city’s racial/ethnic hierarchy with other colonial/racial subjects of these respective empires” (Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, Saldívar 11). This statement emphasizes the inequality established by the colonizer/colonized relationship that permeates countries and regions that proclaim freedom and democracy. The culture belonging to colonized nations is found to be in disadvantage to those represented by the colonizer. As Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, and Saldívar indicate, “the difficulty in the struggle against the new cultural racist discourses is its denial about its own racism” (14). Although avoiding rhetoric directed at the color of the skin, a tendency to adhere essentialist notions to cultural characteristics that may be found in contrast to the mainstream experience has developed. Generalizations about behavior and stereotypes based on culture become accepted. The distinction is made to propagate the belief that the dominant culture’s precepts are the norm. Political Science Professor José Ramón Sánchez in his book about the gain and loss of power by Puerto Ricans in the U.S. explains, “Racist practices, for example, can either facilitate or impede the exploitation of labor and the accumulation of capital. This is also true of other forms of cultural and political power” (Sánchez, 39). This is another way of rationalizing white supremacy in areas like labor, culture, and even language.

Argentinean scholar Walter Mignolo offers the term border thinking, also mentioned in previous chapters, as an alternative to colonial mentality in order to incorporate other forms of

knowledge. Border thinking would entail the incorporation of non-European/North American forms of knowledge as well as the experience of those in the periphery. Bilingual literature could be considered a form of knowledge from the border especially due to the location where it is created. In a society where colonial structures are in place and groups like Latinos/as in the U.S. are found in the margins, forms of knowledge that develop in this specific location breakaway from those hierarchical relations. This is why exploring the use of both English and Spanish in literature as form of knowledge that challenges the hierarchical relations established by colonial practices is significant. When English and Spanish are used interchangeably it superficially questions the language competency of individuals on the border. It also destabilizes the monolingual reader while defying essentialist notions of a dominant language. Literature that includes both languages in this form responds to linguistic colonization.

Linguistic colonization takes place when a dominant language overpowers the conquered one. The first chapter of this study explains the history of U.S. interventionism in Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. These three countries were previously colonies of Spain. Even prior, these were populated by civilizations of Aztecs, Maya, Toltecs among others in Mexico, and the Taíno, Arawaks, and Caribs in the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico. Each of these groups already had their distinct civilizations and languages. In the case of Mexico, the indigenous languages have been preserved by the indigenous population that has survived the invasions mentioned above. Though painfully marginalized, the various indigenous groups of Mexico have kept their language vibrant. Spanish became the language of the colonizer hundreds of years before the English language came in play.

In the cases of the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, the genocide of their indigenous population was survived by some of their vocabulary that was incorporated into the Spanish

language. Some well-known examples of Taíno/Arawaks words are *batey*, *kiosko*, *bohío*, and even words like *hurricane* that made its way into the English language. Because language is not static, it is able to cross cultural blocks and barriers. The indigenous words mentioned above moved from one culture and were incorporated into a newer one. Spanish, as the dominant language, absorbed some of these words. When the United States arrived in these islands, English represented the language of power.

The authors in this study use the knowledge of both English and Spanish as a tool for the Latino/a character to work out their political situation and to work out how they are perceived within a larger (foreign) mainstream culture as well as within the culture of their heritage. (In the case of these novels, this includes Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico). In order to analyze the use of language by the authors, it is important to examine the linguistic variation known as code-switching, which is the predominant style found in the literature of this study.

Code-Switching: An Author's Prerogative

The authors that utilize both English and Spanish within the same text, linguistically known as code-switching, contribute in a meaningful way to the cultural aspects of bilingual literature because they expose a phenomenon incorporated in the daily lives of Latinos/as in the U.S., as well as their own political engagement with this topic. Representing Latinos/as lives in dual language is the outward expression of a deeper matter that is the complicated connection of nationalities and the intercultural exchange of ideas that occur when this bilingual speaking occurs. According to Ilan Stavans, the trend of code-switching in literature started before the decade of the nineties, “to the best of my knowledge then, the first full-fledged Spanglish story *Pollito Chicken* (1981) by the Puerto Rican author Ana Lydia Vega” (“Spanglish” 11). However, Puerto Rican author, Frances Aparicio, reveals poetry that extends further back, “...the early interlingual poetry produced since the late 1960s and 1970s [by Chicano and Nuyorican poets] Alurista, José

Montoya, Miguel Algarín, Pedro Pietri... [and later works of the eighties and nineties by authors] ...“Víctor Hernández Cruz, Sandra Cisneros, Helena María Viramontes, Judith Ortiz Cofer” (Aparicio, 201) are part of a 20th century canon of bilingual literature in the United States.

Puerto Rican linguist Lourdes Torres explores the usage of English and Spanish in literature in her article titled “In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers.” In this work, she exposes the strategies that authors use to delight, challenge or conform to readers’ needs and expectations. The contact zone makes reference to a point of adverse linguistic contact in which both English and Spanish would meet. The term “contact zone” was coined by Mary Louise Pratt to “refer to the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and established ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” (6). In this work the contact zone is mostly found in the United States where English becomes the language of power and Spanish the undesirable one to those in the dominating class. This relationship that starts on unequal ground promotes a struggle of assimilation versus resistance. This conflict can result in an effort to utilize the knowledge of both languages in a way that would direct the individual to identify with principles that encourage incorporation of language used by the dominant culture while confronting its terms.

Torres points out how authors like Esmeralda Santiago address bilingual readers in the character named Correa in *América’s Dream*, indicating that “the monolingual reader will miss the point that the meaning of the noun “correa” (belt) is a very fitting name for this violent character, while this will not be lost on the bilingual reader” (Torres 86). An example of the kind of political inequality that fuels writers’ use of bilingualism is found in Junot Díaz’s writing. He mentions in an interview with Evelyn Ch’ien that to him “Spanish is not a minority language. Not

in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why 'other' it? Why de-normalize it? By keeping the Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers of the fluidity of languages, the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English" (Ch'ien 204). Díaz' intent is to normalize code-switching in literature in order to expose a culture within the U.S. that does not conform to an English only system. Both Santiago and Díaz use bilingualism as a strategy that decolonizes language by questioning the colonial logic of "one language, one country" that permeates in the United States.

Because code-switching is the result of language contact, it may also be the cause of anxiety for monolinguals or proponents of Spanish only or English only due to its unpredictability, especially in everyday language. This is the grounds for many investigations that strongly favor or oppose its prolonged usage. Doris Sommer, in the introduction to *Bilingual Games* (2003), intends to lower the anxiety as she observes the attitudes that are being developed for and against code-switching. One of the purposes of calling it a game is to broaden the spectrum of ideas on the topic and make room for a variety of positions that range from those at "home base and others off in left field" (Sommer 2). She establishes the two sides of the story, the big team contenders, the controversy found in the dichotomy that is constantly seen in the code-switching debate. One side represents the preservation of a unifying tongue, one that would become one for a larger mass. The other side is represented by those who accept the linguistic reality of an ever growing number of the population that utilizes a way of speaking "between particular codes and a lingua franca" (Sommer 3). This dichotomy is at the heart of the section of her book titled "Pushes and Pull." In this part of her work she discusses the intolerance of a system of code-switching. In the United States this is shown by the promotion of a monolingual society that is offended when someone

speaks a different language (Sommer 3). Intolerance by the mainstream culture is discouraging to citizens who struggle to maintain their inherited language as they have adapted to the Anglophone one.

Sommer, leaving temporarily behind the baseball game metaphor to utilize a medical one, calls the intolerance to bilingualism a “dis-ease [that may] feel normal rather than a case to be cured through drastic and violent measures” (Sommer 4). In other words, it is accepted that people will feel uncomfortable when others are speaking a language other than English. Many politely apologize in public when they are speaking a language other than English. Bilingualism, however, is part of the quotidian in many parts of the United States.

Sommer points out how philosophical thoughts by German literary critic Herder have influenced contemporary society to oppose bilingualism. Being true to his nature metaphors, he portrays bilingualism as a defect, “a physical decomposition signaled by flatulence” (Sommer 4). This thought may refer to code-switching as an act that seems impulsive. Sommer also depicts how even philosopher of language Wittgenstein who had explored contact with two languages, German and English, maintained them neatly separated perhaps because “mixing codes seemed undignified for philosophy” (Sommer 6). What Díaz called above “the fluidity of languages” has been previously seen as an impulsive and inappropriate utterance.

This is where the games metaphor comes in again to express that there are “uneven playing field[s] where a powerful language expects to win every match, but where other languages jostle and rub power to win some points” and this shakes the “across the board games of politics, philosophy and aesthetics” (Sommer 6). From the scholarly frowning to code-switching done by Uriel Weinreich who said, “The ideal bilingual switches from one language to the other according to appropriate changes in the speech situation (interlocutors, topics, etc.), but not in an unchanged

speech situation, and certainly not within a single sentence” (Weinreich 73) to Ilan Stavans’s bold declaration of Spanglish as a third language, code-switching has been a controversial topic of studies aiming to best understand its communicative functions in order to support it, discourage, or eliminate it.

The authors that Lourdes Torres describes in her article use English as the main language. Their choices are carefully based on the type of audience they are hoping to reach. Torres analyzes texts written during the decade of the nineties to the year of publication of her article “In the Contact Zone” in 2007, where the authors represent their relationship with their “homelands, languages, and transnational identifications” (76). Lourdes Torres, points out various levels of code-switching that range from “Easily Accessed, Transparent, or Cushioned Spanish” (76), to “Gratifying the Bilingual Reader” (83), to what she calls “Radical Bilingualism” (86). When she introduces her essay, she mentions how authors use strategies to either appeal to mainstream monolingual readers or bilingual readers, instead. Three of the authors in this study, Cisneros, Santiago, and Díaz are mentioned in Lourdes Torres work. She references Sandra Cisneros’ *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* and her use of calques,

“which are creative English renditions of Spanish words and phrases translated literally or figuratively. In this case, Spanish is indirectly, or covertly, present in the English language text. . . . [authors like Cisneros] seem to prioritize the bilingual reader and may cause instances of discomfort or annoyance to the monolingual reader. These strategies subvert the commodification of Spanish and gratify the bilingual, bicultural reader” (Torres 78).

With this description, Torres places *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* in the second category of the three mentioned above, where the goal of the author is to gratify the bilingual reader. She also places Díaz’s 1996 collection of short stories *Drown* in this category. Even though she remarks how he avoids the use of italics to signify words in Spanish, mostly nouns, as opposed to longer phrases with greater instances of code-switching, the text allows a gratifying experience for the

bilingual reader (Torres 86). Cisneros' short story collection *Woman Hollering Creek* (1991) also gratifies the bilingual reader because "it does not mark obvious translations from Spanish that probably read oddly to the monolingual reader, but amuse the bilingual one" (Torres 84). And finally, Torres compares Santiago's novel *América's Dream* to her autobiographic work *When I was Puerto Rican* mentioning that the novel "does not contain a glossary for the Spanish used in the text and Spanish words are not italicized. While some of the Spanish terms in the text are cushioned, the text offers the bilingual reader moments of pleasure that are inaccessible to the monolingual reader" (Torres 85-86).

According to Torres, the most radical authors are Mexican American Susana Chávez-Silverman, and Puerto Rican Giannina Braschi. These authors have in common English as the predominant language of their writing, although they differ in the way they use Spanish, this language almost equally abounds in the text. For example, in Braschi's novel, *Yo-Yo Boing* (1998) the languages are as intermixed as the voices of the male and female characters in the dialog sometimes making it hard to distinguish which is which, and subverting gender traps that are found in the language. According to Torres, these authors are intentional about the use of this mixture of English and Spanish in order to convey the convoluted situations their characters are found.

The novels in this study that are not mentioned in Lourdes Torres' article are *The Americano* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Following the strategies of bilingualism stated above, it is safe to place *The Americano* in the first category because it is a good example of a text that uses "cushioned Spanish" (Torres 76). While *América's Dream* and *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, gratify the bilingual reader, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* offers an unquestionable example of radical bilingualism because of its sustained use of code-switching. Eugenia Casielles' article "Radical Code-Switching in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao"

will provide further insights on this thought. It is important to note how bilingual writing is framed and how its use is able to determine the intricate atmosphere of the characters in these novels.

Implications of Code-Switching: The Issue of Prestige

There is inequality between English and Spanish as illustrated above through Pratt's concept of "contact zone" and Sommer's "bilingual games." Because these languages are not established on equal footing, the perception of mixing them or code-switching brings up the issue of prestige. Linguists study code-switching and agree that language contact is the determining factor for this phenomenon. It happens across the board, around the globe, regardless of age and socio-economic status. And it is certainly not exclusive of English and Spanish. However, this frequency of code-switching has not influenced its acceptance. This is to say that just because it is common in areas where more than one language is spoken does not make it a satisfactory use of the language. In fact, it exposes the negative effect of language essentialisms and the disdain of those who adhere to it. Therefore, the characters in these novels use of code-switching becomes a signifier of their colonial difference.

In the uneven plane of languages, where English is above Spanish, code-switching and using Spanglish has been seen as an even inferior use of the language. Code-switching between English and Spanish is colloquially called Spanglish. The word Spanglish causes an adverse reaction to anyone who is a proponent of English only and/or Spanish only. Mixing the languages puts in question the political loyalty to one language or the other as well as the proficiency attained. Choosing to speak English or Spanish after there is proficient knowledge of both languages brings into question a person's political allegiance. It sometimes becomes analogous to taking sides with the political affiliation that the speaker is inclined to support, whether that is the speaker's intention or not. In an article that compares Puerto Ricans on the island to those in the mainland U.S., linguist Lourdes Torres explains that "their language practice is tied to issues of nationalism and

political loyalties in Puerto Rico and the United States” (Torres “The Politics” 81). There is a sense of patriotism found in the way one speaks. For example, in the case of Puerto Ricans on the island speaking English may symbolize a desire for annexation to the U.S., while speaking Spanish only, a desire for independence from the U.S., I insist, whether that is their intention or not.

Because the first language in Puerto Rico is Spanish and the second official language is English, the public school instruction system has accommodated this second language into the K-12 curriculum. This instruction varies in success. In public schools, it is at best, mediocre, leaving many students with a general idea of the four language skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, while keeping their proficiency at a mid to low level. Many private schools, on the other hand, offer a quasi-immersion program in which all the instruction is in English emphasizing an advantage to the public school education. Classes are taught in English raising the proficiency of the students to a higher level. English, therefore, is more valued and becomes a prestigious commodity for those who can afford it. Torres records in her article that 20% of students in Puerto Rico attend private schools that prepare them “to pursue university study in the United States and assume a higher status and the best paying jobs on the island” (Torres “The Politics” 86). She creates a correlation between English proficiency and social status observing that “the areas with the fewest bilinguals are the poorest” (Torres “The Politics” 86). In general, the English competence on the island is far from stellar. This fact Torres attributes to the attitudes towards the second language. While she notes that there is a positive attitude towards bilingualism in Puerto Rico as well as by Puerto Ricans in the U.S. mainland, she also notes that there is an unspoken loyalist notion everytime one language is chosen over the other.

Something that occurs very often on the island is code-switching between English and Spanish. Colloquial phrases incorporate English in the Spanish language for purposes of

convenience. It is easier to say *parking* instead of *estacionamiento*, or quicker to say *tape* rather than *cinta adhesiva*, or to mention a brand name like *Pampers*, *Kleenex*, or *Dawn* instead of *pañales desechables*, *pañuelo descartable*, and *líquido de lavar platos*. In an article published more than forty years ago, Rose Nash describes the quotidian language in Puerto Rico, “a Puerto Rican buys a *freezer* rather than a *congelador* because that is the word he sees in the advertisements; he speaks of *la high* [for high school] rather than *la escuela superior* because it is shorter” (Nash 230). This trend has not changed. The wave of consumerism that increases everyday produces a lexicon of commercial products that perilously influence languages. Martinican poet Édouard Glissant mentions that the problem with the English language is that it threatens languages to turn into “a technical salesman’s Esperanto, a perfunctory containerization of expressions. . .” (“Poetics of Relation” 112). Advertisement is prevalent in the many modes of communication that are accessible at any given time, facilitating this proliferation of product related words that become the norm in everyday language.

Nash wrote, “This is the linguistic dilemma of Puerto Rico today: a generation of students who feel inadequate with their Spanish, uncomfortable with their English, and guilty about their culturally unacceptable Spanglish” (232). This may still be the reality for some. Although the lack of comfort with English may not be as strong, nor the feelings of inadequacy in Spanish, the guilt over speaking Spanglish may be an inevitable part of the colonial baggage Puerto Ricans carry. The constant bombardment of marketing ads on the island, found in the media, from television, to classified ads, to banners in commercial locations, and the Internet continuously use loan words from English to describe their product. The same is seen in restaurant menus, although most high end restaurants’ menus are all in English. In dialog it is frowned upon depending on the speaker. This is why I argue that code-switching between English and Spanish or Spanglish

has a covert prestige on the island. It is important for the well to do to be proficient in English, on the other hand, there is a stigma that borders on classism when the usage of Spanglish proliferates. Well-to-dos are associated with lighter skin, for the most part, while the rest tend to have a darker skin color and that plays into who has prestige as well. The close connection with the U.S. tends to emphasize these views along with those of the correct use of the language.

In the U.S. the approach to bilingualism is demonstrated by “a strong rhetoric of multilingualism [...] and an equally fierce intolerance of languages other than English” (Torres “The Politics” 87). Knowing more than one language is mostly celebrated as an accomplishment. When the two languages are put together as part of the same sentence or even in the same paragraph, the academic achievement is questioned by linguists and novelists who have debated this topic. As mentioned above, some experts in language contact look down on this practice as a bad habit; however, some linguists maintain that code-switching denotes a high level of proficiency in both languages. Some studies show that the use of code-switching, in the case of this study Spanglish, “is not only structured but, more significantly, a mark of bilingual competence that enable a particular cohort of people to select one language or another in order to increase effective communication” (Rell & Rothman 244). If effective communication is the objective, then Spanglish becomes a viable option in order to fulfill this goal. The characters in the novels in this study exchange ideas using both English and Spanish. By being bilingual individuals, they are open to the use of both languages interchangeably knowing that the interlocutor is also capable of understanding them simultaneously.

According to Torres, bilingualism for the U.S. Puerto Ricans ranges from “standard Puerto Rican Spanish, working class Spanish, Spanglish, working class English [to] standard English” (“The Politics” 90). This range places the individual in categories, which judging by their ability

to express themselves, places them at a particular level in a group. Being able to operate within this range, meaning, knowing how to go from correctly speaking the standard languages and also when to code-switch would seem to be an advantage. The stigma associated with Spanglish continues to be detrimental to this innovative form of communication. Studies show that “. . . second-generation Mexican-Americans unanimously cite Spanglish as a functional and culturally relevant language. In contrast, bilingual Mexican nationals overwhelmingly report a somewhat surprising disdain for Spanglish” (Rell 249). According to this statement the disdain largely comes from nationals from Mexico, similar to the views of Puerto Ricans on the island, and the U.S. Americans who would prefer the English language to be the only one used in the U.S. These three groups have one thing in common: they represent the dominant class in their respective countries, i.e., those who want to preserve national patrimony through language. When the speaker who is immersed in the United States has Spanish as the heritage language, which is especially the case of the characters in Santiago’s, Cisneros’ and Díaz’s novels, questions of patrimony are raised. Their loyalty cannot be placed in a single location. They are usually at ease speaking English but continuously managing Spanish in dialogues. Disdain comes at them from both directions: from the nationals in their country of residence and from the nationals in their parent’s homeland, thus making them feel like “Latinos *agringados* and/or *gringos hispanizados*” (Stavans “The Essential” 9), no matter how it is presented, their mix language is not accepted.

The exception is found when members of the dominant class insert the second language as they please in order to advance their interests. For example, it is acceptable to use Spanish words in advertising in the U.S., like recent television ads by Taco Bell, *Live Más*, or Tide’s mother speaking Spanish and her daughter’s half translation. However, in Puerto Rico, numerous newspaper and television ads insert English to attract attention, even though they are not intended

for an American population but for an English proficient population. Not only in advertising but the usage of Spanglish in the colloquial language in Puerto Rico include verbs that go through the regularization process in order to be inserted in Spanish conversations. Most new verbs fall in the infinitive ending in –ar, and this trend is persistent with verbs like *surfear*, *frizar*, *chilear*. There is an elitist group that send their children to private school, place ads using some words in English, daily uses verbs like the ones mention above, and refer to items by their brands names, and insist that Spanish should be the lingua franca. They hold in their hands the issue of prestige privileging a group for understanding English, and disdaining another group for not speaking it correctly. This constant contradiction illustrates the language dilemma that has been created.

Back in the U.S., there is an expectation of language assimilation for everyone. It is understood that Americans assume everyone on their soil to speak their English language. This expectation travels with those Americans who relocate to other parts of the world. In the novels by Matta and Santiago, the characters who are *Americanos*, while living in Puerto Rico, continue to speak English. Santiago's character who is an *Americano* does not make any effort to learn Spanish, but expect to be spoken to in his own language. In contrast, Matta's *Americano* who is spoken to in English is introduced as one who has "good command of the Spanish language" (Matta 5), this is to maintain the almost infallibility of this character who is presented with virtually no faults and who had people going out of their way to speak English to him. This accentuates the predicament, in many cases choosing to use English is seen as departing from the Spanish culture while choosing to speak Spanish may be interpreted as anti-American. Thus, the use of language is seen as an action that supports particular political values and mixing them unsettles the proponents of monolingualism. The instances of prestige are in the hands of a dominant class.

Communicating through code-switching creates a political struggle for people who are just living their daily lives in contact with two languages and two cultures.

Bilingualism in *The Americano* – Progress for Puerto Rico: A Look Towards the U.S.

The political position of this novel is clearly stated in the language it uses: English. The author of *The Americano*, Enrique Matta, chose to write a novel in English about the integration of an American in Puerto Rico during the beginning of the 20th century. The title of the novel *The Americano* refers to the North American character Glenn Summers. He is a person who stands out from everyone else because of his foreign origin; however, he is widely admired among locals, and through his relation to the community the novel portrays a tendency of some in Puerto Rico to admire white foreigners and discriminate against darker ones from, for example, the neighboring island where Haiti and the Dominican Republic are found.

The use of Spanish is “cushioned” or limited to the names of property like *Vista Alegre* or *Los Toronjales*, which add local flavor to the text. The text also uses words or phrases that are commonly known by English speakers, for which no translation is needed such as, *amigo*, *señor*, *señorita* (27), *hacienda*, *señora* (31), *caballero* (153), *barrio* (155), *pronto* (165) and phrases like “*Adios amigo!*” (44), and in many occasions “*Sí, Señor,*” (Matta 15). This strategy used by Matta is mostly geared towards a monolingual reader who will not need to know Spanish to understand the text. The implications of this kind of writing are explained by Lourdes Torres, “the use of easily accessible Spanish [...] create[s] a more ethnic text. But they also may serve to perpetuate mainstream expectations of the Latino/a text in that they can make the text exotic and allow the reader to believe that s/he is interacting with and appropriating the linguistic Other, while in reality the reader does not have to leave the comfortable realm of his/her own complacent monolingualism” (Torres, “In Contact”, 78). Matta transports the reader to the beginning of the 20th century in Puerto Rico and reminds them of the location by the use of words in Spanish that

create an atmosphere of language contact without requiring the reader to be proficient in said language.

Around the time this book was published, the language dilemma was still being debated on the island. When Puerto Rico became part of the United States in 1898, English became the obligatory language. This was the case “until 1949, when the island’s first native-born elected governor, Luis Muñoz Marín, finally ended the hated policy of language suppression. . . . The Popular Democrats took their reform one step further in 1965; they brought back Spanish as the official language of the island’s local courts. Congress, however, insisted that English remain as the language of the federal courts on the island” (Gonzalez 230). English was still mandatory as a second language in schools and in federal proceedings. Enrique Matta (1884-1975) was born under one colonizer, Spain, in an era when Spanish was the given language. He was able to experience in his early youth the change brought as a result of the Spanish American War. Students who attended public schools at the beginning of the 20th century in Puerto Rico had all English instruction. His contact with both languages shaped his views of the Spanish administration versus the U.S. as expressed in the foreword to his novel where the Spanish civilization is portrayed as “reactionary” and the Americans as “progressive.”

During the era of the Latin American literary boom, when giving an authentic non-European voice to the Spanish speaking people of the Americas, and showcasing their well-articulated eloquence in Spanish was the trend of the times, there was an author, a medical doctor from a small town in the East coast of Puerto Rico, writing a book completely in English subverting the movement. Matta exposes an island in between two empires that is managing relationships of power by using the English language. While the few words he uses in Spanish fall into Torres’ category of “cushioned Spanish,” in which he uses words that provide Puerto Rican flavor to his

story, writing and publishing his novel in English during a time when Spanish was affirmed as the first language on the island, was a radical move.

In *The Americano*, Matta exposes the quagmires found in Puerto Rico in the beginning of the 20th century. Puerto Rico up to this point have cultivated aristocratic values that have become nationally accepted. The text presents the tilted balance carrying ideas that ranged from the way business is done to the way justice is imparted that favor some and not others. For example, the character of the doctor tells the *Americano* about Ramon's father, Don Pedro,

“Well, to begin with, he has money. And to have money is to have power. He and his sons have controlled the commercial life of this community for years. Long before your people got possession of the island. They continue to enjoy that privilege. They grease the palms of official agents and make them toe the mark. They control the local elections by contributing heavily to the campaign fund. They have the only bank in the vicinity. In short, nothing can be done around here without the Perez stamp of approval” (Matta 28).

A society controlled by a few finds the ideas of a newcomer unwelcoming. The character of Teresa Méndez is in the middle of this plight as she needs to choose between Glenn Sumners, the *Americano*, who personifies progress in such a good looking strong package that had everyone smitten (Matta 24), or Ramon Pérez to whom she is already engaged, who personifies, as the book jacket says, “the established hierarchy.”

The author, Enrique Matta, who was a medical doctor, inserts himself in the novel as an intra-historic⁷⁴ character. He is a doctor who feels indebted to the kindness he was shown as a medical student in the U.S. and stands up for the *Americano* in Puerto Rico (Matta 138). His views on progress are expressed in a conversation he has with Don Luis, Teresa's father,

“I'll admit that what's taking place here in Puerto Rico does have a direct bearing on your trouble. The American people have started us toward a new course of life. Our ideas are changing. Customs, quite old, are being scrapped. In the mind of the working people a rebirth is taking place and, in spite of our opposition, the younger generation is heading

⁷⁴ A character who may very well be part of the internal history of the particular setting, but not well-known to everyone throughout history.

away from us. A spirit of unrest manifests itself everywhere. We can't stop it. Peasants want to wear shoes now, just like their town brothers. We are heading toward progress and reform in every walk of life. Above all, we have to reckon with the common people too long held in bondage. You see, Luis, all about us there is flowing a tide of a better civilization that will carry us onward in safety if we know how to swim with it" (Matta 128).

In this paragraph, which embodies expressions of what could be called neo-colonialist literature, the character of the doctor eloquently explains in English how the "American people have started us toward a new course of life . . . progress and reform" that has the potential of liberating the masses and alleviating the problem of poverty on the island. Hence, equating the American presence with opportunities that extend to more than the elite few.

This look towards Americans for progress has an implicit political tone that can be easily dismissed by some as pro-statehood propaganda, even though for others the idea of statehood has been considered in Puerto Rico as a "solution" to the colonized status of the island. The inescapable political implication is a result of an environment in Puerto Rico in which three main political options – pro-statehood, pro-independence, and maintain status quo, i.e., Estado Libre Asociado or free associated state – tend to compartmentalized any thoughts or notions of progress. The pro-statehood position, which I believe is the predominant voice in the novel, offers aspiration for progress that can also be seen as a desire for parity within the system. As Grosfoguel puts it, "After one hundred years of fighting U.S. wars and servings as cheap labor for U.S. corporations, Puerto Ricans deserve equal civil and social rights within the United States" (Grosfoguel "Colonial Subjects" 10). The U.S. political system that has controlled the fate of the island can surely make room for their citizens in the Caribbean to move in uniform with the rest when it comes to basic infrastructure and social developments.

The author through the voice of the doctor has something to say about the legal system and about his fondness for the *Americano*, Glenn Sumners. When the *Americano* is accused of a crime

of arson, the doctor stood up in his defense. When he is asked to explain why, he responded, "...I know the rank prejudice and bigotry this man will have to face before this ordeal is over. Furthermore, I can't forget the debt of gratitude I owe to the Americans for their kindness to me up North when I was a student in college. . . . I'm sure he expects nothing else – just a fair trial" (Matta 138-139). The doctor who presents having a good experience with Americans in the U.S. fears that the *Americano* will not be treated in the same way. He knows enough about the legal system and how popular opinion tends to weigh in and become a factor in trials is trying to help the *Americano* avoid that experience. He is willing to put his own reputation in the line, in order to stand up for his values.

While the doctor is busy bailing out Sumner, the people of the town are appalled by how confidently he behaves in court. Sumner's assertion of his Fifth Amendment rights of no self-incrimination and his option to remain silent is unprecedented. One of the comments about it directly compares Spain's legal system to the American legal system,

"You see how the Yankee law is applied to cases like this," remarked an old Spanish merchant. "In my country, nobody charged with such a crime has any right to keep his mouth shut. He must answer all the questions of the District Attorney. I would like to have seen the *Americano* before our court when the island was under Spanish rule. That system of legal procedure would have compelled him to confess everything" (Matta 140).

This narration exposes the change of guard Puerto Ricans at that time experienced, when every aspect of their lives, from their customs to their legal system, is changing. The doctor sees that this change is for the better. The other characters are not so convinced since the changes included the change from Spanish to English.

As mentioned above, English is the language spoken in the narration and dialogs. Spanish is used mostly to give local color. For example, the locals refer to Glenn Sumners, the *Americano*, as *señor*, which means gentleman, sir, lord, signaling respect and in some cases acknowledgment

of his higher status as landowner and employer. Sumners, on the other hand, also uses words like *amigo* and *señor* to maintain camaraderie and cordiality. Other words like *hacienda* are common loan words to English and would require no bilingual competence for an English language reader. Over all, these words describe the *Americano's* friendly demeanor and recognition of his environment. It is important to remember that as the character of Glenn is introduced in the novel, he is introduced as someone who is not ignorant to Spanish for this reason a reader could assume that his dialogs are in Spanish except when the language is mentioned explicitly. In fact, he surprises people with his good Spanish. He speaks the language well enough to even impress the passerby's. On a casual encounter on the road while riding his horse someone who notices him as an *Americano* addresses him in jest.

“At the sight of Glenn, he straightened momentarily and cried out lustily, ‘American *mucho bueno*.’ He followed it with a wave and a grin that ran from ear to ear. ‘Thank you,’ replied Glenn in Spanish. ‘I think Puerto Rico is very good, too.’ ‘God be with you, *señor*,’ answered the others with utmost respect” (Matta 25-26).

In this encounter, the passerby speaks to the *Americano* with a phrase that denotes a common mistake made by non-native Spanish speakers when trying to say *very good*. Instead of saying it correctly, *muy bueno*, he mockingly says *mucho bueno*. According to the narration, and to the passerby's surprise, Glenn is able to speak well. When he does this he incites respect. The narrator implies in this encounter that knowing Spanish will accelerate the process of earning the respect of those around him. On one hand, the author secures the likeability of the character by creating a rare *Americano* who already speaks Spanish. On the other hand, he emphasizes the eagerness and effort on the part of the people to please him by speaking English, which is a less fictional depiction of Puerto Rican hospitality. For example, Ricardo Torres, the lawyer who greets him upon his arrival to the island, advises Glenn to stay at a close by hotel, “The proprietor, Fernando Lopez, is one of my clients. He speaks English, so that'll make you feel more at home” (Matta 4).

This readiness to speak English is found also in the relationships he has with the leading female characters. While he addresses Teresa as *señorita*, a term that refers to her status as a single woman and that also implies virginity, she behaves around him with ease and familiarity. Teresa is presented as a young woman educated in “American schools” (Matta 39) in Puerto Rico. As mentioned in a previous section, this is where courses are taught in English and where the language acquires more prestige. She is also described as one eager to speak English and who has “acquired many of the ways of the Americanos” (Matta 39), which appears to be one of her many social advantages. Her father owns the land next to the property that the *Americano* purchased and this neighborly position also makes her relationship to Glenn more attainable.

Pilar, on the other hand, is the daughter of the widow who lost the land to the bank but who has made an arrangement to remain in part of the property. Pilar is introduced as a free spirited peasant who is also ready to impress Glenn, ““Why, Pilar, you’re learning to speak English,” congratulates Glenn. Her eyes are filled with excitement. “You like?” she asked” (Matta 159), demonstrating her desire to become bilingual while struggling with competency. Later in their conversation she speaks to him in Spanish. “Pilar answered, talking in her native tongue” (Matta 159). Although the code-switching is not written in the dialog, it was described. Since the novel is written in English the instances of code-switching are not explicit.

The language in this novel demonstrates the transition from one colonizer to the other that the Puerto Rican characters are experiencing. By using only English to write this novel, the author points to the direction he sees literature taking on the island. The strategic words in Spanish denote the relationship between the individuals that were in subservient positions and those who were in power. The admiration for speaking English and the willingness of the *Americano* to speak and understand Spanish presents him as the type of foreigner any country would be happy to have:

someone who is willing to work the land, learn the culture, the language, and settle offering prosperity to all.

But this is precisely the point that Matta's title implies. Glenn Sumners was called throughout the story: the *Americano*. Whether they were speaking English or Spanish, as the narration would describe it, whether they were happy or sad, no matter the situation, Glenn Sumners was perpetually called in Spanish: *Americano*. The significance of this word is the acceptance by all of his foreignness. It also exposes another side, the detachment of all who interacted with him to what he represents, which seems to be a concern in the narration. The lawyer who greets him says, "Be sure you select a location in which you will be accepted" (Matta 3). Shortly after in the first few chapters he helps the needy and stands up for an abused woman and earning the favor of the people around him. As the doctor would say, "You appear to be the kind of young man I'd like to see settle in this community. In one day you've proven that you're both kind and brave" (Matta 24). Again, the doctor is his biggest advocate. Teresa's grandmother on the hand, when she wants to find out more about his family and his background hear him respond, "I know consider this my home and the people here my people," answered Glenn. "That's most unnatural," said Doña Luisa" (Matta 71). His desire of integration was met by resistance. Likewise, Teresa who was falling in love with him and has shown openness to the American culture also knew that his culture was not her own. In a casual encounter with him, she would say to him, "How is it they say it in your country—a penny for your thoughts?" asked Teresa" (Matta 93), signaling her cultural, linguistic competence at the same time that she acknowledges the foreignness of this phrase. The narration suggests that Glenn could be admired or despised, emulated or rejected but he could never be Puerto Rican and Puerto Ricans could not see themselves as Americans.

Matta's novel is set in 1903. At this time in history, Puerto Ricans were not American citizens. After almost two decades of being a possession of the United States, the 1917 Jones Act "extended U.S. citizenship to all Puerto Ricans" (Baker 36). Insisting on calling Glenn, the *Americano*, was clearly making a distinction between him and the rest. Being an *Americano* excuses certain behaviors, raises some expectations, and makes him the *other*, even if he is in power or has a higher place in the societal hierarchy. The character of the doctor has a tendency to serve as an advocate for the *Americano* by both defending and promoting actions. The word *Americano*, singles him out from everyone else. The fact the word is in Spanish in an English text speaks of the location and the point of view of the narration, which is Puerto Rico and Puerto Ricans. It presents a problem that continues to be core to the issue of the status in Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans in this story see themselves either inferior or superior to Glenn Sumners not as Americans themselves. The idea of parity conflicts with the sense of difference in nationality. Puerto Ricans are found indubitably on the border, in between two unequal powers. The use of an English text in an island where English was imposed affirms the favor in which this author sees this language intervention on the island. The use of Spanish in conversations, although not explicitly presented, demonstrates the resistance to the English language the people from the island procures right in the presence of an *Americano*, refusing total assimilation as a response to the dichotomous relationship they are in.

Bilingualism in *América's Dream*: Incompetency in English, Little Need for Spanish

When Esmeralda Santiago returned to Puerto Rico after having received a degree from Harvard University in 1976 she found that "Puerto Rico was so Americanized. That threw everything off for me, especially since Puerto Ricans kept telling me I was Americanized" (Hernández 163). When she refers to Puerto Rico as Americanized she is speaking of the countless fast food restaurants that service the island. She is appalled that Puerto Ricans would "allow the

American contamination” (Hernández 163) through this mass franchising proliferation. Many American tourists are also disappointed to see that because the expectation is to find a tropical, pristine paradise, a virgin island with silent palm trees. Instead they find roads built by the government of Eisenhower to make way for military convoys, constructed around the time Santiago left the island. Once that infrastructure was established it facilitated the entrance of various industries, mostly pharmaceuticals to establish their manufacturing facilities there.

Esmeralda Santiago had to confront a new reality on the island, another reality that had to do with her gender. The only job she could find was a typist, “My boss said to me: ‘You can have ten Harvard degrees, but you’re still a woman in Puerto Rico.’ And I said: ‘I’m out of here. This I’m not going to fight.’ I would have fought everything else, but being seen as a lesser human being because of my gender, I had already fought that” (Hernández 162) by being Latina in the U.S. These words were uttered in 1976 and many women in Puerto Rico have been able to succeed in a variety of industries but the gender hierarchy has not been erased. The other reality was a rejection of her authenticity as a Puerto Rican. She struggles to understand the reasons behind it. They were not explicit and she gave no explanation. “When my family first said to me that I wasn’t Puerto Rican anymore, it was devastating. But when I started hearing it from total strangers, that’s when it really hurt a lot. [She discovered that] a Puerto Rican couldn’t tell me what a Puerto Rican was. They could tell me what a Puerto Rican was not, and I was one of those who wasn’t.” (Hernández 164). Her demeanor, her way of carrying herself, her way of dressing, and her way of speaking did not blend in with those around her on the island. In contrast, she remembers when she arrived to New York for the first, “a little girl came up to me trying to make friends, and she asked: ‘Tú eres hispana?’ And I said, ‘No, yo soy puertorriqueña,’ And she replied: ‘Oh, it’s the same here.’ I go, ‘Really? In the United States we’re not Puerto Ricans?’ She

said, ‘Oh, no, no, all the people from Spanish countries, we’re all hispanos here.’” (Hernández 165). These words in this interview convey the sense of not being part of one culture or the other, while in actuality belonging to both.

Santiago, in her first novel, *América’s Dream* created a character named América, a woman whose name represents in Spanish the name of a continent that from north, to central, to south, has been in the “contact zone” (Pratt) for over five hundred years. The title of the novel using this name, questions the reality of the so called dream reminding the reader with one accent mark that it certainly goes beyond the United States.

Esmeralda Santiago’s use of bilingualism highlights the results of almost a century of U.S. interventionism in Puerto Rico, specifically through the English language in the depiction of her main character América González, a maid from Vieques, Puerto Rico. Her genealogy can be traced back to at least five generations of women who have been working at the hotel. The character is placed in a cycle of low expectations in which there is no clear way out. Language proficiency has not been a priority in her upbringing but it is something that makes her character feel very uncomfortable. The juxtaposition is found in the character of her boss, Don Irving, a North American who does not speak Spanish and seems apathetic to learning the language of the place where he lives.

The setting of this novel is in the 1990s at the end of the 20th century. During this time the U.S. Navy continues to have a strong presence on the island. As mentioned in previous chapters, this presence is a given for the characters of this novel. As Ramón Grosfoguel has summarized,

The island of Vieques off the eastern coast of Puerto Rico has been a naval training ground for joint exercises of NATO and Latin American naval ships. The island’s tropical weather made for good training ground for counterinsurgency operations deployed such as Vietnam. U.S. military interests in Puerto Rico ruled from 1898 through 1945 (“Colonial Subjects” 46)

The U.S. Navy left the island in 2003. This concluded years of protests against military training that had left one recorded death and many ill from the bombs they regularly dropped as part of their training exercises. The importance of this military presence to this chapter is the creation of a contact zone and a border lifestyle right on that 21 mile long island off the coast of Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans in Vieques were in contact with Americans who came for military service or to take advantage of the military population and provide services for them while building their own businesses. As mentioned in the previous chapter the military presence was a factor on the limited economic opportunities on the island. After they left and to this day the people on the island are barely recovering from the economic devastation left behind.

Even though the novel is written in English, Santiago provides a narration that depicts the struggle of América's character with the English language as her accent is captured in the story, "Ay, don no!" (2) for "I don't know" and "Excuse?" (35) for "Excuse me". The narrative voice demonstrates América's shame when she speaks, "'I'm so sorry,' she responds, burning with embarrassment. 'I no understand'" (35). América apologizes for not being able to communicate better in a place where Spanish is the dominant language. She puts the pressure on the language competency on herself even though the narrator discloses that "she keeps expecting him to speak Spanish when he opens his mouth, but he never does" (Santiago 35).

On the other hand, Santiago provides a phonetic characterization of the way América hears him in order to demonstrate how hard it is for her to understand him. She alters the English spelling to relate his intonation in a way that demonstrates his own accent⁷⁵. By doing this she emphasizes how alienating these languages can be towards each other, "Oh, fahcrysakes!", "Geddadehere, c'mon" (3), or "Yerdora. Eniwoidfromeryet?" (Santiago 35) for "Your daughter. Any word form

⁷⁵ See Kimberly Nance's work "If English is Spanish then Spanish is..." about the way Santiago chooses to present the languages from the matrix language, English, and showcase the discomfort América feels with this language.

her yet?” Santiago’s strategy of writing in this manner adds humor to a serious conversation between América and Don Irving, while at the same time highlighting his unwillingness (based on a linguistic superiority anchored in colonial history) to meet her half way: “‘Never mind.’ Don Irving [responds]. He ambles back into the house” (Santiago 36). It is of no consequence to him that the conversation is incomplete and that communication is not achieved. However, as mentioned above, América still feels ashamed about her inability to communicate effectively in English, a language which, in the immediate context of her hotel, is the indicator of prestige and power. On the other hand, she is also mortified by her boss’ insistence on not learning Spanish. As the narrator explains, “He has never learned Spanish and speaks as if it didn’t matter, as if it were the person he’s talking to who has to make sense of what he’s saying” (36). This portrayal of a North American in Puerto Rico is more accurate than Matta’s portrayal of the *Americano*. There are many Americans who live in Puerto Rico today who are able to maintain their language without the necessity of speaking Spanish. Using Aníbal Quijano’s term, América is immersed in the coloniality of power that designates her way of speaking as inferior and his prerogative of keeping his language acceptable.

Unlike *The Americano* where words and phrases in Spanish are italicized, Santiago offers some translations but not consistently. There are words with no italics like in these examples that are subtly inserted in the English sentence, “A público passes in the opposite direction, and the driver waves at her...” (16). The word “público” refers to the public transportation cars or vans that move people from town to town in Puerto Rico. This word is what in language learning is called a false cognate, which means that it visually resembles a word in English, public, but it would be difficult for a non-native-non-local speaker to visualize that it is referring to a certain type of vehicle. The monolingual reader would not have enough information to understand its

meaning conceivably causing a distaste for the cultural flavor. However, this word is not only a Spanish one inserted in an English sentence but also is one for which the reader is expected to understand the idiosyncratic connotation that its meaning carries. Explaining the public transportation system in Puerto Rico may have not only been too long but an unnecessary target to this story. The monolingual reader misses that the “públicos” only travel in broad daylight, that they are usually packed to the brim with people, that this particular one – like most of them – has no air conditioner, because the driver has his hand out already in order to casually wave to América. Santiago provides the Spanish speaking reader who understands the cultural reference, an experience, with one little word. At the same time, the author excludes Spanish speakers who are not familiar with this term as well as monolingual readers. Santiago effectively establishes a linguistic hierarchy, which takes the reader beyond the goal of giving local color to the narration.

There are numerous examples of what linguistically is referred to as the use of loan words. This is when one word from one language is inserted in the other. Examples of these are found in descriptions of the neighborhoods, “she was better than anyone else in the *barriada*, then married a Nuyoriccan who can’t even speak Spanish . . .” (Santiago 22). *Barriada* would be the loan word for neighborhood. In this last description, she includes a comment about the Puerto Ricans who come back from New York to the island with low Spanish proficiency and how they are regarded inferior to the island Puerto Ricans. América who is part of the working class in Puerto Rico has internalized the hegemonic belief that all island Puerto Ricans are superior than Puerto Ricans from the U.S. because they are unable to speak Spanish. Grosfoguel states, “‘Spanish only’ in Puerto Rico is a movement of the creole elites to exclude those working-class Puerto Ricans whose first language is English or whose Spanish does not correspond to the rules of the ‘Academia Real Española’” (“Colonial Subjects” 61). In other words, there is a class system based on language

competence. Instead of América feeling solidarity with the working class, she is deceived to believe that she is above them by this hegemonic value, not realizing that soon, when she moves to New York, she will be one of them.

Other examples of loan words are found in the description of houses, “Each house in this neighborhood has a four-wheel-drive in its marquesina, . . . with elaborate wrought-iron rejas at the windows” (Santiago 18), and in a description of América’s daughter, “Rosalinda is as imperturbable as a *cemí*” (Santiago 57). While “marquesina” refers to a porch and “rejas” to the wrought-iron bars that are found in most home gates and windows, the “*cemí*” refers to a smooth sculpture/deity original to the Taínos that houses ancestral spirits. These words require an understanding of Puerto Rican culture while providing ease to the familiar reader. On the other hand, appearing without italics in the middle of the sentence destabilizes the monolingual reading experience.

There are also instances of switching from English to Spanish. Linguistically she offers cases of switching languages from one sentence to another, which is called intersentential code-switching, and moments of switching languages within the same sentence, which is called intrasentential code-switching. Colorful Spanish expletives are most common on the latter, while emphasis in completing a story or thought are mostly found in the former. For example, “‘I’ll kill that hijo de la gran puta’” (Santiago 14) and “Did they also hear what she called me? *¿Y que me mentó la madre?*” (39), this last one referring to an insult tied to the maternal figure that is to be highly respected in the hispanic culture. Other phrases in Santiago’s novel like “Ay nena..” (1), “Ay, mi’ja” (2), “Ay no, Mami...” or phrases like “Sana, sana, colita de rana, si no sana hoy se sana mañana” (83) that are colloquial in Spanish, emulate the Puerto Rican register and carry the dynamic intonation of a spoken Puerto Rican tune. A monolingual reader has no choice but to

ignore the words and phrases in Spanish. However, Santiago seems to have found a way to challenge the reader and design a system where the highest the level of competency in the language and culture are, the higher the opportunities to access the novel to the fullest.

Once relocated to New York, the issue of her limited English again comes to light, as she interacts with her employer. As a living nanny, her duties include cooking for the family as well as housekeeping. In an interaction related to her cooking, América's character explains that there is no translation for some words "Adobo, sazón, achiote, I don't know how to say in English I need for to cook Puerto Rican." (176). They all refer to condiments that to a reader familiar with these terms would awaken the senses of taste, smell, and sight respectively. Moreover, Santiago is presenting how some concepts have no translation, which creates tension within the geopolitical relationship between América and her employer who is questioning these products in her cabinets. This illustration of the colonial difference, or perspective of the colonized, through words that are untranslatable exposes América's position in a system that positions her as inferior. Yet she is not only affirming but defending her point of view and the practices behind it. In a simple interaction about what to cook, América insists, "If they no like Puerto Rican food, I make something else. But I think they like.' . . . 'You like it, no worry'" (Santiago 176). This assertion on her position brings out a new found determination combined with flexibility that is associated with the individual on the border.

When Mignolo explains the concept of colonial semiosis, he describes "particular moments of tension in the conflict between two local histories and knowledges, one responding to the movement forward of a global design that intended to impose itself and those local histories and knowledges that are forced to accommodate themselves to such new realities" (Mignolo 17). This idea of local histories in conflict with global designs is what propels border thinking. In her U.S.

location, América is placed between the white American family that hired her, the Leverett's, and her upbringing in Puerto Rico. She is the Leverett's nanny and servant and automatically in an inferior position. From their point of view, her language skills have a lot of room for improvement. In a conversation with the child she cares for, he is adamant to get her to say the right pronunciation when speaking English. "...Plis open.' 'It's not *plis*,' he says, opening the door, 'It's please. You're not saying it right.' . . . It's preposterous. She's standing in a hallway being given pronunciation instructions by a tear-stained seven-year-old'" (Santiago 200). While earlier in the food dialog, América was able to be assertive and confident in her abilities, in this dialog, a familiar one to those who have been in an environment where the native language is not the main spoken one, she is disempowered. These moments of receiving correction on the pronunciation of a given word demonstrate a side of bilingualism that highlights inequality through language. While it is instructional and it aims at someone's language skills improvement, it can also be humiliating.

América on the other hand, has something to teach through a tropicalized⁷⁶ language as well. An example is found when América has a conversation with the children that she is caring for in New York. In this scene, she is trying to feed them her Puerto Rican *asopao*. América uses her caregiver authority backed up with her culinary competence, and a hint of clever bribery with the child that previously was correcting her pronunciation. She says to him, "'If you eat five spoon, I give surprise.' 'Five spoons?' Kyle gasps. . . ." (Santiago 178). Her goal is to get him to eat this dinner, an *asopao* she cooked. "Eat five spoons" is a literal translation from Spanish, *cómete cinco cucharadas*, which refers to spoonful of food not actual pieces of silverware (spoons.) The *asopao* is a type of stew that is common where she came from, and is something that she cooks well.

⁷⁶ Tropicalization will be explained in more detail below but in short is a term that Frances Aparicio uses to refer to what linguists call language calques. In this case a phrase from Spanish is literally translated to English making it difficult for the monolingual English speaker to understand.

Eventually, "...she realizes her mistake and laughs with him" (Santiago 178). In this case, she uses humor as a strategy to break the language tension. América is able to laugh at herself, stay firm in her goal, and use one more phrase to seal the deal with the otherwise picky eater, "Tomorrow," América says, "you eat forks" (Santiago 178). She used the English language, and created a phrase that is found in neither language. It allowed her to truly appropriate the language and effectively connect with the child and obtain her goal that he would eat her food today and plan to eat it again tomorrow.

América is also in an in between state with her new colleagues from various Latin American countries. As mentioned in the previous chapter, she is confronted by *empleadas* who make her question the importance of having U.S. citizenship. Her Latin American friends have higher expectations of her than she has of herself, "We have to take whatever work we can find. But you, an American citizen. And you speak good English— My English is not that good. —Still . . . you can go to school, learn a trade. You don't have to do this kind of work the rest of your life" (Santiago 220). As mentioned at the beginning of this section, América comes from a long line of maids who find it to be a way to make an honest living. All of a sudden, her language skills as poor as she feels they are, and her U.S. citizenship present her with a power that she did not realize meant anything. Being able to speak some English is better than no English. América is getting a message from her employer and her friends, although from different sides of the spectrum that she can do better. The thought is puzzling to her and makes her wonder what this would look like.

América's new location between an all English speaking world and her Latin American friends speaking in ways that are not familiar causes her distress. The following passage reveals her discomfort with her daily surroundings. There is one place where she finds relief, "Most of the talk is in Puerto Rican Spanish, and América closes her eyes and listens to the familiar sounds

with gratitude, relaxing in a way she's not able to do around the Leverett's or even the other maids with their varied accents" (Santiago 234). América momentarily fits in, while visiting the hair salon. She is able to close her eyes, listen, and escape the world where she feels left out the remainder of the time.

Carmen Dolores Hernández remarks, in the introduction to her book *Puerto Rican Voices in English* (1997) about this character's dilemma. She explains that it "mirrors the wider Puerto Rican experience. While seeking escape from an oppressive situation, a person or a group may find a life of isolation that may cripple them emotionally if they are unable to come to terms with it" (Hernández 11). In her interview with Esmeralda Santiago about her protagonist, Santiago emphasizes América's isolation, "She's not in the middle of a Puerto Rican community; she gets to see what it is to be a Puerto Rican adrift. I think that is interesting because people keep thinking of us as a group in the ghettos of New York or Chicago, yet we are all over" (Hernández 167). This is not only true of Puerto Ricans but of other groups of Hispanics who are not expected to belong to the mainstream culture but are not necessarily part of a cohesive ethnically representative group. This wandering space is precisely the border mentioned above where Latinos/as in the U.S. are found.

Hernández interviewed a variety of Puerto Rican writers in the U.S. As a Puerto Rican living on the island, she ignored the literature produced in the states until she embarked in this project. When she further investigated the work of these authors, she found

"a hybrid kind of writing that did not belong (according to the traditionally accepted canon) to Puerto Rican literature, because it was not in Spanish. Nor did literature written by Puerto Ricans in English seem to have found a place in American literary tradition, [. . .]. This writing also made liberal use of Spanish forms of expression: words, idioms, and whole sentences. Indeed it did not seem to fit anywhere" (Hernández 1-2).

Not fitting anywhere does not mean that they are in a vacuum. As has been mentioned before, this location of being on the border between two cultures brings to the forefront other forms of knowledge. The form of writing that is found in this novel is expressed in a way that conveys the sense of isolation and exclusion from a mainstream society. This is combined with the freedom of escaping the oppression that the individual may feel by other sources. For example, América flees from her violent predator in Vieques, Puerto Rico to Bedford, New York, a place where she is reinventing herself, evaluating her ambitions, and asserting her contribution. In this section, moments of liberation come in the form of those liberal expressions of English appropriation and manipulation in order to increase her influence. They also come through the form of loan words in her native Spanish inserted in the English language, just like her character inserted in the U.S. stands out.

Bilingualism in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* – Low Prestige in Mexico and the U.S.

Sandra Cisneros is able to problematize various aspects of language that are particular to women who are Hispanic in the United States. The marginalization of women in society is unfortunately not limited to one culture. It is found across nations and it is manifested in different ways. In this particular case, the conflict is not only about being in between the Mexican culture and the U.S., but also about her location between the Mexican culture of Mexico, which I referred to in the section about prestige as the Nationals, and the Mexican American culture. Nevertheless, the culture in the U.S. serves as her central background due to her location. In her book, *Border Crossings and Beyond : The Life and Works of Sandra Cisneros* (2009), Carmen Haydée Rivera relates that “Cisneros consistently deals not only with social, gender, and linguistic constraints but also with discriminatory barriers encountered by those who form part of a minority group living in the United States” (5). This position of minority serves as a point of departure for Cisneros’

narrative work. Cisneros uses bilingualism through characters who experience cultural ambiguity and who can be identified as bicultural.

In her novel *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, Cisneros' writes the story of Celaya, an observant teenager who was born in Chicago and traveled every summer to Mexico with her siblings to visit her grandparents. Celaya's character finds herself uncomfortably surrounded between the linguistic expectations of her Mexican family in Mexico and those of Mexicans in the U.S. Some of these expectations are tied to behaviors that define a woman's reputation in the larger society. Celaya is raised in Chicago, Illinois and later her family relocates to San Antonio, Texas. From the heartland to the south, these areas of the U.S. continue to be predominantly white with clusters of high Latino/a or Hispanic populations. Just like the discussion on Santiago mentioned above when people insisted that she was not Puerto Rican, Celaya in Cisneros's novel, a young Mexican American woman, negotiates the language limitations that are imposed through the two cultures in which she lives. Rivera summarizes how biculturalism affects the characters *Caramelo*,

“Throughout the narration, a cultural and linguistic schism arises among those still living in Mexico, those who immigrated to the United States but still identify as Mexican, those who identify as Mexican American, and/or those who are more assimilated to Anglo American culture derisively known as ‘Pochos.’ For the most part, the grandmother expresses strong contempt for anyone living outside of Mexico and for those who fail to adhere to strict Mexican cultural mores that extend to speaking the mother tongue, Spanish” (Rivera 79).

Celaya's father is from Mexico, while her mother is Mexican American. Her ethnicity is negotiated through the language that they are expected to speak in the U.S. as well as in Mexico. Raised in the U.S., her dominant language is English. Her ability to capture the nuances of both languages and to develop further ones is a surprisingly captivating aspect of the narration. As mentioned above, Celaya must contend with the disdain her Awful Grandmother feels for the

English language. When her grandchildren visit Mexico, they find out how displeased she is with their upbringing.

“. . . and the Awful Grandmother herself has seen how these children raised on the other side don't know enough to answer, – ¿Mande usted? to their elders. – What? we say in the horrible language, which the Awful Grandmother hears as ¿Guat? – What? we repeat to each other and to her. The Awful Grandmother shakes her head and mutters, –My daughters-in-law have given birth to a generation of monkeys” (Cisneros 28).

The Awful Grandmother represents a segment of nationals who do not see how Mexican Americans can be authentic Mexican. Their mannerisms and way of using the language reflect a foreignness that separates them as one people. This is one of the characteristics that the novels in this study share in common. Instead of a strong sense of belonging to one culture or another, there is a great gap that is reflected in the language. On one hand, this can be perceived as a loss. The loss of one concrete culture that appears cemented and static. An idea like this one can be found in the stability of someone who has been rooted in one place for a long time. This permanence creates a sense of belonging that is tied to identity, language, and culture. It is also a false sense of permanence because like languages, cultures are changing continuously, but the speed at which the change is not as noticeable. Another way of seeing this gap between cultures is as gain, an opportunity to unite two languages, two cultures, in order to expand ones worldview.

This optimism towards the unification of more than one language and culture is not easily or readily welcomed by everyone. Going back to the characters of *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, in Mexico, the Awful Grandmother directs her distaste for the English language and the culture that it represents against her daughter in law, Zoila, a Mexican American. Zoila, who is Celaya's mom, was born and raised in the U.S., and is able to speak both English and Spanish. Her character deals with both cultures in a way that could be viewed as more American than Mexican. This should be expected, since this is where she is from, but it is not accepted, especially by her mother in law.

In a chapter titled “Echando Palabras” (Cisneros 79) the Awful Grandmother reveals to Zoila her son’s past infidelity that resulted in the birth of a child almost as old as Celaya. This revelation provokes a large argument between Zoila and her husband, “In two languages Mother [Zoila] hurls words like weapons, and they thump and thud their target with amazing accuracy” (Cisneros 84). She yells at her husband making a public scene. The Awful Grandmother intervenes and among other things says, “My son could’ve done a lot better than marrying a woman who can’t even speak a proper Spanish. . . . And to make matters even more sad, you’re as dark as a slave” (Cisneros 85). Celaya points out in the next sentence that her uncle, her Awful Grandmother’s son, was as dark as her mother and that perhaps that is why she did not love him as much as she loved Celaya’s father. The remaining theme is that Celaya is witness to cultural racism. In this case it is coming from someone from the homeland of Mexico who has very definite prejudices against language and color. In the same chapter the grandmother had remarked on the lack of value she sees in Indians, when the illegitimate granddaughter, Candelaria, who is center to the conflict of this argument is part Indian. It is in a few sentences where Cisneros is able to tie the issue of language and race and expose some of the bigotries of her Mexican grandmother.

In his article “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Social Classification,” Aníbal Quijano explains how the deployment of racist categories that pervaded the colonization of America has been an effective way of endorsing forms of domination since the sixteenth century that favor Europeans versus non-Europeans. Quijano states, “So the conquered and dominated peoples were situated in a natural position of inferiority, and as a result their phenotypic traits as well as their cultural features were likewise considered inferior” (183). This idea is ingrained in the Awful Grandmother in a way that she would never think twice about her rants about Indians or even think to apologize about her insulting words to her daughter in law. She sees herself as

naturally superior to them and therefore was within her right to speak in this demeaning way. More importantly for our topic, in addition to racist categories, notions of monolingual purity (whether directed at speakers of indigenous languages in Mexico, or at Mexican Americans who do not speak “proper Spanish”) are an important part of the colonial logic.

Her prejudice is tied to language and color directed specifically to a female character who also deals with the ambiguity of being part of two cultures. Rivera points out how Cisneros exposes bicultural depictions throughout the novel as “She also juxtaposes images of the Mexican Revolution and Mexican American War with specific references to President Woodrow Wilson, Pancho Villa, the Zapatistas, the Carranzistas, the Texas Rangers, among others, that form part of the disarray of economic and political relationships between the two countries often involving reactionary military force on both sides of the border” (Rivera 74). In this enumeration that intermingles U.S. and Mexican historic events and icons the rooted influence that has resulted from U.S. interventionism in Mexico creating intertwined histories is demonstrated.

In addition to that, the female characters also have to deal with confidence issues about their position within the cultures around them. There is a behavioral expectation of females that is directed to the way they communicate. Cisneros titles one of the chapters of her novel *Caramelo* (2002), “Mexican on Both Sides or Metiche, Mirona, Mitotera, Hocicona – en Otras Palabras, Cuentista – Busybody, Ogler, Liar/Gossip/Troublemaker, Big-Mouth – in Other Words, Storyteller” (351). This long title is full of feminine adjectives that negatively and derogatorily describe a woman who talks too much. These words question the veracity and authenticity of the person described. They are the opposite of shy, quiet, modest, unassuming, qualities that are much more promoted as feminine. In this particular chapter Celaya’s family has relocated to San Antonio, Texas. She has to deal with the poverty her family is found in due in part to the medical

bills left behind after her grandmother's death. She has to deal with a new student body, predominantly Mexican descent who question her ethnicity. "Hey, hippie girl, you Mexican? On both sides? – Front and back, I say" (Cisneros 352). There is the outer appearance and then there is the language and the perception other Mexican American young girls have of her.

"They start throwing words and end up throwing rocks at me. —What you looking at, *bolilla*? Think you're so smart because you talk like a white girl. *Huerca babosa*. You think you're better than us, right? *Pinche* princess, you're nothing but *basura*. See who'll come and help you now. Somebody hits me upside my head . . . [and the beating continue for a little longer. She was able to run away from them thinking to herself,] I don't care, I never belonged here. I don't know where I belong anymore. And the sting from the beating like nothing compared to how much I hurt inside" (Cisneros 356).

Celaya's character witnesses prejudice against the way her mother speaks in Mexico and is recipient of similar prejudice in Texas by other Mexican Americans. In Mexico the problem is that her mother does not speak eloquent Spanish. In Texas the problem is that Celaya speaks eloquent English.

Her character is confronted by issues of identity related to language from both sides. Gloria Anzaldúa addresses that subject in her book *Boderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1999). In a chapter titled "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," she confronts various issues. One is the expectation of keeping silent as a proper feminine quality. Like the title of Cisneros' chapter mentioned above implied, speaking too much is an undesirable quality. Anzaldúa speaks against that repression and offers a list of ways in which the people around her really speak. She gives details of the variety of linguistic strategies used in what she called Chicano Spanish. She is especially aware of the differences between the ways Chicano women talk versus other Latin American women in the U.S. She notices that the big difference between Nationals and Latinos/as in the U.S. is their immersion in the Spanish before arriving to the United States. Anzaldúa did not have access to Spanish in all the communication media or in the public school instruction as

her Latino counterparts in their country of origin. She expresses a feeling of inferiority growing up knowing that her Spanish has not been good enough.

Moreover, she argues that the contact between Spanish and English has gone for so long that it has “developed significant differences in the Spanish we speak” (Anzaldúa 79), meaning the way it is spoken in the U.S. For example, she describes the use of archaisms, Anglicism, among other linguistic strategies that are daily used to communicate. She finds it important to emphasize the strong ties between language and identity. It is not something that can be compartmentalized and therefore, she finds the need to defend it as it represents her linguistic reality.

“Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity – I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself. . . . Until I am free to write bilingually and to switch codes without having always to translate, while I still have to speak English or Spanish when I would rather speak Spanglish, and as long as I always have to accommodate the English speakers rather than having them accommodate me, my tongue will be illegitimate” (Anzaldúa 81).

Throughout Cisneros’ novel *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, the author feels free to use a variety of linguistic tactics to convey her character’s bilingualism in a completely unapologetic manner as seen in the title of the book and subsequent titles of parts and sections. Yet Cisneros does not completely ignore her English monolingual audience. She is able to convey this mix of English and Spanish in her story by sometimes providing italic words as a warning and sometimes translating and sometimes offering both. For example, in a description of her father, she uses italics, “He isn’t *acabado* yet. He isn’t *finished*,” (Cisneros 3), guiding the reader from the Spanish word and connecting it to its English translation. Nonetheless, she takes her readers into an engaging reality where code-switching is presented. In a description of Mexico’s Centennial day parade she reports, “You forgot the doomed Moctezuma carried in a gilt litter by sixteen sweating *infelices*, or the draped chariot filled with *chaparrita* Mexican Greek nymphs. In their hands,

scrolls with wonderful words – *Patria, Progreso, Industria, Ciencia*—their meanings lost to most of the city’s citizenry because they could not read” (Cisneros 125). These expressions in two languages are as intertwined to the narration as the characters to each other, and their history.

The linguistic strategy that she uses that I would like to highlight in this section is what Frances Aparicio calls tropicalization of the English language. Tropicalization occurs when a colloquial Spanish phrase is transferred to English in ways that English is rarely used because the main meaning of the words or phrases is founded in Spanish. Therefore, the writer is in the position of bringing into English ideas that are unknown to the Anglo culture because they are idiomatic in Spanish. As Aparicio indicates, “Thus, U.S. Latinos/as wage a discursive war by resisting, opposing, rewriting, and subverting stereotypes. In this process, they tropicalize themselves – already tropicalized Others -- assuming new discursive power as linguistic subjects” (195).

Cisneros’ novel presents the phenomenon of tropicalization through semantic calques, phrases that are almost literal translations from Spanish to English but that are not expressed in the way an English speaker would say it. For example, the phrase “Someone is coming to take your lap” (Cisneros 35), in Spanish: *alguien viene a quitarte la falda* is telling the child who will soon have a sibling that they will no longer be the youngest in the family, someone else soon will take the coveted spot on their mother or father’s lap. Another phrase she uses is “God Squeezes” (Cisneros 118) referring to a popular saying in Spanish *Dios aprieta, pero no ahorca*, God squeezes but does not strangle or strangulate, meaning that in bad times, there is a limit to how bad it is going to get. Other phrases are, “He worked . . . playing the piano in the “cabarets of the bad death” . . . (Cisneros 162), which refers to places *de mala muerte* or just plain dangerous places, or “It’s the hour of the nap” (Cisneros 39), *la hora de la siesta*, but in English it is known as nap time, or “You don’t like me when I begin” (Cisneros 226), *No te gusta cuando empiezo*,

referring to when someone is getting ready to start an argument. These phrases in English evoke the Spanish language to the bilingual reader. Cisneros uses numerous words in Spanish and code-switching as well, but this particular strategy, the tropicalization of the language makes English the vehicle to convey meaning that did not originate in that language. English as an object receives the meaning from Spanish, the subject. Cisneros is able to subvert the dominant language without erasing it. These phrases are an example of resisting total assimilation to the English language through the appropriation of the language. As the bilingual reader recalls the Spanish and makes sense of what is being said, a unique sense of complicity with the narrative voice is created. The second thing that happens is that it provokes in the monolingual English reader a feeling of instability. A feeling that a proficient reader in both English and Spanish who understands the particular culture represented may feel as well, not knowing if they should nervously laugh or feel ashamed, or empowered. One more important aspect of her bilingualism that also applies to Esmeralda Santiago's and below to Junot Díaz's narration is the creation of a hierarchy of accessibility to the text through the language. There are many allusions to references that are specific to the Mexican culture or the Mexican American culture that even Hispanics who are fully bilingual would miss. To the Anglo-Saxon culture, all Hispanics belong to one group, one culture. On the one hand, Hispanics are able to take advantage of this group's generalization to show solidarity to one another. On the other hand, there is room for resentment when their distinct histories, and traditions do not completely coincide and cultural nuances are lost. Just as Anzaldúa mentioned the difference between her and other Latinas who grew up immersed in Spanish through all communication mediums, they as well are not able to relate to the English/Spanish amalgamation that she has experienced in the U.S. Bilingual writing therefore, plays with the tension that the use of language creates in, not only the monolingual reader, but also the actual

bilingual reader who may not share the same cultural background, even though in the U.S. census forms, we all share the same box.

Bilingualism in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* – Challenging Hierarchies with Radical Bilingualism

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz, the characters incorporate the experiences of those in the periphery through the use of various linguistic forms. One is the tropicalization of the English language mentioned above, and highlighted in this section are the use of loan words, an eloquent and articulate use of the English language, and sustained code-switching. In Díaz's novel, there are semantic calques, almost literal translations from Spanish to English, very similar to what Cisneros did, as shown in the section above. Also, there are moments of tropicalization found in short phrases that lack verbs. For example, in a scene where there is a violent altercation, a character yells, "You alone her!" (Díaz 142). This would be *¡Déjala sola!* in Spanish, for the phrase *leave her alone*. In this line, the verb is omitted and the adjective alone is tropicalized to function as the action. Or in the line where the narrator says about Oscar, "He knew he had to *cogerlo con* take it easy" (Díaz 283). In Spanish, *cogerlo suave* means take it easy. *Cogerlo* means take it, *con* means with, thus, emphasizing he had to really take it easy "take it with take it easy." Through code-switching a new catch phrase is created "cogerlo con take it easy" where English and Spanish are almost equally represented. This is important because Junot Díaz incorporates in literature a number of strategies from the spoken language of the U.S. Latinos/as in the 20th and 21st century and through his writing subverts and challenges the normativity of literature in the English language.

Junot Díaz's radical bilingualism combines politics and the use of language. The Dominican Republic and the U.S. language contact begins their 20th century relationship when the U.S. militarily intervened in the Dominican land. In the Dominican Republic the fear of economic

sanctions from Europe urged the U.S. to step in in 1904 and eventually militarily intervene in the country. These interventions created Diasporas that had an effect on the people from this country who reside in the U.S. today as well as the people who stayed⁷⁷. Díaz illustrates this through the narration of this family's story in his novel.

The U.S. government under President Theodore Roosevelt “took control of the Dominican Custom Service in 1904 and enforced a lien on the nation’s external revenue, its primary source of income” (Roorda 13-14). This economic involvement evolved into military intervention that started on November 1916 and lasted until 1924. This intervention left the Dominican Republic in even greater debt and created a culture that was economically in a disadvantage with the U.S. It is important to emphasize the direct relationship between U.S. interventionism in the Dominican Republic and the poverty it has created because in the U.S., where racial discrimination continues its bouts of denial, cultural racism continues to grow as more acceptable. According to Grosfoguel, Maldonado-Torres, and Saldívar,

“Those groups [referring to Mexicans, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and African Americans] coming from colonial or neocolonial experiences are the ones with the highest poverty rates. . . . For metropolitan populations racism is invisible. . . . This invisibility and denial is linked to the transformation of racist discourses from biological racist discourses to cultural racist discourses (Balibar 1991, Gilro 1993, Essed 1996, Grosfoguel 2003, Fanon 1988)” (12).

In other words, it is not uncommon to look down upon a group of people and decide that their economic difficulties are brought on upon themselves, quickly forgetting any previous U.S. involvement that would have served as an initial deterrent to any economic advancement. Instead

⁷⁷ In 1965 the U.S. invaded the Dominican Republic around the time when the U.S. feared the communist ideology coming from the Soviet Union. This “paved the way for Joaquín Balaguer, a longtime aide of assassinated dictator Trujillo, to capture power during elections that followed in 1966. . . . To diffuse the postelection crisis, U.S. officials hastily facilitated the mass exodus to the United States of the very revolutionaries our government had helped crush” (Gonzalez 118). This mass exodus created a diaspora that has had an effect on the people of the D.R. today as well as those Dominicans that reside in the U.S.

it is easy to adhere to core American dream values. As Grosfoguel describes, “One implication of this myth [the American dream] is that if you fail, it is because you have not worked hard enough and that, therefore, there has to be something wrong with you” (“Colonial Subjects” 197). This thought gives permission to look at different minority groups and pass judgement on their situation and detach from any responsibility towards them.

The United States invasion in the Dominican Republic lasted for 8 years and created a contact zone (Pratt) that made a linguistic impact, “A marked Americanization of the language also took place during these years with the dissemination of U.S. trade marks on almost all the products consumed in the country” (Pons 338). Díaz points out words that emerge from this contact. An example of this is seen when the narrator describes Oscar through a Dominican neologism that is originated on past U.S. invasions. “Who goes to a party to *watch*? Thereafter, the Marines were *parigüayos*, . . . The kid who don’t dance, who ain’t got game, who lets people clown him – he’s the *parigüayo*” (Díaz 20). This was the description of a Marine, who would not behave in a party like Dominicans are used to, for example, by dancing. This terms then is transferred and becomes the description of any Dominican who is passively attending a party.

In the book *Weird English* (2004) by Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch’ien, she dedicates a chapter to explore Junot Díaz’s work. She gives emphasis to the language employed in the novel, which is mostly English with inescapable Spanish, or as she explains, “Spanglish plus the linguistic register of the nerd, so that the result is a weird combination of Spanglish and sci-fi language” (Ch’ien 224). Oscar, the protagonist, who is an avid reader of comics “was gorging himself on a steady stream of Lovecraft, Wells, Burroughs, Howard, Alexander, Herbert, Asimov, Bova, and Heinlen, and even the Old Ones who were already beginning to fade – E. E. ‘Doc’ Smith, Stapledon, and the guy who wrote all the Doc Savage books – moving hungrily from book to book, author to

author, age to age” (Díaz 21). These authors’ publications from the 1930s and 1940s were the readings that formed Oscar’s vocabulary in English and the landscape of good versus evil that helped him cope with reality. His reality was plagued with poverty and the languages he was juggling included his mother’s Spanish, the books he read, the schools he attended, and the streets of Paterson, New Jersey. All of these registers, presented in sustained code-switching, reflect Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia and the carnivalesque. As it is presented in Zavala’s book, different social classes and historical events influence the voices heard on the text “la heteroglosia y el carnaval introducen la pluralidad de discursos (y clases y etnias y géneros sexuales) que pueblan el mundo. [. . .] La inversión social (o sexual) del carnaval, en sus ambigüedades y deslizamientos, es un modelo de percepción liberador contra las hegemonías” (Zavala 25). In my translation, "heteroglossia and the carnivalesque introduce a plurality of discourses and social classes and ethnic background and gender that inhabit the world . . . the social inversion of the carnival and its ambiguities and sliding movement, is a model of liberating perception against hegemony." A Dominican young man in New Jersey would be expected by the dominant class to speak a certain way. However, his voracious readings informed his high proficiency in English. His expressions also came from television shows and “the libraries of Paterson [that] were so underfunded that they still kept a lot of the previous generation’s nerdery in circulation” (Díaz 21).

Similar to Celaya’s experience in San Antonio, Texas presented in Cisneros’ story, in New Jersey, Oscar does not fit-in the U.S. culture or the Dominican culture. When he goes to college, he hopes to improve his social standing, but he is not able to, “The white kids looked at his black skin and his afro and treated him with inhuman cheeriness. The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You’re not Dominican. And he said, over and over again, But I am. Soy dominicano. Dominicano soy” (Díaz 49). On one hand, he

faces rejection from white Americans based on race; on the other hand, his overweight body, and overall nerd mannerisms are a barrier between him and his fellow Dominicans. He reaches out to them in Spanish. In English, though, the eloquence of his vocabulary, “he used words like *indefatigable* and *ubiquitous*” (Díaz 22), sets him apart from the regular crowd. He finds it impossible to fit in and ultimately, he doesn’t. Yet through his use of language, he resists being pinned down to an identity that conforms to the stereotype of Dominicans.

Another form in which Díaz uses bilingualism is to poignantly illustrate the ways in which tyrannical and colonial rules manipulate the trusting naïve individual who happens to respect their authority. This individual in this case is Oscar who manages his sense of self and identity through language. His character who struggles with relationships and with fitting in does not seem to be as aware of his political history as the narrator Yunió. As the omniscient narrator, Yunió explains how U.S. influence help create one of the worst dictators in history, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina, “one of the longest, most damaging U.S. backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it’s tolerating U.S.-backed dictators, . . .” (Díaz 3). A government that does not tolerate opposition produces a group of loyalists whose militant behaviors disregards and denies human rights. It sadly becomes part of the normative of governing even after Trujillo’s assassination. Frank Moya Pons calls this era “Neo-Trujilloism” (381) a time after the 1965 U.S. military invasion and Joaquín Balaguer’s insistence on domination⁷⁸. It is important to recognize this political atmosphere because it directly impacts the protagonist’s

⁷⁸ Joaquín Balaguer was one of Trujillo’s trusted advisors. According to Moya Pons, “When Joaquín Balaguer assumed the presidency on June 1, 1966, the Dominican government was dominated by some 400 U.S. functionaries and advisors. The military were practically managed by a U.S. military team of 65 advisors. The Ministry of Agriculture was controlled by 45 U.S. technicians who made almost all the decisions. The National Police and security forces were advised by 15 experts on matters of public security, one third of them members of the CIA. Other government departments, such as the Oficina de Desarrollo de la Comunidad and the Instituto Agrario Dominicano, operated under the supervision of U.S. advisers, as did the Ministry of Education. . . . Balaguer reinstated the Trujilloist centralist style of the presidency” (396-397).

heritage and eventual demise. Oscar's mother's relocation to the U.S. is directly related to the abuses of the Trujillo government. Her character represents among other things the diaspora of Dominicans to the U.S. and the subsequent revolving door of migration in which Oscar's character is found. In a return to the Dominican Republic, Oscar is ultimately betrayed, ironically, by language. He is taken to the sugar cane field by the same group of men who assaulted him in the past. The cane field as mentioned in previous chapters symbolizes that U.S. occupation of the land that like in Puerto Rico changed their agricultural system to one of sugar plantations for U.S. private industries. Oscar has started a romantic relationship with a woman who has been in a relationship with a member of the local law enforcement. Associates of this man take Oscar for a second and last time, in order to put an end to that relationship. Oscar ingenuously proceeds to speak to them in Spanish about his new found love. "They waited respectfully for him to finish and then they said, their faces slowly disappearing in the gloom, Listen, we'll let you go if you tell us what *fuego* means in English. Fire, he blurted out, unable to help himself" (Díaz 322). Oscar did not see how the translation of this noun in Spanish would turn into a command in English that would end his life. His inability to manage the code-switching did not allow him to survive in a colonial atmosphere that has successfully manipulated both languages to his demise. Two important aspects of the language contact are highlighted in this interaction. The first one confirms the pattern that has been demonstrated above with the tension between Hispanics going from the U.S. to their motherlands and finding rejection based on the way their mother tongue is spoken. Oscar who is not seen as a native Dominican because he grew up in New Jersey is mistreated and linguistically mocked by the nationals. These nationals as mentioned above have years of experience with U.S. interventionism and are apt at code-switching. The second aspect of language contact is found in the necessity for constant translation in order to survive or even exist

in this type of colonial environment. In the book, *Lost and Found in Translation* (2005), Martha J. Cutter finds in her analyses of twenty literary texts that in bilingual writing there are gains and losses for readers both monolingual and bilingual. For example, when a monolingual English reader is presented with a text in Spanish, he or she is forced to translate and gain in his or her cultural experience. In the same way a bilingual reader may lose part of their mother tongue when reading a text that is presented mostly in English. She points out how English only policies in the U.S. discourage bilingualism and how “native-born Hispanics have adopted English more rapidly” (Cutter 224) and third generation Hispanics tend to only speak English. She exclaims that “Without translation, ethnicity cannot be transcoded, and tongues cannot be transmigrated” (Cutter 225). In other words, she sees translation as a necessary skill for both appropriation and preservation of languages in contact. Díaz presents a character whose language contact presents a mortal conflict. In the scene where Oscar loses his life to a tragedy of translation, it signals how manipulating English and Spanish has the power to oppress and the power to liberate, the power of life and death.

Furthermore, Díaz’s offers in this novel characters who move from the English only environment to the Dominican Republic and in turn confronts readers with a language that persist on the use of various linguistic strategies through code-switching. For instance, Díaz’s work is widespread with loan words. In the example below the narrator describes Lola’s daughter towards the end of the book.

“Behold the girl: the beautiful muchachita: Lola’s daughter. Dark and blindingly fast: in her great-grandmother La Inca’s words: una jurona. Could have been my daughter if I’d been smart, if I’d been -----. Makes her no less precious. She climbs trees, she rubs her butt against doorjambs, she practices malapalabras when she thinks nobody is listening. Speaks Spanish and English” (Díaz 2007: 329).

These phrases offer two distinct linguistic strategies. In the last sentence of the two, it is noticeable that the subject is omitted. This is acceptable in the Spanish grammar structure, (*Ella*)

Habla español e inglés, but not in English, where the subject is central to the syntaxes of the sentence⁷⁹. Sentences without a subject are found over and over throughout the text of this novel. The other linguistic strategy in this example, as mentioned above, is the use of loan words from Spanish to English. *Muchachita, una jurona, malapalabras*; these are three unlike descriptions of a little girl. The diminutive used for young woman, *muchachita* provides a tender way of describing one who is also a *jurona*, which according to the dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy (rae.es) could be the female of a *hurón*, a large animal or “persona que averigua y descubre lo escondido y secreto,” a person who finds out what is hidden or kept in secret. She is also known for practicing *malapalabras* or bad words. This last word evokes the phonetic intonation used by a Dominican speaker who tend, as most Caribbean Hispanics, to aspirate the last consonant especially when it is an *s*. For example, the name *Lucas* would be pronounced, *Luca* or instead of *¿Qué comes?* it would be said, *¿Qué tú come?* In the example above, instead of *malas palabras* it becomes *malapalabras*. These linguistic strategies not only project a distinct taste of Dominican culture but it also display the variety of cultures intertwined in the Dominican Republic that inevitably includes the U.S. through the English language.

In an article by Theodore Beardsley, this author recounts how loan words from English have made it into the Puerto Rican Spanish due to the U.S. presence on the island since 1898. He explains how loan words became a necessity to provide vocabulary for words that could not appropriately be articulated in Spanish. The “. . . American term was accommodated phonetically into Spanish form” (5) allowing for the complete communicative thought to be expressed. As mentioned above, the U.S. also made its presence into the Dominican Republic with two military invasions in the 20th century. However, in Díaz’s novel, the English language, as rich in

⁷⁹ Although this is quickly changing through electronic texting, where subjects are often omitted in English.

vocabulary as it is, does not convey the flavor that the words mentioned above bring to the sentence, full of the Dominican sound and craftiness that it evokes. This novel, a Pulitzer Prize winner, is a remarkable example of an American experience that requires Spanish words to better impart the message presented.

The description of this girl as well as the language in which she is described can be a metaphor of the new and current generations of Latino in the U.S. English and Spanish carry a long list of traditions and ideologies that can bind the speakers into a position of taking sides. The way Diaz' narrator paints a picture of Lola's daughter makes that mix mentioned before look as a delightful blend that results in a new beautiful yet strong creation, that neither glorifies nor denies the importance of one language over the other.

Spanish words are used in what Lourdes Torres points out as sustained code-switching, which in her article is a description of radical bilingualism. This strategy asserts the coexistence of both languages to the point that one almost depends on the other. This dependability, according to Torres has the objective to show a style that "contributes to the task of making bilingual prose writing acceptable and legitimate" (Torres "In the Contact" 88). Notable works in this category are the novel *Yo-Yo Boing* (1998) by Giannina Braschi and the *Killer Crónicas* (2004) by Susana Chávez-Silverman (Torres "In the Contact" 86). Both of these novels are characterized by sustained code-switching and have been published in "academic presses, rather than mainstream" (Torres "In the Contact" 86), which is a testament to the risks that academic presses are willing to take in an area that can be denominated as experimental, as opposed to mainstream presses that may be more concerned with the bottom line.

Martha J. Cutter also uses the term radical bilingualism in her analyses of Cherríe Moraga and Susan Powers work. Cutter says that this strategy that authors utilize "force[s] the reader to

become a translator. This form of radical bilingualism dismantles the line between the translator and the reader, between the dominant language and the ‘disempowered’ one(s)” (25). Junot Díaz in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* effectively achieves a disempowerment of the dominant language while at the same time altering it in order to give voice to bicultural and bilingual characters throughout this narration.

Junot Díaz utilizes radical bilingualism through sustained code-switching where the coexistence and interdependence of the two languages is emphasized. These voices express the relationship they have with one another as they articulate advices, insecurities, preoccupations, and anger in two languages. For example, in an encounter between Lola and her mother Beli, Lola describes how her mother got her to come back home after she had run away and eventually sent her to live with her grandmother in the D.R.

“That was when I realized she hadn’t been crying at all. She’d been faking! Her smile was like a lion’s. Ya te tengo, she said, jumping triumphantly to her feet. Te tengo. And that is how I ended up in Santo Domingo [. . .]. It was like the fight between the egg and the rock, my abuela said. No winning.” (Díaz, 70)

As Lola narrates, her mother’s words are written in Spanish. This paragraph is an example of code-switching and tropicalization of the language, where the sensitivity of the characters be it either through desperation, anger or surrender, whichever the emotions are, can be best enunciated as well as affirmed in a language that is expressed through the simultaneous use of English and Spanish. Code-switching lets the bilingual reader have a fuller understanding of the phrases while provoking anxiety to the Anglo-American monolingual reader. The strategy of code-switching on one hand gratifies the bilingual reader (“Contact Zone” Torres 83) by providing phrases and cultural puns that reward their reading experience. On the other hand, Junot Díaz allows the narrator to appropriate the dominant language, English, and infuses a meaning that was not there before in a phrase that can only be found in Spanish, *the fight between the egg and the rock*, which

makes no sense in English. However, through this narration this phrase in English becomes a form of knowledge found in the border that affects the language and has the potential to change it. Díaz manages to provoke anxiety not only by using Spanish but also by using the English language in a way that gives the illusion of communicating cultural information while allowing an implicit meaning to be created. The translation of this phrase disempowers the dominant tongue. Cutter explains this best, “When translation mixes codes and also undermines them, it illustrates that in the end there is no absolute language of hegemony and no absolute mother tongue; all languages exist in relationship to each other, and all speakers appropriate languages that are not really (nor ever were) their ‘own’” (252). Díaz achieves a leveling of both languages that values and equally subverts both.

Another linguistic example is found in the crass advice Oscar receives from his uncle about his love life. The fact that Oscar did not have a girlfriend was disturbing to his Dominican friends and family. His uncle offered him some recommendations on that subject.

“Listen, palomo: you have to grab a muchacha, y météselo. That will take care of *everything*. Start with a fea. Coje that fea y météselo! Tío Rudolfo had four kids with three different women so the nigger was without doubt the family’s resident météselo expert” (Díaz 24).

The first word in Spanish, *palomo*, is a very colloquial way to say young man. This word would not be used in all Spanish speaking countries but it would be common in the Dominican Republic. The first two sentences start with a series of commands that change from English *grab* to Spanish *metéselo*, in which his uncle shares his advice, and in which the accent in the last word emphasizes once again Dominican intonation. The third sentence switches to the narrator’s voice using that same Spanish command and changing it into a noun. This manipulation of both languages makes the incorporation of them fluid without idealizing one over the other.

A final example of sustained code-switching from Díaz novel presents the use of intersentential code-switching when Lola as the narrator describes feelings about her mother.

“Like they say: Plátano maduro no se vuelve verde. Even at the end she refused to show anything close to love. She cried not for me or for herself but only for Oscar. *Mi pobre, hijo*, she sobbed. *Mi pobre hijo*. You always think with your parents that at least at the very end something will change, something will get better. Not for us” (Díaz 208).

Within the context of bicultural, bilingual life experiences, Díaz creates moments of complicity with the bilingual reader. The monolingual reader may miss nuances as they may have limited knowledge of the culture. The narrator goes along with the author who according to Ch’ien, “tries to capture the different sentiments of generations through use of Spanish, English, and a mixture of the two” (Ch’ien 235). This manipulation generates a meaning that conveys transcultural connotation. “Díaz engages in the art of assertive nontranslation, placing Spanish words side by side with English words without calling attention to them, without contextualizing them or grammatically indicating that Spanish is other” (Ch’ien 209). By doing this he challenges the English prose and normalizes its coexistence with Spanish.

The radical bilingualism in this novel is not only done by the code-switching generated in dialog or in the narrator’s thoughts, or in the historical endnotes that he provides, or even in the lack of warning style that he employs, but also in the voices it represents and the places where it is thinking from. Eugenia Casielles refers to it as “radical hybridism” because by going from “the sentence and even the phrasal level inwards down to the word level, and even the morpheme level, with the result that rather than alternating words with English, Spanish words and phrases blend in with English grammar and are treated as if they were English” (485). Thus, using loan words, semantic calqued phrases, the highest forms of Standard English and its vernacular in the same sentence, mixed with Dominican colloquialisms, no italics concerning the code-switching and

rarely a translation, the author launches into a pattern that represents the kaleidoscope of Latin culture in the U.S.

Bilingual/Transmodern Literature: A Strategy of Decolonization

In conclusion, both Spanish and English represent empires, conquest, and subjugation. First through the Spaniards in the sixteenth century then in the nineteenth and twentieth century when the U.S. position themselves as the hemisphere's superpower. Their languages are established on uneven grounds. Thus, for the characters in these novels, there is no need for loyalty to any side, while at the same time both sides are so ingrained in their heritage that taking them apart or choosing sides is not a viable option. The loyalty to English only or Spanish only is subverted in code-switching texts that do not appear faithful to either language. Also, both languages are a mix of other languages as well, as Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien puts it, "Spanish is also just as originally hybrid as English" (210). The authors that use radical bilingualism in a way bring to the forefront the absurdity of this loyalty.

The characters of these novels experience rejection and marginalization not only as Latinos/as in the U.S. but also within the oppressive racial and gender power structures of their own home cultures. In Matta's and Santiago's novels respectively they also experience marginalization within their own culture because of race and classism. In Cisneros's novel there is the prejudice against their own indigenous people as well as Mexican Americans, while Dominican prejudices against their African heritage – often associated with the neighboring Haiti – play a prominent role in Díaz's novel. Through tropicalization of the language, the use of loan words, code-switching, and even an elevated articulation of the English language, characters play with assimilation tools to use the language of the colonizer, appropriate it, and become empowered by it. Thus, bilingual literature creates possibilities to use language in a way that moves the individual away from dichotomous positions of colonizer/colonized. It avoids idealizing one point

of view over the other. It acknowledges that the border is between two unequal partners but does not acquiesce to the inherent superiority of one side over the other. Works on this category carry the post-modern idea of hybrid cultures that accentuates ambiguity, rejecting the authority of one language over the other. Instead of bounding or incasing an individual into a language often imposed, it frees the individual to express him or herself with ownership. Yet the term transmodern helps shed light to characters that are found in the periphery of society and who may have not been part of modernity in a way that could even be considered post-modern. Enrique Dussel, who proposes the transmodern project as a way to consider those excluded from the dominant class, also alerts for the consideration of those whose culture is considered outside of Modernity.

About the transmodern project, “In the first place, it suggests the affirmation, the self-valorization of one’s own negated or merely devaluated cultural moments which are found in the exteriority of Modernity . . . Secondly, those traditional values ignored by Modernity should be a point of departure for an internal critique, from within the culture’s own hermeneutical possibilities. Thirdly, the critics should be those who, living in the bi-culturality of the ‘borders,’ can create critical thought. Fourthly, this means a long period of resistance, of maturation, and of the accumulation of forces. It is a period of the creative and accelerated cultivation and development of one’s own cultural tradition, which is now in the path toward a *trans*-modern utopia” (Dussel *Transmodernity and Interculturality* 49).

In other words, Dussel is saying that the ultimate goal would be the creation of a new culture that would include the incorporation of knowledge of other cultures as well as their own interpretation of what these cultures are. This is not entirely impossible as the word utopia may suggest because cultures are constantly changing, just as languages change. According to Dussel this utopic ideals go beyond decolonization. However, moments of liberation and decolonization are what can be realistically achieved within the context of coloniality of power. Going beyond decolonization would assume a state where colonial structures are not in place and where the exteriority of the dominant class no longer needs to be examined. The literature in this study

portrays changes that can produce moments of liberation that influence the creation of a new culture that can contribute to a transmodern utopia but it is not quite there.

These characters are found on the border of two cultures. The concept of border thinking brought by the Argentinean thinker, Walter Mignolo is present in this type of writing. For Mignolo the border is always a specific ideological location and border thinking continually looks in two directions (Local Histories 5). According to Mignolo all thinking has a “thinking from” (Local Histories 5) somewhere, which means that there is no such thing as an unadulterated or pure point of view. Thinking from “dichotomous concepts” (Local Histories) is an acknowledgement of the inequalities created by colonization. When the “perspective of subalternity” (Local Histories 45) is allowed, ultimately moments of decolonization are achieved (Local Histories 45), which is what these novels accomplish.

The decolonization of language is really the creation of a space where the person in the margin has the opportunity to use the language not only to establish any political association but to also de-link from them. To delink, according to Mignolo, “leads to de-colonial epistemic shift and brings to the foreground other epistemologies, other principles of knowledge and understanding and consequently, other economy, other politics, other ethics” (Mignolo, Globalization, 307). In other words, the main objective becomes the acknowledgment of other forms of knowledge or *saberes del margen*. The examples of the production of phrases that are particular to individuals who know English and Spanish in these novels, becomes a way to strive for liberation from a colonial state of mind, in which they are found, even while residing in the U.S. mainland. The peripheral location of the characters of the novels within the dominant culture creates a need to aspire for ways to achieve liberation. This use of language is a choice that enables the communicator into taking ownership by resisting total assimilation, resisting the stereotype

imposed, and not being locked into one specific identity. Also, by provoking anxiety, and instability to the dominant class, while bringing to the forefront forms of knowledge found on the borders of the two languages and the two cultures transmodern literature provides the tools for liberation and decolonization as they creatively begin to form a new culture.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION: FROM U.S. POLICIES TO SPANGLISH WITH SOME SPIRITUALITY “IN BETWEEN”

The trajectory of U.S. interventionism in Puerto Rico, Mexico, and the Dominican Republic is displayed in the selected narrations by Enrique Matta, Esmeralda Santiago, Sandra Cisneros, and Junot Díaz. Their novels are able to demonstrate how ingrained is the U.S. influence both in the history of these countries and in the lives of their characters. I have argued that U.S. foreign interest and goals of expansion is what brings them to an unending relationship with these countries. The subsequent interventionism that these policies promoted also fomented a standing invitation to their citizens to come to the U.S. The United States is implicitly presented as a haven, or as the best alternative and final destination to people who are struggling with socio-economic maladies found in these countries. Ironically, the United States, through interventionism, contributed to the creation of some of the problems they encounter, in the first place.

Mexicans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans back in their respective nations are undeniably entangled with the U.S. Their geographical proximity and economic dependence prohibits their nations from having full autonomy from a global market highly driven by the U.S. The market and the media are constant reminders of the superpower to their north. On the other hand, generations of Mexican Americans, Dominicans, and Puerto Ricans who reside in the U.S. and continue their ties with their ancestor's homeland, struggle to navigate the socio-economic realities of this country. These realities while reminiscent of the ones in their ancestor's lands because of the racial and class hierarchies that establishes inequalities, are found under the disguise of a country that promotes unfettered opportunities. Social dissimilarities affects this part of the Latino/a population in the U.S., as it is one of the aspects presented in these novels.

I have chosen to look at these novels through a specific lens that allows a point of view that parts from the notion of coloniality of power as defined by Anibal Quijano, taking into

consideration the location of the characters, which is helped by the concepts of border thinking as Walter Mignolo defines it, and the idea of transmodernity that Enrique Dussel offers. This special trifocal lens helps to look at characters who live in a constant state of coloniality even if they are on U.S. soil. Because the U.S. is a free democratic republic and an example worldwide of an advanced nation, it is difficult to grasp the idea that part of its population is consistently marginalized. It goes against the tenets of freedom, unalienable rights, and the pursuit of happiness that was declared long ago. Therefore, coloniality of power serves as the foundation to the characters' situation, border thinking sheds light into the characters' way of responding to their specific circumstance, and the transmodern response is found in these novels, as dichotomous positions are subverted.

I have chosen to look specifically at four aspects in which U.S. interventionism is present in these novels. These four aspects have been the main topics of the body of this work. In the second chapter, I looked at the way the history of U.S. interventionism has been presented in all four novels. In the third chapter, the focus shifted to two narrations, Cisneros' and Díaz's and how they have handled matters of spirituality. In the fourth chapter the development of Puerto Rico's colonial identity has been examined through the novels by Matta and Santiago. Finally, in the fifth chapter, the use of English and Spanish in all novels has been analyzed. All of these aspects has served as connections to the topic of U.S. interventionism and have shed light into the lives of Latinos/as in the U.S.

History of U.S. Interventionism

This thesis began presenting the history of U.S. interventionism in Latin America. After making a correlation between this history and U.S. foreign policies, it has been demonstrated that interventionism is part of a carefully plan of expansion that is as old as the birth of this nation. In order to eliminate threats from another European invasion, the U.S. develops its forces and

reputation by establishing themselves as the political and military superpower of the hemisphere and eventually stand side by side or above powerful countries from around the world. The policies that supported the thoughts of expansionism are dated back to the beginning of the 19th century. In this work I have emphasized the Monroe Doctrine, the Roosevelt Corollary to the Monroe Doctrine, the Good Neighbor Policy, and the Johnson Doctrine. These policies have been behind important events that affected the countries represented in this study. These major events are the 1848 war between Mexico and the U.S., where the U.S. obtains the northwest of Mexico; the 1898 War between the U.S. and Spain, where the U.S. obtains among other countries, Puerto Rico; the period of dictatorship in the Dominican Republic sponsored by the Good Neighbor Policy; and finally, the invasion of the Dominican Republic after this period supported by the Johnson Doctrine. Expansionism impules the wars and economic interests the other two events.

At the beginning of the 21st century multiple wars have been fought throughout the world, and U.S. involvement has been the starting force. Foreign policy becomes a major focus in politics. Meanwhile the increasing Latino/a population is viewed as a threat to local economic stability. The influx of Latino/a immigrants in the U.S. is seen as a political polarizing matter. The present negative reactions towards one of the fastest growing minority group is alarming and affects the people who are against policies that reject this population. Debates promote dichotomous positions and seldom an honest recognition of the benefits this population has had in the formation of the U.S. overall, and even less, the fact that U.S. involvement has anything to do with this increase in population. These debates leave out the history of U.S. interventionism in these countries and the military and economic hold that the U.S. has had on their soil. The novels in this study offer insight into historical events that are connected to U.S. foreign policies. Using history as a point of departure has been useful to evaluate each novel and obtain from the text how they

deal with history, spirituality, and language and observe those moments of liberation their characters experience.

Caramelo or Puro Cuento: History and Spirituality

First, Sandra Cisneros' novel *Caramelo or Puro Cuento* narrated interventions in Mexico that go back to the 16th century with the Spaniards, then the French, and finally, North Americans. The land Mexico lost to the U.S. in 1848 not only changed their geographical environment but also their interpersonal relationships. The Monroe Doctrine has been in place since 1823 influencing in this case, American expansions to the west. More than a century later, a Mexican American voice reveals through her narration how this has affected generations of Mexicans born after this historical event. In this case, the history of U.S. interventionism is told through the eyes of a young woman, with the help of an omniscient narrator, and the ghost of her grandmother. I believe this young woman's character reveals a point of view that surpasses dichotomies. U.S. born Celaya, at this point in her life, has had ancestors who have fought with and for the U.S. The military pride that she presents as part of her history does not fit in with mainstream military pride. Her story, while fiction, represents the story of many U.S. citizens who must wrestle with a history that the rest of the U.S. citizens are not necessary aware exists. The way she looks flags stereotypes that dictate who she is before anyone really gets to know her. Yet, she is an American and because of that her loyalties are not exclusive nor circumscribed to one culture or the other. Thus, rejecting positions that would trap her into selecting one country over the other. A person like her brings a richness to the American culture that is not as appreciated as it should be. Nonetheless, her contribution to society is a voice that, more than a diversity token, has the potential to offer transformative thoughts.

Cisneros intertwines historical events with the story of the characters. Sometimes she includes historical information in the text, like in the following example,

“Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘Good Neighbor Policy’ invited Mexican workers to harvest U.S. crops, since the U.S. labor force was depleted by the draft. And young men like Inocencio could even brag that Mexico had done its part to aid the Allies by sending a small but brave air unit, Squadron 201,* to assist General MacArthur in the Philippines” (Cisneros 206).

Inocencio is Celaya’s father, a fictional character⁸⁰. The 201 Squadron is a verifiable group of the Mexican army. Cisneros finds it important to expand on this information and offers more information about the squadron in a footnote.

She explains that “During World War II, a squadron of Mexican fighter pilots, Escuadron 201, helped liberate Luzon and Formosa. Created by Mexican president Manuel Ávila Camacho in 1944, the squadron of 38 fighter pilots and 250 ground personnel serving under U.S. orders logged 59 missions and 1,290 hours of combat flight time.

For a super-sentimental story of Squadron 201, see Indio Fernández’ *Spending Salon México*, a classic. Note the Mexican matriarchy scene between the injured returning pilot and his angelic mother. This scene alone will explain everything” (Cisneros 207).

These footnotes are usually the voice of an omniscient narrator who starts the narration objectively but cannot help the editorial comments or tangents because this voice presenting history is aware of the ironies that are enraptured in it. Through this novel, as well as the other ones, we get a sense of a retelling and a reformulating of the historical discourse from an-“other” point of view. Instead of Mexicans being viewed as opportunists who head north, Cisneros reminds the reader of policies that invited them to the U.S. She also exposes how they were allies in World War II, despite the previous history of interventionism. As allies they were on equal footing, one neighboring nation helping the other in times of need, and nullifying U.S. superiority. She also reminds the reader of the Mexican cinema and the arts something that is not mentioned in this study explicitly but is part of Mexican culture and through forms of arts besides literature, history is presented.

⁸⁰ Inocencio also joined the U.S. Army and was forced to prove it to the INS when they paid him a visit at work. He was especially proud was a document signed by President Truman (Cisneros 377).

Another important aspect of the way Cisneros deals with history has been the way she presents a character, Celaya, who is between childhood and adulthood, in between English and Spanish, in between U.S. and Mexico, aided by her grandmother who is in between lives “Well, it’s that I’m halfway here and there. I’m in the middle of nowhere! *Soy un ánima sola*. (Cisneros 406), “I’m here, neither alive nor dead” (Cisneros 407). All of these “in between” stages emphasize how her personal history, the one she is creating, is caught up in a national limbo where patriotism is questioned and at the same time sought after. Her history contains belief systems that have been part of her heritage, which include matriarchal figures like the Aztec goddesses, and the Virgin of Guadalupe. An important aspect of her belief is that “she takes comfort in the spiritual strength of the Virgin of Guadalupe, who symbolizes inner female power, not orthodox institutional Catholicism, a definite US Latina perspective.” (Heredia 348-349). This iconic spiritual figure is connected in her present with a strong female figure in her life, her dead grandmother. Communicating with the dead is a way of examining reality. As she evaluates how these matriarchs impact her life, she learns to appreciate another point of view that helps her understand her ancestry and who she is in the present. Through the relationship with her grandmother, she reformulates her-story.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao: History and Spirituality

Junot Díaz’s novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* also mixes historical events in the narration. For example, we have seen events that were affected by the Good Neighbor Policy and the Johnson Doctrine. The Rafael Leónidas Trujillo regime was a result of years of non-U.S. interventionism, in between two major U.S. invasions in the Dominican Republic (D.R.). This history has not gone unnoticed by the narrator who also likes to use footnotes to expand on the accounts that help put in place the great oppressor of the D.R. The narrator’s voice uses sarcastic tones to retell a story that most Americans ignore. In a description of Trujillo and some of the

things he has done, the footnote's explanation declares that he is the, "most damaging U.S. backed dictatorship in the Western Hemisphere (and if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating U.S. backed dictators" (Díaz 3). Adorned with sarcastic humor, Díaz is able to authenticate the origins of an unequivocal oppressor who directly affected the family of the characters in the story. In this case a young man, Oscar, is the protagonist, whose mom leaves the Dominican Republic to flee from a government that could not protect her from people in authority who abuse their power. Ramón Grosfoguel points how this migration occurs in his book *Colonial Subjects* (2003),

"The Dominican Republic, with a total population of fewer than five million people, has one of the highest rates of legal emigration to the United States of any country in the Western Hemisphere, made possible by U.S. and Dominican government policy, which in the years after 1965 actively encouraged Dominican 'entry' to the United States. But the geopolitical interest of fostering migration to achieve security in the Dominican Republic did not translate into a policy of active incorporation. In fact, many of the Dominican migrants came with only tourist visas and were unable to obtain permanent resident visas. Dominicans who emigrated were able to enter the United States but then were left to fend for themselves" (166).

Junot Díaz's perspective provides insight into the circumstances that has brought this Dominican family to Paterson, New Jersey. This fictional family illustrate the history that impules some Dominican families to move to the U.S. The re-telling of the history of U.S. invasions in the D.R. as part of Oscar's story allows the narration to offer direct connections between U.S. interventionism and Dominican migration to the U.S. Oscar's character breaks stereotypes of Latinos/as in the U.S. His love of reading, writing, and sci-fi television programs are a better description of another type of American kid, not one raised in Paterson, New Jersey. In this text the act of writing allows Oscar to survive, even after death. His writings provide moments of liberation for those who received it posthumously. The narrator, Yuniors, through the act of writing, takes ownership of his-story.

Another important aspect of this novel has been that the narrator of Díaz's novel points out that U.S. interventionism is behind the political catastrophes of the D.R. However, the U.S. is not explicitly blamed for them. The fault is placed on a curse, *fukú*. This curse is bigger than the U.S. because it is found in the spiritual realm. But it is even more specific. It is a spiritual realm that impacts the Caribbean imaginary. It gives insight to the marvelous world of the Caribbean and the realities found in a part of the world that has been the target of colonization for centuries before the U.S. invaded any of the islands. Thus, the U.S. is displaced as the ultimate power because there are greater powers that are part of a belief system that precede their intervention in the D.R. This is important because these ways of thinking are found in the 21st century on U.S. soil and continues to be an explanation for the circumstances of Latino/a in the U.S. Believing in other forces, disempowers the oppressor and again it is another way of finding moments of liberation for the oppressed. Finding an explanation for conditions of subjugation that are beyond governmental policies, and merely human greed, offers the possibility for liberation that would also come from sources that are also in the spiritual realm and that are able to supersede a nation. Writing about it, once again, becomes the tangible within the intangible, the *zafa* to the *fukú*, the counterspell, and liberating act in an oppressive environment.

The Americano and América's Dream: History and Colonial Formation

The other two novels are set in Puerto Rico where the history of U.S. interventionism explicitly begins in 1898 after the Spanish American war. Theodore Roosevelt's corollary to the Monroe Doctrine are put in place following the war and becomes the 20th century mandate to affirm U.S. domination in the hemisphere. Enrique Matta's *The Americano* paints a picture of an eager Puerto Rico who can only see the good in American interventionism. Those characters who opposed it are closely attached to a Spanish descent aristocracy that is not interested in sharing the wealth of a potentially developed island. The rhetoric of progress is combined with the American

way being the way of the future. Characters who are willing to support the *Americano*'s success do it in hopes that his success will be theirs, too. Standing up to the "old Spanish ways" seems hopeful for all the people and not just the elite minority. Matta's book discloses that situation and presents the *Americano* as the ideal solution for this problem,

"By shortening working hours and raising the daily wage scale, Glenn had introduced a new order in labor relations. This was a thorn in the flesh of the big landowners. Glenn was fully aware that he had started something novel in a land where the laboring people were still held in a state of peonage or semi-slavery. He knew that the peons had lived under the same impoverished condition for centuries, with no hope of improving their lot. They were not permitted to speak despairingly of public officials. Their way of life was almost primitive. They could subsist on the simplest diet without complaining about the abuses heaped upon them by the ruling class" (Matta 54).

According to the text, the *Americano* uses his power to improve the lives around him as he works in improving his own life. This scenario represents a need that Matta suggest can be fix by American aid. In reality, workers at the beginning of the 20th century were ready for reform and protection, they craved labor laws that would protect them, and wages that could alleviate the extreme poverty. The government of the U.S. as they allowed companies to expand, mainly in the establishment of sugar plantations, failed to protect workers from unjust compensation. But in this novel, the plantations are presented as the new job opportunity for people and the *Americano* as the ideal boss.

Esmeralda Santiago's book *América's Dream* presents the picture of a people used to Americans having various levels of success in the island that may or may not affect the local population significantly. These two books illuminate how a hundred years of being an American colony has affected Puerto Ricans who come from the island to the mainland. A revolving door was opened up, offering the U.S. mainland as an economic option. Thanks to the military bases, the infrastructure of the island improved. Roads, schools, hospitals, have been built. However, the economies of the areas where the military bases were settled was limited to the needs of the

workers in this private land and the health of the population around them was compromised. U.S. companies looking for tax incentives also arrived on the island offering innovative jobs. Scientists, and business executives trained in universities in Puerto Rico and abroad could look forward to challenging jobs while others had opportunities in manufacturing. The compromise to these jobs on the island were lower salaries than these companies would offer in the main land. These companies created their own revolving door as soon as their tax incentives expire.

Economic problems affect other social aspects and in these novels the issue of domestic violence is presented. Matta treats this issue as a common practice that did not require much attention. It gave local flavor to the narration when the color woman would say, “it’s nothing” after being slapped by her lover. In Santiago’s novel, the main character relocates to New York in an attempt to escape from domestic violence. I argue that this type of violence that is brushed off as a soap opera issue have its roots in the environment of colonialism in which the characters are found and is a response to this systemic affliction that as the novels showed is difficult to just escape. While domestic violence trends on the island rise and fall in proportion to the population, the U.S. mainland’s violence problem exacerbate when the formula of colored-people-are-to-blame is tainted by the increase in number of young white mass murderers and the recent exposure of police abuse of power. These two novels have given me the opportunity to examine violence from its innate colonial beginnings in order to see how the colonality of power maintains systems of oppression that are often dismissed as mere deficiencies found in particular cultures.

Another matter that became evident through the examination of these novels in particular was the disproportion in opportunities Puerto Ricans faced for centuries and how U.S. intervention offer possibilities for parity that were denied under Spanish rule. While the island is governed by U.S. appointed leaders, Spanish born Santiago Iglesias Pantín forms the Socialist party and begins

to organize labor laws that would protect workers. Later members of the Socialist movement join the Partido Unión Republicana in order to partner with the U.S. in the formation of laws that would protect workers. In 1932, Iglesias Pantín is assigned to be a representative in Congress for Insular matters and continues to fight for the rights of workers throughout his life. The line of thought of Santiago Iglesias Pantín, mentioned earlier in this thesis, is similar to Enrique Matta's political affiliations. They believe that the right partnership with the United States is a resource that can improve the standard of living of Puerto Ricans. While the standard of living of Puerto Ricans has been raised, parity within the U.S. system is still pending. Thus, characters like América, from Esmeralda Santiago's story, learn to reformulate success in order to find contentment.

Bilingualism

The fifth chapter of this study has examined the use of Spanish and English, in all four narrations. All authors used English as the base language inserting various levels of Spanish. I believe this use of Spanish is strategic. I looked at this strategy within the context of coloniality of power and it is an example of a form of knowledge from the margins. I believe Matta's text that was written mostly in English demonstrates the readiness of Puerto Ricans to be viewed as equal to other American citizens through this language. The accessibility to his text equals to the accessibility that Americans have had to the island and Puerto Ricans to the mainland. Simple words in Spanish, like "amigo," and "señor," promotes intercultural comfort as it implicitly reminds the reader of hierarchies where owners are/can be *amigos* but should be called *señor*. Even though the American in this novel was described as knowing Spanish, this was not demonstrated in the text. This action places more importance in Puerto Ricans knowing English than in Americans learning Spanish. There is a subject to please and this is the *Americano* who in turns speaks Spanish without ever having to perform it.

In contrast, when Esmeralda Santiago's text ridicules both the American and Puerto Rican accent in English, it demonstrates how these languages have learned to live in Puerto Rico side by side and in tension.

“‘América, canayhafawoidwidyu?’ . . .
 ‘Excuse?’
 ‘Kemir.’
 ‘Yes?’
 ‘Kenyubeibisitunayt?’
 ‘Excuse?’
 He takes the cigar out [of his mouth]” (Santiago 93).

Santiago's work shows resistance by both parts as they attempt to communicate with each other. The quality of public education in Puerto Rico and its English instruction is opened to criticism through América's character because of her deficient language skills. On the other hand, her boss in Puerto Rico represents hundreds of Americans who relocate to the island, but do not fully integrate to Puerto Rican culture. The text demonstrate what I call a parallelism phenomenon. This is supported by both Puerto Ricans and Americans. While some Puerto Ricans do not allow Americans to fully penetrate their culture, some Americans' lack of interest prevents greater efforts into acculturation. Language, then, instead of an obvious barrier, becomes an ideal tool to mediate this relationship and maintain its distance.

In Santiago's, Cisneros', and Díaz's novel we see characters who live in the United States and where Spanish is present in their everyday life. The narrators establish a relationship of complicity with the bilingual reader that assumes competence in both language. It presents various levels of competency as well. Santiago's “público,” Cisneros' “tejocotes,” and Díaz's “carajitos” also reminds the reader of regionalisms. This emphasizes that notwithstanding the similarities that unite Latinos/as in the U.S., the differences are very marked and are also worthy of appreciation.

They add a layer of knowledge to the text that allows the reader to get a true taste of the country these novels represent.

Moreover, bilingual writing reflects a form of knowledge that originates in the margin, in the border of two cultures. This aspect is significant to me because when both languages are merged to express one's thought, at that moment dichotomies are subverted, loyalties are dismissed, nationalism becomes irrelevant. What matters is that a thought is communicated. It is a creative way of dealing with two languages that represent conquest and subjugation. These languages are transformed and made into one code, one that depends in the ability of managing two or more codes. No es muy difícil comenzar con un idioma and extrapolate ideas from the other. Especialmente cuando los dos son parte del heritage de la persona, just to offer a taste. The novels in this study do their best to describe the reality of their characters. Their language is an intrinsic part of who they are as individuals. These novels help illustrate how language does not come in a vacuum but how it is tied to a history of interventionism. Eventually, ideas are created that reflect how does in the margin would like to proceed: accepting and resisting cultural influences as they see fit.

To conclude, through these narrations, the annals of U.S. interventionism are appropriated and transported into four novels. Through fiction, history is made more accessible. It is said that history is written by the victors. When history is presented from the point of view of those who were affected by those victors, it is open to new ways of interpretation. In this work, the importance of the history of U.S. interventionism in the life of Latinos/as in the U.S. is emphasized. Interventionism is the background force behind immigration and it needs to be taken into consideration when discussing this important subject. Latinos/as born in the U.S. are not foreigners. Their history is as significant as that of immigrants who were escaping the potato

famine in Ireland, for example. The ties Latinos/as have to the U.S. are as strong and long lasting yet this is not often remembered, presented or included in social studies or history curriculums.

In the colonial/modern/world system where multi histories are in place, forms of knowledge that are created on the border are capable to rewrite history, to offer supernatural explanations to their environment, and to use language in a subversive way. The novels in this study provide the links between this history of U.S. interventionism and the lives of Latino/as in the U.S. The correlation between foreign policies in place and military conflicts has clearly resulted in their move to the U.S. In the meantime, Latinos/as go about their lives sometimes knowingly, sometimes not fully aware of the history of U.S. interventionism that is carried on their shoulders as a baggage and that has greatly shaped their movement to the mainland. The texts in this study afford approachability to this history while it is appropriated by the characters. The characters' relationship to the U.S. is not denied. It is a complicated relationship that instead becomes an instrument to negotiate the other cultural connections that are simultaneously influencing the characters. The result is the dream of parity in *The Americano*, the reformulation of success in *América's Dream*, the reinvention of one's story in *Caramelo or Puro Cuento*, and in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* the promise of a future where history won't repeat itself.

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ABSTRACT**BETWEEN COLONIALITY AND TRANSMODERNITY: LATINO/A FICTIONAL
RESPONSES TO U.S. INTERVENTIONISM IN LATIN AMERICA**

by

DOLLY R. TITTLE**May 2016****Advisor:** Dr. Víctor Figueroa**Major:** Modern Languages (Spanish)**Degree:** Doctor of Philosophy

This work focuses on four novels: *The Americano* (1963) by Enrique G. Matta, *América's Dream* (1996) by Esmeralda Santiago, *Caramelo or Puro Cuento: A novel* (2002) by Sandra Cisneros, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Junot Díaz. These novels share a history of U.S. interventionism, which has not only affected the inhabitants of Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico, still a colony of the U.S., but also the lives of their population that now reside in the U.S. mainland. As Latino Studies Scholar Juan Flores has explained, many Latinos/as in the U.S. “migrated here for both political and economic reasons, in part because of the U.S. intervention in their homelands” (Flores 199). This interventionism operated on the basis of *coloniality of power*. This expression, created by Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano, refers to the way power operates in places where essentialist colonial categories of class and race prevail. Walter Mignolo links Quijano’s notion of coloniality to global socio-historical developments since the conquest of the Americas, so that one can talk of a modern/colonial world system. In the same manner, Argentinean scholar Enrique Dussel criticizes the Eurocentric category of “modernity” with its emphasis on only one intra-European

line of historical development and he calls for a “transmodern project”; the effort to include the positions and perspectives of those on the periphery who were erased from Eurocentric accounts. These peripheral accounts are portrayed in these novels through their re-telling of history, their notions of spirituality, their view of their colonizer, the role of violence, and the use of English and Spanish simultaneously in bilingual writing, establishing a link between the history of U.S. interventionism and the lives of Latino/as in the U.S.

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL STATEMENT

I was born and raised in Fajardo, Puerto Rico where I lived with my mother Dolly Reed Feliciano, my late stepfather Luvon Reed, and my siblings Lucy Hanftwurz, and Rey Benjamín Acosta Feliciano. I completed my Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from the Universidad de Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras. A year later, I married my husband Joaquín Ricardo Tittle Fuertes and moved to Michigan. I received a Masters of Arts degree in Spanish at Eastern Michigan University in Ypsilanti, Michigan where I currently reside. After I completed my Masters, I had two children twenty one months apart, Lucas Joaquín Tittle and Luisa Reina Tittle. When my youngest was in Kindergarden, I began my doctoral studies at Wayne State University where I was awarded the Graduate Teaching Assistantship, and was the recipient of the Rumble Fellowship, and the King-Chávez-Parks Future Faculty Fellowship. During my time as a graduate student, I had the opportunity to be active in the Graduate Forum and was able to organize various roundtables. I was also able to present my work at Wayne State's Graduate Conference and the Humanities Center Brown Bag Colloquium, as well as in conferences abroad in Puerto Rico and Panamá. In January 2015, Cambridge Scholars Publishing released the book *Caribbean Without Borders: Beyond the Can[n]on's Range* where my article, "Bilingual Literature: A Strategy of Decolonization in Response to U.S. Interventionism" is published. I credit these accomplishments to God's grace and strength who allowed me to have a student life. Currently, I teach Basic Spanish Courses at the Department of Classical Modern Languages Literatures and Cultures of Wayne State University and Introduction to Interdisciplinary Latino/a Studies Research in the Center for Latino/as and Latin American Studies at Wayne State University.