

Strangers at Home: Opaque Citizenships in Contemporary Caribbean Literature

By

Natalie L. Belisle

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

Guillermina De Ferrari (Director), Professor, Spanish
Victor Goldgel-Carballo, Associate Professor, Spanish
Luís Madureira, Professor, Spanish
Jerome Camal, Assistant Professor, Anthropology
Tejumola Olaniyan, Professor, English and African Cultural Studies
James Sweet, Professor, History

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I explore depictions of citizens who are, paradoxically, construed as strangers in Spanish and French Caribbean literature, authored from the nineteen-eighties until the 2010s. Centering on a period in which countries such as Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic found their national sovereignty under duress from external forces, I explore how Caribbean literature calls into the meaning of sovereignty, as a fundamentally Western European construct that, in turn, obscures citizens' right representation as members of the nation-state. I show how the affirmation and defense of nation-state sovereignty in the Spanish Caribbean is achieved by masking differences in origin, race, language, and gender, so as to give primacy to the all-encompassing ethos of the nation-state. In particular, the nation-state fosters the promise of this universal juridical identity and status in three ways that concern my reading of citizen-strangers in this dissertation.

First, by providing "documentation" or, broadly, a universal narrative that authenticates a person's belonging and membership in the political community. This is evidenced in my first chapter, where I explore novels from Ena Lucía Portela and the writing of the Cuban Blogosphere. In my reading of these texts, I suggest that dissident Cuban citizens who do not conform to socialist demand for uniformity and transparency are rendered paperless and unrepresentable in a manner similar to the predicament of stateless subjects. In my second chapter, I consider how the nation-state makes this juridical documentation readable in a universally translatable language. Looking at novels and essays by Eduardo Lalo and Giannina Braschi, I show how Puerto Rico's indeterminate and confusing neocolonial status causes Puerto Ricans and Puerto Rican literature to be misread on the U.S. mainland and globally. Third, I examine how the nation-state covers citizens under the ostensibly transparent cloak of

racelessness *qua* whiteness. In this dissertation, I consider how these three forms of expressing and practicing citizenship collapse and fail to engender a universally intelligible citizenry when implemented in the context of the post-emancipation and postcolonial Caribbean. Turning to speculative fiction of Haitian writer René Philoctète and Dominican writer Pedro Cabiya, I claim that the human becomes estranged from Dominican political life owing to the Dominican state's disavowal of blackness and concealment of the body politic's flesh under a fictive white skin. Through an extended reading of these multifarious forms of Spanish and French Caribbean "documentation" —fiction, essays, and blog writing, I argue that exercise of nation-state sovereignty in the postcolonial Caribbean transforms lawful subjects into citizens in name and strangers in everyday practice.

These three manifestations of juridical estrangement suggest a conflict between, on the one hand, the nation-states' desire to confirm their juridical subjects to a universalizing notion of citizenship and, on the other, the ontological and political opacity that gave birth to the Caribbean today. I support this claim by reading citizen-strangers as the manifestation of what I call "opaque citizenship," which I contrast with Martiniquan philosopher Édouard Glissant's notion of "consented opacity": the shared refusal to be reduced, made transparent, and rendered intelligible—as a form of strangeness and, especially, as a political right through which inhabitants of the Caribbean make their claim for legitimacy beyond the limiting confines of the nation-state. Overall, in light of this opacity, I argue that what defines Caribbeanness, according to these representative works, is the constant unsettling of home.

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Introduction

“Why did God make me an outcast and a stranger in mine own house?” (8)
The Souls of Black Folk

In this poignant question, posed by sociologist W.E.B. DuBois in 1903, I locate a nexus with the topic of this dissertation: the predicament of citizens who, paradoxically, exist as strangers in their homeland. Writing during post-Reconstruction United States, DuBois captures the ontological quandary of Black Americans who, although having been granted citizenship not even four decades prior, remained not only marginal to the political processes of the state due to de facto segregation but, also, erased from its foundational narratives. In DuBois’ declaration, the outcast and stranger do not come from outside; instead, they are created within the house, whose foundations the strangers built with their own hands. Most telling, however, is DuBois’ political theology: although it may seem that he is appealing to a divine being (God), that DuBois’ held to an irreligious worldview suggests that he is, in fact, advancing critique of political sovereignty—the belief that a state has a right to exist and self-govern without the intervention of other forces—as the source of Black Americans estrangement.¹

In referencing DuBois’ reading of citizen-strangers, I follow the trajectory of intellectuals such as Paul Gilroy, who in *The Black Atlantic* invokes DuBois’ notion of double consciousness in his claim that, for those in the African Diaspora, “striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness” (1) and facing “two ways at once” (3). The theoretical richness and prophetic relevance of DuBois’ thought—his tacit engagement with

¹ Regarded a secular thinker who abandoned religious influence, DuBois’ invocation of a divine (God) reflects what German jurist Carl Schmitt described as political theology: the extrapolation and secularization of religious concepts—most, notably, the secular sovereign state in lieu of a sovereign God—in modern political thought. For a political theological interpretation of *The Souls of Black Folk*, see Jonathon S. Kahn.

whiteness as an ontology of home—makes it a well-suited heuristic for understanding other present-day communities haunted and unsettled by the legacy of European racialization. Thusly, as Gilroy explains in his close reading of *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois’ concepts “illuminate the experience of post-slave populations in general” (126).

In the context of this dissertation, I focus on the contemporary Spanish Caribbean, a post-slave and postcolonial society that, in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, finds its sovereignty under duress. To clarify, I do not seek to conflate the Black American experience with that of the Caribbean, nor do I focus solely on the experience of black Caribbeans. For, while in the United States of DuBois’ time—and, without question, today—Black Americans exist as a racialized minority who, in large part, have been marginalized from the political processes of the state, in the Spanish Caribbean the formerly enslaved and colonized have been able to self-govern; arguably, the ability to see those who look like you in positions of governmental power can attenuate citizens’ feeling of strangeness. Still, because the legacy of natal alienation and enslavement wrought by colonialism haunts the Caribbean, to such an extent that it informs postcolonial governments’ anxious and reactionary defenses of sovereignty—in the specific cases I consider, to the detriment of their citizenry, DuBois’ suggestion that the exercise of sovereignty in post-slave societies transforms already marginal citizens into complete strangers (both in the eyes of the state and their compatriots) conceptually elucidates my reading of the tensions between nation-state sovereignty and the idea and practice of citizenship in the Spanish Caribbean today.

As it pertains to this latter point, my dissertation engages more recent critical concerning, to echo the title of an essay by Barbadian sociologist, “the dissolution of the myth of sovereignty” (68) in the twenty-first century Caribbean. According to Lewis, the idea of

sovereignty in the Caribbean is “built on a foundation of myth and illusion” (69) for two key reasons. First, he argues, post-emancipation nation-state formation in the Caribbean did not necessarily give way to novel and autochthonous forms of political self-determination; instead, Caribbean political communities simply conformed their governmental structures to a notion of sovereignty passed down from Westphalian Europe and, thus, an extension of the very foreign forces that colonized the region (70). Second, Lewis contends, it is an illusion because it suggests that it is the people who are sovereign when, in fact, the very meaning of sovereignty presupposes the separation and elevation of the sovereign subject (i.e. the King or the state) over and above the particularity of the people (“Introduction” 3). While my readings in this dissertation generally corroborate Lewis’ claims, I advance his position by exploring how the sovereignty of the nation-state in the Spanish Caribbean is sustained by making the nation-state outward-facing so that it appears metaphorically foreign to citizens. I will show how the geopolitical coordinates of the nation-state become displaced in an indeterminate elsewhere, from whose perspective citizens become strangers (across race, gender, and language) in as much as the nation-state becomes unrecognizable to them. Also, I interrogate how this “myth”—a term that points to the centrality of the narrative expression—unfolds in relation to literary practice in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.

Citizenship, by definition, constitutes a juridical status that grants persons membership in a nation-state, which, in turn, confers upon citizens a set of rights (e.g. voting, representation, and legal protection) in exchange for their allegiance and fulfillment of civic responsibilities. Among these multifarious citizenship rights, my dissertation attends primarily to the right of (self-)representation, or what theorists call “cultural citizenship”—in summary, the right to be visible, the right to be speak and be made legible, and the right to be portrayed as one actually is,

and not as a fabricated projection of the nation-state. I underscore the significance of cultural citizenship for two reasons.² First, while the right of (self-)representation may seem less critical and motivated solely by self-interest rather than an allegiance to a broader community—in contrast to voting—as elucidated in the anti-colonial writing of Frantz Fanon, whom I read more closely in chapter 3, to have one’s image erased and replaced by the self-negating narrative of another has dehumanizing effects on the consciousness of the Antillean subject; representation then is fundamental to the ontology of the citizen *qua* human. Second, I will show, the affirmation, defense, and imposition of sovereignty in the Spanish Caribbean requires collapsing the portrait of the body politic (i.e. citizenry) into a uniform image and universal discourse.

It stands to reason, then, that I tackle this problem of unrepresentation in its diverse permutations—legibility, visibility, intelligibility—through the disciplinary framework of text-based cultural studies. Specifically, I focus on diverse genres of writing that include novels, blogs, and essays, authored in Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti from the nineteen-eighties until the 2010s. As a cultural and aesthetic practice, literature has functioned as a crucial expression of and inducement to the exercise of citizenship, given that modern citizenship, like sovereignty, is understood as a fictive construct. That is, citizenship provides the secular origin story of humans’ second birth into the nation-state—in many instances, overriding our biological parentage. This story appears inscribed not only in legal documents (i.e. passports, visas, and birth certificates) furnished by the state but, also, in literary narratives that mobilize a reading public, or what Michael Warner calls a “republic of letters” that conforms citizens to the nation-state’s ideals. As Warner argues, the public circulation of print texts is concomitant to the

² Notably, political theorist Iris Marion Young and cultural anthropologist Renato Rosaldo make salient and convincing arguments in favor of a cultural approach to citizenship.

sociopolitical upheavals that bore the interconnected principles of universal emancipation and citizenship (ix), two of the foundational concepts of Western political modernity. For Warner, literary representations of the people organize and “construct the people” as the body politic of the nation-state; they give citizens a blueprint for what it means to belong as a productive and loyal member of the nation-state. This perspective seems consonant with the standard discourse Latin American and Caribbean “foundational fictions,” many of which bear the authorship of writers who served as the intellectual architects of their country’s political-juridical ideology and occupied the role of civil servants.

In the Caribbean context of this dissertation, I find that both the meaning of sovereignty and the idea of citizenship have been thematized most in representative works by Cuban writer Ena Lucía Portela, the *Alternative Cuba Blogosphere*, Puerto Rican writers Eduardo Lalo Giannina Braschi, Luis López Nieves, Haitian writer René Philoctète, and Puerto Rican-Dominican Pedro Cabiya. At the same time, in their portrayal of citizens, these Spanish and French Caribbean writers’ fail to construct the people as anything other than strangers. Moreover, in their representations of citizens as strangers of their texts, likewise, reproduce and allegorize this politics of estrangement in their thematic and rhetorical structure. In doing so, they engage in self-reflexive commentary about the value of artistic and intellectual practice and the marginalization of writers whose practice is deemed as counterproductive to the furtherance of sovereignty in the Spanish Caribbean, and who, in many instances, occupy the position of the citizen-stranger.

While the three national case studies encapsulated by these writers pertain to distinctive political and constitutional forms, several features unite them. First, in all of them, governments disclose their preoccupation with eclipsing the gender, sexual, linguistic, and racial diversity of

the Caribbean body politic under a generic portrait of uniformity and sameness. In this regard, the rhetorical, visual, and performative expressions of diversity that form the basis of Caribbean cultural identity politics clearly belie the lived juridical reality of the region's citizens. Second, the texts I read situate governments' push for representational uniformity within the context of external forces—namely, neocolonial interventionism, neoliberalism, and globalization, which local governments internalize in ways that frustrate their desire to preserve and give the appearance of legitimacy through the aestheticization of political consensus. Overall, I trace these local models of achieving political consensus and sovereignty to the principles of universalism that undergird the project of Western modernity.

Arguably, what makes citizenship work—what motivates diverse and dissimilar peoples to vest their allegiance in the nation-state and to cohere with those who do not look, speak, or believe like them as consociates—is its claim to “universality” as a form of consensus. As Iris Marion Young remarks, “Citizenship is an expression of the universality of human life; it is a realm of rationality and freedom opposed to the heteronomous real of particular need, interest, and desire (253).” This universality takes shape in two interconnected ways. First, it equalizes persons as universally human, thereby compelling them to set aside their differences by emphasizing their sameness as a species. Second, as Young notes, it reflects the belief that laws must be undifferentiated and “apply to all in the same (250).” The emphasis on the legal *expression* of citizenship's universally humanizing potential suggests that it is, more than anything, a discursive formulation that may contravene the material reality of citizens' particularity.

But in the postcolonial Caribbean the drive to create citizen uniformity and universality is linked to the affirmation and defense of sovereignty against what corresponds with what Michael

Hardt and Antonio Negri describe as “Empire.” Not to be confused with the early brand of imperial expansion undertaken by a select group European nation-states, Hardt and Negri’s notion of “Empire” defines the configuration of supranational world order and a “common notion of right that is decidedly postcolonial and postimperialist” (9). Under this new world order, the Western political community imposes a universal or world model of the nation-state that acquiesces to the demands of accelerated capitalist flow, mass trans-migration, and networked information in ways that supersede the circuitry of bodies, materials, and resources in the Atlantic Triangle Trade.

Undoubtedly, this global reordering weakens the right of sovereignty that many Caribbean communities fought to obtain. We glean this in this in three specific instances. First, the Caribbean finds itself subject to the Monroe Doctrine and, in the nineteen-fifties, its corollary, the Good Neighbor Policy, by means which the United States made itself a trustee and gatekeeper of Caribbean sovereignty against the encroaching interests of European neoimperial expansion. Through what Hardt and Negri identify as “the right of intervention” (18), the specter of coloniality looms over the Caribbean by attaching itself to the promise of postcolonial freedom, national sovereignty, and geopolitical security—guaranteed, of course, only through U.S. entrenchment in the region. The right of intervention prefigures the second and, arguably, most insidious manifestation of the Caribbean’s subsumption under the universal reordering of the world: the globalization of the Caribbean. Accordingly, as Mimi Sheller argues, the West elevates the Caribbean as a paradigm of globalization (175)—a place whose people, material resources, and ideas can be siphoned and consumed, through their decontextualization and displacement from the Caribbean proper by foreigners living out their intellectual, ideological, and personal fantasies. Lastly, the globalization of the Caribbean is concomitant to the

restructuring of local political practice under the rationality of neoliberalism. As one scholar argues, “neoliberal policy represents a country’s ticket or passport to the globalizing economy” (Klak 3)—and, I would add, to the international political community—by accruing legitimacy to state sovereignty based on what kind of capital it can contribute to the world market. The idea of a nation-state having a metaphorical global “passport” is telling, for it eclipses individual citizens’ passports and by, extension, the relevance of their civic responsibilities at the local level. Thus, neoliberalism’s reduction of the human *qua* citizen to *homo economicus* sublimates political practice at the local level and deterritorializes the vital and quotidian spaces that make up civil society. As a result, citizenship—the exemplar of human progress and rationality—becomes equated with the capacity to consume foreign and, particularly, North American products as indicators of progress and cosmopolitan worldliness. In the Caribbean, however, neoliberalism necessitates the imposition of postmodern plantation and factory economies, the effects of which are felt most acutely by Afro-Caribbean communities, still recovering from the vestiges of the colonial plantation.

While the local impact of these global transformations has led scholars across various disciplines to herald our entry into an era that is decidedly “postnational” and “postpolitical”—two terms that signal the declining ascendancy of the Westphalian state model and the displacement of citizenship practice—the Spanish and French Caribbean texts I study in this dissertation remain transfixed on the perseverance of nation-state sovereignty.³ I attribute the thematic centrality these texts accord to the nation-state and, more importantly, to the crisis of

³ Notably, in *Modernity at Large*, anthropologist Arjun Appadurai examines postnational constellations of communities that structure their identities beyond the consent of the nation-state. By contrast, García Canclini uses the term “postpolitics” (147) to describe the “disappearance of spaces of political negotiation,” displaced by the “hermetic spaces” created by mass media and popular culture.

citizenship to several factors. On the one hand, fearing that foreign intervention and globalization would not only bring about the restoration of a colonial paradigm but, also, fragment the hard-fought allegiance of their citizenry, representative Caribbean governments—Puerto Rico aside—worked to consolidate the sovereignty of the nation-state as a weapon against these disruptive, foreign forces. In affirming the continued relevance of the postcolonial nation-state, Caribbean governments call for the solidarity and uniformity of their citizens. For example, as I explore in Chapter 1, the post-Soviet Cuban state eclipses difference under the universalizing rhetoric of socialism, giving the appearance of consensus among its citizenry amidst fears that the emancipatory of the ideals of the Cuban Revolution have faltered; the universality of Cuban juridical discourse, I show, renders difference invisible, outside the law, and undocumentable. In a similar vein, within the Dominican Republic, to which I turn in Chapter 3, the state asserts its right to self-governance by appealing to the juridical language of the universal or world state advanced by the [Western] international political community; to do so, the Dominican state distances itself from Haitianness *qua* blackness and conceals racial difference in its body politic under a of symbolic whiteness, understood as the default of Western modernity. Although distinctive in their approach, both cases bespeak a desire on the part of the Caribbean nation-state to present a unified front in the face of an encroaching international political community. On the other hand, I explain in Chapter 2, Puerto Rico's redefinition by the United States as an *Estado Libre Asociado*—a “Free Associated State”—attempts to give meaning to the island's status by imputing to Puerto Rico the phraseology of universal right formed in a North American context that is, undoubtedly, foreign to the Puerto Rican cultural construct; ultimately, I argue, this juridical construct renders Puerto Ricans as universally incomprehensible, given their

incommensurate construal as both citizens of the United States and, ostensibly, a “free” and sovereign people.

Anthropology and political philosophy that take approach the concept of Western citizenship from a culturalist perspective, suggest that the representational reduction of the particular under the universal engenders forms of “second-class citizenship”—a liminal exclusion of the citizen from the political practices of the state, coupled with a sense of being not quite equal to fellow citizens. That the image of the universal tends to be embodied in normative forms—for example, heterosexual, male, English-speaker, and white—supports these culturalist claims. Still, in the Caribbean texts I read, I find that citizens forced adherence to a universal model of citizenship not only creates conditions of social liminality and inequality among citizens. Instead, I contend, something more sinister takes shape, such that Caribbean existence itself is called into question. The universal forces Caribbean citizens to inhabit categories of existence (mobilized by the sovereign Law) that, at the same time, do not make sense based on what the logic of the Law deems normative. Because of this, citizens in the Caribbean become outlaws, groundless, and even inhuman when they come face-to-face with the reality of their juridical construal under a universalizing ethos subject. My claim here is that the universalizing ethos of national sovereignty is hostile to Caribbean existence that it is the source of citizens’ estrangement in a home they perceive as foreign.

Overall, I describe this politics of estrangement as the manifestation of an “opaque citizenship.” Here, I find productive DuBois’ notion of the “veil (8)” that estrangers [Black American] citizens both from the state and themselves. But, I especially have in mind the work of late Martiniquan philosopher Édouard Glissant, who mobilizes the concept of opacity to affirm the Caribbean’s right to cultural self-definition and particularity, against its reduction to a

set of reproducible and consumable concepts in the marketplace of cultural tourism. Against this depersonalization wrought by the imposition of a political economy of universal transparency, Glissant declares, “Nous réclamons la droit à la opacité [We demand the right to opacity]” (*LD* 14), an affirmation that, as the philosopher clarifies in *Poétique de la Relation*, should not be mistaken as the espousal of an identitarian, communicative, or literary obscurantism; instead, it commands a respect for the Caribbean subject’s “irreducible difference,” which, in turn, leads to the acknowledgement that there is, in fact, no universal human *qua* citizen (based on a Western European model) but, rather, “humanities (204).

In turning to the idea of opacity to make sense of citizens *qua* strangers in the Caribbean, my dissertation highlights the tension between three interconnected and, at the same time, competing dimensions of opacity: the opacity of citizens whose made invisible, illegible, and unintelligible; how texts themselves reproduce this political opacity in their aesthetic and rhetorical thematization of citizens’ strangeness; and, following Glissant, an affirmative opacity—a metaphor for citizens’ difference and particularity—that resists the universalizing ethos of the sovereign. In view of this tension, I aim to unpack the juridical implications of Glissant’s framing of it as a “right”—indeed, I contend, as a Pan-Caribbean Declaration of Rights, in contrast to the famed, occidental Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen.

The doctrine of moral principles known broadly as “rights” constitutes the centerpiece of modern political philosophy, for it provides justification for protecting and furthering the posterity of human existence—both in relation to and above all other forms of life—by subjecting human life to the Right (laws and norms) of governance (the State). Rights, by definition, entail a set of entitlements and obligations designed to contour the boundaries of human freedom, to the extent that our freedom to exist and act must consider that we do so in

relation to others. The relationality of rights coupled with their concern for how we treat each other make them, according to political philosopher Seyla Benhabib, an ethical or “moral imperative” (56). But, Benhabib notes, “Such rights, which generate reciprocal obligations among consociates, that is, among those who are already recognized as members of a legal community, are usually referred to as ‘civil and political’ rights or as citizens’ rights (57).” Put another way, the doctrine of rights is always already political insofar as the recognition of a person’s rights remains contingent on their membership as a citizen of a nation-state. For Benhabib, this is encapsulated in Hannah Arendt’s definition, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, of the citizen as the Man who has the “Rights of Man” and citizenship as the “right to have rights.”

Reflecting on the crisis of statelessness that besieged Europe in the first half of the twentieth-century, Arendt came to the logical conclusion that the human *qua* Man has no [human] rights save those that are accrued to them as a citizen. Hence, the paradox of citizenship: it is right to which all humans are ostensibly entitled but, without this right, one cannot access the inalienable right to be recognized as human and free. Highlighting this paradox, Arendt brought to light the quandary of stateless persons who were, effectively, lawless—that is, they possessed no law (right) to account for their humanity and, because of this, they plunged, by default, into a state of fugitivity, criminality, and inhumanity. Benhabib and others analyze the prophetic brilliance Arendt’s prophetic vision, for it foregrounds the crisis of global statelessness and the dilemma of human rights being deliberated by the international community.

I draw partially on Arendt’s work on the rightlessness to pursue an alternative critical direction in which persons granted the right of citizenship in places such as Cuba, Puerto Rico,

the Dominican Republic, and Haiti, paradoxically, cannot access their entitlements notwithstanding their obligations to the state. Through my reading of Caribbean literature, I explore how the concept of rights in the Caribbean is defined in direction relation to literary and authorial practices—to what the texts and writers can say and not say about what it means to be a citizen. As form of political membership, citizenship guarantees its possessors the right of recognition and representation in the political discourses and foundational fictions of the state. But, as I have previously noted, literary narratives constitute the real testament to citizens' inclusion in the political processes of the state.

The texts I read suggest that the right to representation—and, thus, the right to write and be written into the state's political imaginary—are contingent on the citizen's willingness to be rendered transparent, universal, and concealed under the cover of uniformity of the nation-state. This begets both active and passive resistance by the texts' authors and protagonists, who, ultimately, cannot extricate themselves from the multi-temporal relations that form the basis of their existence as Caribbean subjects. Turning to these interred histories, the protagonists develop a right of belonging on the basis of a “worldwide Relation” that fundamentally disavows their reduction and allegiance as citizens to body politic of a given nation-state.

Here, I am gesturing toward Glissant's concept of Relation, which has inspired a plethora of scholarly interventions, from proponents and critics alike, for its expansiveness or, as Guillermina De Ferrari explains, for its capacity to “contain past, present, and future...as well as the potential balance between the singular, collective, and the specific (“The Ship” 191).” A term that captures the Caribbean's constitution at intersecting geo-temporalities, as I have previously delineated, Relation often appears in Glissant's work interchangeably with other conceptual derivatives—such as “*Relation mondiale* [worldwide Relation] (LD 9)” and “*multirélation*

[multi-relation]”—to underscore how the manifold dispositions occupied by Caribbean subjects (across space, time, culture, race, language, and ethnicity) preclude their reduction to a Western universal humanism. Because these manifold dispositions “contain past, present, and future” they may not be immediately accessible to the Caribbean subject’s consciousness or quotidian reality; they are, to echo the opening of Glissant’s *Poétique*, interred in an abyssal space, thereby making Relation a form of ontological opacity. This view is consonant with De Ferrari’s reading of Relation as an ethics or a moral philosophy that has implications on the political subjectivity and political membership—the processes of incorporation and inclusion in the polity—of citizens from the Caribbean.

Although she does not mention Glissant, Judith Butler proposes a way to clarify the connection between Relation, as a Caribbean geo-ontological disposition, and opacity in terms that foreground its ethical implications:

The opacity of the subject may be a consequence of its being conceived as a relational being, one whose early and primary relations are not always available to conscious knowledge...Moments of unknowingness about oneself tend to emerge in the context of relations to others, suggesting that these relations call upon primary forms of relationally that are not always available to explicit and reflective thematization. If we are formed in the context of relations that become partially irrecoverable to us, then that opacity seems built into our formation and follows from our status as beings who are formed in relations of dependency (*GA* 20).

For Butler, the fact that we are impinged upon by “primary relations” that antecede our subjective constitution in the present imposes on us an ethical obligation to the other. To be

clear, by “ethical obligation,” Butler does not mean that we are responsible or to blame for everything that happens to others with whom we do not have an immediate personal connection. Instead, it means that when we give an account of ourselves—of who we are as individuals—we must do so by disinterring and, to the best of our ability, naming those who have come before us and those we cannot see. Taking this into account, my dissertation expands the ethical reading of *Relation* to show how opacity can also be interpreted as the juridical right of citizens *qua* strangers, in cogent terms unforeseen even by Glissant in his demand for “right to opacity.”

That said, my dissertation centers on three case studies of citizens *qua* stranger, placing readings of juridical strangeness in Caribbean literature in dialogue with an array theoretical disciplines—namely, continental political philosophy, Caribbean critical thought, gender theory, translation studies, and critical race theory.

In Chapter 1, I focus on the transformation of the meaning and practice citizenship in post-Soviet Cuba, focusing on the correlation between political representation and the limits of authorial expression. Because the fall of the Soviet Bloc threatened the political and, especially, economic the integrity of Cuba, to give the appearance of solidarity in the face of—real or perceived—imperial aggression from the North, the Cuban state intensified the demand for uniformity and, especially, sameness—two forms of occidental universality rooted in the socialist ethos—of its citizens. Examining two novels from Ena Lucía Portela—*La sombra del caminante* and *Cien botellas en una pared*—along with the dissident authorial practices of key writers—Yoani Sánchez, Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo, and Claudia Cadelo—in the “Blogósfera cubana” [the Cuban Blogosphere], I argue Cuban citizens who do not conform to socialist demand for uniformity and transparency are rendered paperless and unrepresentable in a manner similar to the predicament of stateless subjects. I consider how works of these writers make

manifest a discourse of strangeness through their representations of Cuban citizens as “symbolically stateless”—namely, gender variant outlaws, racialized refugees in Havana’s urban “camp”, and undocumented or “paperless” bloggers. These three configurations of strangeness depict Cuban citizenship as “beyond the law” in two interconnected ways. On the one hand, to act beyond the law reflects the necessity of non-conforming Cubans citizens to be seen and recognized as full-fledge members for their difference in ways that transgress the Right of the state; on the other hand, these texts portray abrogation of the socialist’s state promise as cause to render the state stateless. Overall, this chapter contributes to and reframes our understanding of the meaning of statelessness, by bringing Cuban literature into dialogue with key interventions on statelessness in the work of Arendt, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Rancière.

My reading of Cuban blog writers as paperless subjects in Chapter 1 provides a segue to examine, as I do in Chapter 2, the ways in which the unintelligibility of Puerto Rico’s indeterminate status as an *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA) or Free Associated State begets “misreadings” of what it means to Puerto Rican on island, the U.S. mainland, and in the international political community. I premise my reading of literary representations of Puerto Rico’s status on two ideas: first, that we become legible and intelligible as citizenship through various forms of documentation; second, that the legibility of citizenship advances what Glissant calls a “monolingual intent” which is to suggest that the documentation of citizenship must conform to a universally intelligible language. With this in mind, I consider how Puerto Rico is depicted as an untranslatable language incommensurate with the language of citizenship in four texts: Giannina Braschi’s novel *Yo-Yo Boing!*, Eduardo Lalo’s novel *La inutilidad* and essay “*El Estado Libre Asociado y la glossolalia*,” and Luis López Nieves’ novella *Seva*. Indeed, I argue, the very untranslatability of Puerto Rico’s status begets what I call “allegories of misreading,”

such that confusion these texts engender in readers allegorizes the failure of the ELA to clearly articulate what it means for Puerto Ricans to be citizens of the United States. Broadly, my chapter brings together the phenomenology of orientation delineated work of Sara Ahmed alongside Glissant's framing of the Caribbean as a "multi-relation" to consider Puerto Rico's cultural, geopolitical, and cosmopolitan orientations toward the Caribbean, Latin America, the United States, and Europe creates a sense of political indeterminacy. In underscoring the untranslatability of Puerto Rico's status, my chapter intervenes in recent debates about literary translation and world literature and, thus, the place occupied by Puerto Rico in what Pascale Casanova calls the "world republic of letters," owing precisely to its "multi-relational" orientation.

Chapter 3: "Clothed Inhumanity: Citizenship as Concealment in Haitian-Dominican Speculative Fiction." In this chapter, I reconsider the claim, as advanced by contemporary political philosophy, that the status citizenship operates as a vestment authenticates one's humanity, in distinction to the bare or naked life of inhuman subjects. Turning to borderland speculative fiction of Haitian writer René Philoctète and Dominican writer Pedro Cabiya, I claim that the human becomes estranged from Dominican political life owing to the Dominican state's disavowal of blackness and concealment of the body politic's flesh under a fictive white skin. Drawing on theories of affect and philosophy of the mind, I argue that the metaphoric concealment of the Dominican body political under the vestments of whiteness *qua* citizenship neutralizes their Dominican citizens' capacity to feel and be touched by Haitianness, which functions as a lifeline for Dominicans and Haitians coexisting in the borderland.

Through these distinctive yet interconnected case studies of juridical strangeness, my aim is to show how Caribbean literature envisions the conditions of possibility for emancipation from

the strictures of uniformity, sameness, universality. As imaginative practices, these works of Caribbean literature delineate a world—arguably, utopian in possibility—in which Caribbean subjects become liberated from citizenship itself, as the dominant organizing principle of belonging and membership. By looking at the stranger as a looming, indeterminate presence that continually comes and stands before the law yet remains unclaimed by the law, I, likewise, argue for thinking of the Caribbean as space in constant regeneration and as region whose political identity—and concept of belonging and membership—is still coming-into-being. From this standpoint, I argue that postcolonial Caribbean citizens exist at the threshold of the law, as they await “in the meantime” for the authorship of a law that accounts for their multi-relational, affiliative existence. Given that citizenship takes shape through aesthetic practices such as writing and reading, I claim that Caribbean texts engage in political practice insofar as they adumbrate the still-emergent terms of citizenship in the Caribbean today.

Chapter 1: Outlaws, Refugees, and Undocumented: Mapping an Ethos of Statelessness in Post-socialist Cuban Narrative⁴

Recent theoretical and creative interventions in political philosophy, art, and literature have attempted to re-imagine a world in which the idea of political community is no longer organized around the principles of citizenship but, instead, an ethos of statelessness. These interventions respond, in large part, to the growing number of stateless persons across the globe. Their primary objective is to call into question the hegemony of citizenship as the exclusive mode of political practice, belonging, and representation for political subjects today. What is perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of these discussions is their probing of those grey areas where citizenship and statelessness collide—that is, where the conditions of citizens in many parts of the world can no longer be completely distinguished from that of stateless persons. It is in light of this latter definition that I will explore how contemporary Cuban writers have sought to make sense of the political alienation of citizens in post-Soviet Cuba.

As of yet, under international law, there exists no acceptable language that adequately frames these emerging and contradictory circumstances where a citizen would be cast as stateless in their own homeland. As a juridical category, statelessness specifically defines the condition of a person “who is not considered a national by any State under the operation of its law.”⁵ Concretely, a stateless person is one who either lacks or has lost their legal attachment and protection as a citizen of a nation-state. Refugees consigned indefinitely to foreign camps,

⁴ My use of the term “post-socialist” does not suggest that Cuban socialism has passed. Rather, it accords with what art historian Aleš Erjavec has identified in “post-socialist” art as a tendency to envision a future beyond socialism even when these works emerge within countries where the framework of socialism still stands (3).

⁵ This is the internationally recognized and accepted definition of statelessness as set forth in the United Nations “1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons.”

denaturalized subjects who have been stripped of both citizenship and passports, and even some enemies of the state are perhaps the three most salient examples of stateless subjects today. The recognition of statelessness under international law, however, entails two important provisos: technically, one cannot simultaneously be a citizen of a state and a stateless person; nor can one claim to be stateless *while* living as a citizen in their homeland.

These stipulations, however, do not exactly hold sway in recent post-Soviet Cuban narrative, which patently dismisses the distinction between a citizen and a stateless person. As I claim in this chapter, some key post-Soviet Cuban writing re-constructs a society in which Cuban citizens who live on the island, paradoxically, embody varying forms of symbolic statelessness. I use the term “symbolic statelessness” within the post-Soviet Cuban context to describe the condition of persons who are legally and technically citizens; yet, like stateless subjects, they are excluded from or do not have access to the political processes of the state. To support this claim, I build my case study around two texts—the allegorical crime novels *La sombra del caminante* (2001) and *Cien botellas en una pared* by Ena Lucía Portela (2002)—and the corpus of writings produced by the “alternative Cuban blogosphere,” notably helmed by Yoani Sánchez’s blog *Generación Y*, all of which appear from the Special Period until the present.

In my estimation, the Special Period in Times of Peace—the official name for the economic crisis that befell the island following the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc in the early 1990s—precipitates the appearance of what I call an “ethos of statelessness” in post-Soviet Cuban narrative. Although the Special Period has often been framed in economic terms, I believe that it also represents a moment of reckoning concerning what it means to be a citizen in Cuba today. After the Cuban Revolution, Cuba’s socialist state sought to pave the way for a classless,

communist society on the island by reforming its terms of citizenship. Cuban sociologist Velia Cecilia Bobes identifies two significant ways in which citizenship was re-semanticized in post-revolutionary Cuba. First, the notion of “the people” replaced a representative concept of the [individual] citizen (126). Secondly, in order to belong as a member (citizen) of the people, one had to “adhere to the social project of the Revolution” (130). through demonstrable acts of militant service (135). Broadly speaking, it was in these terms that Cuba’s revolutionary government upheld its socialist model of citizenship as a legitimate and superior form of political community and practice as distinct from the capitalist society of liberal democracies—typified by what Cuba perceived to be its most menacing aggressor: the United States of America. With its emphasis on equity, justice, collectivity, and social uniformity, the idea of a revolutionary Cuban citizenship appealed to a citizenry previously divided along racial, class and gender lines. Its rhetoric of militancy positioned citizens defensively—against the constant threat of aggression from the North—as revolutionaries and guardians of an exclusive society.

All in all, the Cuban state consolidated this model of citizenship by adopting what Guillermina De Ferrari calls a “revolutionary social contract” (86)—based on a similar Soviet model. According to De Ferrari, this contract stipulates that “the socialist state agrees to provide its people with a series of services, such as job security, housing, health care and education in exchange for their compliance and loyalty” (85). As De Ferrari further elaborates, it also required citizens to demonstrate their compliance and loyalty in two specific ways: citizens had to relinquish their autonomy to freely express their disapproval of the socialist state; moreover, they could not desert the state. By silencing citizen disaffection and restricting travel outside its boundaries, the socialist state gave the appearance of unity and prosperity, thereby ensuring its posterity even under perceived external threats.

It then stands to reason that, for many Cubans, the collapse of global communism and, subsequently, the advent of the post-Soviet era signaled the indefinite postponement of the communist utopia heralded by the Cuban Revolution.⁶ The society to which Cuban citizens had aspired disintegrated in the face of visceral hunger, poverty, and widespread material scarcity. Arguably, the state failed to uphold its part of the contract when it could not provide basic goods and services such as food and paper. Moreover, when the State did enact a range of policies to mitigate the impact of the crisis, Cuban citizens found themselves facing even greater territorial, economic, and cultural disenfranchisement, since these changes largely benefitted foreign investors.⁷

Clearly, given the Cuban state's abdication of responsibility toward its citizens, it would seem that it would no longer require the compliance and allegiance of its citizens. Yet, the Special Period revealed a deceptive irony: the state absented itself from responding expediently to the overwhelming needs of its citizens; at the same time, the state clearly made its presence felt through its heavy-handed policing of citizen desertion, thus denying citizens the right to exit legally with visas.⁸ Instead, President Fidel Castro insisted that citizens persist in their adherence

⁶ As Carlos Rafael Rodríguez explains, the Cuban Revolution was based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, in which communism reflects the final phase in society's transformation from the vestiges of capitalism (13). In theory, this communist society could be classified as "utopian" insofar as it anticipated not only the eradication of class differences but, also, of the nation-state altogether. Communism would inaugurate a stateless society characterized by the collective and inclusive reign of the people.

⁷ Notably, in 1995, the Cuban State passed the Foreign Investment Act, which denationalized land and allowed foreign business investors to purchase commercial space in Cuba. This move spurred a tourist boom, providing a temporary fix to the island's impending financial ruin. Nonetheless, Cubans on the island, who lacked the monetary means to live, enter, and purchase in these spaces, experienced what Susan Eckstein calls "economic apartheid" (613).

⁸ The exception to this mandate occurred in August 5, 1994—a date that came to be known as "El Maleconazo." On this day, in response to massive rioting on Havana's waterfront among

to Cuban socialism. Under the Special Period, notes De Ferrari, the government refashioned the terms of its revolutionary social contract into a “post-Soviet revolutionary contract.” This revised contract required Cuban citizens to accept unlimited hardship in exchange for the state’s protection of the island’s sovereignty (87). Importantly, by demanding citizens’ loyalty in the face of hardship, the post-Soviet revolutionary contract implicitly called for their sustained acknowledgment of the legitimacy of Cuban socialism. Indeed, several years later, Castro further consolidated the State’s position in a 2002 constitutional reform, in which he declared that “socialism and the revolutionary social and political system were *irrevocable*” (Colomer 119, emphasis in the original). Castro’s mandate not only gave the state license to shore up its governmental power; also, it positioned citizens who no longer had faith in the country’s socialist rhetoric at odds with the political practices of the state.

That said, while the rhetoric of the Cuban State has created the appearance of consensus among citizens, post-Soviet Cuban writing—to which I will now turn my attention—unmasks citizens whose views and political practices are radically at variance with the terms of Cuban socialist citizenship today. Consequently, I find that the creative expression of many Cuban writers on the island would indicate that citizens no longer feel beholden to Cuba’s socialist ethos. Notably, these writers appropriate a discourse of “foreignness” as the basis from which their works make sense of the failure of Cuban socialism and conceptualize an alternative political community in its place. In his defining essay, “El Hombre Nuevo ante el futuro,” the Cuban essayist Iván de la Nuez proposes a way to make sense of the disavowal of socialist

Cuban citizens angered over the poverty on the island, Castro threatened to lift the ban on foreign travel and release Cuban refugees en masse. Castro’s threat was particularly leveraged against the United States, which he blamed for encouraging the illegal exit of Cuban citizens from the island through its policy of granting automatic asylum to Cuban exiles.

rhetoric in Cuban writing today as a form of creative dissidence. De la Nuez sustains that the generation of intellectuals born after the Revolution—from the early 1970s onward—now write as “foreigners and aliens” from an “*outside and after*” (11-12, emphasis in the original). He figuratively evokes the concept of “foreignness” and the spatial metaphor “outside” as a means of qualifying the creative and ideological estrangement of Cuban intellectuals from socialism.⁹ And yet, his statement cannot be disentangled from what I propose is an “ethos of statelessness” in the works I analyze in this chapter.

For citizens who remain on the island, their ideological estrangement from socialism countervails their geopolitical confinement—yet, not without consequences. It seems to me that, in post-Soviet Cuba to estrange oneself from the principles of socialism—creatively, ideologically, or otherwise—is to be cast by the Cuban state as “lawless”—as one who contravenes the state’s expectations for its citizens. The ethos of statelessness I map vis-à-vis *La sombra del caminante*, *Cien botellas en una pared*, and in the alternative Cuban blogosphere, collectively, presupposes an alternative political community that is metaphorically founded on lawlessness or at the tangent of the law. To trace this principle of lawlessness that inheres within these narratives of statelessness, I draw mainly on the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt, Giorgio Agamben, and Jacques Rancière, all of whom have examined the plight of the stateless and the politically disenfranchised in their writing.

In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt makes an important claim about citizenship that informs our understanding of statelessness. First, Arendt shows that to be a citizen is to be a

⁹ The expectations for Cuban intellectuals in post-revolutionary Cuba were defined in 1961 in Fidel Castro’s historic pronouncement, “Inside the Revolution, everything; outside the Revolution, nothing” ((Schmitt) (Rosaldo)12). Underlying this diktat was the caveat that artistic and intellectual expression in Cuba was permissible so long as it buttressed socialist ideology.

“lawful” subject—that is, to exist as a legally recognized person under the protection of the state’s law. The legality of citizenship guarantees the citizen’s right to community, belonging, and civic representation. Conversely, she argues, the stateless are those who, not belonging to any state, are deprived of the law by, paradoxically, the state’s very law (295). Since the law does not recognize their right to exist in the political community, the stateless are figuratively and literally cast as “outlaws” (283) or, put another way, outside the law. The very existence of the stateless person is itself a transgression of the law (286). Thus, her analysis suggests that alienation, marginality, and invisibility mark the condition of the stateless.

I believe that the symbolically stateless subjects disclosed in the narratives of Portela and the alternative Cuban blogosphere present a post-Arendtian notion of the absence of law. This lawlessness is constitutive of the overall character and the value system—that is, the “ethos”—that sustains symbolically stateless subjects within the citizenry of post-Soviet Cuba. Based on this premise, I define the “ethos of statelessness” in post-Soviet Cuban writing accordingly: it constitutes the organizing principles of a person who, even while existing within the State, does not aspire to membership (citizenship) under the terms of their nation-state. Rather, such a person exercises their right to be recognized and to belong to a self-defined community of fellow stateless persons who act beyond the jurisdiction and consent of the state. This community accepts and celebrates its exclusivity [and in a sense its untouchable “caste” status].

The character of this stateless community is concretized in the work of Giorgio Agamben and Jacques Rancière, both of whom offer *a posteriori* readings of Arendt that elucidate distinctive modes of stateless political practice. Agamben has argued that the growing presence of refugees and, as an example, refugee camps in Palestine exemplify alternative political communities *within* nation-states that leave the state “topologically deformed” (“We Refugees”

119). threatening its integrity and singularity as the exclusive manifestation of a political community. The Italian theorist's analysis of the refugee camp as a zone of exclusion created by the state is indispensable to my readings of similar camps that manifest in post-Soviet Cuba. Alternatively, Jacques Rancière contends that subjects who do not have juridical rights embody the essence of politics when they mobilize as a community and assert their right to belong and be to be heard. Specifically, I will make use of Rancière's notion of "scenes of dissensus" to explain how counter-hegemonic strategies of political representation and expression take shape in post-Soviet Cuba. For Rancière, "scenes of dissensus" take place when those who do not have juridical rights or status counteract the state's erasure of their person by refusing to conceal themselves; instead, they demand visibility and recognition. Undoubtedly, stateless subjects like "illegal" aliens—euphemistically described as "undocumented immigrants," non-citizens who lack legal documentation to warrant their lawful residence in a foreign state—would fall under Rancière's domain of subjects who, for all practical purposes, do not possess juridical rights, as they must belong to a state that will recognize them as citizens.

Drawing upon the theoretical work of Arendt, Agamben, and Rancière, I delineate three configurations of the stateless subject in this chapter: the outlaw, the refugee, and the undocumented. In the first critical section on this chapter, I contend that the representation of a gender-variant outlaw in *La sombra del caminante* allegorizes the Cuban citizen's political "dismemberment" from the Cuba's post-Soviet revolutionary system. By definition, to dismember is to sever or separate the members (parts or organs) from a larger body. In my reading of *La sombra del caminante*, I deploy the term "dismemberment" to posit the outlaw's crime as the act of severing herself from Cuba's socialist system—a symbolic renunciation—as a member (citizen). Through their self-dismemberment, I contend, the outlaw reveals their singular

desire for recognition and expression, which contravenes the terms of citizenship in socialist Cuba. In the second section of this chapter, I will discuss how Portela's novel, *Cien botellas en una pared*, renders the territorial and economic marginality of Cuban citizens as a postmodern, metaphorical configuration of the refugee. By extrapolating Agamben's readings of the refugee, I explore how the novel establishes trans-historic parallels between the refugee of World War II Europe and the marginalization of lawless Cubans who are affected by the poverty of the Special Period. I argue that *Cien botellas en una pared* frames the history of the persecuted Jewish refugee as a signifier that gives meaning to the Cuban context, where citizens live as though they were refugees. In the fourth and final critical reading of this chapter, I explore the predicament of writers in the alternative Cuban blogosphere, whose critique of the Cuban State means that they cannot publish traditionally (i.e. on paper) via the island's state-run publishing outlets. I establish a metaphorical correlation between the plight of the landless, undocumented subject—the “illegal”—and the alternative Cuban blog writer, who is forced to write virtually in cyberspace, since they cannot express themselves through the state's print media outlets. Extending Rancière's analysis, and borrowing from other relevant interventions by Jacques Derrida—who explores the relationship between the materiality of paper and citizenship--, I interrogate the extent to which what I call the “undocumented narratives” of the alternative Cuban blogosphere forge an alternative political community in cyberspace.

Collectively, I claim, these three “texts” establish a symbolic relationship between juridical status and creative dissidence in post-Soviet Cuban narrative. Portela and the alternative Cuban blogosphere enact creative dissidence by fashioning narratives that praise citizens who challenge or eschew the terms of Cuban socialism. Indeed, I suggest, they also embody a mode of intellectual rebellion that puts them at odds with the Cuban socialist state. In my view, through

their creative dissidence, these writers make evident two salient issues. On the one hand, they suggest that the living conditions of Cuban citizens have, in recent history, approximated the status of those who, elsewhere, have been legally defined as “stateless.” On the other hand, the glaring reality of the symbolic statelessness to which many Cubans are consigned makes it possible for several prominent Cuban intellectuals to adopt a critically and aesthetically marginal position with respect to the hegemonic voices of Cuba’s state-sanctioned intellectuals. As my readings of their texts will show, it is from this position that a number of Cuban writers now re-assess the present and future of Cuba beyond the framework of socialism.

Naming Strangeness Beyond the Law

In post-Soviet Cuban literature, the plight of the symbolically stateless is, often, represented in allegorical narratives that center on subjects who embody non-normative gender and sexual identities.¹⁰ As scholars have shown, such subjects do not generally inhere within the rhetoric of citizenship and nationhood in Cuba, where the idea of political community and belonging have been represented, metaphorically, through heteronormative gender roles and sexual relations.¹¹ Thus, we might read the representation of gender and sexual difference in

¹⁰ This view accords with that of Cuban scholar Margarita Mateo Palmer, who has argued that the literary production of Cuban writers born in the decade after the Revolution reveals “perverse” expressions of sexuality and “hidden but authentic zones” of humanity (61), which exposes the “ideological collapse” of the Revolution (52). See also De Ferrari’s *Community and Culture*.

¹¹ In *Gay Cuban Nation*, Emilio Bejel shows how the ideas of citizenship and nationhood in both pre- and post-revolutionary Cuba have been reified through narratives that fabricate a “natural” alignment between heterosexuality and biological sex (196).

post-Soviet Cuban literature metaphorically—as a subversion of the narrative of Cuban socialist citizenship and a disavowal of the existing political order.

It is in this context that I situate my reading of Ena Lucía Portela’s *La sombra del caminante*, whose protagonist personifies, I argue, both the disintegration of Cuba’s socialist framework and the creation of a nascent stateless community. Set in end-of-millennium Havana, Portela’s groundbreaking *roman noir* follows the flight of an assassin, who has killed their instructor and classmates while practicing on a shooting range. Interestingly, the assassin goes by the dual name of Gabriela/Lorenzo, which—as I will further explain—is indicative not only of their gender-variant nature but, also, of their political indeterminacy. I suggest that through Gabriela/Lorenzo’s crime, *La sombra del caminante* allegorizes what its narrator describes as the “unthinkable (16)” in post-Soviet Cuba: the insubordination of a citizen who attempts to subvert Cuban socialist law and, subsequently, renounces their allegiance to the post-Soviet revolutionary contract. It seems to me, however, that the motives driving Gabriela/Lorenzo’s criminal insubordination derive from their political exclusion as a gender-variant subject.

I interrogate the political meaning of the outlaw’s crime in *La sombra del caminante* as it relates to their embodied non-normativity. Specifically, by reading the novel as an allegory of political dissidence, I will show that the crime has two paradoxical yet interconnected objectives. First, I claim that, through the crime, the outlaw not only eludes their political marginalization and erasure as a gender-variant subject but, also, rejects their willingness to conform and be assimilated as a citizen in Cuba’s socialist state. Thus, I read the crime as an act of “dismemberment” from the collective citizenry. In the second place, I claim that the crime discloses a politics of recognition: the outlaw countervails their renunciation of the principles of Cuban socialist citizenship by demanding that the state recognize their personhood and political

agency. I suggest that these two aspects of the crime position the outlaw literally and symbolically outside the law—that is, as a symbolically stateless subject. To support this claim, I will read *La sombra del caminante*, on the one hand, within a broad trajectory of legal discourse in post-Soviet Cuba that excludes and erases gender-variant subjects from the law and positions them as “non-members” of the state and, on the other hand, in light of contemporary jurisprudence, which reveals the relationship between outlawry and statelessness.

While the story of the crime is the core theme of *La sombra del caminante*, the interpretation of the crime is interconnected with the novel’s ancillary representation of Gabriela/Lorenzo’s gender-variance. Although there may be initial confusion as to who or what Gabriela/Lorenzo is, given their dual name, *La sombra del caminante* clarifies early on that she/he is not “two distinct persons, nor a double personality” (13). Described in the same passage as an “exceptional duplex character,” Gabriela/Lorenzo appears in the novel in alternating fashion or, in the singular, as Gabriela/Lorenzo. The novel’s presentation of the Gabriela/Lorenzo’s identity provokes confusion in readers; for what gender do we use to address the outlaw? In trying to name Gabriela/Lorenzo we feel compelled to make *a* choice—we must choose a pronoun, for example—even as the novel constantly undermines our choice to (en)-gender, so to speak, Gabriela/Lorenzo’s personhood.¹² Yet, I contend that the novel’s construal of the outlaw’s indeterminate identity is intentional—for, in doing so, it frustrates the integrity of Cuban socialist law, which demands uniformity and sameness of its citizens. In view of this, Gabriela/Lorenzo’s representation as a gender-variant subject should not solely be construed

¹² In keeping with the novel’s gender-variant representation of Gabriela/Lorenzo, and following the protocol as established within (Trans-)gender Studies for identifying gender-variant subjects, I will routinely use the both the feminine and masculine pronouns, or the neutral pronoun “their” for identifying gender-variant subjects in the singular.

literally—as a physical condition or a sexual orientation. Rather, I suggest that the outlaw’s gender-variance also functions metaphorically as an ideological posture and, specifically, a marker of political indeterminacy, which challenges the Cuban state’s capacity to render citizens intelligible and transparent under the law. Gabriela/Lorenzo confound precisely what Brad Epps has described as the post-revolutionary Cuban state’s “preoccupation with seeing and revealing, detecting and denouncing (234)” deviance and difference. As I will show further ahead, this also has profound implications on the state’s capacity to detect and punish Gabriela/Lorenzo in the aftermath of her crime.

The attention given to the outlaw’s gender-variance in *La sombra del caminante* can also be interpreted in light of the Cuban state’s desire to secure and guard the allegiance of its citizens from other possible [political] loyalties during the Special Period. Indeed, gender and sex are mobilized in various ways in the legal discourse of the Special Period to reify the principles of socialist citizenship. The outcome of a 2005 legal sentence, for example, reinforced the Cuban state’s mandate that its citizens be in possession of one, and only one, gender; furthermore, the sentence instructed, citizens must conform their gender to an exterior, visible sex.¹³ Indeed, the rhetoric of choice upon which the 2005 stipulation is based originates in a 1985 legal precedent, which, according to Cuban transgender rights advocates Marta Fernández Martínez and Yamila González Ferrer, mandated that all Cuban citizens be in possession of one, and only one, name (176). Yet, we must recognize that such a law is not merely intended to regulate the sex and

¹³ Notably, in December of 2005, the Cuban Parliament declared that all transgender citizens were required to undergo sex reassignment surgery in order for the state to grant them recognition of their new gender status (Castro Espín 38). The purpose of this law was to force transgender and transsexual citizens to identify as one, and only, one gender. Like the post-Soviet revolutionary contract, the 2005 legal requirement concerning transgendered citizens puts pressure on them to make *a* choice—one that is decidedly in favor of Cuba’s socialist principles.

gender of Cuban citizens. Rather, I view the law as a means of determining who belongs to the state as a citizen and who does not. Underscoring the relationship between gender uniformity and political community, Gayle Salamon explains, “Membership in one or the other gender is an allegiance figured as a kind of nationalism” (173). It follows, then, that a citizen who claims to belong to both genders is perceived, at best, as an unreliable and traitorous citizen. Salamon’s analysis of how the law intervenes on a person’s body by forcing them to choose a gender resonates profoundly in the post-Soviet Cuban socialist context where the state insists that citizens demonstrate their unwavering loyalty to socialism. Hence, those whose gender identification cannot be fixed not only threaten the integrity of the law; importantly, their membership as citizens must be called into question.

Undoubtedly, Gabriela/Lorenzo’s gender-variant identity cannot be accounted for within the general framework of Cuban socialist law, which demands that citizens classify themselves as either/or, but never and/both. Owing to their duplex nature, Gabriela/Lorenzo exists as “strange one among the rocks” who desperately desires to “fit in with the majority” as a “common *citizen*” (32, emphasis mine). Thus, while it is clear that Gabriela/Lorenzo’s difference may isolate them socially, the novel’s emphasis on their desire to conform and assimilate as a *citizen* suggests that their embodied estrangement in *La sombra del caminante* has juridical implications.

The rhetoric of the post-revolutionary Cuban state emphasized its capacity to reform, transform, and conform citizens to its revolutionary principles. Thus, Gabriela/Lorenzo’s indeterminacy makes them a prime target of the state’s transformative power, which we glean in the novel’s opening pages. Here, we find Gabriela/Lorenzo practicing on a shooting range with their collegiate peers. The shooting range, the novel intimates, is in fact, a symbol for a decadent

post-Soviet Cuba that, myopically, seeks to prolong its utopian fantasy (11). Ironically, what will soon become the scene of Gabriela/Lorenzo's crime is, initially, described as "laboratory" that nurtures and trains "prosperous, happy and very patriotic citizens, examples...of the indescribable archetype of the New Man" (32). The allusion to the "New Man" transports readers to the early years of the Cuban Revolution. It was then when Che Guevara proffered the "New Man" as a messianic archetype of the revolutionary Cuban citizen, who would be reborn and redeemed from his "original sin" (14)—whose source was, undoubtedly, capitalism. According to Velia Cecilia Bobes, the New Man embodied all of the positive attributes of revolutionary citizenship: responsibility, hard work, rejection of material goods, collectivism, and a militant devotion to the revolutionary cause—qualities that citizens were expected to emulate and personify in order to rightfully belong as members of Cuba's new, socialist society (129). It is the model against which Gabriela/Lorenzo is measured and to which the state seeks to conform and assimilate her/him. The outlaw's political indeterminacy, symbolized by their gender-variance, is construed as an aberrancy that must be excised through rigorous conditioning in the shooting range, a symbol of the militant society forged nearly fifty years prior. Nevertheless, the novel abruptly disrupts the fulfillment of this utopian fantasy when Gabriela/Lorenzo turns the gun on her/his teacher and classmates. In doing so, Gabriela/Lorenzo not only destroys the revolutionary archetype once and for all; her/he also renounces her own desire to assimilate in the collective citizenry.

Leading up to the crime, Gabriela/Lorenzo mockingly expresses their refusal to comply with the principles of revolutionary socialist citizenship in an audacious declaration, "Now I am the law" (15). On the one hand, as Paula Di Dio suggests in her article "Menuda faena," this scene functions as an ethical subversion (417), in which the law is displaced from the state and

transformed into the hands of an unwieldy criminal. Conversely, I interpret this scene as the inauguration of an ethos of statelessness in post-Soviet Cuba. As an outlaw, Gabriela/Lorenzo operates according to the principle of lawlessness. In the eyes of the socialist state, the protagonist is considered to be "strange" because she does not conform to the standards or worldview of "the other." Indeed, this law creates and nurtures the conditions for her political alienation, as it is not inclusive. However, Gabriela/Lorenzo is not strange in the world she/he inhabits; hence the assertion: "Now I am the law". Moreover, Gabriela/Lorenzo stages a renunciation or what I call a deliberate act of "dismemberment" from the post-Soviet revolutionary contract. As a result of the crime, Gabriela/Lorenzo is transformed from a mere "stranger" to an outlaw and, in particular, a stateless subject.

Outlawry, a concept originating in ancient jurisprudence, does not merely refer to the banishment of a criminal. It is, in fact, the precondition of statelessness.¹⁴ By definition, the outlaw is a person from whom the law has withdrawn its legal protection as punishment for a criminal act. Specifically, this means that the state symbolically places the subject outside the law, in a juridical no man's land, such that he effectively ceases to exist as a political subject. However, as both ancient and contemporary jurisprudence illustrate, a person need not necessarily commit a crime to be regarded as an outlaw. Indeed, on the basis of the aforementioned definition, statelessness personifies a type of outlawry, insofar as the state also

¹⁴ In *Homo Sacer*, a seminal work that traces the relationship between ancient and modern jurisprudence, Giorgio Agamben posits the *homo sacer*—an outlaw according to ancient Roman law—as the precursor to the contemporary stateless subject. According to Agamben, the *homo sacer* was a person who was banned and excluded from the protection of the law, such that he could be subject to unmitigated violence with impunity. In the second half of his text, Agamben shows how stateless refugees—like the *homo sacer*—are also excluded from the law the moment they lose their citizenship status through the process of denaturalization.

places the stateless person outside its legal protection. This is precisely what Hannah Arendt acknowledges when, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she described the stateless person as “an outlaw by definition” because there is “no appropriate niche” for them “within the framework of the general law” (283). Consequently, Arendt intimates, the stateless persons’ mere existence is regarded as criminal in the eyes of the state, for they have no law that would justify and legitimize their right to exist. Ironically, as Arendt underscores, the criminal patently has more rights than the stateless subject—for even the former has recourse to the law in a court, while the latter, she argues, does not (286). Yet, unlike the criminal who is prosecuted and sentenced according to the crime, the state altogether ignores stateless persons’ existence; and, instead, confines them to a political no man’s land.

Arendt’s understanding of statelessness as a process whereby the state places a subject outside the law simply by ignoring and erasing their existence, likewise, informs my interpretation of both Gabriela/Lorenzo’s behavior after the crime and the police’s unresponsiveness. In what I believe to be the novel’s most representative scene, Gabriela/Lorenzo pauses to monitor the news in order to verify whether she/he has been accurately identified as the person committing the crime:

Lorenzo dared to presume that the media owed him something...Something with which to erase the doubt, the unease, the restlessness followed by the terror caused by the absence of the police and onlookers at the dirty field...Even if it were a fantastic summary of the six shots: the target, the stray bullet, the scratch on the arm, the fatty, the instructor...They owed her, and Gabriela there, in front of the monitor, waiting...(144).

While Gabriela/Lorenzo's obsessive vigilance of the media may appear not only counterintuitive to a criminal but, also, patently narcissistic, it reveals a desire for recognition, given her/his exclusion as "stranger." I argue that, through their crime, Gabriela/Lorenzo attempt to carve what Arendt, in *The Human Condition*, calls "a space of appearances" (199). For Arendt, this space is where "each individual...confirms himself in speech and action" so as to secure his "remembrance" (208). This drive for the visible recognition of our uniqueness is, according to Arendt, the condition of the "plurality of men": the political community of citizens.

In *the Origins of Totalitarianism*, Arendt further enumerates the limited ways in which a stateless subject might join the "plurality of men" and escape their political estrangement. She uncovers a confounding paradox: "Only as an offender of the law," she argues, could a stateless person "gain protection from it" (286). Since even criminals are regarded as juridical subjects with recourse to a plethora of legal rights, reasons Arendt, the "logical" move for the stateless person—who lacks these rights—would be to commit a criminal act. In doing so, she suggests, the stateless person would, temporarily, have their legal rights reinstated—albeit as a criminal—and, for a brief while, would be regarded as "*almost* a full-fledged citizen" (286, emphasis in the original). In this sardonic passage, Arendt explains why a stateless person might resort to crime in the hope of securing rights that are, for the most part, accorded to a citizen: the right to membership, belonging, recognition, and visibility.

As an estranged citizen, Gabriela/Lorenzo "offends the law" as an attempt to be recognized and seen, given that their gender-variance—a sign of political indeterminacy—alienates them from the common citizenry. Nevertheless, Gabriela/Lorenzo's desire for recognition and visibility should not be mistaken as a desire to belong or a desire to be recognized as a *citizen* under the terms of the post-Soviet revolutionary contract, from which

they are excluded. Unlike the stateless subject who, according to Arendt, breaks the law to eventually re-inscribed as a citizen of a state, Gabriela/Lorenzo, I argue, seeks to be recognized on their own terms as the lawless subject that they are. Thus, I argue, their lawlessness allegorizes a politics of recognition that is founded on an ethos of statelessness.

Notwithstanding Gabriela/Lorenzo's desperate attempt to be seen, it backfires—for neither do the police attempt to pursue and capture the outlaw nor do the media broadcast the crime. Rather, there is a media blackout, which understandably confounds Gabriela/Lorenzo. Interestingly, the failure to represent and detect Gabriela/Lorenzo contradicts what the novel describes as the Cuban state's propensity to boast about its regulatory power through regular broadcasts that feature the capture of criminals by the state's "illustrious police" (144). In my view, the media's censorship of the crime can be understood in two ways—both of which position the outlaw as a stateless subject. First, it has a pedagogical and disciplinary purpose. In censoring the crime, it is clear that the Cuban state hopes to hide the fact that a citizen has gone "rogue." Indeed, this accords with Michel Foucault's analysis of why the state often represses the representation of criminality. Penal repression, Foucault argues, has as its object the liquidation of criminal subculture (61), which evinces a rather narcissistic pleasure at having its crimes on display. Thus, he explains, the public representation of criminality can be seen as disadvantageous to a repressive, disciplinary system, as the criminal may be perceived by some sectors as a hero (63). Following Foucault, I suggest that it is to the benefit of the Cuban state to not broadcast Gabriela/Lorenzo's crime, for to do so with undermine its power. At the same time, by ignoring Gabriela/Lorenzo and refusing to punish her/him deservedly for the crime, the state effectively places her/him outside the law, as a stateless subject. Conversely, the unsuccessful capture of Gabriela/Lorenzo functions as what scholars like Glen Close have called

the “failure of detection” and the heroic “ascendancy” of the criminal in the postmodern Latin American *novela negra* (146-148).¹⁵ Following this line of thought, Iraida López argues that the weakening of the law in *La sombra del caminante* betrays, on the one hand, a rupture from the revolution’s norms and, on the other, a shift toward the exaltation of individuality, alterity, and non-normativity (xi, xix). In my view, however, it is not only Gabriela/Lorenzo’s individuality and alterity that *La sombra del caminante* exalts but, broadly, an ethos of statelessness that dislocates the revolutionary ethos of citizenship.

Hence, the law in *La sombra del caminante* attempts to secure its power by pushing lawlessness to the margins of the text in a no man’s land inhabited by another lawless subject: the ebony Aimée. Having found the weary Gabriela/Lorenzo in the throes of death after their labyrinthine flight through Havana, Aimée rescues and rehabilitates the outlaw only to be reminded of her own marginality. As Gabriela/Lorenzo deliriously recounts the alienation she/he endured because of strangeness, Aimée simultaneously recollects the racial slurs targeting her black skin. In the novel’s muddled, indiscernible ending, the outlaw dies by way of a murder-suicide at the hands of Aimée (235). I suggest that this pairing of Aimée and Gabriela/Lorenzo depicts a textual struggle between competing discourses of criminality and lawlessness. The positioning of Aimée in the novel reflects what Alejandro de la Fuente has argued is the sustained codification of visible blackness as a symbol of criminality in the Special Period; this has resulted in the Afro-Cuban’s concealment and invisibility in the nation’s public sphere (320-324). Thus, together, as symbols of criminality, strangeness, and statelessness, Aimée and

¹⁵ In this regard, *La sombra del caminante*, like the postmodern crime novel, reflects a noteworthy divergence from blueprint of the traditional detective novel, for it disregards the story of the criminal investigation.

Gabriela/Lorenzo form an unlikely alliance. On their own they were merely lawless *individuals*; together, however, they now personify the creation of a lawless *community*. It is an alliance that originates in their shared exclusion from the nation and from the law. In its closing sentences, I suggest, *La sombra del caminante* proposes the comingling of these lawless voices—symbolically stateless, criminal, and foreign by another name—as where the future of a post-socialist Cuba presides.

Signifying Refugees

In my reading of *La sombra del caminante* I have shown how Cuban socialist law construes dissident citizens as outlaws and, thus, as symbolically stateless subjects. It does so by excluding them from the law and altogether erasing them from the state's legal discourse. Specifically, this exclusion occurs when the state refuses to name the outlaw. Indeed, the idea of symbolic statelessness I proffer in this chapter is premised on the argument that one cannot [legally] name, define, or recognize that for which there exists no juridical precedent. In this section, I now examine how a citizen may be recognized as [symbolically] stateless through a legal metonymy of sorts. This strategy, I contend, is disclosed in Ena Lucía Portela's third novel, *Cien botellas en una pared*. In my reading of *Cien botellas en una pared*, I show how the novel draws parallels between the living conditions of Cuban citizens during the Special Period and that of a legally recognized stateless subject: the refugee.

A refugee is a person who has been displaced in a legal settlement in a foreign state that is not their home.¹⁶ Indeed, central to the shaping of Portela's novel is the real and metaphoric

¹⁶ Article 1 of the "1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees" defines a refugee as "someone who fled their homeland because of a well-founded fear of being persecuted for

presence of refugees. In her novel, I sustain, Portela constantly challenges the shifting and rather inadequate meanings of citizenship in post-Soviet Cuba by positioning citizens as refugees. She does so by showing how citizenship operates symbolically on two, paradoxical levels. First, she positions a privileged citizen as a symbolic foreigner to convey her degree of distancing or estrangement from the poverty of the Special Period. In the second place, I argue, the novel invokes the figure of a refugee to depict legitimate citizens who, nonetheless, live at the threshold of Cuban society. The magnitude of their marginalization during the Special Period was such that it resembled the condition of refugees being granted asylum by the state. Portela shrewdly erects this paradox precisely to interrogate the equally paradoxical economic, territorial, and political disenfranchisement of Cuban citizens on the island—for how does one make sense of the fact that citizens have seemingly less political and territorial rights in a manner similar to refugees? Importantly, I argue, Portela positions a refugee in her novel as a signifier that enables readers to interpret the marginalization of Cuban citizens as a form of symbolic statelessness that approximates the conditions of real refugees elsewhere.

Homing in on the contentious relationship between two friends—Linda Roth, a professional writer and self-proclaimed refugee and Zeta, a self-described no-name “amateur” (43), *Cien botellas en una pared* mobilizes two somewhat disparate accounts of Special Period Cuba. One version is revealed through Zeta’s voice as the omniscient, first-person narrator of the novel. Her voice is tinged by a self-deprecating tone—especially when comparing herself to Linda. Yet, I believe that Zeta’s self-deprecation—her frank and unaffected view of herself as subordinate, inconsequential, and a second-class citizen—functions as a mirror into the world of

reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.”

Cuban citizens whose voices, like hers, have been silenced. Notwithstanding her lowly view of herself, Zeta's eyes and uncensored voice testify to the economic privation of the Special Period. The citizens portrayed through Zeta's eyes bear witness to the ravaging effects of the economic crisis on their daily lives. Portela's raw depictions of poverty, violence, hunger, and racism expose readers to the underbelly of Cuban civil society. Nevertheless, her testimony on behalf of her fellow alienated citizens unfolds in the struggle for narrative authority, as it contends with being eclipsed by Linda's commanding authorial voice.

The *other* and, perhaps, questionable version of life in Cuba is evinced through Linda's voice as a refugee. Ironically, Linda's extravagant life in Cuba does not jibe with the impoverishment that surrounds her. Roth is ensconced in a world that bears no resemblance to that of her neighbors. She drives a Mercedes Benz; she wears an ostentatious Rolex watch; and, she resides in a luxurious penthouse in Centro Habana, a neighborhood that has borne some of the greatest structural and economic causalities of the Special Period. Notwithstanding her economic privilege, Roth insists on anchoring both her professional and personal identities on what she deems to be a "biological legacy" (47) of suffering—for Linda is the descendant of Ashkenazy Jews who survived the Holocaust and fled to Cuba as refugees. Linda oscillates between two identities—one juridical, one embodied—as citizen and refugee. She sustains her refugee identity, legally, on the basis of international law. Having "inherited" her parents' refugee status, Linda also claims multiple citizenship statuses: she's classified as citizen of both the European Union (EU) and Cuba, where she was born. Furthermore, with her EU passport, Linda can travel internationally—unencumbered by the very laws that restrict the travel of Cuban citizens. Effectively, Linda's political status and economic privilege allow her live and move in two different worlds that position her in the novel as a citizen and refugee.

I situate Linda's interstitial identity within a broader narrative of trans-historic estrangement that originates in secular Jewish thought. In her 1943 essay "We Refugees," Hannah Arendt described Jewish refugees as the "vanguard of their peoples" (63). Writing specifically about Jewish intellectuals, poets, and writers who became stateless during World War II, Arendt contended that they would represent an "avant-garde" so long as they embraced their refugee identity and rejected the privilege that came with political assimilation. Because their refugee status alleviated them of the burden of declaring their allegiance to any particular nation-state, Jewish intellectuals were strategically poised to engage in the laborious and messy work of politics. In his *a posteriori* reading of Arendt's "We Refugees," which I will further discuss, Agamben uncovers the prophetic potential of her essay, for he suggests that Arendt had already anticipated a world in which refugees, and not citizens, would be the *de facto* model of how political communities organize themselves globally. In a way, Linda Roth traverses these multiple worlds as both citizen and a refugee. Yet, Roth's flaw as an intellectual is that she *has* assimilated into a life of privilege to such an extent that she cannot leverage her identity to critique the economic privation of fellow citizens in her native Cuba. Rather, she distances herself from them—as a foreigner—by adopting an essentialist narrative of suffering. Indeed, Emmanuel Levinas espoused this belief in an essential Jewish suffering, underscoring Israel's timeless "predisposition to involuntary sacrifice, its exposure to persecution" (*DF* 225). Unlike Arendt, Levinas saw Jewish victimization as a trans-historic phenomenon—one that was not limited to the historical juncture of the Holocaust but, rather, timeless. I read the representation of Linda's cognitive dissonance in the novel in light of these two equally dissonant but critical views of Jewishness.

At the same time, I argue, Linda's roles as both a Cuban citizen and a Jewish refugee in

Cien botellas en una pared have a strategic function insofar as the novel mobilizes her narrative of Jewishness as a metonym. Specifically, I argue, Roth's Jewishness functions according to what Erin Graff Zivin calls a "wandering signifier" (2) or a "mobile sign that travels between literary texts and social historical contexts" (10). According to Graff Zivin, owing to the very trans-historic interpretations of Jewishness in secular Jewish thought, Latin American literature also mobilizes and displaces Jewishness from its varied cultural contexts such that it functions broadly as a signifier of alterity.¹⁷ Following Graff Zivin, I argue, Linda's Jewish refugee identity also signifies onto the post-Soviet Cuban context such that we can read the political, spatial, and discursive alienation of Cuban citizens from the state, symbolically, as form of refugee displacement. In the absence of a legal vocabulary that would adequately frame the plight of Cuban citizens during the Special Period, Linda's presence in the novel provides a juridical reservoir from which we can draw to interpret their sociopolitical alienation. Importantly, in my examination of symbolic refugee displacement in *Cien botellas en una pared*, I set forth two claims. First, I read the representations of symbolic refugee-citizens as an instantiation of the principle of lawlessness. Secondly, I read Zeta as a textual refugee to the extent that her testimony is displaced behind Linda's authorial voice and, broadly, the discourse of the law.

As I have noted, *Cien botellas en una pared* seeks to make sense of the territorial displacement of certain sectors of Cuban citizenry during the Special Period. As scholars have shown, the unemployment and urban decay that resulted from the economic crisis spurred the spatial displacement of residents across the island. In the late nineties, according to historian

¹⁷ Notably, Graff Zivin's concept of Jewishness as signifier is rooted in Levinas' notion of the transitivity of Jewish suffering, which he fleshes out in *Otherwise than Being*.

Alejandro de la Fuente, residents of Havana found themselves assaulted by an influx of “immigrants” (327-328)—described in colloquial terms as *orientales* (Orientals), *palestinos* (Palestinians), and *ilegales* (illegals). Ironically, while the rhetoric of both the Cuban State and citizens construed these immigrant invaders as “illegals,” “aliens,” and “foreigners”—terms that are used in a very specific context under international law—these outsiders were, in fact, [mostly] black Cuban citizens who had migrated to the capital from the island’s rural, eastern provinces in search of work, education, and housing. However, the legal terms used to describe these citizen-refugees stems from the official policy of Cuba’s central government, which restricted who could reside and work in the Havana; “outsiders” from other parts of the island could only do so with proper documentation (work permits and residence cards) issued by the state. The citizen-refugees in Cuba, however, are not fleeing political persecution, not unlike international refugees elsewhere; they are fleeing the impoverishment engendered by a state that has turned a blind eye to their predicament and has demanded their compliance and endurance in the midst of economic hardship. Interestingly, the legal categories to which these Cuban citizens are consigned, particularly as *palestinos*, also invokes the historic plight of Palestinians who live as refugees in Israel—a state to which they also lay claim, ostensibly, as rightful citizens, even though neither the state of Israel nor international law recognizes them as such.¹⁸ In a manner similar to the predicament of Palestinians in Israel, the descriptions of such illegals in Havana bring to light the problem of recognizing and naming a situation for which there is no juridical

¹⁸ Since the writing of this chapter, the status of Palestinians under international law has been revised. On November 29, 2012, the General Assembly of the United Nations recognized, de facto, the sovereign statehood of Palestine. However, as political theorists are keen to note, recognition of either citizenship or statelessness by the United Nations does not necessarily guarantee the recognition of such by individual nation-states.

precedent. Hence, *Cien botellas en una pared* explores this issue by interrogating the political significance of the “illegals”’ presence in Havana. In particular, the novel examines their capacity to transform the city’s urban ecology into a space of lawlessness that temporarily destabilizes the rule of Cuban socialist law.

I want to underscore the significance of naming unwelcomed or “illegal” Cuban citizens as Palestinians, particularly as it relates to Linda’s refusal to acknowledge Cuban marginality and suffering when Zeta presents her with evidence to the contrary. In one scene, Zeta’s eyewitness account takes readers to Havana’s Vedado neighborhood, where these illegals are residing. Upon entering the neighborhood, Zeta observes a disquieting element: University of Havana students, most of whom originate from outside of the city, live among squatters, often sharing the space with visitors described as “illegals” (246). While Zeta does not possess the sophisticated legal, or even intellectual, vocabulary to describe the space that stands before her, it is clear from her description that this space is, symbolically, a modern permutation of a refugee camp.¹⁹ Like the refugee camp in foreign spaces, the “camp” in the Vedado neighborhood is comprised of illegal settlers—outsiders from other parts of the island—who live culturally and politically isolated from the citizenry that surround them. Yet, in order to underscore the correlation between the symbolic refugee camp in Havana and an international refugee camp, *Cien botellas en una pared* alludes to the concentration camp vis-à-vis Linda’s voice. In particular, when Zeta takes note of the illegals’ impoverishment and territorial disenfranchisement, Linda quickly silences her by invoking and elevating the Auschwitz concentration camp as *the* unparalleled paradigm of suffering, violence, and alienation (249). Linda’s assessment is partially correct: there is no

¹⁹ In her valuable monograph, *Invenición de la Habana*, Emma Álvarez-Tabío traces the representation of Havana as a camp comprised of dislocated ghettos and ever shifting-centers.

direct comparison between the suffering of Jews in the Holocaust and the crisis lived by Cubans in the Special Period. And, yet, I do not suggest Portela wishes to make this claim. Rather, *Cien botellas en una pared* retrieves the historical memory of the Jewish camp to conceive other iterations of what we might call “camp living” today. Arguably, it is Linda’s defensive posture that implicitly signals readers to make the historical leap—or to signify, as I argue, from Second World War Europe to Special Period Cuba.²⁰ I suggest, however, that the model for Havana’s illegal camp is not only Auschwitz but, rather, Palestine, which has also been likened to a modern-day camp in the state of Israel.

In point of fact, Giorgio Agamben uses the example of Palestine to argue that the camp has reappeared in new forms that are, nonetheless, sustained by the old principles of juridical exclusion. Traditionally, the notion of a camp elicits the nefarious image of one of the most horrific criminal spaces of the twentieth-century—the concentration camp—where the genocide of millions of Jews took place. However, Agamben argues, the camp is not a historically-determined space relegated to the past. Rather, he states, the camp occurs even today wherever there exists any delimited space of people who live as a juridical exception. A zone of exception, explains Agamben, is any space where the law, as it normally applies to citizens, ceases to function and where “the police temporarily act as sovereign” (*HS* 174). Following Agamben, I argue, the exception transforms citizens into “illegals.” At the same time, his reading of the modern-day refugee camp in “We Refugees,” restores its political potential, as such a space threatens and “topologically deforms” the integrity of the state’s political and territorial boundaries. Citing the example of Palestine, Agamben posits the refugee space as a “no man’s

²⁰ This is notable since the Cuban State propagated a discourse of warfare and adopted a war economy during Special Period. Indeed, the refugee has always emerged as a casualty of war.

land” where the state’s power loses its grip, as refugees mobilize—independent of their juridical status—a “political community to come (“We Refugees” 118).” In my reading of Agamben, I find that this community sustains itself according to what I have called a principle of lawlessness, for it no longer relies on the state that surrounds it for recognition of its political status or for validation of its right to exist and to belong.

Cien botellas en una pared offers a prime example of this no-man’s land in its description of the illegal’s camp. The university space is rendered as an orgiastic bricolage where *jineteros*, drugs, violence, world music, non-normative sexual practices, and “perpetual disorder” (247) reign. What is most notable about this scene is the suggestion that its disorderliness is the product of foreign influence or, conversely, an internal estrangement—for the camp residents spend most of their time blasting “world music”—mostly from other parts of Latin America and the United States, which acts as a gateway to the drug use, sex, and violence. Importantly, uninhibited by their lawlessness, the residents of the camp feel empowered to critique the government (252)—an unthinkable occurrence elsewhere. Consequently, this scene suggests, any attack on Cuba’s socialist state—even from within—requires the symbolic self-fashioning of Cuban citizens as refugees.

Yet, lawlessness has its limit and the law has the final say in yet another of Portela’s novels. *Cien botellas en una pared* presents the triumph of the law in two ways. In one instance, we glean the law’s power, literally, in the police’s repression of the symbolic refugee community. Like a spell, the open critique of the state calls the attention of the police, who descend on the illegal space and disband its residents. It becomes, following Agamben, a zone of exception. Moreover, the law ostensibly succeeds in suppressing Zeta’s authorial voice as an eyewitness. Zeta’s testimonies in the novel—what she calls the “other, subterranean story”

(266)—always become “undocumented,” so to speak, and displaced in favor of an “official” story (265), which neither Zeta nor we, as the novel’s readers, can access.

Even though my reading of symbolic statelessness in *Cien botellas en una pared* focuses on the relationship between political alienation and territorial disenfranchisement, Zeta helps us understand how the voices of citizens in post-Soviet Cuba are also displaced and silenced in civil society. In this light, the novel discloses two types of symbolic refugee displacement in post-Soviet Cuba: one territorial and one discursive. Indeed, as I have shown, what characterizes the symbolic refugees in the novel is their lack of documentation—both literal and symbolic. Thus, Portela mediates on their behalf by mobilizing their voices in her fictive universe. We might, then, ask ourselves how and where might these voices find “asylum” from their narrative and political erasure? To answer this question, I now turn to the alternative Cuban blogosphere.

From Cuba, *Sans Papier*

The representation of the symbolic refugee camp in *Cien botellas en una pared* offers an instructive image of alternative discursive communities that are being engendered in present-day Cuba. While the metaphoric camp stands as a symbol of the political, economic, and territorial alienation of Cuban citizens with respect to the state, alternatively, I suggest that it could be mobilized productively as a protected space for minority and marginalized voices to exist and to be heard. In this final section of my chapter, I read the controvertible rise of the alternative Cuban blogosphere in the late 2000s as the instantiation of such a narrative camp. Excluded from Cuba’s state-run intellectual spheres, the alternative Cuban blogosphere has found asylum, so to speak, within cyberspace from where they foment their critique of the state and, in particular, the country’s literary and intellectual institutions.

The rise of the alternative Cuban blogosphere is constitutive of a wider, transnational configuration of networked communities beginning in the mid to late nineties. The advent of blogging and other forms of cyberwriting, note new media scholars, has enabled citizens across the globe to mobilize virtual, trans-territorial communities in ways that print media and traditional social institutions have been unable to. Owing to blogs' capacity to virtually propel people across territorial, national, and political boundaries, sociologists of new media have described cyberwriting as a "network society." A term brought into currency by sociologist and communications scholar Manuel Castells, "network society" expands on the notion of a civil society—a concept that describes social institutions and spaces (community and cultural centers, schools, NGOs, churches, etc.) that operate independently of the state and, at the same time, reify the political, social, and cultural values of the citizenry.²¹ The idea of a "network society" suggests that citizens today no longer organize themselves "on the ground" through these institutions. Rather, a "network society" enables citizens to forge cultural, social, and political practices through virtual, electronic networks. Moreover, "network society" also brings into the fold the voices of those who lack juridical rights—who are generally excluded from the practice of state politics and, at times, social institutions within civil society—to partner with citizens in creating alternative, virtual communities. Indeed, according to new media scholar Mark Nunes, blogging "reterritorializes the spaces of everyday life" (46) by de-centering civil society in an elsewhere and everywhere in cyberspace. Importantly, Nunes contends, cyberspace does not necessarily dismantle civil society but, rather, functions as its alternative "lived" or augmented

²¹ The idea of "civil society" is an old and contentious one whose usage varies among scholars. For the purpose of this discussion, I center my reading on the ways in which alternative blogging in Cuba attempts to circumvent dominant intellectual practices and institutions in post-Soviet Cuban civil society and, instead, maps what I have called an "ethos of statelessness."

space. Arguably, Nunes' definition of cyberspace preserves the centrality of civil society. Yet, in my analysis of the alternative Cuban blogosphere, I argue that blogging not only detaches itself from Cuban civil society and the state but, also, altogether unsettles them.

My reading of the alternative Cuban blogosphere hinges on the notion that alternative blogging in Cuba fomented narratives, spaces, and practices of dissent that can be regarded as an *uncivil*. Here, I use the term uncivil as distinct from that of a "civil" society to frame the alternative Cuban blogosphere's critique of and radical disengagement from Cuba's intellectual and cultural institutions—the very institutions that patently inhere within Cuban civil society.²² Indeed, the alternative Cuban blogosphere was the product of what may be deemed as the "uncivil" exclusion of Yoani Sánchez—considered to be the pioneer of alternative blogging in Cuba—from Cuba's intellectual spheres. According to Sánchez, in 2007 she was spurred to create her blog, *Generación Y*, after she was repeatedly excluded from a series of meetings convened by the island's intelligentsia in January of the same year.²³ Absent from these meetings, Sánchez has noted, were "amateur" writers and intellectuals like herself. Ostensibly, Sánchez was unofficially excluded from this meeting because she had not been recognized as a legitimate writer, critic, and intellectual by the Cuban state and within the country's intellectual

²² As Velia Cecilia Bobes explains, the notion of civil society in post-revolutionary Cuba is characterized by a citizen's adherence to social institutions that are themselves governed by the state (115).

²³ In an interview conducted by political scientist and blogger Ted Henken, Sánchez explains that the January 2007 gathering of intellectuals was provoked by the televised appearance of Luis Pavón Tamayo, the president of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura de Cuba (the National Council of Cuban Culture) from 1971-1976, a period otherwise known as the historic "Quinqueño Gris." At the 2007 meeting, Pavón expressed remorse for his involvement in the repression of Cuban writers in the seventies, which culminated with the public censuring of writer Heberto Padilla. At the meeting, attendees also discussed ways to improve the historically fraught relations between intellectuals and the Cuban state.

circles.

Sánchez's account underscores that access to literary and cultural spaces and written and cultural expression in Cuba is mediated by Cuba's socialist state. As intellectual historian Rafael Rojas confirms, Cuba's socialist state occupies a dual role as both sovereign *and* Editor-in-Chief (12). However, as I will show, the alternative Cuban blogosphere displaces the centrality of these cultural institutions and, by extension, the centrality of Cuba's socialist state by re-democratizing written expression. Today, the alternative Cuban blogosphere has grown into a collective of more than a dozen writers who blog from Cuba under the moniker of *Voces Cubanas*.²⁴

Additionally, Sánchez offers workshops to interested citizens who may have never owned a computer, seen a blog, or written formally for public readership. As Cuban blog scholar Beatriz Calvo Peña explains, the alternative Cuban blogosphere is notable for its inclusion of everyday, "common folk"—amateurs who have no formal training or recognition as cultural critics, established authors, or journalists (158). Importantly, by re-democratizing writing in cyberspace, the alternative Cuban blogosphere need not rely on Cuba's state-run publishing houses, editorials, and, importantly, their *paper* to express themselves.²⁵

In this regard, my reading of incivility in the alternative Cuban blogosphere focuses precisely on the meaning of the absence of paper as it relates to intellectual and juridical

²⁴ The *Voces Cubanas* collective was previously known as "Desde Cuba." Since they often collaborate with writers who live outside of Cuba, the name change reasonably derives from the desire to emphasize the transnational nature of their partnerships.

²⁵ The ability to create alternative means of written expression is also significant in light of the paper shortage during the Special Period. As a result of the collapse of the Cuban economy, the Cuban publishing market was one of the hardest hit sectors of civil society, as many publishing houses become insolvent. Due to the paper shortage, Esther Whitfield notes, publishing [on paper] became the exclusive privilege of renowned and established writers (70).

legitimation in post-Soviet Cuba. Given their lack of access to print media and, specifically, paper, alternative Cuban bloggers have been keen to highlight the correlation between their textual disenfranchisement in cyberspace and their precarious juridical status. According to blogger Claudia Cadelo of *Octavo Cerco*, alternative Cuban bloggers are consigned to a state of “landlessness (6)” —a term that portrays alternative bloggers as territorially displaced in a manner similar to refugees. Likewise, the rhetoric of political “undocumentation” pervades Yoani Sánchez’s writing. In one instance, she equates alternative Cuban blogging to a narrative “apartheid” (*Cuba libre* 13), given that bloggers are excluded from Cuba’s literary space. “We Cubans,” she explains, “continue to exist as undocumented internauts, since our incursions into the territory of the Internet are defined by illegality” (*Cuba libre* 13).²⁶ The alternative Cuban blogger, suggests Sánchez, embodies a double-illegality. On the one hand, as bloggers who critique the state’s policies, they are banned from both Cuban cyberspace, which I will further explain, and from access to the country’s print media. Thus, their blog writing is illegal. On the other hand, their banishment in international cyberspace positions them, symbolically, as “illegal” immigrants—euphemistically described as “undocumented subjects.” Sánchez further elaborates on the complexity of her “undocumentation” in a 2011 blog post, in which she discusses real threats against her Cuban citizenship status. Not only did Cuba’s Office of Immigration revoke her passport. In 2008, the same office denied Sánchez a visa to travel to Spain, where she was to be awarded the prestigious Ortega y Gasset Prize in recognition of her blog. Again, in January of 2012, the Cuban State denied Sánchez an exit permit after the government of Brazil granted her an entry visa and an invitation to attend the premiere of a

²⁶ Here, Sánchez devises the neologism “internaut,” an amalgam of “Internet” and “astronaut,” as a metaphor for her displacement in the blogosphere.

documentary, ironically, about freedom of expression in Cuba (Phillips 2012). In light of these incidents, Sánchez reasonably asks, “Have I become undocumented (“Un pasaporte, un salvaconducto”)?” Clearly, she remains a citizen under the law. Yet, her question encapsulates the seemingly indissoluble relationship between the loss of literary and intellectual capital that accompanies the loss of paper and the loss of juridical capital.

In *Paper Machine*, Jacques Derrida uncovers the relationship between the literary and the juridical aspects of “undocumentation,” as he ponders the symbolic status of paper in light of the ascendancy of electronic writing *and* undocumented or “paperless” subjects. Paper, he argues, “has the force of law, it gives accreditation, it incorporates, it even embodies the soul of the law, its letter and its spirit. It seems to be indissociable...from the rituals of legalization and legitimation...” (58). Conversely, he argues, “the ‘paperless’ person is an outlaw, a nonsubject legally, a noncitizen of a foreign country” (60). Derrida’s crucial reading explains how both citizens and writers alike obtain legitimacy from the material significance of paper: it can be touched, circulated, marked, regulated, and censored. The materiality of paper—exemplified in passports, birth certificates, money, and books, for example—instantiates a politics of legitimacy for both political subjects and writers: it allows them to make themselves visible, legible, and recognizable. Paper embodies the law because it is the framework through which citizens and writers forge for themselves—to borrow Hannah Arendt’s words—a “space of appearances.”

Building on Derrida’s reading of “paper,” if paper is indeed the “force of law,” blog writing not only threatens to construct a world of “paperless” people (61). Also, by its very nature, it symbolizes an abrogation of the law. Taking this argument a step further, I sustain that alternative blogging in Cuba is *uncivil* precisely because it enacts a politics of lawlessness that eludes the grasp of the Cuban state and its regulatory institutions. In other words, alternative

Cuban bloggers exercise their right to write even when the right to paper has been rescinded by the state. In fact, we might better understand the dissidence of the alternative Cuban blogosphere in terms elucidated by Jacques Rancière, who foresees such a politics of lawlessness in his reading of “dissensus.” In his essay “Who Is the Man of Rights?” Rancière defines the “scene dissensus” not as mere dissidence but, rather, as “the putting two worlds in one and the same world” (304). The legal rhetoric subtending the historic “rights of man,” he explains, divides the world into citizens who have political rights and non-citizens who do not have rights.²⁷ However, Rancière contends, “dissensus” occurs when those who do not have rights act as though they were citizens. They mobilize themselves as a community—they create a space of appearances, so to speak—and they do not rely on the state’s legitimacy to do so. This is what he means by the putting together of two worlds. Hence, I would argue, the “scenes of dissensus” are founded on the principles *incivility* and lawlessness precisely because these practices are subterranean to institutions that inhere both within the state and civil society.

In what follows, then, I claim that the alternative Cuban blogosphere, as a symbolically undocumented community, enacts dissensus or a politics of lawlessness in three ways. First, I argue, the alternative Cuban bloggers mobilizes the idea of “ungrammaticality”—that is, the fact that blog writing is not subject to the rules of grammar—as a metaphor for the dismantling of Cuba’s regulatory institutions. In a second instance, I contend that the virtual nature of

²⁷ In his framing of “dissensus” Jacques Rancière explicitly interrogates the language to the “Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen,” the principle document that emerged from the French Revolution. The Declaration sought to acknowledge the humanity and freedom of all men by declaring that the rights of men are universal. Rancière, however, deconstructs the language of the Declaration—upon which contemporary iterations of political and human rights have been based, by arguing that political rights is neither the exclusive domain of the state nor of its citizens. Instead, he argues, [authentic] politics takes place when the stateless act as if they have the very rights that are not accorded to them by the state.

alternative Cuban blogging disrupts the integrity of the Cuban state's political, territorial, and, importantly, virtual boundaries by interrogating what it means to write "from Cuba." Lastly, I argue, alternative Cuban bloggers circumvent their symbolic undocumentation by making themselves recognizable through the visual rhetoric of the blog page and the computer screen.

Perhaps, one of the most confounding aspects of blogging to the Cuban state is its ungrammaticality or "untraceability." Yoani Sánchez brings this to bear in a 2008 interview for the U.S.-based *Hispanic* magazine:

The fundamental blow that the Internet could deal to an authoritarian and totalitarian system such as this one is in connecting citizens to the virtual world... Suddenly there's a new terrain where the Cuban citizen, despite all of the limitations, can express opinions, and those opinions can remain there. The censors in Cuba can't delete them, they can be blocked so that they're not read here, but they can't be eliminated (Corsa 33-34).

What stands out in Sánchez's explanation regarding the political subversiveness of the alternative Cuban blogosphere is the fact that it eludes the power of editorial censors, who normally control the language and grammar printed texts. As an electronic, hypertextual medium, blogging dispenses with the rules of grammar, making both editorials and editors non-essential. By definition, grammar systematizes the use of a language among a given people. In his seminal work, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Pierre Bourdieu explains that the production of an official language is "bound up with the state" and with the process of "state formation" (45). Language, then, becomes an element of political distinction such that it must be "codified by grammarians." The codification of language vis-à-vis grammar grants uniformity to a language such that the state can distinguish its citizens from foreigners, insiders from outsiders, and *real* writers from mere dilettantes based on how they speak or write.

In the blog world, however, there are no grammarians—for the grammar of cyberspace is one that is constantly evolving, given that blogging brings together people from linguistic communities far and wide, often under one space, depending on the reach of a blog's readership.²⁸ Alternatively, suggests Cuban essayist Jorge Ferrer, the blog deploys a new grammar, which is the “grammar of the letter, the image and the hypertext” (21).²⁹ What Ferrer suggests is that blogging is defined by its visual rhetoric and connectivity—that is, on what can be seen and recognized with the eye and on its potential to transcend its point of origin. As a hypertextual medium, blogging de-institutionalizes both the writer and writing. Now, literally, anyone can write and publish without relying a publishing house. The hypertext also makes blogging a dialogic, collaborative process in which readers are implicated not as passive observers but as visitors, co-participants and, one could argue, as co-authors. It is in this regard that alternative blogging frustrates the authority of Cuba's literary and cultural institutions—and thus the rhetoric of socialism—since these institutions are incapable of regulating the content and uniformity of civic discourse.

Grammar, then, has become a significant discursive battleground for alternative Cuban bloggers based on its symbolic relation to the law. In one notable example, the alternative Cuban

²⁸ This is not to suggest that words escape codification in cyberspace. Instead, I want to suggest that the meaning of a word, a turn of phrase, or a character is defined not by a cadre of “expert” grammarians but, rather, by “common folk,” whose presence in cyberspace often brings vernaculars into mainstream usage.

²⁹ Pioneering new media scholar George Landow defines the hypertext as the digital offspring of the “intertext”—a terrain previously theorized by poststructuralist thinkers, who posited such concepts such as “networks,” “discursivity,” and “webs” to emphasize how texts move, multiply, and signify beyond their original meaning (52-55). According to Landow, the hypertext is an infinite system of imbedded links that move “readers through a web or network of texts” that “continually shift the center” (56).

blogger Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo deploys the metaphor of “grammatical warfare” to frame his critique of Cuba’s literary establishment and its passive complicity with socialism. In a tendentious but important essay on blogging and the future of Cuban literature titled “¿Hay Literatura Cubana después de la Revolución?” (Is There Cuban Literature after the Revolution?),³⁰ Pardo Lazo describes the alternative Cuban blogosphere as a “syntactical guerrilla” that derides the territorial and institutional boundaries of Cuba’s literary field (21). Subtending his positioning of the alternative Cuban blogosphere is the rhetoric lawlessness. On the one hand, the use of the term “guerrilla” is crucial here, for guerrillas represent rogue combatant forces generally comprised of untrained civilians who have rebelled against the state’s authorized, traditional army. Effectively, they are outlaw combatants within the dominant political order. Syntax, on the other hand, is concerned with the proper order of words and the construction of sentences; it is regulated by norms. The lexicon of blog writing, however—with its acronyms, turns of phrases, and malapropisms—defies the syntactical orderliness of the printed text. Interestingly, Pardo Lazo contends that the syntactical guerrilla of the alternative Cuban blogosphere “conspires against the Cuban canon” (22). A canon, by definition, is a law against which we measure the authority and legitimacy of a work. Thus, the canon might also be understood as a community of lawful texts that adheres to certain narrative, grammatical, and aesthetic principles. Yet, Pardo Lazo’s critique of the Cuban literary canon suggests that it is but the extension of the socialist state—that is, what the state deems lawful, in this case, for literary consumption. Whether or not we agree with Pardo Lazo’s debatable condemnation of the Cuban

³⁰ Pardo Lazo intentionally breaks with the rule of non-capitalization of internal words (that are not proper nouns) in Spanish titles by capitalizing “Literatura Cubana.” In doing so, I presume, Pardo Lazo is referring to the Cuban literary canon as a national expression.

literary canon, the valuable take away here is that the mere existence of a canon is contingent on the silencing and marginalization of other voices. Thus, through his metaphor of “syntactical guerrilla” warfare, he positions the alternative Cuban blogosphere as a rogue narrative community whose aim is to undermine the institutionalization of writing in Cuba and, with it, the integrity of socialist discourse in post-Soviet Cuba.³¹

I contend that the alternative Cuban blogosphere undermines the authority of Cuba’s intellectual and cultural institutions by constructing what I call virtual topographies of dissent. These are spaces that patently circumvent the eye of the Cuban state and, importantly, challenge what it means to write *from* Cuba today. The material conditions under which alternative Cuban bloggers write require that we interrogate the very notion of “writing from Cuba”—for the Cuban state has erected firewalls to ensure that no unauthorized blogger—and citizen—can post from the island. In countries where Internet access is available, a Web site’s universal resource locator or address—known in abbreviated terms as the “URL”—ends with an abbreviated domain name that indicates a Web site’s country of origin. However, on the URL of blogs in the *Voces Cubanas* collective—authored by bloggers who ostensibly live in and write from Cuba—notably absent is the .cu domain, which identifies Web sites originating in Cuba. This is because the *Voces Cubanas* blogs are not necessarily posted from Cuba. Instead, alternative Cuban blogging is made possible through a series of physical, spatial, and textual displacements. For example, as Yoani Sánchez has explained, she must disguise herself as a tourist, which allows her access to hotels and cafés in Havana from where she emails her posts to friends outside the

³¹ We might also understand Pardo Lazo’s declaration of warfare against the Cuban literary canon in light of Rafael Rojas’ assertion that “...the post-Soviet moment [in Cuban writing] is associated with the fracture of the national canon of letters, the emergence of multicultural subjects, the invasion of the market and the incursion of popular culture” (122).

island. Then, from their respective international locations, Sánchez's allies post her blog entries onto *Generación Y*.³² The physical displacement of the alternative Cuban blogger from the real, international locations where the blog posts are published complicates our ability to distinguish the local from the foreign and the citizen from the non-citizen. Moreover, by furtively embodying foreignness, Yoani Sánchez is able to transgress and subvert the political neutrality of tourist spaces—spaces of leisure that, are, nonetheless, complicit with the state since the revenue they generate benefit the government; these are spaces from which Cuban citizens are mostly excluded. She transforms them into topographies of dissent by exploiting their technology to disseminate critiques of the very state that sustains them.

Outside these “foreign” spaces, however, alternative Cuban blogs must be “documented,” so to speak—for Cuban citizens, who cannot access these blogs on the island, alternative Cuban blogging must be materialized in its pre-virtual form, as paper. This is the case with Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo's *Revista Voces*, which can be downloaded and circulated locally and abroad in a portable document format, otherwise known as a PDF. Undoubtedly, the circulation of these blogs on paper runs the risk of “outing” their allies and any reader who comes in physical contact with them, regardless of their political disposition toward bloggers and the state. At a symbolic level, that the only recourse for Cuban citizens is to read the alternative blogs on paper assures

³² The predicament of the alternative Cuban blogosphere eerily recalls the plight of the late Reinaldo Arenas, who although living on the island had to send his manuscripts abroad to be published, even amidst threats by the state against Arenas's livelihood. In one telling passage from his biography, *Antes que anochezca* (*Before Night Falls*), Arenas describes in detail his clandestine meetings with friends at the historic Hotel Nacional—a magisterial tourist space from which Cuban citizens were excluded. There, he would entrust his manuscripts to a Cuban friend who had been living in exile and who, later, would submit them for publication to an editorial in Europe (141). Arenas's literary career was engendered in the face of myriad physical, professional, and political displacements and alienation.

that they are kept under the constant gaze and threat of the law.

Yet, I would argue, alternative Cuban bloggers rely on the law's gaze to make possible their politics of lawlessness or "scenes of dissensus." If the materiality of paper signifies the law, alternative Cuban bloggers, I contend, countervail its authority through the visual rhetoric made possible by the screen. The Cuban essayist and blogger Emilio Ichikawa defines blogging as a hybrid, the "paper-screen," which underscores the significance of the screen as another iteration of "paper" (20). However, unlike printed-paper, whose material tactility allows it to be touched, circulated, and censored with greater immediacy, the technological interface of the screen displaces writing from the hands of censors. Furthermore, the screen allows bloggers to make themselves and their writing recognizable and visible in the absence of paper. The screen, then, becomes a way of countervailing the paper's "force of law." A clear example of this can be seen in the visual interface of many of the *Voces Cubanas* blogs, which exploit the signifying potential of the screen to conduct their "syntactical guerrilla" warfare. Both Yoani Sánchez and Claudia Cadelo, for example, posted their national identity cards on the frontispiece header of their blogs. Hence, they counteract the state's symbolic revocation of their juridical identity by reaffirming their status as political subjects. In another instance, Orlando Luis Pardo Lazo's telephone number appeared on his blog's sidebar in a taunting repetition, inviting anyone to call him. The publishing of Pardo Lazo's phone number re-territorializes him and ties him to a real place of residence—Havana, which neutralizes his symbolic de-territorialization as a "landless" subject. Alternative Cuban blogging, thus, is reconfigured as form of prison writing: their persistent dissent, for now, guarantees their confinement to the island.³³ However, like prison

³³ The metaphor of blogging as prison writing takes on real in the case of blogger Ángel Santiesteban, who since December 2012 has been imprisoned in Cuba. Santiesteban's unnamed

letters, these images serve as daily testimonies of their survival and recognition to the outside world. Like Portela's outlaw who seeks to flaunt her crime on the screen, these "undocumented" Cuban bloggers assert their demand to be recognized as an uncivil community and the rightful authors of their uncivil narratives.

Textual Asylums

In 2010, Sánchez diversified her authorial status when she released an anthologized edition of her blog in a printed book, under the title *Cuba libre: Vivir y escribir en La Habana*. The English-language edition followed a year later. The Spanish-language book was published by the Mexican press Debate, a subsidiary of the Barcelona-based Random House-Mondadori— itself a joint venture of Random House Books, which is based in New York City. These transnational, trans-territorial, and trans-linguistic significations of *Cuba libre* re-enact a virtuality that, once again, dislocates the book from Cuba's publishing structure. I interpret the print publication and translation of Sánchez's anthology as form of "textual asylum" in international literary space to the extent that it moves from its "undocumented" status in both Cuba's blogosphere and its publishing houses to the "symbolic camp" offered by international publishing houses.

Interestingly, after announcing the book's release on her blog, Sánchez does not offer an explanation behind her decision to publish in printed form, other than to express genuine delight in her achievement, having joined the ranks of "legitimate," published writers. Perhaps the rationale for book's publication can be explained in light of Derrida's tentativeness to describe

allies ensure that his blog, *Los hijos que nadie quiso*, is kept active through regular posts concerning his legal and physical status.

cyberwriting in triumphant terms. In a statement that recalls Agamben's "zone of exception," Derrida describes electronic writing as a "zone without rights" (17), a no-man's land that, superficially, appears emancipated from the institutional regimes of the state. However, he warns, the unprotected, deinstitutionalized framework of cyberwriting—the absence of a material trace—might, in fact, make cyberwriters more susceptible to legal erasure and, thus, human rights abuses—if they rely on the paperless medium as their sole source of documentation. Conceivably, the still indeterminate and unprotected status of cyberspace is what motivated Yoani Sánchez to contain her writing in the bounded, printed book. At least for now, the book will never be openly available in Cuba, given that in 2010 a DHL shipment of her books to the island was confiscated en masse by the customs agency at the José Martí International Airport in Havana ("*Cuba libre* Imprisoned in Cuba"). However, with the publication *Cuba libre*, we might ask if [reformed] institutions, with all their flaws, offer a modicum of protection that, for the time being, sheer statelessness and, with it, lawless cannot. At the same time, Sánchez's publication in book form sets her apart from other bloggers both economically and ideologically and it patently neutralizes her self-fashioning as a symbolically "undocumented" subject. In this regard, we see how membership, belonging, and recognition become subtended under new laws and new papers to come.

Symbolic Statelessness as Transition

By showing how the conditions of many Cuban citizens parallel that of stateless subjects, my reading of Ena Lucía Portela's novels and the alternative Cuban blogosphere challenges what we define as statelessness today. One could argue that, in exposing the juridical estrangement of Cuban citizens, I am in fact, enacting my own "illegal" transgression—a catachresis, of sorts.

Indeed, the texts I bring to bear suggest that Cuban citizens' struggle for membership, belonging, recognition in post-Soviet Cuba is, indeed, engendering new modes of political and discursive practices for which there is yet a measure of value. I conclude by suggesting that symbolic statelessness can be understood as a transitional or liminal space occupied by citizens who—while they are construed as outlaws, refugees, and undocumented—await and imagine the becoming of a future citizenship that is not defined by the principles of socialist citizenship as they are enforced today in Cuba. It is a citizenship defined by individuality, unspecificity, non-conformity, disagreement, and incivility. In the meantime, as they forge and await the political community to come, these symbolically stateless subjects ask for recognition of their status as strangers to the law.

Chapter 2: Dis-Orienting Citizenship: Allegories of (Mis-)Reading Puerto Rico's Status

Political philosophy and literary theory ascribe significant value to the role of reading in consolidating the idea of citizenship among subjects of a nation-state. Undoubtedly, reading becomes instrumental to the practice of citizenship owing to the simple fact that the laws, ethos, and conditions for membership of a political community have been chronicled in written documentation—for example, in constitutions, declarations, passports, and, as I explore in this chapter, literary narratives. Thus, it is through reading this documentation that citizens not only conceptualize the political processes of the state but, also, identify and relate to other citizens as their cohorts. Yet, I find that certain documentation may engender bewilderment instead of clarity such that it produces unintelligible narratives about the citizens it describes. To wit, Puerto Rico's legal status as a territory of the United States betrays what many consider to be senseless language. As a result, it becomes difficult to accurately read and interpret the documentation that identifies Puerto Ricans as lawful citizens. It is from this vantage point that I explore how texts by Puerto Rican writers Giannina Braschi, Eduardo Lalo, and Luis López Nieves allegorize the senselessness of Puerto Rico's juridical status through the very feeling of disorientation they beget in readers.

Since citizens can often be estranged from one another either by geography or cultural differences, reading can operate as a compass that brings citizens' mutual ties to the nation-state within view.³⁴ In this regard, cultural theorist Sara Ahmed illuminates how reading functions as an orientation or straightening device that galvanizes citizens and directs their collective attention toward the nation-state. In *Queer Phenomenology* Ahmed argues that the

³⁴ Notably, in *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson notes that the act of reading literary works enables citizens separated by geography to imagine themselves as members of a shared political community.

“political requirement” (15) for becoming a member of the nation-state entails citizens’ symbolically facing or turning toward it as a shared object of belonging. For Ahmed, the political act of facing the nation-state becomes possible through the quotidian practice of reading. “The very act of reading means that citizens are directing their attention toward a shared object, even if they have a different view upon that object, or even if that object brings different worlds to view (119),” she asserts. Ahmed suggests that while citizens may read the nation-state from varied locations, within or outside the state, the nation-state always remains fixed like a straight line or path. Moreover, she explains, the nation-state tends to be portrayed, metaphorically, as a straight line that citizens must follow in order to be represented and included in its political processes. It follows, then, that reading orientates citizens around a political community only to the extent that the texts they read provide them with a clear and sensible course along the nation’s path.

By contrast, I find, key works of Puerto Rican literature seem to have a dis-orienting effect on both Puerto Rican and non-Puerto Rican U.S. readership alike. That is to say, these texts leave readers in a state of confusion and unable to find their bearings in the narrative content. As I will show, the disorienting nature of Puerto Rican literature stems from the fact that Puerto Rico is not oriented, symbolically, along a straight line. Instead, Puerto Rico faces multiple and seemingly incommensurate directions juridically and geopolitically; owing to its complex political and legal history, Puerto Rico is oriented toward the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Because of this, I claim, facing Puerto Rico through the act of reading paradoxically generates “misreadings” of Puerto Rico and its literature. In this chapter, I draw a parallel between these misreadings and the ways in which Puerto Rico’s disorienting juridical status causes Puerto Ricans to be misconstrued as outsiders both on the island and the

U.S. mainland. To this end, I explore representative works of Puerto Rican writing that tackle how the island's juridical status as a territory of the United States engenders a crisis of misreading today: the novel *Yo-Yo Boing!* (1998) by Giannina Braschi, the novella *Seva* (1982) by Luis López Nieves, and, selected works from the Eduardo Lalo's narrative oeuvre.

In my estimation, depictions of Puerto Rico's juridical disorientation within contemporary Puerto Rican literature can be understood as the corollary of the cultural legacy described in Antonio Pedreira's foundational 1934 essay *Insularismo*, in which he defines the Puerto Rican subject as one held in a state of abeyance between two seemingly incommensurate geopolitical cultures: the Hispanic and the Anglo-American. In my view, Pedreira's notion of "insularity" portrays Puerto Rico not only as secluded or cut-off space—as the term obviously denotes—but, also, as a dis-orientated space. Broadly, Pedreira illustrates the meaning of insularity as a juridical disorientation by invoking the metaphor of the "frontier" or, alternatively, the "no man's land" (31). Known formally in legal theory as *terra nullius*, the "no man's land" defines a dispossessed space that has not been appropriated and named by the law. At the same times, as a space that, in theory, does not exist before the law, the no man's land lacks cartographic orientation on a map.³⁵ For Pedreira, then, Puerto Rico emerges as a no man's as land owing to its vicissitudes at the hands of multiple custodians: first, as colony of Spain and, then, annexed in 1898 as an unincorporated territory of the United States. Moreover, although

³⁵ According to legal historians, the concept of *terra nullius* justified the colonization and dispossession of lands based on the premise that they were uninhabited and unclaimed as property by a sovereign state. As Andrew Fitzmaurice explains, *terra nullius* emerged in the nineteenth century as an *a posteriori* "invention" that was attributed anachronistically to legal tradition in order to help European states shore up their weakening imperial power. Lands that were, in fact, inhabited and claimed by indigenous peoples could be declared *terra nullius*, thereby dehumanizing its inhabitants and presenting them as non-existent or "invisible" (non-) occupants.

the island exists on a map, its historical affinities and geographic position with respect to Latin America and the Caribbean makes it difficult to specify Puerto Rico's geopolitical coordinates.

Having surveyed Puerto Rico's disorienting political terrain, Pedreira then invokes three metaphors that, in my view, personify Puerto Ricans as disoriented subjects wrought by this insular space. First, he asserts, the "fusion" of Spanish colonizers and enslaved Black Africans had begotten racial "con-fusion" (27). Constructing a specious distinction between Europeans and Africans based on their propensity to make the law and transgress the law (28), respectively, he explains that Puerto Rico has failed at governing itself as a sovereign nation because it has internalized this racial-juridical conflict. Second, revisiting the history of Puerto Rico's annexation by the United States, he constructs an allegory of Puerto Rico's geopolitical disorientation vis-à-vis the figure of the castaway shipwrecked in an errant vessel (74). Caught in an irreconcilable frontier between home and elsewhere, Puerto Rico is adrift between incompatible identities: a *nation* marked by Spain's cultural legacy, on the one hand, and the Anglo-American construct of the *state* as the site of its juridical authority, on the other.³⁶ Lastly, he diagnoses Puerto Rico's linguistic disorientation when he laments Puerto Ricans' inability to properly master either English or Spanish. Their language reduced to a "nasal stammering," Puerto Ricans, according to Pedreira, lacked the capacity to engage in rational, public debate (78)—a precondition for full-fledged citizenship.

³⁶ Of critical importance in understanding the fissure of the nation and the state is the groundbreaking work of the late Michel-Rolph Trouillot, who reconsiders whether the widely-accepted "interface" of the hyphenated "nation-state" is tenable (23-26). Trouillot, in particular, builds on the work of social theorist Ernest Gellner, who suggests that national identity presupposes the recognition of a shared culture between members of the nation. Although Trouillot's study concerns Haiti, I find that his distinction between state and nation offers a compelling point of comparison with Puerto Rico, where insular, nation-building practices have not always been aligned with the directives of the U.S. State.

Notwithstanding this grim scenario, Pedreira earnestly believed that Puerto Rico had a chance to set itself on a right course by cultivating a reading culture. This becomes evident in his rather subversive exhortation that the “press fulfill its *orientational* mission” (85, emphasis mine).³⁷ Unlike many politicians of his time, Pedreira sidestepped the question of Puerto Rico’s juridical status, arguing, instead, that what Puerto Rico really needed was an “aesthetic” (85) revitalization of its national culture; developing a lettered citizenry would have political payoffs in the future. As scholar Luis Felipe Díaz notes, for Pedreira and other like-minded intellectuals of his generation, the greatest threat posed by the United States’ annexation of Puerto Rico was not a juridical takeover but, rather, a cultural occupation (255-256). Thus, the task of Puerto Rico’s Spanish language press—broadly defined as print and literary institutions—entailed cultivating literary works that defined Puerto Rico’s “sensibility,” and “spirit” (92)—that is to say, a national ethos—, by mining the island’s elite Spanish cultural legacy.³⁸ Indeed, Pedreira asserts, these literary guides would reorient Puerto Rican readers toward a “universal...Hispanic American (109)” identity—over and above the juridical and cultural dictates emanating from the United States. All things considered, if the nation can be represented metaphorically as straight orientation or line, in Pedreira’s vision Puerto Rico would be brought back into line, so to speak, through narratives that espoused a raceless, [Spanish] monolingual, and continental identity.

Nevertheless, the extent to which Pedreira’s three metaphors of racial, linguistic, and geopolitical confusion haunt Puerto Rican literature suggests that these writers have failed to

³⁷ In Spanish, “to orient” (*orientar*) has two connotations: on the one hand, it designates the act of aligning someone in a specific direction; on the other, it signifies the act of providing moral counsel or guidance.

³⁸ The notion of the *ethos* as an orientation appears similarly in Michel Foucault’s *Care of the Self*, wherein, by way of Plutarch, he regards the *ethos* as a “guiding” and “setting straight” of the soul (90-92).

fulfill the orientational task with which they were entrusted. Indeed, as examples of this failure, López Nieves, Braschi, and Lalo's texts seem to purposefully confuse readers as to the place Puerto Ricans occupy as legal subjects of the United States. At bottom, I argue, the disorienting character of Puerto Rican writing today could be attributed, in large part, to the cultural and economic transformations ensuing from the island's 1952 juridical reclassification as the *Estado Libre Asociado* (ELA)—or, the “Free Associated State” of the United States.

The establishment of the ELA, writ large, complicated the real and symbolic language of Puerto Rican political identity in three significant aspects. First, it re-defined Puerto Rico *vis-à-vis* terms that were incompatible within the language of political theory. Backed by the United Nations, the ELA purportedly brought closure to Puerto Rico's colonial status and eliminated any ambiguity as to Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. Yet, according to Puerto Rican legal scholar Pedro Malavet, the ELA rendered Puerto Rico as a juridical “misnomer (43)”; for, in actuality, there exists no commensurate model for the ELA in the international community of recognized nation-states. Second, this juridical misnomer became reified in everyday communicative practices, as Puerto Ricans emerged according to what social theorist Juan Flores calls “interlingual (202)” subjects. Owing to the mass transmigration of Puerto Ricans between the island and the U.S. mainland, beginning in the nineteen-fifties, Puerto Ricans moved, in a parallel manner, between Spanish and English in ways that confounded both Spanish speakers in the Hispanic world and English speakers in United States.³⁹ Thirdly, the ELA refashioned Puerto Rican subjectivity through the political language of other U.S. racial minorities—for example, as not white and, in many instances, as Black. In *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, César Ayala and Rafael Bernabe note that Puerto Ricans became increasingly

³⁹ Since 1993, Puerto Rico has two official languages: Spanish and English.

construed under U.S. racial classification systems (256) that, subsequently, were imported to the island. Yet, in a place that espoused a raceless national ideology, the minutiae of U.S. racial discourse appeared patently foreign to insular Puerto Ricans, who ascribed to a “raceless” identity.

Language, then, becomes a pervasive metaphor for the problem of misreading I identify in Braschi, Lalo, and López Nieves’ texts. Indeed, that many Puerto Rican intellectuals have made the practice of language the battleground over which they confront the future of the island’s status suggests that language can powerfully orient or disorient Puerto Ricans politically. Yet, while Puerto Rican intellectuals often restrict the notion of language to the practice of a “tongue” or a linguistic system (i.e. Spanish), the texts I study expand the meaning of language such that it becomes a metonym not only for the ELA but, also, the racial, linguistic, and geopolitical categories through which Puerto Ricans have been defined as U.S. citizens. Collectively, I argue, these texts allegorize the multifarious and conflictive political “languages” subtending Puerto Ricans’ juridical status through the very “misreadings” they generate among readers. To elucidate this overarching claim of my chapter, I draw on Sara Ahmed’s analysis of reading as an orientation in dialogue. Then, turning to Édouard Glissant’s work on language and belonging, I examine how it is the very language of these Puerto Rican texts which dis-oriens readers.

Previously, I explained that Ahmed theorizes reading as an orientation device that turns citizens toward the nation-state—and, by extension, their compatriots—insofar as the texts they read provide a clear direction along the nation-state’s path. Later in *Queer Phenomenology*, Ahmed helps us consider how reading could also disorient. In particular, she defines disorientation as a “failed orientation” between bodies that cannot extend their reach to one

another because they are mediated by objects that deviate from a straight line; instead, these objects “point somewhere else or they make what is ‘here’ become strange” (160). Through Ahmed’s definition of disorientation, I propose that texts—the very objects that mediate citizens’ relationship to the nation-state—can disorient readers in any of the following three ways: 1) they can direct readers’ attention away from the nation-state and toward an uncertain terrain; 2) alternatively, the nation-state toward which these texts point may appear distorted, foreign, or unrecognizable to readers; or 3) in the event that the reader is simultaneously situated in the nation-state represented in the text (the “here”), they may feel estranged from the place they previously identified as “home.”

These three aforementioned forms of disorientation I have mined from Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* encapsulate one key aspect of my analysis of the allegorical “misreadings” of Puerto Rico. This predicament is further complicated by the fact that Puerto Rico as a nation with its own cultural and political identity is, often, divided from the U.S. State from which it obtains juridical legitimacy. Thus, when attempting to comprehend Puerto Rico in these texts, readers are confronted with the experience of not knowing which way to turn to locate and understand Puerto Ricans. At the same time, I claim, it is also the texts’ very language that makes the experience of reading Puerto Rico through its literature disorienting. In this latter regard, I find that the Martiniquan philosopher Édouard Glissant brings clarity, as I will show below, to the ways in which language in the Caribbean enables speakers to assume multiple orientations.

To start with, in *Le discours antillais*, Glissant states that language typifies the “common practice of a particular collective” (401).⁴⁰ That is to say, “language” does not merely constitute

⁴⁰ Henceforth, all translations of original French texts are mine, unless otherwise noted.

a grammatical system but, rather, it encompasses a community's organizing ethos, history, and culture. Thus, Glissant pronounces, when a community practices a language it takes a position of "trust or mistrust" with respect to it. Stated differently, in developing these affective dispositions toward a language, such that it becomes emblematic of home ("trust") or strangeness ("mistrust"), a political community has developed, following Ahmed's line of thought, either an orientation or a dis-orientation toward it.⁴¹ At first glance, Glissant's proposition might seemingly resemble Pedreira's view of [literary] language as a guide for Puerto Rico. Yet, unlike Pedreira's appeal that Puerto Rico adopt a monolingual orientation (toward Spanish), Glissant espouses that Caribbean communities disclose "multi-relational" orientations.

In a short passage in *La cohée du Lamentin*, Glissant builds on his earlier ideas when he defines "multi-relation" (143) as a process whereby languages come in contact with one another without losing the political, cultural, and historic specificities of the communities from which they emerge. To be clear, there are two interconnected facets to Glissant's idea of multi-relation that are fundamental to my argument. First, as theory of translation, multi-relation presupposes that languages in translation render "all the places of the world visible." If we regard translation, in the traditional sense, as an orientational equation between two languages whereby one of them "disappears" in the process, Glissant, alternatively, suggests that languages in translation, in fact, leave traces of themselves and their communities in the text. Second, as a metaphor for belonging in a globalized world, "multi-relation" imagines a way for communities, like Puerto Rico, to exist and be recognized at the intersection of multiple "languages" or, put another way,

⁴¹ Indeed, Glissant's premise stemmed from a real concern with how the imposition of colonial languages (i.e. French or Spanish) in the Caribbean served to dispossess Caribbean subjects of their attachment or, in his words, "responsibility" to their [Caribbean] homeland by turning their attention toward the metropolitan state.

to face multiple political directions. In this manner, I contend, Glissant's "multi-relation" disavows the symbolically "straight" line that orients, on the one hand, citizens toward nation-state and, on the other, the nation with the State. Effectively, he proposes a way to dis-orient citizenship from its straight line through the multi-relational practice of language.

With this in mind, I draw primarily on Ahmed and Glissant—along with other key theorists of language and political membership—to construct my analysis of three allegorical misreadings of the Puerto Rican subject's juridical status. It seems only fitting that I begin my discussion by tackling what, according to Carlos Pabón, has become a fixation in Puerto Rican literature: the question of the "status." To this end, I bring into dialogue two key texts—Eduardo Lalo's short essay "El Estado Libre Asociado y la glossolalia" ("The Free Associated State and Glossolalia") and Giannina Braschi's experimental novel *Yo-Yo Boing!*—, both of which use figurative speech to represent the ELA as an illegible and untranslatable language in the United States. I argue that these texts—Braschi's, in particular—tangibly illustrate the senselessness of the ELA by drawing an explicit parallel between the mystifying experience of reading and interpreting what they say and the experience of interpreting the meaning of the ELA. My reading of *Yo-Yo Boing!* raises questions about the Puerto Rican intellectual's illegibility that I expand upon in my analysis of Eduardo Lalo's *La inutilidad*, in the third critical section of this chapter. There, I explore how the novel's Puerto Rican intellectual protagonist appropriates French, an emblem of emancipation and citizenship, to recuperate his juridical and literary legitimacy as a Puerto Rican subject. Moreover, I interrogate the novel's implication that the consumptive drive of the ELA mystifies Puerto Ricans such that they devalue the practice of reading and, as a consequence, are estranged from Puerto Rican writers. To complicate Lalo's assertion, I consider how the intellectual's transformation *vis-à-vis* an "outside" language causes

him to be misrecognized on the island. I conclude this chapter by looking at a text that, unlike *La inutilidad* suggests, managed to attract a frenzied Puerto Rican reading public, if only for the fact that it cast doubt over the rhetoric of Puerto Rican racelessness. I argue that the text in question, Luis López Nieves' controvertible novella *Seva*, challenges the imposition of the classificatory language of U.S. citizenship on the island by representing Blackness, metaphorically, as a foreign language that, ultimately, cannot be properly translated on the island. Thus, I explore how *Seva*'s publication literally dis-oriented Puerto Rican readers by forcing them to (mis-)read Blackness, simultaneously, as a symbol of Puerto Rican emancipation from U.S. rule and as that which stands outside the language of the law.

(Mis-)Reading the ELA

Explaining the precise definition of Puerto Rico's status as a "Free Associated State" or "ELA" can pose as much a challenge for Puerto Ricans as it can for non-Puerto Ricans who attempt to understand its meaning. And, odds are that not many U.S. citizens on the mainland could cogently articulate Puerto Rico's juridical status *vis-à-vis* the United States.⁴² Because of these circumstances, legal scholar Pedro Malavet notes that critical race theorists often avail themselves of narrative and storytelling to convey the experience of juridical minorities when the language of the law either erases them or cannot represent them in plain terms (21). It is one thing, then, to talk about Puerto Rico's status and it is a wholly different thing to represent how an audience that is unfamiliar with Puerto Rico's juridical history reacts to explanations of the

⁴² For example, new stories asserting that Puerto Rico's status is "to most Americans...a matter of little import (Botsford)" not only bespeak that Puerto Ricans are perceived as immigrants or foreigners (and not as "Americans") but, also, the lack of basic civic education in the United States concerning the island's juridical relationship to the mainland government.

ELA. As I will demonstrate, Puerto Rican writing is not necessarily concerned with elucidating the meaning of the ELA as it is with illustrating its meaninglessness both for Puerto Ricans and non-Puerto Rican U.S. citizens. In what follows, I consider two narrative works that rehearse this challenging task—first, Lalo’s essay “El Estado Libre Asociado y la glossolalia” and, then, as a point of contrast, Braschi’s novel *Yo-Yo Boing!*

As evidenced by the title of his essay, Lalo draws a tendentious analogy between the phraseology of the ELA and the fictive language of glossolalia to explain why Puerto Rico’s juridical status often fails to make sense. The catalyst for his essay is a conversation Lalo recalls between two Catholic priests at his former parochial school: one asks the other, who has traveled and lived extensively outside the island, how he explains Puerto Rico’s status to foreigners. We are never privy to the priest’s answer—indeed, the indefinite deferment of the priest’s reply becomes a simulacrum of the answer itself. Yet, for Lalo, the conversation’s religious backdrop—the very setting in which glossolalia typically takes place—parallels the insular setting in which Puerto Ricans adhere to the elusive language of the ELA through a “blind faith” in the legitimacy of the ELA’s meaning and its capacity to ennoble Puerto Ricans as legitimate political subjects in the eyes of the international community.

An occurrence in which religious worshipers burst into senseless utterances, glossolalia—informally known as “speaking in tongues”—masquerades as a language. Glossolalia is a disorienting practice: not only does it lack any commensurate meaning within existing language systems but, also, speakers of glossolalia rarely understand one another because they don’t speak “language.” Even so, it is expected that religious practitioners will have faith—a belief in something that cannot be logically proven—that these Babelian utterances, in

fact, possess a tangible meaning, which, with the aid of a gifted “interpreter,” can be translated into a “real” spoken language.

Understanding this definition of glossolalia elucidates Lalo’s declaration that, “Puerto Ricans are victims of glossolalia: we speak a language that no one understand.” Lalo construes the ELA as a “language” that not even Puerto Ricans share, since they each possess their own erroneous understanding of what the ELA does or does not mean. In particular, Lalo asserts that the ELA resembles glossolalia in three ways. First, the three terms that make up the ELA—“State,” “Free” (or sovereign), and “Associated”—when taken together, constitute a malapropism and an aporia within the language of contemporary political thought. Breaking down the phraseology of the ELA, Lalo casts doubt on whether a people can be simultaneously “sovereign” and [unwillingly] “associated” to a metropolitan protectorate, considering the fact that the ELA was instituted as a “compact” or an agreement between the United States and Puerto Rico; never mind that Puerto Ricans lacked a full understanding of the ELA to give their formal consent to the status—by vote or other means.⁴³ Furthermore, Puerto Rico is, technically, not a “state” of the republic in the sense that it does not have the constitutional association and protections guaranteed to the fifty United States. These aporias lead Lalo to draw a second parallel with glossolalia in his indictment that “Truthfully, the ELA exists...only for those who have faith.” For Lalo, Puerto Ricans’ complacency and uncritical acceptance of the ELA requires a cognitive leap of “faith,” so to speak: to believe that its language has logical meaning and to believe the “interpreters” who speak on behalf of the ELA. Hence, his third assertion that, much like the practitioners of glossolalia, Puerto Ricans have been falsely swayed by erudite

⁴³ Ayala and Bernabé describe that the illusion of Puerto Ricans’ popular consent to the ELA was key in demonstrating Puerto Rico’s “sovereignty” as a non-colonial state (172).

“habladores” (speakers)—that is to say, Puerto Rican politicians—who claim to bring clarity to its meaning.

We could further read Lalo’s analogy in “The Free Associated State and glossolalia” in light of the distinction Michel de Certeau draws between glossolalia and political discourse. Defining glossolalia as a type of “vocal delinquency” (33), in which glossolalic expression disavows the logical structure of communicative speech, de Certeau argues that, by contrast, “Political, scholarly, and religious discourses...all progressively close themselves off to that which emerges where voice ruptures or interrupts a series of propositions, to that which is born where the other is present” (30). Unlike the errant “speech” of glossolalia, it seems that political discourse—as in the case of the language of citizenship—not only regulates those who are allowed to speak but, also, requires that those who speak as legitimate political subjects can be rendered universally intelligible in the international political community. Yet, de Certeau argues, although glossolalia is, technically, untranslatable, it accrues legitimacy to itself as a language with “hidden” meaning when the scholarly discourse on glossolalia mobilizes hermeneutic principles to force a meaning out of the senseless tongues. Overall, more than positing a clear distinction between glossolalia and political discourse, de Certeau’s analysis succeeds in highlighting the dubious performativity of what we deem “interpretation.”

In point of fact, Lalo declares that “linguistic misuse” is fundamental to contemporary political discourse—thereby making the phraseology of Puerto Rico’s status the rule and not the exception. The fact that the ELA always requires constant re-interpretation and redefinition gives it the pretense of legitimacy, notwithstanding the sense of bewilderment these interpretations provoke among interlocutors. Notably, Puerto Rico’s redefinition has been the issue of three U.S. congressional plebiscites convened in 1993, 1998, and 2002 to deliberate on the future of the

island's status. Indeed, I contend, Lalo's essay can also be read not as an interpretation of the ELA but, rather, as a performance of these interpretive acts.

Now, whereas Lalo's essay mobilizes the metaphor of glossolalia to parodically rehearse these failed interpretations of the ELA, Giannina Braschi's *Yo-Yo Boing!*, I argue, takes this gesture a step further insofar as it interrogates how readers might react to the interpretation. To be clear, the language of *Yo-Yo Boing!* does not, by definition, constitute glossolalia. Yet, as a whole, its disjointed content parallels the unintelligible structure of glossolalic discourse to the uninitiated reader looking at Puerto Rico from the outside or, in this context, from the U.S. mainland.

The second installment in a trilogy of novels that emblemize the three juridical options with which Puerto Ricans have contended—sovereign nation, the ELA, or U.S. statehood—*Yo-Yo Boing!*, as an allegory of the current status, points to the ways in which the meaning of the ELA as a juridical category has no bearing outside of [insular] Puerto Rico.⁴⁴ Set in New York, *Yo-Yo Boing!* reconsiders the widely-held view that Puerto Ricans, whether born on the U.S. mainland or the island, consider “home” to be equally situated in both places. Instead, the narrator observes, “I woke up from one reality into another and became a stranger to myself and to others” (64). Here, I suggest, the implicit reference point for the narrator's (self-)estrangement is Puerto Rico's re-classification under the ELA. While, in the grand scheme of things, the ELA did little to change Puerto Rico's status in the international political community, *Yo-Yo Boing!* suggests that it did transform the vocabulary through which Puerto Ricans defined themselves.

⁴⁴ In the trilogy, *Yo-Yo Boing!* follows the Spanish-language *Imperio de los sueños* and precedes *United States of Banana*, written almost entirely in English.

We glean this precisely in the novel's portrayal of the Puerto Rican subject, on the one hand, through the mixing of genres (poetry, prose, and drama) and, on the other, through the Babelian chorus of nameless voices who code-switch between "Spanglish," Spanish, and English.⁴⁵ Unfolding across three seemingly disconnected sections, these voices ultimately fail to coalesce into a cogent narrative plot. Just when the voices appear to lead us somewhere, they quickly shift and merge into yet another fragmented story, and so forth. In this regard, scholars such as Doris Sommer and Alexandra Vega-Marino have keenly observed that Braschi's novel uses language to typify both Puerto Rico's indeterminate status as an "Either/And" and the lived reality of Puerto Ricans navigating their multi-relational identities on the U.S. mainland. In my reading of *Yo-Yo Boing!*, however, I expand these analyses to consider how the novel self-reflexively interrogates readers' response to its language in the same way that those on the U.S. mainland might respond to interpretations of the ELA.

When confronted with the novel's polyphony of multilingual voices and indeterminate context, we find ourselves grasping, albeit unsuccessfully, for clarity of meaning. Notwithstanding the seemingly futile and elusive task of decoding *Yo-Yo Boing!*, one of the voices declares, paradoxically, "There is always understanding in misunderstanding" (90). Elsewhere in the novel, another voice recapitulates the same sentiment, although worded differently, "My confusion is my statement of clarity" (163). The insistence that, underlying the novel's disorienting and abstruse language, there exists clarity of meaning fulfills—following de Certeau—the hermeneutic demand that the text possess an interpretation to be deemed legitimate as a work of literature, a point to which I will later return. For the present purposes, I claim, the

⁴⁵ Broadly, code-switching is a linguistic practice whereby multilingual speakers mix and alternate words, syntax, and grammar from different languages in everyday speech.

text's avowal that it is intelligible—that it actually means something—even when this is not readily discernible to us as readers, is a way of presenting *Yo-Yo-Boing!* as an allegory of the language of the ELA.

As I previously noted, narratives can bring clarity to hidden meaning when, as in the case of *Yo-Yo Boing!*, the language of the law fails. In the *Ethics of Reading*, J. Hillis Miller proposes a way to understand how narrative itself can exemplify or stand in place of the law, when the language of the law cannot convey its intended meaning. “Narrative, like analogy, is inserted in the blank space where the presumed purely conceptual language of philosophy fails or is missing,” he explains (24). Reading the use of analogy in Kant’s philosophy, Miller explains that when language reaches a dead end, such that it alone cannot account for the law he is attempting to describe, the philosopher must then resort to “analogies and figures of speech” through storytelling to make the law plainly understood. We glean a similar strategy in Lalo’s deployment of analogy to frame the ELA as a form of glossolalia. For Miller, however, a person—whether a real or fictional character—can also stand in place of the law, when the law fails to make sense on its own terms:

If we can never confront the law as such, we *can* confront the person who is an example of the law...Insofar as narrative takes place within the space of a perpetual deferral or direct confrontation with the law, it can be said that narrative is the narration of the impossibility of narrative in the sense of a coherent, logical, perspicuous story (24-25, emphasis in the original).

This substitution of the law for a [human] representative of the law by way of narrative might also be read as an allegory of the reader’s re-orientation toward narrative, which Miller describes as a “confrontation”. Extrapolating Miller’s analysis to *Yo-Yo Boing!*, then, what would a person

who represents the law of the ELA be or sound like? Perhaps Miller provides us a clue in the second part of the aforementioned quote, when he suggests that confronting a representative of the law, vis-à-vis narrative, would, in fact, reveal that it is impossible to make sense of philosophical and legal discourse. It seems to me that confronting the representative of the law does not bring us closer to decoding the law's meaning but, rather, continuously postpones our desire for clarity of meaning. Put another way, reading the ELA would be like reading *Yo-Yo Boing!*: unreadable or misread (according to the hermeneutic prescription that texts possess a linear, coherent interpretation).

Both Lalo's "El Estado Libre Asociado y la glossolalia" and *Yo-Yo Boing!* deploy this strategy of postponement by invoking a discussion of the ELA and, yet, failing to make its meaning legible to readers. Nevertheless, whereas Lalo's essay postpones the answer to the priest's question ("how do you explain the ELA?"), *Yo-Yo Boing!*, I argue, revisits the question, in slightly different terms, by forcing Puerto Rican voices in the text to clarify how the ELA defines them as U.S. citizens:

Do you no longer want to be Puerto Rican? American is what you want to become.

I don't have to become what I am.

You're American? Listen to her. She says she's American.

Why would I deny that I was born *here*.

But *where*? Stop playing games (195, emphasis mine).

Presented entirely in Spanish, the dialogue represents one of many instances throughout the novel in which its Puerto Rican speakers are mistaken for foreigners not only by other U.S. citizens but, also, by other presumed "foreigners"—in this case, Spanish-speaking, Latino readers. Although the answer to the question is plainly documented in the written law, the

interrogation not only suggests that the language of the ELA is at odds with the discourse of U.S. citizenship. Moreover, the interrogation of the Puerto Rican's political identity gives way to a dialogue about where the "America" of which Puerto Rico constitutes a part is actually located—especially since "America" for Latino Americans encompasses the entire continent. The speaker's ambiguous "here" blurs the distinction between the "here" that is insular Puerto Rico and the "here" of New York, described elsewhere in the text as the "capital of Puerto Rico" (145). Yet, the questioner's skepticism discloses, to echo Sara Ahmed, a failed orientation not only between the Puerto Rican island and the U.S. mainland but, also, between other Latino readers and the Puerto Rican voices in the novel. This failed orientation casts doubt on the "hereness" of Puerto Ricans' citizenship before the Spanish-speaking Latino reader, who perceives the Puerto Rican as an impostor (for claiming U.S. citizenship), a traitor (for legitimizing themselves through U.S. discourse and not Latin American and Caribbean), and, lastly a dilettante (for writing an incomprehensible text that dispenses with "good," uncontaminated Spanish).

Because of this, *Yo-Yo Boing!* reveals anxieties about the political consequences of being misread as fraud. At the tail end of a critical section that interrogates the novel's choice of narrative structure, one of its nameless voices disputes the legitimacy of Puerto Rican Spanish and Spanglish. Furthermore, the voice offers Puerto Ricans' language as cause for calling into question their right to political membership in a nation-state: "I can understand Spanish but I can't understand Puertorricans...Scum of the earth. Destiérrenlos de la república [Exile them from the republic]" (164).⁴⁶ The passage rehearses many of the widely held and pejorative

⁴⁶ Given the subject of my analysis, I have chosen not to translate any passage that employs Spanglish or code-switching in the original.

appraisals—expressed by Spanish-speaking Latinos—of Puerto Rican Spanish as a “broken” or “deficient” language due to the contamination and borrowing of English. Hence, we might also regard the speaker’s criticism of Puerto Rican Spanish as an espousal of monolingual discourse—that is to say, either Spanish or English, but never both. At the same time, *Yo-Yo Boing!* makes an implicit connection between the practice of monolingualism and the capacity for citizens to coexist and relate to one another as members of a shared political community. That is, in putting the unintelligibility of Puerto Rican language as grounds for Puerto Ricans’ “banishment”—or, more literally, their “deterritorialization”—from the [American] “republic,” the speaker reveals how citizenship is legitimized within a monolingual context.

The fact that most nation-states, with notable exceptions, generally make use of one official or *de facto* national language in matters pertaining to government affairs—for example, in voting and naturalization ceremonies—certainly speaks to the ways in which monolingualism is immanent to the rhetoric and practice of citizenship. Yet, the speaker’s valuation of monolingualism in *Yo-Yo Boing!* discloses the ways in which citizenship, as a juridical language, functions as a universally recognizable or translatable contract. Jacques Derrida hints at this in his essay, “Des tours de Babel,” wherein he explores the political implications of multiple contacts between languages. “It is generally supposed that in order to be valid or to institute anything all, every contract must take place in a single language of appeal (for example, in the case of diplomatic or commercial treaties), to a translatability that is already given and without remainder: in this case the multiplicity of tongues must be absolutely mastered” (208), he says. As Derrida observes and later critiques, a “proper” translation between two languages, as it has traditionally been understood, would eliminate the trace of “foreignness” or “strangeness” from the original language so that the final text expresses a universal meaning. Take, for example, the

1969 Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, which mandates that legal treaties between two states must use language that, when translated, can render an “equally authoritative” (341) or congruent interpretation for all parties. In the absence of a universally authoritative translatability, the legitimacy of the contract becomes disputable.

Through Derrida’s idea of the translational nature of politics we can draw a parallel between, on the one hand, the ongoing debates concerning the legitimacy of the terms of the ELA as a “compact” between island and U.S. mainland and, on the other, the novel’s concerns about its (un-)readability. Midway through the novel, a voice reprimands what could only be Braschi for her choice of language: “You must realize you’re limiting your audience by writing in both languages” (162). If, as Lalo has argued, the ELA, like glossolalia, only holds sway within an insular community of [Puerto Rican] “believers,” then, to the reader this contract loses any pretense to meaning, precisely because of the multiplicity of languages at work in the text. I want to hesitate on this idea of *Yo-Yo Boing!* as a tenuous contract between readers in light of key passages that explore the relationship between its linguistic multiplicity and the text’s literary legitimacy.

The political implications of Puerto Rico’s marginalization from the republic of citizens owing to its “unreadability” become the stepping stone for a meditation on the “banishment” of *Yo-Yo Boing!*—and, broadly, Puerto Rican literature—from the literary canon. In the concluding pages of the novel, a voice—one of many that point back to Braschi herself—reflects, “Because Puerto Rico is not a country that has power in the world, I cannot establish myself as a great poet” (194). Here, Puerto Rico’s powerlessness stems from its inability to legitimize itself *vis-à-vis* the universal, monolingual language of the law. And, yet, the “law” to which I am here referring does not necessarily entail the [juridical] law but, rather, the law that regulates the

legitimacy of literary works—broadly speaking, the canon. As I have explored elsewhere (“Literatura Nullius”), Puerto Rican writing suggests that these two “laws” are interconnected insofar as they both adhere to the logic of monolingual discourse—that is, to a principle of “translatability”—and, in doing so, they exclude both individuals and texts that exhibit multi-relational geopolitical affiliations.

With regard to this latter point, I find that Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* foregrounds the relationship between the “translatability” of a writer’s juridical status and the circulation of their text, as a translated work, in the literary space of the canon. In particular, she accounts for the international acclaim that previously unknown and marginalized writers received once their texts began to circulate globally, by proffering the concept of “world republic of letters.” As an international literary space where texts circulate “freed from political and national dependencies” (xii) and “independent of political boundaries” (4), Casanova argues that writers’ entry into this space is made possible primarily by translation. Later on, however, she undermines her claim that the world republic of letters constitutes a postnational entity when, by analogy, she compares the international political community’s recognition of state sovereignty to the world republic of letters’ legitimation of authors and texts produced within a particular national context (36). Arguably, Casanova’s vision of the world republic of letters—one that certainly mimics the canon’s current division of texts by monolingual kinship—fails to account for texts that bear the imprint of multiple languages—and, thus, are rendered technically untranslatable—and whose authors write from multi-relational places such as Puerto Rico, where nationality and citizenship patently collide in the language of the ELA.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Although, in the practice of international law, nationality and citizenship may often be used interchangeably, in theory they do not denote the same meaning. On the one hand, nationality constitutes, according to political theorists Dawn Oliver and Derek (Oliver and Heater), a

Still, writing years before Casanova, Braschi already envisions a way for *Yo-Yo Boing!*—and, broadly, Puerto Rican literature—to legitimize itself before readers while disavowing the canon’s demand that authors possess a “literary nationality,” so to speak. Against the threat of alienating readers for choosing to write in two languages, Braschi’s self-referential voice posits defiantly:

Desde la torre de Babel las lenguas han sido siempre una forma de divorciarnos del resto del mundo...I’m not reducing my audience. On the contrary, I’m going to have a bigger audience with the common markets—in Europe—in America. And besides, all languages are dialects that are made to break new grounds. I feel like Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio, and I even feel like Garcilaso forging a new language (163).

Now, at first glance, we can interpret Braschi’s market-based appeal as an espousal of the world literary market. But, as Casanova shows, even in the world republic of letters texts can never shake off their affiliation with a national point of origin. It seems to me, then, that Braschi does not necessarily aspire to re-orient Puerto Rico toward the world—for Puerto Rico is, for all intents and purposes, a paradigm of worldliness—as much as she seeks to re-orient or, perhaps, dis-orient readers’ approach to her text. Invoking the narrative of Babel, a Biblical origin myth in which humans attempted to create a universal language only to be scattered and confounded in multiple directions across the earth, Braschi challenges readers to consider the possibility of multi-relational reading. If we recall Ahmed’s phenomenological notion of reading as a political

“cultural concept” (23) that identifies not only one’s ties to a country of birth but, also, the language, traditions, and customs that inhere within an individual’s identity. Citizenship, on the other hand, is not always imputed to an individual at birth but, instead, it is a conditional legal status that can be bestowed to an individual (and revoked) by a nation-state to whom they have sworn allegiance and that differs their country of origin.

orientation, facing the nation as citizens entails reading it along a straight line, to the abandonment of all errant paths. Hence, the difficulty we encounter in reading *Yo-Yo Boing!* might also be due to the fact that we tend to approach a text with the understanding that, through its language, it discloses a particular juridical orientation. Moreover, we want our “here” and the novel’s “there” to be clear and unambiguous. Alternatively, I argue, *Yo-Yo Boing!* forces readers to assume a symbolically oblique position, such that we no longer read from our monolingual, political orientation. In doing so, it is we, as readers, who abandon our straightness—our literary citizenship as readers, such that we see ourselves as part of a common world.

Shipwrecked Reading

As I have shown in my reading of *Yo-Yo Boing!*, Braschi’s representation of Puerto Rico through a multi-relational framework not only disavows the potency of the nation-state’s monolingual discourse but, importantly, it challenges readers on the U.S. mainland to dis-orient themselves in ways that defamiliarize their understanding of “home,” as members of the U.S. republic of citizens. Moreover, *Yo-Yo Boing!* re-orientes readers’ vision of Puerto Rico toward the world such that the island’s juridical and literary identities come to constitute an avant-garde. In this regard, Braschi’s worldly re-orientation of Puerto Rico anticipates the writing of Eduardo Lalo, who has suggested that “Puerto Rican culture lived globalization before the concept existed and, thus, when it was impossible to conceive it” (*Los países* 52). In construing Puerto Rico as *the* paradigm of worldliness, Lalo goes on to consider whether Puerto Rican writers might locate a more intelligible vocabulary for Puerto Rican political identity both outside of Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland. In what follows, I shift my analysis of misreading from the U.S. mainland back to the island, as I interrogate the implications for insular Puerto Rican readers when the

Puerto Rican intellectual embarks on a search for an alternative and “worldly” language of Puerto Rican juridical, as depicted in Lalo’s first novel *La inutilidad*.

Broadly, *La inutilidad* revisits an ongoing preoccupation both in Lalo’s narrative oeuvre and, more recently, among the island’s intellectuals concerning the dwindling status of the Puerto Rican intellectual as a public figure of influence and, with it, the devaluation of reading as a legitimate political and cultural practice. In my view, this thematic can be understood in light of the novel’s setting in the nineteen-eighties and nineties and, importantly, its faint but critical gestures to the annexationist party of then-governor Carlos Romero Barceló, the *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP). Coinciding with the PNP’s political upheavals were actions taken by the island’s dissenting political parties to legislate Puerto Rico’s official language (as Spanish, English, or both)—whether as a means of protecting its [Spanish] national legacy and [Latin American] continental identities, on the one hand, or to cultivate a more definitive legal kinship with the U.S. mainland government, on the other. When, in 1993, the PNP instituted Spanish *and* English as Puerto Rico’s official languages—reversing the previous pro-ELA or “status quo” government’s (*Partido Popular Democrático*) officialization of Spanish as the *only* language—it represented a stronger cultural re-alignment of Puerto Rico with the United States. Arguably, English was perceived metonymically, not only as a linguistic practice but, also, as a conduit of Anglo-American cultural practices, which Puerto Rican intellectuals such as Pedreira had historically opposed. So, while the status had always been a source of contention, when the purity of Puerto Rico’s monolingual, national language (Spanish) had also been muddled, many Puerto Rican intellectuals perceived it as an abrogation of their authority as, according to Pabón,

the [unofficial] “legislators” (151) of Puerto Rican national identity.⁴⁸ In the face of their diminished status as legislators, Puerto Rican social theorist Arturo Torrecilla explains, many Puerto Rican intellectuals demonstrate an overwhelming anxiety as they struggle to find their *raison d’être* among a public who, I will show, misreads them as strangers at home.

It is against this historical backdrop that I situate my reading of the role of French in *La inutilidad* as a real and symbolic language that the Puerto Rican intellectual appropriates to re-orient himself and his writing, albeit unsuccessfully. This unfolds in the novel’s first half, where we glean the journey of its protagonist—a young, nameless writer—who flees his alienation in San Juan to live in Paris. Initially, Paris’ cosmopolitanism culture presents for him a viable means to redeem Puerto Rico’s waywardness and, subsequently, to nurture a worldly juridical and literary vocabulary that, on the island, have been muddled in the contentions over the language of its status. Later, however, Paris—its inhabitants, its culture, and its language—appear elusive to him, forcing him to return to Puerto Rico as a self-described failure and a stranger to his own people. Indeed, though a substantive part of the novel’s plot unfolds in Paris, its critical gaze clearly remains centered on Puerto Rico. The protagonist’s inability to re-orient his juridical and authorial identities through French becomes a counterpoint to his estrangement from his Puerto Rican compatriots who, following his return to San Juan, misread him as a stranger.

Notwithstanding his failure to having developed an intimate rapport with both French language and Parisian life, the protagonist returns to Puerto Rico bearing the discernible imprint of its lexicon. Arriving on the island after a nine-year absence, he states, “San Juan welcomed

⁴⁸ As Carmen Centeno notes, the struggle to align Puerto Rican national identity with the Spanish language had, for many Puerto Rican intellectuals, “constituted the culmination of their struggles” (32).

me as it would a foreigner...On the inside, I was looking with different eyes" (120-21). Here, I (Siskind) argue, the novel situates the object of misrecognition from two vantage points: one from the perspective of the ordinary Puerto Rican subject and the other from the gaze of the Puerto Rican intellectual. Owing to the subtle inflections in his accent and his bodily modulations, Puerto Ricans fail to recognize him as one of their own. At the same time, an unveiling has taken place that allows him to see Puerto Rico from a patently critical and foreign gaze. The overwhelmingly chaotic atmosphere of the San Juan reads like gibberish to him. Moreover, he finds Puerto Ricans have been mystified by the seductive and assimilationist rhetoric of U.S. statehood buttressed by the incumbent PNP. And yet, it becomes clear to the protagonist that he, and not the island, has changed—and that French has, undoubtedly, changed him. Hence, I suggest, Puerto Ricans' misapprehension of the intellectual serves as that basis for interrogating whether a Puerto Rican literary and political identity formed abroad can truly restore to him the authority and legitimacy needed to be understood at home and, importantly, attract a local readership.

That said, in my analysis of *La inutilidad*, I argue that the novel's bipartite framework attribute the misreading of the Puerto Rican intellectual on the island, in a manner similar to *Yo-Boing!*, to the confrontation of two incommensurate languages—in this instance, French and Spanish. Recalling my earlier claim that language in Puerto Rican literature functions as a metonym for both juridical and literary status, I read the construal of French in *La inutilidad* in two interconnected ways. On the one hand, I will show, French in the novel emblemizes the foundational language in Western modernity—to wit, the language of political legitimacy, progress, and citizenship. On the other, given the relationship between juridical and literary legitimacy, French in *La inutilidad* also represents the official language of, according to Pascale

Casanova, the capital of the world republic of letters—that is, Paris (32)—, through literary works enter and move through via translation. Thus, in turning toward Paris and the French language, the novel's Puerto Rican protagonist, I argue, aims to legitimize himself both as a political subject and as an intellectual. By contrast, recalling Pedreira's critique of Puerto Ricans' "underdeveloped" Spanish, the novel, I will show, implicitly positions Spanish as a marker of juridical-indeterminacy, political indecision, and complacency.

To elucidate my reading of French in *La inutilidad*, I turn once again to Glissant's writing on language. Writing on the cultural hegemony of French, Glissant explains that the language has been credited with articulating modern concepts such as mankind, the individual and the citizen—emblemized in the Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen—, accruing to itself the dubious legacy of a "humanizing function" (*Poetics* 113-114). Broadly, in historicizing the political significance of French, Glissant helps us understand why it became a language toward which both colonial and postcolonial subjects of all ranks—but, especially, intellectuals—oriented themselves from a position of admiration and from the perspective of fledgling citizens seeking to be elevated from "incivility" into an enlightened community of citizens.

Indeed, in a 2008 interview Lalo rehearses this viewpoint, when he explains Paris's appeal as the setting for *La inutilidad*. "For a Latin American, Paris was the door to enter modernity," he states. "There was no means of getting there in one's language... There [Paris] it was possible to believe that modern culture was of utmost relevance" (Marsan). Yet Lalo's invocation of Paris recapitulates a long-standing relationship cultivated by intellectuals in the

first half of the twentieth-century.⁴⁹ In the wake of decolonization, as Latin American countries sought to hone their distinctive postcolonial, national identities, Paris offered intellectuals from these regions the vocabulary with which to articulate the ethos of their evolving nation-states. Indeed, Pascale Casanova corroborates, in Paris writers hailing from Latin American “discovered their national identity” (32). Paradoxically, the capital of the world republic of letters proclaimed a “universal” language even as it required writers to “declare” their specific national origin as a mode of literary and aesthetic distinction.

Still, Lalo’s valuation of Paris should be qualified, since it is not a matter of Latin American (and Caribbean) literature lacking the aesthetic innovation to be considered on par with the cosmopolitan ideals of Paris’s literary culture. Rather, his statement can be understood in light of Guillermina De Ferrari’s assertion that the rich intellectual tradition of Latin America and the Caribbean—which, precedes and foregrounds (by several decades) the more recent scholarly turn toward world literary studies—has been a critical “blind spot” (25) of the Western literary field (academics, editors, and publishing houses, etc.). Operating through a blind spot that is both deliberate and a circumstance of pre-existing socioeconomic asymmetries, these appraisers of literary legitimacy do not look to the region’s literature a purveyor of groundbreaking ideas but, rather, as repository of tropes. Moreover, I contend, Lalo’s controvertible statement bespeaks the quandary of writing in a “dominant” language that, nevertheless, has been subalternized in the West. Indeed, Walter Mignolo explains, Spanish lacks vehicular capital owing to the perception that it was incapable of fomenting “philosophical and scientific” innovation—ostensibly, the principles upon which Western modernity is founded

⁴⁹ In *Cosmopolitan Desires*, Mariano Siskind considers how Latin American writers negotiate their position in the world literary marketplace—their desire to be recognized as legitimate authors beyond national boundaries.

(220). In this light, Lalo construes French as a political prosthesis—something that can be amended to both his juridical status as a U.S. citizen and his tenuous literary status in the world republic of letters as a Puerto Rican writer—that allows Latin American and Caribbean intellectuals to remediate their countries’ perceived stagnation and “translate” themselves into an elusive “modernity.”

Arguably, given that Puerto Rico is not recognized as a legitimate and autonomous political community, Paris’ redemptive mystique holds sway over the Puerto Rican intellectual. “*Away from the country [Puerto Rico], I had always defended my belonging to this one. I believed that we could be something: a history, a culture with which we could sustain ourselves, with which we could validate our existence,*” declares the novel’s protagonist retrospectively in San Juan (125-126). I find that the protagonist’s defense of his Puertoricanness evinces a tacitly political distinction: he belongs to Puerto Rico (and *not* to the United States). He misguidedly believes that Paris will equip him with the armature (“history” and “culture”) to envision a self-legitimizing narrative that countervails the island’s juridical invisibility within the United State’s foundational narrative. Ironically, his self-definition through French posits a dubious distinction between Paris (and by extension Europe), on the one hand, and U.S neocolonial power, on the other. And yet, situating Puerto Rico at the intersection of divergent colonial histories—a move that recalls Latin American writers’ strategic use of Paris to frame their ideological emancipation from Spain—, enables him to disavow the United States’ dominance over Puerto Rico.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ Although she does not address the Caribbean, Marcy Schwarz offers an indispensable account of Latin American writers’ sustained engagement with Paris in the twentieth century. In particular, she explores how, paradoxically, Paris offered a paradigm of political and cultural modernity that was deployed as a “battleground” against [Spanish] European domination,

An example of the protagonist's intersectional self-fashioning can be gleaned from his postgraduate, Orientalist research of a French ethnographic novel about a warrior named Klok—the last surviving member of a vanquished Amazonian tribe. Rescued and brought to France by an anthropologist, Klok teaches his language to students at the *Normale*. His language, the text tells us, constituted a “missing link” in genealogy of the Tupí-Guaraní (23). An intermediary of the now-extinct Brazilian Tupí and their Guaraní kin, Klok embodies an unbroken, untainted kinship. In France, however, Klok leads a solitary existence, as he is unable to communicate with others and his language has been archived in the bibliographic memory of a sole anthropologist. Yet, an auspicious friendship with a young student in the neighboring flat brings an end to his confinement. In the wake of the Klok's passing, the student—who has learned the warrior's customs and language—returns to the Amazon to bury the native's ashes and, subsequently, disappears. The narrative concludes with unverifiable rumors of a white *cacique*—the student assimilated into a native community as its chief.

The placement of Klok's story in *La inutilidad* has an allegorical function that discloses the Puerto Rican protagonist's desire for authentic community, culture, and an uninterrupted history, all of which Klok's language supposedly embodies. Indeed, suggests James Clifford, ethnographic texts allegorically disclose universal truths about human behavior. He argues that one such allegory is represented in the trope of the “vanishing primitive” (112-113). emblemized by an ethnographer who acts as the guardian and inscriber of a traditional and “authentic” past (the native) that the forces of modernity have steadily destroyed. At the same time, Clifford states, knowledge of the inevitability of loss accrues salvific authority to ethnographic writing—entrusted with preserving this irretrievable, “pure” past.

Interestingly, the protagonist's affinity for Klok brings to mind the revalorization of Taíno identity in the Puerto Rican Diaspora in the nineteen-eighties and nineties. Juan Flores has argued that the postcolonial rehabilitation of a romanticized Taíno identity makes manifest a "culture of national resistance" against the incursion of European values (66). Effectively, the reinvestment of Taíno symbols and vocabulary in the Puerto Rican Diaspora disavows the nation's foundational histories of indigenous extinction, colonization, and failed emancipation in favor of a triumphant, oppositional narrative. We glean something similar in the protagonist's assertion that his study of indigenous cultures in Paris serves as "armas de resistencia [weapons of resistance]" (11) to anchor his Puerto Rican identity. And yet, the irony of Klok's passing belies such restitutionary efforts. Considering that the [French] ethnographic text effectively erases Klok (behind the white, French cacique) and silences his language in an archive, "history" and "culture" are only available through the French text's rehabilitation of Klok. His language is never translated and vitalized into something that has functional value in modern society—that is, into something that is spoken. Rather, it simply reflects back on the "civilizing" power of French. Indeed, the protagonist's attempt to re-orient his identity *vis-à-vis* Klok rehearses the Orientalist gaze that, as Edward Said demonstrates in his classic text, through which the West distinguishes itself as a civilizing authority. In order to construe himself as a "modern" subject who possesses a legitimate juridical and authorial identity, the protagonist must, paradoxically, become estranged or dis-oriented from himself and assume the gaze of the Orientalist.

Nevertheless, his interactions with Puerto Ricans on the island betray the incommensurability of the identity honed in France with what he really is at home. The novel illustrates this pointedly in a letter the protagonist writes to his friend Pétrement—a French Orientalist and translator, to whom he describes his efforts to acclimate to his new life in San

Juan. He explains that, when writing to Pétrement, he must “translate his life...by altering it so that he could understand it and accept it without getting infuriated” (132). Here, “translation” is clearly a euphemism for dissimulation or, simply put, lying. The protagonist “translates” that in Puerto Rico he must hold mundane jobs to sustain his life as a writer and that the glamorous life of an intellectual is a privilege. Effectively, this passage represents an undoing of the fictive identity the protagonist cultivated in France.

These circumstances inform the broader axiological and existential questions posed in the novel’s concluding pages. Recounting his research of indigenous cultures to associates in Puerto Rico, he bemoans their dismissive tone: “Soon I re-discovered that it became common to express an atrocious disdain in the form of ‘what’s the use?’ or ‘who cares?’ towards the things that interested me...To speak with someone about the things I did for a living in France meant to fall into the unintelligible” (123). The protagonist’s declaration betrays an anxiety that is characteristic of Lalo’s work: that Puerto Ricans neither read nor can they find value in literary culture; that they cannot comprehend the life of an intellectual. Arguably, there is an element of truth to this, given the preponderance of mass media and material consumption on the island. This aside, I find that the interpretive disjuncture between the protagonist and his Puerto Rican compatriots cannot be reduced to mere intellectual docility or disinterest on the part of the latter. Rather, I suggest, underlying their supposed disinterest is a valid critique of a text fashioned and translated by the world republic of letters—embodied by the protagonist, which conforms to an image of Puertoricanness crafted abroad and, thus, does not necessarily reflect the community at home.

La inutilidad contrasts the unintelligibility of the protagonist’s Frenchified “text” with that of the island’s political discourse at the time of his return. Referencing the tenure of the

annexationist governor, Carlos Romero Barceló, the protagonist declares that, “Romero appeared to speak in a dialect that was his own, barely comprehensible, plagued by surprising pauses, interjections, entire blocks of sentences that constituted a delirium, which, in spite of my perplexity, almost everyone listened without amazement, with the resignation and habit of one who watches the rain fall” (122). The rhetoric of U.S. statehood, personified in the figure of Romero Barceló, is camouflaged under a garbled, frenzied message designed to stupefy Puerto Ricans into political complacency. And yet, the protagonist’s bemusement at his compatriots’ uncritical acceptance of Romero Barceló discloses the confrontation of two untranslatable discourses—statehood *versus* political autonomy. This encounter explains their indifference and bafflement toward his intellectual interests and his political identity. More than anything, however, the passage reveals the futility or the uselessness—recalling the novel’s title—of his efforts. In *La inutilidad*, no other event typifies this failure than the shipwreck.

Early in the novel, the protagonist suggests that Puerto Rican identity is “more or less shipwrecked” (11). The protagonist’s invocation of the shipwreck places Lalo’s writing, once again, in dialogue with Pedreira’s *Insularismo*, which, as I have previously shown, describes Puerto Rico as an “errant ship” (75) trapped between the North American and the Hispanic cultures. Pedreira likened the Puerto Rican subject to a castaway, describing him as a “half-man,” in reference to his cultural and political debasement (79). And yet, the armature of *Insularismo* follows that of the Spanish American colonial narrative, which often stages the shipwreck of its European protagonist on an island in the New World as a plot device to bring about his psychological transformation. Effectively, the shipwreck emblemizes the predicament of being caught in a no man’s land, a space where, by definition, everything is untranslatable. The shipwreck reduces the European castaway to an almost bestial native—for

his clothes, his language, and the instruments he brought with him from Europe are rendered useless in the foreign habitat of the island; effectively, the castaway is left with his ravaged body as the only instrument with which he can survive and translate [himself into] the New World.⁵¹

Undoubtedly, *La inutilidad* can be read as the story of a dis-oriented castaway who attempts to circumvent the reality of his condition, only to return to the very shipwreck that constitutes contemporary Puerto Rico. At the same time, the [translational] failure emblemized by the shipwreck forebodes not the end but, rather, the starting point for envisioning the emancipation of the Puerto Rican intellectual from his estrangement and invisibility. *La inutilidad* spurns the possibility of a conciliatory, happy ending as we watch the protagonist ruminate on the “labor, the pain, and the failure of generations” (182) of Puerto Rican writers. With its seemingly hopeless ending, Lalo’s novel—like much of his work—begs the question: why write in the face of dwindling readers? For Lalo, the novel suggests, writing from and in the face of failure is, indeed, affirmation of a Puerto Rican existence.

(Mis-)Translating Blackness

Overall, it seems to me that inability to properly “read” the Puerto Rican intellectual in *La inutilidad* stems from Puerto Ricans’ disavowal of texts that mobilize symbolically “foreign” languages to represent Puerto Rican political identity. Indeed, for many insular Puerto Ricans, understanding the extent to which race shapes the island’s political fabric can be akin to reading a foreign language. Until recently, an overwhelming majority of Puerto Ricans would have argued that racialized discourse has been alien to Puerto Rican political identity—a view that

⁵¹ Álgvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca’s *Naufragios* offers an emblematic representation of the castaway’s transformation and bodily degradation. I credit Margarita Zamora for offering this invaluable interpretation of the Spanish American *naufragio* or shipwreck.

contrasts with that of their fellow citizens on the U.S. mainland, where political membership has been stratified along racial lines. Thus, attempts to broach the question of race in Puerto Rico have, for the most part, elicited vague and dismissive responses among the island's intellectual elite. Consider, for example, Tomás Blanco's 1942 essay, *El prejuicio racial en Puerto Rico*, which offers an emblematic portrayal of how Puerto Ricans have dealt with the question of Blackness. A contemporary of Pedreira, Blanco rejects the notion that Puerto Ricans would identify themselves specifically as "black" (51) subjects—especially given the island's racial admixture; subsequently, he deflects accusations concerning the existence of anti-black prejudice in Puerto Rico. According to Blanco, both racism and the idea of blackness are non-issues and ideologically foreign "imports" brought to the island from the U.S. mainland" (60). In neutralizing the discursive power of blackness in Puerto Rico, Blanco's essay has two notable effects. On the one hand, I contend, it construes Puerto Ricans who would self-identify as black as symbolic foreigners. On the other, by aligning blackness with the United States, Blanco makes the case for Puerto Rico's political distinction from its northern protectorate. Today, Puerto Rican writing continues to rehearse this view of blackness in order to challenge Puerto Rico's subordinate juridical status within the U.S. narrative of citizenship.

Traces of these ideas persist in Luis López Nieves' controvertible novella *Seva*, which, I argue, pushes blackness to the margins of the text as a symbol of foreignness and lawlessness to construct a counternarrative of Puerto Rican resistance against the island's U.S. occupation. Although the official, historical record shows that the U.S. military had, in a single attempt, invaded and gained possession of Puerto Rico in 1898, *Seva* recounts a prior, undocumented invasion in the eponymous town of "Seva." Unbeknownst to Puerto Rican readers, *Seva*'s residents valiantly fended off, to their death, the incursion of the U.S. military, which was forced

to return two months later to complete its mission in the town of Guánica. Yet, the authenticity of the novella's account hinges on the testimony of *Seva*'s sole survivor and key eyewitness—a Black fugitive named Ignacio Martínez. Nearly 83 years after the massacre and still fearing for his capture, Martínez lives as self-described “maroon” (47) in Puerto Rico's remote hillside.

The depiction of Blackness as a symbol of estrangement and lawlessness in *Seva* is fundamental to the novel's broader strategy of defamiliarizing Puerto Rican readers' knowledge of the island's neocolonial history. For, as scholars have shown, the story narrated in *Seva* is tantamount to the story of its reception by Puerto Rican readers. With this in mind, I first explore how *Seva*'s initial reception in Puerto Rico was primarily informed by the prevailing view that Blackness was foreign element on the island. Then, homing in on select passages from the text itself, I explore how *Seva* disorients readers by presenting Blackness, metaphorically, as a language that doesn't properly translate within Puerto Rico's sociopolitical context.

Now, while those of us who read *Seva* today, in its book form, do so with the awareness that it is work of fiction, at the time of its initial publication in 1983 Puerto Rican readers interpreted it as a factual, historical account. The story first appeared as a rigorous piece of investigative journalism in Puerto Rico's nationalist journal *Claridad*, lacking any disclaimer as to its fictive nature and undergirded by knowing complicity of the journal's director, Luis Fernando Coss. Then, *Seva* provoked mass confusion, for it proved that Puerto Rico had not willingly acquiesced to U.S. domination, as the dominant narrative suggests. After decades of being typecast as “passive” and “docile” subjects, Puerto Ricans felt vindicated by *Seva*'s portrayal of their valiant, albeit unsuccessful opposition to the heavily fortified U.S. military.⁵²

⁵² The trope of Puerto Rican docility is emblemized in two classic texts: the aforementioned *Insularismo* and the essay “El puertorriqueño dócil” by the dramaturge and novelist René Marqués.

As it would turn out, readers were misguided in their interpretation the novella, for it was merely a fabrication. Undoubtedly, what has mostly perplexed *Seva*'s commentators was its capacity to dupe the very people who should have been well-acquainted with the island's history: Puerto Rico's intellectuals.

Scholars have sought to make sense of *Seva*'s reception through an affective lens. Notably, Carlos Pabón argues that *Seva* enacts an oneiric fantasy in which Puerto Rico's repressed past morally haunts the psyche of the nation, forcing it to reimagine itself, *a posteriori*, as victorious (244-255). Similarly, Frances Negrón-Muntaner recapitulates this ethical indictment in her assessment that the text responds to Puerto Ricans' internalized shame and trauma over the failure of the island's political elite to defend the nation against the invasion. In turn, she asserts, *Seva* attempts to "refashion" and "redeem" that shame into a triumphant narrative (36). Without question, Pabón and Negrón-Muntaner's incisive readings of *Seva* corroborate the author's own pronouncement that he wanted *Seva* to serve as an alternative history—a "new way of looking at ourselves"—of "how it should have been, how it could have been" (Ramos 73). Luis López Nieves' declaration patently discloses that *Seva* was borne from a desire to orient Puerto Rican readers toward a triumphant nationalist ethos, and away from the narrative of Puerto Rican docility.

Still, I find that lending credibility to this "new way" of envisioning Puerto Rico—and, making sense of the cognitive leap involved in accepting *Seva*—equally required a new reorientation of Blackness within the narrative of Puerto Rican nationhood. Perhaps it is no coincidence that *Seva* appears in the wake of critical works such as José Luis González's *El país de cuatro pisos*, an essay that re-centers Black identity as the foundational sediment of contemporary Puerto Rican culture. A striking counterpoint to González's pivoting of Black

Puerto Rican subjectivity, the depiction of the Black fugitive Ignacio Martínez as Puerto Rico's hero—not only for his resisting of U.S. occupation but, as I will show, for disavowing U.S. citizenship—revises the prevailing view that black Puerto Ricans were, in fact, supportive of the island's annexation by the United States. It is widely held, González explains, that Puerto Rico's back laboring class “favorably received the North American invasion” (34) because it crippled the hegemony of Puerto Rico's pro-independence, white ruling class. As beneficiaries of Spanish colonial rule, these same white Puerto Rican nationalist elites cast aside the black sector's demands to be granted the same political and economic privileges as their white *criollo* compatriots (35-36).⁵³ Likewise, in the more recent *Silencing Race*, a groundbreaking monograph that explores the eschewal of Blackness within Puerto Rican nationalist discourse, historian Ileana Rodríguez-Silva explains that prioritizing black Puerto Rican subjectivity over an all-inclusive, “raceless” Puerto Rican national identity was, for the most part, perceived as “anti-national” (3). Fearing that talk of “race” (a synecdoche for blackness) would portray Puerto Rico as volatile (like their Haitian neighbors) and, thus, thwart their struggle for independence, Puerto Rico's nationalist [white] elite falsely promoted the absence of racial conflict on the island. We can conclude from both González and Rodríguez-Silva's analyses that, in linking racial recognition to their political emancipation, black Puerto Ricans may have been perceived not only as disloyal to Puerto Rico's pro-independence, nationalist cause but, also, as “outsiders” or “strangers” because they embraced the privileges of U.S. citizenship.

In light of this historical precedent, I contend that *Seva* confounded Puerto Rican intellectuals not only because of its duplicitous publication as historical fact but, also, because it

⁵³ In the Spanish American context, the term “criollo” referred to free whites, of Iberian peninsular descent, born on the American continent.

brought Puerto Ricans face-to-face with a blackness they had long relegated to a metaphorically foreign space. Thus, it would seem quite logical that *Seva* would cast the black fugitive Martínez in the dual role of both hero and a lawless subject. For, in constructing what Pabón calls a “neo-nationalist” (244-245) counternarrative that rehearses the ideological position of Puerto Rico’s intellectual forefathers, López Nieves is careful to uphold the island’s ethos of racelessness inasmuch as he reduces blackness to an instrument of resistance against the United States. In this regard, the treatment of Blackness in *Seva* accords with bell hooks’ reading of the black body in “Eating the Other” as a symbol the dominant culture readily appropriates, commodifies, and represents to reconstruct and assert a “masculine” and “transgressive” norm (24-25). In the process, the dominant culture divests black subjects of any ontological value; reduced to mere props, they are estranged from the very cultural landscape that appropriates them.

To balance black Puerto Rican subject’s dual roles—as hero and as lawless—, *Seva* exploits the ways in which racial discourse in Puerto Rico engenders multifarious meanings. As the novella’s prefatory text informs readers, the main body of *Seva* represents “an exact and faithful translation” (21) of “lost documents” sent to López Nieves by the novella’s fictive chronicler, Victor Cabañas. These translated documents comprise the journal of the real life U.S. General Nelson Miles. In the text’s first and only indication as to the fugitive’s race, Miles describes Seva’s fallen as “niggers” (35). Interestingly, Cabañas seems to undermine his own translational mission when leaves the racial slur parenthesized and translates “niggers” into the Spanish text as “negritos” (literally, “little blacks”). A purportedly “exact and faithful translation”—that is, one that adheres to the traditional principle of *adequatio* or total fidelity to the original in the translated text—would have dispensed altogether with the parenthetical citation of the original English word. Arguably, the trace of the original would go undetected; for

a skillful translator would be able to render the Spanish equivalent in the Puerto Rican lexicon. To the contrary, Cabañas parenthesis discloses that, while the Spanish translation is technically correct, the distinctive contexts in which Puerto Ricans and North Americans interpret Blackness are certainly not equivalent. As scholar Randall Kennedy explains, “Nigger,” a derivative of the Spanish “Negro” (86), takes on a vastly different connotation within the U.S., where the English slur was mobilized to dehumanize both enslaved and free Blacks. By contrast, the term “negrito”—or even “negro”—betrays what Isar Goudreau calls the “fugitive semantics” of race in Puerto Rico, where the polyvalent meaning of racial labels can function simultaneously as means of including and excluding individuals (65). According to Goudreau, the underlying meaning(s) of “negrito” vary both by context and the user’s intent. I suspect that *Seva*’s Puerto Rican readers would have recognized and clung to the distinction between the English “niggers” and the Spanish “negritos” for two significant reasons: on the one hand, by leaving the English slur as is, the text enables readers to create distance between Puerto Rico and the U.S. as a “foreign” aggressor and not its sovereign; on the other hand, in thinking of racial discourse a form of fugitivity—as that which exists symbolically outside the law—, readers could relegate *Seva*’s black Puerto Rican subject to the very metaphorical no man’s land described by Pedreira.⁵⁴

Ironically, while the translated U.S. documents render the heroic Martínez as a black subject, the Puerto Rican Spanish legal text construes him as stateless, without any mention of his race. After recounting the elaborate scheme of *Seva*’s destruction, the novel concludes with two startling documents: the first, an affidavit in which Martínez corroborates, under oath, the

⁵⁴ Not to mention the fact it would absolve Puerto Ricans from accusations of anti-black racism against black Puerto Ricans.

validity of his testimony; then, a sardonic “portrait” that renders Martínez as a blank, empty space. These fictive Spanish legal documents, authored in Puerto Rico 83 years after the Seva massacre, serve as a counterpoint to General Miles’ English journal. By making them part of the Seva’s story, López Nieves seemingly reverses what, in chapter 1, I demonstrated to be “undocumentation” or “paperlessness” of the symbolically stateless subject. For fugitives can also generate an excess of paperwork for state—in the form of bounties, warrants, and wanted signs—designed to procure their capture. In the affidavit declaring himself a “fugitive of the law,” Martínez reveals his ignorance that Puerto Rico has since become a territory of the United States, which would, technically, make him a legal citizen. Yet, recalling that he absconded precisely at the moment of Puerto Rico’s juridical transition from Spain to the United States in 1898, his declaration begs clarification: from which law is he a fugitive? The existing law of the Free Associated State (ELA) established under the United States? The now expired Spanish colonial law under threat at the time of the U.S. invasion of the island in 1898? Thus, it is not absence of paper that positions Martínez as a stateless subject but, rather, the failure to define and clarify the origin of the law from which he has fled. The second document—a picture left blank under the pretext that Martínez fears for his safety—, recalls a wanted sign. Yet, as Negrón-Muntaner argues, the picture renders blackness “unpresentable” within Puerto Rico (46). Put another way, I contend, in arresting the visual representation of black Puerto Rican subjectivity, the picture mitigates the semantic fugitivity of blackness in the English (U.S.) journal. Together, these “legal” two documents in Spanish—when contrasted with the English text’s labeling of Seva’s residents as “niggers”—not only limit Puerto Rican readers’ identification of Black Puerto Rican subjectivity but, also, circumvent the juridical authority of U.S. law.

Overall, I claim, this strategy of legal containment and erasure corresponds with the decimation of all archeological and historical traces that would authenticate Seva's existence to readers. Returning to U.S. General Miles' journal, readers will note that the stated objective of his mission is to "erase every trace...and mention of Seva" (31). To support this objective, Miles orders the construction of a nearby town, "baptized with the name Ceiba" (35), that would divert islanders' attention away from the massacre. This latter point would further explain why readers received the novella both with unflinching credulity and bewilderment, since Ceiba is, in fact, the real name of an existing municipality located on the island's far eastern shore. Thus, the novella would have readers believe that Miles, lacking fluency in Spanish, miscopied or mistranslated the authentic name Ceiba as "Seva" in his written records. Alternatively, Emily Apter has read mistranslation as a deliberate tactic deployed by rival states to further their political interests. Interpreting mistranslation as a "paranoid misreading" (15), Apter discloses how translated documents during times of war come to be regarded as untrustworthy because they spawn multifarious and, at times, incorrect translations; this, in turn, leads to a diplomatic frenzy, of sorts, as individuals on either side of the political (and translational) equation obtain disparate translations of a text. She goes on to explain, "Mistranslation in the art of diplomacy thus comes to signal an intractable non-translatability between nations" (21). Undoubtedly, as a revisionist war narrative, *Seva* intentionally depicts the mistranslation of "Ceiba" to underscore the political and cultural non-translatability of Puerto Rico and the United States. At the same time, I claim, mistranslation parallels the translator Cabaña's failure to arrive at an "exact" translation of blackness in Puerto Rico.

In mistranslating Ceiba, however, *Seva* implicitly reorients readers to Puerto Rico's indigenous past. It would not be lost on readers that Ceiba is the indigenous Taíno name of a

tree. From the Puerto Rican reader's perspective, in substituting Seva's original Black residents by, paradoxically, fabricating traces of a new community through an indigenous name, *Seva* pointedly makes a genealogical claim about Puerto Rican national identity. If we read the trace as a straight line, Seva's tracelessness, I argue, represents not only the absence of a trace, in the literal sense, but, also, the veering or disorientation of Blackness from the nation's genealogy. As Ahmed explains, "Genealogy itself could be understood as a straightening device, which creates the illusion of descent as a line" (*QP* 122). Effectively, the rhetoric of "genealogy" sustains itself through the claim that one can legitimately trace an infinite line of forebears. While the rhetoric of genealogy has been fundamental to the construction of Puerto Rican national identity, it has also been a source of contentious debate. According to Juan Gelpí, the Puerto Rican literary canon deploys the metaphor of the *la gran familia puertorriqueña* ("the great Puerto Rican family") family as the cornerstone of Puerto Rican national identity (5). And, of course, the great Puerto Rican family is usually depicted as raceless (or, in reality, white), patriarchal, and law-abiding. Nevertheless, Gelpí overlooks the figure of the native Taíno, who, beginning in the nineteen-eighties was rehabilitated by sectors of Puerto Rico's intelligentsia to occupy the foundational strata of the Puerto Rican nation. Indeed, the Puerto Rican social theorist Juan Flores undermines the re-centering of Blackness in *El país de cuatro pisos*—and, effectively, revises the foundational narrative of Caribbean history—, arguing, instead, that it is the indigenous Taíno—and not the enslaved African—who constitutes the base of Puerto Rico's cultural genealogy.

In turn, *Seva* implicitly re-orientes readers toward Puerto Rico's indigenous genealogy by disinheriting the traces of Black Puerto Rican subjectivity from the text. Accordingly, I argue, inasmuch the text renders fugitive Martínez stateless, it also represents him as the misbegotten

child whose revelation threatens the posterity of Puerto Rico's incorruptible family.

Undoubtedly, bastard children assume the role of the "black sheep," in Ahmed's terms, who get "easily read as a stranger, or a foreigner" (127). Still, I contend, the wayward black sheep can still play a useful role in the family: because they have nothing to lose—not even family itself—the black sheep can also be mobilized and exploited by the family as a profitable symbol of change and emancipation—that is, at least, before they are ushered away to its margins.

Dis-orienting Reading and Puerto Rico's Indecision

Broadly, in framing the problem of (mis-)reading in Puerto Rico, a key aspect of my chapter serves as a critical intervention in recent debates concerning the discursive authority of the Puerto Rican intellectual today. Interestingly, in recent years, Puerto Rico has witnessed a literary resurgence—evidenced by the proliferation of new publishing houses on the island and the emergence of new authors—, an occurrence that belies the commonplace assertion that "Puerto Ricans don't read." Judging by the texts I have analyzed, it appears that Puerto Ricans *do* read and that Puerto Rican literature *is*, in fact, read—perhaps, not with the desired results. For Puerto Ricans, as for much of the world, the practices of reading and writing have, historically, been associated with a political and cultural emancipation. Thus, a reading subject is the precursor to a sovereign subject—that is, a citizen. However, in Puerto Rico, the orientation of this subject is divided between the U.S. State and the Puerto Rican nation. Ultimately, I contend, complaints over the absence of readership or the misreading of Puerto Rican literature, at bottom, disclose Puerto Rican intellectuals' frustration over their inability to orient readers toward the Puerto Rican nation, as a sovereign state. It suggests that if more Puerto Ricans read (the way Puerto Rican intellectuals expected to read), Puerto Rico's status could, perhaps, be

decided once and for all. Alternatively, in construing Puerto Rico and its literature as disorienting, Braschi, Lalo, and López Nieves texts—whether intentionally or by circumstance—indeinitely defer the arrival of the decision. Indeed, Puerto Rico’s “indecision” disavows universal categories—such as citizenship, for example—that render subjects legible, oriented, and, “translatable” within a world political (and literary) system. In thematizing Puerto Rico’s indecision, these texts they bring what was once distorted from the rhetoric of citizenship into readers’ line of sight such that Puerto Rico becomes a paradigm for belonging and reading today.

Chapter 3: Inhuman Citizenships: Concealing Love in Haitian-Dominican Speculative Fiction

The story of Man's concealment marks a critical distinction between the inhuman and the human in contemporary biopolitical philosophy. In one notable instance, Giorgio Agamben exemplifies the force of this distinction vis-à-vis his concept of *nuda vita* (literally, naked life), a metaphor for Man's divestment from humanity through the process of denaturalization. By contrast, Derrida elucidates in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, the Judeo-Christian myth of humans' evolution [from a state of nature] into clothed beings informs the representation of the human *qua* Man in the Western European discourse of modernity. Unlike the ontological nakedness of the inhuman, the human is metaphorically robed in language, consciousness, and reason, among other properties attributed to Man by key Enlightenment thinkers (373). Thusly, citizenship—the anti-thesis of naked life—can be considered humans' most complete vesture; for, arguably, it is by their membership in political community that humans make manifest their capacity to speak, think, and feel.

That said, I would like to unmoor this conceptual symbiosis of the human being and citizenship by considering two speculative novels I analyze in this chapter: René Philoctète's 1989 novel *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* [The People of Mixed Lands] and Pedro Cabiya's 2011 novel *Malas hierbas* [Wicked Weeds].⁵⁵ Although set in distinctive temporal contexts, both novels wrestle with the paradox of what I call an "inhuman citizenship"—a category of existence in which citizens of the Dominican Republic fail to become actualized as human beings even as they remain concealed under the metaphoric garment of membership in the nation-state. In

⁵⁵ In its English translation, the title of Philoctète's novel is rendered as *Massacre River*, a reference both to the informal name of the Dajabón River, which forms the divinding line between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, to the Rafael Trujillo's 1937 massacre of Haitians, who fled persecution across the river.

Philoctète's novel, the shadow of a bestial bird eclipses Dominican citizens' humanity; in Cabiya's, a Haitian-descended man finds himself resurrected as zombie who, nevertheless, manages to camouflage his decomposing body under the adornments of a neoliberal citizenship.

This imbrication of the inhuman and the human rehearses a defining thematic of speculative fiction, a broad category of narratives in which elements that contravene established laws of nature are made tenable according to the epistemology of the texts' otherworld. Dealing with subjects once presumed inconceivable within natural science—such as the hybridization of man and beast, or the postmortem rehabilitation of the undead—the speculative, as the genre's foremost theorist Darko Suvin argues, is intended to inspire a sense of “cognitive estrangement” (viii), which prompts readers to naturalize or render familiar the otherworld populated with “humanized non-humans” (viii).⁵⁶ Suvin's argument is persuasive in its appraisal of speculative fiction as a genre that awakens readers from their estrangement to the historical and material realities of the world they inhabit. But, in the case Philoctète and Cabiya's novels, the “humanized non-humans” appear as juridically naturalized subjects in the Haitian and Dominican and postcolonial contexts, and not as mere metaphoric counterpoints to the Western reader.

By contrast, scholars such as Sheryl Vint encourage a more straightforward reading of speculative texts in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries—when what “once belonged entirely to the fictional realm” (161) now plays out in real life, as political governance expands its control over the management, production, and manipulation of biological life in ways that exceed the capabilities of the merely biological. Thusly, in speculative fiction Vint locates “a

⁵⁶ To be clear, Suvin's theories center around science fiction, which represents a subset of the speculative genre. Still, scholars on speculative fiction were loath to differentiate science fiction from the speculative, writ large.

privileged position to think through the anxieties and contradictions” of what Foucault identified as “biopolitics”—the capacity of governance to make life and sanction death through the disciplining of the human body (*HS vol. I* 241). Yet, post-Foucauldian criticism reminds us not to lose sight of the centrality of race in the biopolitics of speculative fiction; for in disciplining bodies to be marked as living or not-so-living, Western political governance historically has apportioned a system of racial difference. Indeed, the speculative genre both replicates and interrogates the tendency in Western biopolitics to situate racialized others as bioevolutionarily inferior forms of the [white] human.⁵⁷ With this in mind, I turn to *Philoctète* and *Cabiya*’s speculative texts to explain how an inhuman citizenship arises as a result of a biopolitical governance that mandates the racialized concealment of the Dominican body politic.

To a certain degree, *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* and *Malas hierbas* rehearse many of the representational motifs of Western speculative fiction in their casting of racialized subjects as a tragically and irredeemably inhuman species displaced from a human minority. However, the novels also introduce a twist that reflects a notable departure from the genre’s typical alignment of the racialized, not-white subjects with the strangely inhuman: as it turns out, it is not Dominican citizens’ distance from whiteness that renders them inhuman but, in fact, the inhumation of their racialized bodies under the vestments of citizenship. As I argue in this chapter, this racial concealment entails not only a disciplining of the body but, in particular, a

⁵⁷ Historically, the genre’s otherworldly context often has as its reference point societies radically transformed by colonialism: for example, the New World Caribbean. Explaining the genre’s origins, John Rieder notes that early forms of Western speculative fiction reinvent the colonial encounter between white Europeans and New World “racial others,” by displacing it allegorically in an alien elsewhere (30). But the real political import of this otherworldly displacement makes sense in light of the genre’s emergence concomitant to key global sociopolitical transformations—for example, the rise of the nation-state and, with it, the conceptual symbiosis of Man and Citizen.

disciplining of the mind (consciousness) and affect (the ability to register a loving touch), whereby Dominican citizens are convinced to disbelieve and disguise the material reality of their bodies. My reading of the novels interprets this biopolitics of concealment vis-à-vis the Dominican state's radical disavowal of any racial-juridical proximity to Haiti and blackness, writ large. In the face of this disavowal, the novels' farcical depictions of Dominicans citizens' racial-juridical concealment bespeak a troubling irony, given that the Dominican Republic is comprised of a predominantly mixed-race and black body politic. Forcing them to cognitively and affectively dissociate from the material reality of their racialized bodies, the Dominican state metaphorically conceals its citizenry under an anti-Haitian and, by extension, anti-black veil that renders them insentient and incapable of experiencing consciousness, which, per dominant Western scientific discourses, constitutes the distinguishing marker of one's humanity.

Inhuming Dominican-Haitian Consciousness

In my estimation, one cannot overlook Philoctète and Cabiya's indebtedness to Caribbean thought and literature, which conceptualize a critical vocabulary through which to interpret the political and cultural roles of concealing practices in Caribbean society.⁵⁸ Notably, in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*), Frantz Fanon anticipates the inhuman implications of black concealment. Through a case study of his native Martinique, Fanon concludes that his compatriots—and, broadly, other Afro-Caribbean subjects situated in a similar historical juncture—have been estranged “in human relationships” (BS 230), even though metropolitan

⁵⁸ In *Masking and Power*, Gerard Aching examines how masking practices in Caribbean literature and popular culture articulate forms of self-knowledge both in dialogue with and resistant to the sociopolitical concealment of enslaved blacks under colonialism.

France had granted them the “droit de cité [rights of citizenship]” (*PN* 30).⁵⁹ In making this claim, he subverts the premise, as espoused in Western political philosophy, that citizenship authenticates a person’s status as a human being; for these black Antilleans were citizens in name but estranged from the category of citizen in everyday practice. This estrangement, he argues, derives from anti-black language encoded in dominant Western narratives—“details, stories, and anecdotes” (*BS* 111), which construe whiteness as the default of the human and blackness as its negative and aberration. Concealing themselves behind the mask of this anti-black language, black Antilleans mistakenly believed they could “amputate” their blackness, so as to exist on equal footing with [white] humans *qua* citizens. To the contrary, Fanon explains, for black Antilleans unable to reconcile the material reality of their black bodies in a white world, “le connaissance du corps est un activité uniquement négatrice [consciousness of the body is only a negating activity]” (*PN* 89). To be clear, Fanon held to a phenomenological understanding of consciousness; meaning, he understood humans developed their consciousness—“the absolute certainty of my existence for myself” (xi), as defined by one of Fanon’s key interlocutors, Maurice Merleau-Ponty—from being in the world, in contact with other humans. For Fanon, then, the mask of an anti-black Western world places in abeyance black Antilleans’ certainty of their existence as human beings.

Although Fanon’s analysis speaks to the circumstances of citizens living in a neocolonial relationship to a white nation-state, I find several aspects of his text still prevail upon my reading of the inhuman in the postcolonial context of *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* and *Malas hierbas*. For starters, Fanon’s text articulates a preliminary definition of the inhuman—“le Noir n’est pas un

⁵⁹ To maintain the integrity of meaning, I occasionally will cite from Fanon’s original French text.

homme [the Negro is not a Man]” (*PN* 6)—as a racialized being who, although appearing in the physical form of Man (i.e. a citizen), suffers from a diminished consciousness to such an extent they become estranged from the reality of their own existence. At the same time, Fanon rejects the notion—originating in colonial discourse—that the racially black subject is a biologically inferior form of the [white] human. Instead, as I examine in subsequent sections, his text anticipates the disrobing and exposure of the human *qua* citizen’s mask as the origin of an emancipated humanity, what later in *Les damnés de la Terre* [The Wretched of the Earth] he calls a New Man (316).

Turning to the postcolonial Dominican context, however, it appears that the juridical emancipation of racialized subjects as citizens of a non-white, sovereign nation-state fails to bring them closer to an awareness of their humanity. In fact, as Philoctète and Cabiya’s novels illustrate, the idea of citizenship in the Dominican Republic betrays the coloniality of belonging and membership. Here, I am drawing on Aníbal Quijano’ and Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ articulations of coloniality as colonialism’s afterlife. Coloniality entails the persistence and re-configuration of forms (originating in New World colonialism) of describing cultural knowledge and managing socioeconomic and “intersubjective relations” (Maldonado-Torres 243). Accordingly, Quijano explains, coloniality gives meaning to the racial homogenization of the post-emancipation and postcolonial nation-state (558)—namely, under a discourse of racelessness that, simultaneously, marks what I have called the “stranger at home” as literally and metaphorically darkened. Thus, he continues, in Latin America and the Caribbean today “the construction of the nation, and above all the central state, has been conceptualized and deployed against American Indians, blacks, and mestizos” (568) as authentic citizens. Yet, while Quijano leaves room for the possibility of an authentic and democratizing citizenship, absent of the

coloniality of power, I argue, instead, that coloniality always already remains immanent to the very notions of “citizenship”—as a form of belonging—and the “nation-state”—as its purveyor—insofar as they both emerge as white Western constructs. Coloniality, then, leads racialized postcolonial subjects to believe they can overcome their biopolitical inferiority by concealing themselves, as Fanon has shown, in the whiteness of citizenship.

This coloniality of Dominican citizenship emerges in response to [white] Western refusal to recognize Haiti’s sovereignty. Given Haiti’s immediate proximity to the Dominican Republic, the Western international community feared Haiti’s black revolutionary ideology would contaminate eastern Hispaniola.⁶⁰ In fact, this very fear prompted the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924. Social historian Michael Baud suggests this occupation consolidated Dominican intellectuals’ desire to demonstrate their country was more than capable of governing itself, as any true [white] nation-state (131).⁶¹ To this end, these intellectuals cultivated a narrative that would radically distinguish the Dominican Republic from Haiti based on race and, effectively, conceal their country’s legacy of blackness and black enslavement. This

⁶⁰ In his landmark text, *Silencing the Past*, Haitian anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot argues the Haitian Revolution—and, specifically, the existence of a black nation-state—was “unthinkable” (82) to European Enlightenment thinkers—the very architects of the modern ideas of Man and Citizen—for it violated their unrelenting perceptions of blacks as docile and irrational subjects lacking the strategic mindset required to devise a sophisticated military revolt.

⁶¹ Dominican intellectuals’ actions seem to reflect a keen awareness that the nation-state is, as scholars David Theo Goldberg and Charles Wade Mills contend, inherently racialized. On the one hand, in *The Racial State*, Goldberg contends that all nation-states are, by default, “racial states” insofar as they govern and regulate access to spaces and means in ways that fundamentally include certain racial groups while excluding others. By contrast, Mills pointedly asserts that the whiteness of the nation-state bespeaks a “racial contract” that subtends the traditional social contract. In the overarching, racial contract, the [white] state recognizes whites, and only whites, as full persons (human beings and citizens), while demarcating “nonwhite men as a prepolitical or nonpolitical state” (13).

dubious racial-juridical narrative, as sociologist Ernesto Sagás details, bore two “national prototypes” (66): on the one hand, blackness came to constitute a signifier of Haitianness, such that only Haitians could ever be black (67); on the other, Dominican national identity became rendered, in the words of the renowned Dominican nationalist Francisco Moscollo Puello, as “Constitutionally white” (10). Moscollo’s constitutional definition of Dominican whiteness suggests that he may have also had in mind the racial taxonomy of Haiti’s postrevolutionary constitutions—namely, Jean-Jacques Dessalines’ constitution of 1805 and the subsequent ones in 1843 and 1868. These juridical documents, literary scholar Sybille Fischer explains, pronounced all Haitians as black and the foreigner (*étranger*) as white (234-235), a move that reflected a “radical resignification (232)” and inversion of the language of the European colonizer. Undoubtedly, that Haiti’s postrevolutionary leaders framed Haitian citizenship as constitutionally black made it all the more convenient for Dominican intellectuals to impute a symbolic, racial-juridical whiteness to the country’s predominantly mixed-race and black population and, thusly, assert a racial-juridical distinction between Dominican sovereignty and Haiti’s tenable statehood.

A Genre of the Inhuman

Since the development of national literatures is attendant on the formation of nation-state ideology, it is Dominican literary anti-Haitianism that most effectively consolidates the Dominican state’s move to conceal the blackness of its body politic. According to Dominican literary scholar Silvio Torres-Saillant, “insofar as Haitians are seen as homogenously black,” anti-Haitianism mobilizes Dominican citizens’ affect around a “declared contempt for blackness” (55). Moreover, he observes, anti-Haitianism becomes equated with a form of Dominican patriotism. Torres-Saillant situates the rise of literary anti-Haitianism in the early twentieth

century, owing to “the reticence of Dominican intellectuals to assert their country’s cultural link and affinity (9)” with the Caribbean’s black African legacy. Self-conscious the image of a country inhabited predominantly by mixed-race and black subjects led foreign critics to dismiss the aesthetic value of Dominican literary production, Dominican intellectuals attempted to re-align their country’s writing with the ethos of a universal Hispanism and racelessness (or whiteness, by default) characteristic of Latin American modernist writing, whose aesthetic forms critics perceived as proximate to those of Europe. Dominican intellectuals in the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries felt they could right this blackened image of their country by constructing what Torres-Saillant calls the “standard discourse on Dominican literature” (50)” which denies any kinship with Haiti, viewed as the paradigm of Caribbean blackness.

Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées and *Malas hierbas*, however, trouble this standard discourse by exposing the incongruities underlying Dominican intellectuals’ anti-black assertions about their country’s purported juridical whiteness. In addition to the novels’ speculative framework, the authors’ juridical status helps make these incongruities visible. On the one hand, Philoctète’s authorial gaze proceeds from the vantage point of his native Haiti, where, but for two brief periods of exile in 1966 and 1992, he lived and died. And yet, Philoctète’s Haitianness—his assertion that the borderland constitutes, as the novel’s title denotes, a *terre mêlée* (mixed land)—suggests that the imposition of anti-Haitian ideology in the borderland severs the Haitian lifeline from which Dominicans citizens patently derive their humanity. On the other, hailing from Puerto Rico, Cabiya has resided in Santo Domingo for over a decade; his own affective ties to Dominican society are notable in view of his public, albeit critical, allegiance to Dominican

sociopolitical matters.⁶² Still, one could argue that Cabiya's Puerto Ricanness has purchase on the interpretation of *Malas hierbas* because of the liminal status many Haitian and Dominican migrants have occupied in Puerto Rico, where both are prejudicially marked as black, making them subject to discrimination and, in some instances, forms of *de facto* segregation.⁶³ In this regard, both Philoctète and Cabiya, through their works, can be said to enact a discursive exposure of Dominican citizens' racial-juridical concealment.

Ultimately, if, as Fanon argues, anti-black narratives constitute the mask under which black Antillean subjects lose sight of their human consciousness, then, I claim, what Torres-Saillant calls "standard discourse" on Dominican literature works in concert with the Dominican state to birth an inhuman citizenry. To support this later claim, I would like to revisit Fanon's indictment of "details, stories, and anecdotes," this time, through the more recent interventions of Jamaican philosopher Sylvia Wynter. Drawing on Fanon's assertion that the human is not solely biological but, rather, forged at the intersection of biological and sociocultural forces, Wynter suggests that human consciousness arises "through the mediation of the processes of socialization to which we give the name *culture* ("Towards" 53, emphasis in the original)." What Wynter here classifies broadly as "culture" equates with Fanon's identification of stories wrought by the dominant, white culture. Further decoding Fanon through philosophy of mind and neurobiology, she illustrates that it is through storytelling that one derives an understanding of what it is like to be human—that is, human consciousness. "Our *mythoi*, our origin stories,"

⁶² Notably, in June 2015, Cabiya took to his Facebook page to condemn the Dominican state's move to deport Dominicans of Haitian descent, on the basis of the 2012 *Sentencia* passed by the Constitutional Tribunal of the Dominican Republic.

⁶³ The work of sociologist Jorge Duany details Dominicans' confinement to the periphery of Puerto Rican society owing to anti-black discrimination.

Wynter asserts, “are therefore always formulaically patterned so as to co-function with the endogenous neurochemical behavior regulatory system of our human brain” (McKittick and Wynter “Unparalleled 11, emphasis in the original”). Put another way, these cultural texts generate in the mind affirming or negative sensations that signal to the reader what constitutes a “normal” human or an “aberration.” Although presented as universal representations of the Western human, in reality, they suggest to black subjects that they can never fully experience what it is like to be human, so long as they interpret their existence through [white] Western “origin stories”—in this case, I argue, the narrative of citizenship as the origin of modern Man.

Undoubtedly, subtle distinctions mark Fanon and Wynter’s post-Fanonian reading of how narration structures the human and, by extension, the inhuman—particularly as it informs my analysis of *Philoctète* and *Cabiya*’s text. On the one hand, Fanon’s work centers affect—that is, feelings and the experience of being touched—as a phenomenologically orientating device through which humans become conscious (or lose consciousness) of their humanity. Thusly, he condemns the concealing mechanism of anti-black Western stories for inciting “affective aberrations (8)” —the inability to sort love from autophobia—that disrupt the black Antilleans’ ability to perceive their inhumanity. On the other hand, Wynter extends Fanon’s original, affective argument to consider, instead, how the rhetoricity of anti-blackness neurochemically restructures the mind (“Towards” 60), from which human consciousness arises. As I see it, Wynter aims to free black subjects from the dehumanizing prison of the body—degraded and concealed by Western culture—by enacting a psychic, and not merely a sensorial or affective, transformation.⁶⁴ Modern philosophy, as I will further explore, describes the immaterial part of

⁶⁴ In a conversation with McKittick—perhaps one of Wynter’s closest interlocutors—she has cautioned against hasty reductions of the Jamaican philosopher’s ideas with affect theory. For McKittick.

the human body as the mind or consciousness, which also governs our perception of being affected. Political and social theory, on the other hand, call this nation-state's "ethos," which, manifests as an affective disposition that guides citizens to feel a sense of belonging to the nation-state.

Turning now to my extended close readings of *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* and *Malas hierbas*, I hold these two interconnected views of the human in tension, alongside other theories of affect, consciousness, and the inhuman. First, in my analysis of *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées*, I consider the unfolding of inhuman citizenship in relation to the novel's representations of skin and flesh as forms of affective concealment and nakedness, respectively. I argue that the inhuman reveals itself vis-à-vis the Dominican state's redefinition of the body politic through white skin, which serves as a metaphor of anti-Haitian contempt. Overall, I explore how Philoctète's construction of the borderland as a space of the inhuman borderland novel that explore how the bestial citizen emerges through of the Dominican state's concealment of Dominican citizens in the borderland through what I call (re-)membering. Specifically, I liken the state's attempts to conceal the memory and consciousness of a unitary, borderland blackness in to the body politic's vesture in white skin. I then distinguish the state's appropriation of this skin with the novel's exploration of what I call a "sub-dermal" ethos of belonging, membership, and freedom. In turn, my interpretation of *Malas hierbas* expands the meaning of the Haitian-Dominican borderland, beyond the legal, territorial borders diving both countries, to encompass an onto-affective and cognitive (dis-)position occupied by a naturalized Dominican of Haitian descent who remains estranged from everyday Dominican life as a zombie. I home in on the novel's assertion that the protagonist's farcical concealment to draw a correspondence between zombification and passing, which does not allow the Dominican citizen to fully grasp and inhabit

the consciousness of a living human being. Overall, I conclude by exploring how these speculative novels theorize the liberation of the inhuman from the prison of the inhuman through affective relations that render the body vulnerable to touch.⁶⁵

Inhuming Love

Citizenship is a highly affective political identity. By this, I refer to fact that political community takes shape, on the one hand, through the mobilization of affects (emotions) and, on the other, through the experience of being affected or impinged upon by these emotions. Moreover, social and literary theorists agree, literature, insofar as it taps into the sensorial faculties, has been instrumental in affecting citizens' emotions in defense of the nation-state. Indeed, literary scholar Doris Sommer speaks to political force of narratives with an affective or emotional bent, underscoring that an "erotic rhetoric" (2) subtended the foundational fictions of post-emancipation Latin American and Caribbean nations. According to Sommer, these foundational fictions centered on allegorical "national romances," which cultivated in readers a fervent patriotism by directing them to identify emotionally with the betrothed protagonists—the embodiment of the newly independent nation—whose love triumphed, notwithstanding plots from foreign (European) forces to thwart their romantic union. As it concerns this chapter, I find noteworthy Sommer's mention of Haiti's erasure from the Dominican foundational narrative

⁶⁵ Philoctète and Cabiya's depiction of bodily and affective vulnerability resonates with De Ferrari's reading of the vulnerable Caribbean body in her monograph *Vulnerable States*. According to De Ferrari, the idea of Caribbean originates at the intersection of medical, scientific, and political discourses designed to render the body vulnerable to the "symbolic colonization of the region" (3). With this foundational history in mind, my reading of *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* and *Malas hierbas* considers how the body is made vulnerable in the context of the postcolonial Caribbean, this time, as means of facilitating the inhuman beings' liberation from the colonality of citizenship.

(251); for, although both countries are bound on the island of Hispaniola by contiguous borders and entwined colonial legacies, the Dominican state's radical disavowal of any racial proximity with Haiti makes it seem as though these states and their respective peoples all but touch, either geopolitical and affectively.

Still, when we turn to the small but critical corpus of texts that document life on the Haitian-Dominican borderland, René Philoctète's *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlée*, more than any other, sheds light on the quotidian reality of Haitian and Dominican cross-border alliances and supranational romances, which, as historians elucidate, long antecede and surpass the demarcation of their respective countries' geopolitical boundaries.⁶⁶ Indeed, in a series of groundbreaking articles Dominican Haitian-Dominican borderland and its main constituent group—*rayanos* (literally, the border people), Dominican historian Frank Moya Pons confirms that Haitians and Dominicans in the borderland lived in such intimate proximity that they acquired a politically indeterminate character that blurred what were believed to be the fixed cultural and linguistic markers of Dominican and Haitian identity.⁶⁷ In response, Dominican President Rafael Trujillo took what may be deemed the creolization of the borderland as proof of Haiti's subtle but strategic imperializing agenda. And, accordingly, he moved to enact

⁶⁶ Both countries consolidated the demarcation of the Haitian-Dominican border in 1907, as part of the Dominican American Convention.

⁶⁷ Dominican historian Moya Pons describes *rayanos* as “un conglomerado de personas más o menos bilingües y más o menos binacionales...más o menos negras y más o menos mulatas, más o menos dominicanas y más o menos haitianas [a conglomerate of persons more or less bilingual...more or less black and more or less mulatto...more or less Dominicans and more or less Haitians]” (Moya Pons “La matriz”).

“programas de Dominicanización,” ethnic and social cleansing initiatives tasked with restoring the Dominican side of the borderland to its authentic racial and cultural character.⁶⁸

Against this historical backdrop, the opening pages of *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* augur the state’s aggression against the Haitian-Dominican borderland via the 1937 massacre of Haitians. To Dominicans the event came to be known as “El Corte” (The Cutting), owing to Dominican president Rafael Trujillo’s mandate to slaughter—with the machete as the weapon of choice—all those identified by officials as Haitians residing in the Dominican side in the borderland. At the same time, the novel counterbalances the horror of Haitian genocide with an enchanting portrait of a close-knit Dominican-Haitian border community, embodied by the inviolable love of its protagonists Pedro Brito, a *mulato* Dominican citizen, and his black Haitian wife Adèle Benjamin. Abandoning natural allegiances to their respective countries, the couple, alongside other Haitian-Dominican *rayano* families, forge their lives in the Dominican border town of Elías Piña as a “single people” (66) of “single land” (36), unencumbered by geopolitical boundaries. When the massacre finally unfolds, there occurs a shift in nomenclature, such that the novel recasts Elías Piña in biopolitical terms—not merely as a people but, also, as “common humanity (27)” pitted against the “inhumanity” of the Dominican state’s “representatives of power (69).” This dichotomy between statecraft and peoplehood gives way to a scattered but consistent reflection on the meaning of being human in the borderland. And it is with this latter question in mind that I situate my reading of the novel’s representation of affective politics.

⁶⁸ Notwithstanding its systematic debilitation by Western powers following the Haitian Revolution, Haiti continued to be construed in the Dominican political imagination as an imperial force with an eye fixed on the conquest of eastern Hispaniola (the Dominican Republic). This view of Haiti as empire sets the tone in the opening pages of the canonical anti-Haitian essay Joaquín Balaguer’s *La isla al revés*, a work I consider below.

In *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* the human, as I explore further ahead, becomes denaturalized—disconnected from the status and practice and citizenship—and pushed to the literal and metaphorical borders of the Dominican nation-state to the extent that Trujillo moves to physically and politically dismember the Haitian-Dominican borderland community. I find that the denaturalization of the human and the subsequent naturalization of the inhuman occur parallel to the transformation of the state's affective disposition toward Haitians. Thus, whereas love once constituted a politically unifying affect in Latin American and the Caribbean nineteenth-century foundational fictions, in Philoctète's twentieth-century rendering of borderland society we find Dominican discourse mobilizing fear and contempt toward insider-outsiders (borderland Haitians). Arguably, a foundational horror fiction emerges as Trujillo reconfigures and conceals his country's racial-juridical landscape under the mask of whiteness by purging Haitians, whose blackness he perceives to be a contaminant. If, as I have previously noted, citizenship constitutes a highly affective political practice, as my reading of the novel demonstrates, it is in the contempt for Haitianness that Dominican citizenship transforms into an inhuman citizenship. As I will show, from Philoctète's markedly Haitian perspective, the novel's task is two-fold: on the one hand, it shows the involution of the foundational fiction—the “national romance” that sustains Dominicans' understanding of belonging and membership—into an inhuman horror narrative; and, on the other, it rehabilitates Haiti's exclusion from the Latin American and Caribbean foundational romance by positioning Haitians' affective alignment with Dominicans as essential to the experience of their humanity—that is, consciousness itself.

To situate my affective reading of *Le Peuple de Terre Mêlées*, I would like to reconsider Fanon's affective framing of the human in *Black Skins, White Masks* alongside philosopher

Martha Nussbaum's recent work on political emotions. Against what he calls the "inhuman voices" that accost both black and white subjects in the Western world, the Martiniquan theorist proposes a way out of the Western world's dehumanizing prison with the following admonishment: "Why not the quite simple attempt to touch the other, to feel the other, to explain the other to myself?" (213). To be clear, the type of affective impingement of which Fanon speaks constitutes what, earlier in the text, he describes as "true, authentic love (41)"—the substance of the human. The human comes into being through a relational touch undergirded by love; by contrast, violence amounts to a refusal to feel the other. It is the surfeit of affect impingement to the point that touch turns back on itself, becoming a deadly narcissism sustained against all others, as so happens in jingoistic defenses of the nation. On the other, in her recent work, *Political Emotions*, Nussbaum describes this narcissistic retraction of affect as "anthropodenial"—a stance whereby one expects "to be above the human lot" (173). The hubris of anthropodenial, she clarifies, leads one to project non-human animal traits onto those toward whom contempt is felt, as is often the case with racialized others. Yet, Nussbaum's brilliant analysis of political emotions remains constrained by the view that narcissistic contempt dehumanizes the target of these negative emotions alone. By contrast, as Philoctète's novel seems to suggest, to perceive oneself "above the human lot" is, in effect, to take on a form of inhumanity.

Readers of *Le Peuple de Terre Mêlées* can appreciate a prime example of Dominican anthropodenial in a comically speculative scene depicting Trujillo conspiring and theorizing with eugenicists to develop a new biopolitical vocabulary that would distinguish Dominicans citizens from Haitians. In the scene, we find a series of experts convened to weigh in on the status of

Dominicans first, with respect to black Africans, and then, with respect to the broader human race:

They called in ethnographers, ethnologists, sociologists, historians, linguists, even statisticians. They deliberated. Some, experts on the question, spoke right up: ‘The Dominican nation is a product of the black African and red American races.’ Quite beside the point. ‘Simplistic propositions,’ declared the voice of authority. They reopened the inquiry. Brought in works on semantics, semiotics, dermatology, philosophy. Studies of the overall situation, a *Treatise on the Education of Nations*. They beavered away. Sweated like pigs. And discovered: ‘The human race is Dominican!’ A rather timid majority proposed: ‘It’s both human and Dominican!’ Who? Who knows who. Or what (83, emphasis in the original).

The historical record provides the interpretive framework for the part of this passage. According to Dominican historian Bernardo Vega, Trujillo’s racial-juridical reconfiguration of Dominican identity drew from Nazi, Falangist, and Fascist ideologies. In fact, Vega notes, the Dominican dictator went so far as to consort with the Nazi party’s top officials and scientists, whom he invited to Santo Domingo to inaugurate the Instituto Científico Dominicano-Alemán (the German-Dominican Scientific Institute) (319). Returning to the text, however, it appears that while Trujillo purportedly based his re-classification of Dominicans on a dubious Nazi science, the gathering of semioticians and semanticists—masters of the word—consolidates the fictive nature of his endeavor. If citizenship is a fiction, for Trujillo so too can human physiology be subject to narrative reinvention. But the fiction devolves into a joke. Notwithstanding experts’ attempts to elevate Dominicans to the highest echelon of humanity vis-à-vis anti-black European discourse,

Dominican space seems to have a regressive, inhuman effect on them—as evidenced by the passage’s ironic invocation of animal metaphors (they “beavered away” and “sweated like pigs”), which nullifies the subsequent attempt to situate Dominicans evolutionarily as an exemplary form of humanity. Effectively, Trujillo’s anthropodenial of Dominican proximity to Haitianness constitutes a genre of the inhuman.

Yet, among all the expert fields to crucial the reimaging of the Dominican body politic, I want to hesitate on the mention of dermatology—the science of skin—for, above all else, the Dominican state mobilizes a dermatological discourse to render Dominicans insentient to [Haitian] touch. Indeed, the dermatological permeates the visual repertoire of Philoctète’s novel, gesturing toward the significance of skin, as a metaphor both for the border and for proximity to Haitianness, in Dominican political discourse. If the Hobbesian concept of the body politic functions as a metaphor for the nation-state, in a parallel manner, the skin—the body’s largest protective organ—represents the nation-state’s borders. Thus, cultural historian Robin (Lauren) Derby elaborates, early twentieth-century Dominican state and popular discourse reproduce this notion of the Haitian-Dominican border as the skin of the body politic to distinguish Dominicans from Haitians based on bodily practice. In these terms, Haitian bodies are deemed open, extended, and porous such that they “seep onto whatever they touch” (521). Interestingly, Derby explains, Dominicans came to believe—and fear—in the mystical “power of Haitian touch” (522), to alter Dominicanness at the border.

Moreover, in Dominican political thought being touched by Haitianness has been equated with a form of symbolic denaturalization. Perhaps no other text has helped consolidate this relation to such an extent as Joaquín Balaguer’s canonical anti-Haitian essay, *La isla al revés* (The Backwards Island). An accomplished writer and member of dictator Rafael Trujillo’s

cabinet, whom he later succeeded as president of the Dominican Republic, Balaguer has been instrumental in shaping both official Dominican literary discourse, as Torres-Saillant notes (56), and official state rhetoric toward Haitians.⁶⁹ Balaguer's literary imagination and political vision converge in his anguished warning that "La vecindad de Haití ha sido...y sigue siendo el principal problema de la República Dominicana [The proximity of Haiti has been...and continues to be the principal problem of the Dominican Republic]" (182). Reading this declaration in light of the essay's detailed attention to Haitians' moral (145) and sexual influence (96) over Dominicans, it becomes clear the former head of state is not merely speaking of a geopolitical proximity but, also, alluding to an affective proximity. As Balaguer sees it, this proximity is problematic because it occasions the "denationalization" of the country's border (159); and, as Haitians migrate inward, they threaten to "denaturalize" (129) the capital of Santo Domingo.

In revisiting the history of Elías Piña's constitution as a factory town, *Le Peuple de Terre Mêlées* discloses the nature of this affective denaturalization. Reverting its gaze to a less ominous time before the massacre, the novel reminds readers of the province's significance as a major artery for Dominicans leaving the country to sell goods to Haitians and for Haitians entering the country to labor in the sugar factories or *bateyes*. The familiarity of Haitians and Dominicans faces who make the same trajectory, day after day, causes the Dominican border agents to, in a manner of speaking, let down the emotional guard that forms the basis of anti-Haitian sentiment: "Strangers embrace, and without asking permission too!...People going back and forth, from both sides. The border guards waving away passports. All hard feelings are

⁶⁹ In 1990, *La isla al revés* also received the country's *Premio Nacional de Literatura* (the Dominican version of the National Book Award), which bespeaks its influence—for better or for worse—both in Dominican political thought and literary imagination.

forgotten” (123).⁷⁰ Here, I find, *Philoctète* offers a salient definition of the border as the sum of “hard feelings”—resentment, hostility, and, especially, patriotic contempt. At the same time, this pivotal scene of mutual recognition between strangers brings into view the multifarious and, often, conflicting dimensions of memory as it pertains to the configuration of the Haitian-Dominican borderland. Notably, I hesitate on the novel’s equation of the embrace that blunts the hardened skin of the border with a form of forgetting.

In his monumental text, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul de Ricœur proposes a way to understand the forgetting that unites Haitian and Dominican strangers as the consequence of being touched by the hands of time, which wears down the surface of an object—in this case, skin—on which the past has been recorded. Forgetting, de Ricœur argues, entails the “effacement of traces” (415)—the lifting of an imprint from an image. We can fully appreciate the affective implications de Ricœur’s assertion in light of Sara Ahmed’s more recent work, *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, wherein she argues that the experience of having an emotion leaves behind an impression—“a mark or a trace” (6)—on the surface of an object, such as the collective body politic of the nation-state. It follows, then, that to forget an experience one must, first, remove the emotional traces impressed upon the psyche by said experience. For this very reason, de Ricœur underscores that forgetting is not always an involuntary endeavor but, often, the outcome of a deliberate work of repetition (445). Hence, one must repeatedly work to forget with as much determination as one works to remember. Given that the narrative of Dominican citizenship is coded in highly affective terms, the narrative of forgetfulness in *Le Peuple de*

⁷⁰ Perhaps *Philoctète* is too generous in giving the impression that border guards allowed Haitians to pass out of philanthropic sentiment. In fact, historian Bernardo Vega clarifies, border officials were known to colluded with the heads of the major sugar factories—in exchange for a fee—to introduce illegal Haitian labor in the country, so as to avoid paying the required tariffs levied against them by the state (286).

Terres Mêlées—effectively, a border love—suggests that the repeated embrace of Haitian-Dominican strangers passing through the borderland eventually wears down not only skin but, importantly, the traces of contempt.

Yet it is this wearing down of skin that prompts to describe Trujillo's dubious recreation of the nation-state's white origins. Dissatisfied with the Nazi, Falangist, and Fascist scientists' inability to deliberate conclusively on Dominicans' placement in the spectrum of humanity, Trujillo makes an alternative pronouncement: Dominicans are "*blancos de la tierra* [whites of the land]" (83). More specifically, the narrator affirms, "Rafael Leónidas Trujillo y Molina, the Dominican head of state defined his nation neither by its daily life nor by its collective aspirations, but by the color of its skin" (85). Given of the effacement of the geopolitical border, Trujillo erects a new, fictive border. But, in this movement from defining what it means to be human to imputing whiteness to the Dominican body polity, the Dominican state discards the human. It matters not that citizens are human but, rather, that they are white, for, as Trujillo very well recognizes, whiteness is what grants legitimacy in the global stage. However, as later passages make clear, Dominicans remain unconvinced by Trujillo's mandate: "Morning, noon, and night people looked at themselves in mirrors, but deep down, they didn't trust them. Someone who had seen himself as snow-white fifteen minutes earlier would detect a café-au-lait tint an hour afterward...And lost all faith in themselves in the specificity of their roots" (110). That Dominicans fail to buy into the racial-juridical mandate is unsurprising, for, although Haitians are seen as black and only black and Dominicans as mixed-race and white, the fact is—and this fact will become even clearer in my reading of *Malas hierbas*—they are often indistinguishable from one another; in the borderland, this would incite laughter, which is what the text precisely invokes. Instead, I believe the text invites a reading of Dominican whiteness as

an onto-affective disposition, with a twist: for Dominicans to claim whiteness they must feel contempt not only for Haitian blackness but, also, for their skin (or, in the text's words, the specificity of their [black] roots). This contempt of [Haitian] blackness—and thus, for the Dominican self—initiates a disturbance in Dominicans' consciousness: they question the certainty of their very existence.

The novel allegorizes this loss of Dominicans' human consciousness vis-à-vis the specter of a bestial bird, whose hybrid features lend it a "human gaze" that is, paradoxically, "so inhuman" (69), inciting terror in those who deign to look defiantly upon its countenance. The narrator's gaze descends from the bird's aerial position, which casts its shadow over Elías Piña, to the supranational unity of Elías Piña, under threat as the image of the bestial bird quickly vanishes into the image of Trujillo (24). Through the bestial bird, I argue, the text captures the meaning of Dominicans' affective concealment under fictive white skin. It is the Dominican Pedro Brito—married to Haitian Adèle—who anticipates the affective implications of this prophetic bird in his warning to fellow Dominican laborers against colluding with the state: "We measure ourselves against the horror of the beast: we begin to resemble it. Praising its authority, our children draw its profile on their slates. People say the thing will be part of us until, losing ourselves, we find ourselves completely changed. Paws, hoofs, claws, instead of our consciousness and our hearts" (31). The novel atomizes the beast's profile down its paws, hoofs, and claws—terms used to describe animal appendages, in distinction from human hands. From a bioevolutionary standpoint, both sets of appendages fulfill analogous functions, insofar as they enable both non-human animals and humans to grasp, touch, and feel. And yet, as the passage intimates, not all touch elicits the same type of conscious and affective experience. In describing the bestialization of Dominican citizens, Brito establishes a boundary between the affective

violence wrought by the beast's desensitized touch and the loving touch that engenders human consciousness. The appearance of the bird serves as a warning that no one is spared from Trujillo's hand. The massacre wages war on the humanity of Dominicans and Haitians alike: the former find their consciousness inhumed under a bestial skin, while the machete reduces the later to dismembered flesh.

Still, amidst the carnage that overflows the text's visual rhetoric, *Le Peuple de Terre Mêlées* accounts for the human. Ultimately, the effacement of the trace of hard feelings exposes the flesh a subdermal ethos. Philoctète's novel holds this voluntary, amicable exposure of Haitian-Dominican flesh in tension with the carnage wrought by machete, the instrument of choice mobilized by agents of the Dominican state to violently dismember the flesh of Haitian bodies. To be sure, Dominicans who Haitians without do not remain unscathed by this persecutory gaze of the state. It becomes clear to them they simply cannot afford to remain indifferent to the carnage, for the dismemberment of Haitians from Elías Piña will certainly fragment the community's economic life force: Dominican *bateyes* or sugar factories, described by Moya Pons as a "prolongación modificada [modified prolongation]" (EB 18) of the colonial plantation system. The awareness that both Haitian and Dominican bodies labor side-by-side in the *bateyes*, yet another denaturalizing space that further dissolves their respective natural allegiances, precipitates a powerful reflection about their shared condition as flesh:

And the workers had gathered together. The flesh of workers is common flesh. It gleams red in the light of dawn. Closes up shop at night. Always faithful to what it firmly believes, it cannot believe that night should lay down the law. The flesh of workers is both a political statement and the rattle of chains. It has the force of law when the law has foundered (101).

Broadly, this scene of enfleshment emblemizes what Kaiama Glover describes as Philoctète's Spiralist aesthetics, whereby the Haitian author draws attention to the continuities between Hispaniola's colonial past and postcolonial present by creating temporal discontinuities in the storyline. Alternative, I argue, recalling Quijano and Maldonado-Torres, the passage brings into view what we might call the coloniality of flesh. In these terms, the enchainment of flesh constitutes a trans-historic signifier that links Haitian and Dominican workers' mutual exploitation in the contemporary Dominican *batey* to the enslavement of ancestral black bodies in the plantations of colonial Saint-Domingue.

At the same time, I argue, this flesh can also be understood as material representation of what Édouard Glissant calls the abyss. In *Poétique de la Relation*, Édouard Glissant contends that the Caribbean originates in “le gouffre-matrice [the womb-abyss] (18),” a metaphor both for the slave ships carrying living and dead black bodies side-by-side across the Atlantic and for the plantations where enslaved blacks labored in a state of social and political death. Later, Glissant asserts that the experience of death touching and engendering life in the abyss constitutes “connaissance partagée [a shared knowledge] (20)” —indeed, I suggest, what Philoctète calls a “common flesh.” Putting Glissant's abyssal ethos in the context of *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées*, Haitians and Dominicans laboring together flesh gives rise to a postcolonial, abyssal remembering that impedes Dominicans from colluding with the law against their Haitian counterparts.

The flesh often appears in biopolitical thought as posthuman and, by extension, postracial.⁷¹ But it is precisely on the basis of this common flesh that *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées*

⁷¹ This tendency toward a postracial and posthuman reading of flesh is exemplified most notably by Cary Wolfe, a prominent theorist of the posthuman, in his work, *Before the Law: Humans and Animals in a Biopolitical Frame*. Arguing that biopolitics acts fundamentally on “the flesh,”

locates the common humanity of Elías Piña. Together, critical race theory and phenomenology clarify the human potential subtending Philoctète's ethics of a common flesh. Notably, African American literary theorist Hortense Spillers interprets flesh through the lens of captive black bodies, stripped bare of their humanity by the marks of chains and the wounding of whips.

"Before the 'body'," she pronounces, "there is the 'flesh,' that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse (206)."

Enslaved black bodies are reduced to flesh, which precedes the discursive constitution (if we recall, Fanon's "details, stories, and narratives") of Man *qua* human as a person with a conscious body. Expanding Spillers' reading vis-à-vis Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of the flesh, Alexander Weheliye locates in the flesh the condition of possibility for an "alternate instantiation of humanity" (43). Previously, Merleau-Ponty posits flesh (*chair*) as the invisible or, stated differently, the immaterial material substrate of the body; from this vantage point, he associates the sub-dermal invisibility of flesh with another key immaterial member of the body—consciousness, which does not reside solely in the mind but, rather, arises from the sense of touching and being touched by another (*VI* 139). Thusly, a phenomenology of the flesh articulates a re-humanizing structure of feeling for black subjects typically seen as having neither self-possessed bodies nor consciousness. Indeed, Weheliye asserts, this phenomenological vindication of the flesh constitutes a "modality of relation" (44)—that is, the very sense of relation through which persons becomes conscious of their humanity. This modality of relation restores the human from their burial under a racial epidermal schema—or, in Weheliye's words, the "armor" of Western Man.

Wolfe defines flesh as, "the communal substrate shared by humans with other forms of life in and through which 'the body' is both sustained and threatened" (50).

The borderland no longer an indeterminate, supranational space, *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées* concludes with the emancipation of the Haitian-Dominican human *qua* flesh from the concealing armor of citizenship, presented as an exodus story that mirrors the liberation of ancient Israel from Egyptian captivity. In this Haitian-Dominican Exodus, Philoctète—with no pretense of impartiality—vindicates Haiti, the first black republic and the first independent nation-state in Latin America and the Caribbean, as a refugee promised land. Even so, Philoctète maintains the neutrality of the refugee, without imputing on them the political agenda of the Haitian nation-state. Undoubtedly, recalling chapter 1 of this dissertation, these refugees embody what Arendt called the “vanguard of their peoples.” Giving the temporal displacements fundamental to *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées*, it would not be far-fetched to imagine that Philoctète sees in the love and hope of these early Haitian-Dominican refugees a paradigm for a future Haiti that, at the time of the authorship of his novel (1989), finds itself wrecked, in a state of political turmoil as the kleptocracy of Haitian dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier is replaced by a series of unstable and inefficacious governments.

Passing Life

Moving from the geopolitical borderland to the ontological borderland occupied by Haitian exiles, Pedro Cabiya’s 2011 novel *Malas hierbas* (Wicked Weeks) considers the cascading effects of the Duvalier regime on Haitian-Dominican relations today. These exiles, the novel tells us, are mostly families of Haiti’s elite, the former high-ranking military officials—Tonton Macoutes—in the Baby Doc regime (37). A paramilitary force formed by Baby Doc’s father and political predecessor, François “Papa Doc” Duvalier, the Macoutes enforced the Duvaliers’ power using terror, violence, death, and, according to popular lore, voodoo sorcery.

For example, legend has it that Papa Doc—dubbed the “Vampire of the Caribbean”—enlisted the service of *hougans* (voudun priests) to conform unwilling Haitian citizens’ to his will by turning them into zombies.⁷² Following in his father’s footsteps, Baby Doc obtained the unconsented loyalty of many Haitian citizens through similar tactics of mind control. However, as Peter Hallward chronicles in *Damning the Flood*, following the overthrow of the Baby Doc, in 1986 and, again, in 1994, after the election of the Haitian priest Jean-Bertrand Aristide to the presidency, the Macoutes were disbanded. In the wake of these events, Halward explains, the Dominican Republic granted the Macoutes asylum, legal immunity, and even military training, with the hope they would eventually depose the democratically-elected Aristide and reestablish their power. Using the sociopolitical upheavals of Duvalierian Haiti as one of its critical reference points, *Malas hierbas* depicts these elites as a clandestine network of impostors who, ensconced in the upscale, gated communities of Santo Domingo, have strived not only to assimilate into Dominican life but, also, exceed its standards, owing to the class privilege that accrues to their light skin and mulatto identity.

In my reading of *Malas hierbas*, I consider the (in-)human implications of Haitians’ liminal into the ontological borderlands of Dominican civil society. Framed as a “scrapbook”—a compendium of disjointed stories woven together anachronically by a Dominican citizen of Haitian-descent named Isidore, the main story of *Malas hierbas* centers on Dionisio, a chief executive at the Dominican division of Eli Lilly and a scientist who, resurrected as a zombie, searches for a cure that will restore life to his undead body. From the opening pages, it becomes

⁷² Ethnobotanist Wade Davis’ controvertible text, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*—one of the zombie narratives toward which Cabiya’s text tacitly gestures, explores uses of zombification (caused by plant-derived poisons) during the Duvalier regimes. In Davis’ account, zombification was a form of social death imputed to citizens perceived as disloyal to their local communities.

evident that Dionisio is not entirely modeled after archeyptal zombie—the listless, decrepit corpse who lacks any self-will—that we’ve come to expect in popular culture. Far from being an unthinking automaton, Cabiya’s zombie is thoughtful, excessively measured in his mannerisms, and in full control of his ratiocinative capacities. Importantly, he does not betray the signs putrefaction. Given his “comfortable social position” (21), made possible through a hefty inheritance bequeathed to him by his deceased parents, the zombie can afford to protect his body from decay through concealment and camouflage. These two factors suggest that Dionisio bears some type of kinship with the novel’s Haitian elite (although, to what degree the novel leaves unclear). And, it is because of these privileges that he can “pass” as a living being in Dominican society.

By definition, passing entails the ability to construct and assume a fictive public identity as a member of a social group that does not correspond with one’s “authentic” private identity. For the most part, narratives and theories of passing pertain to the history of antebellum and Jim Crow U.S., where racial difference adhered to a rather rigid black/white binary based on a fixed set of phenotypes. But, as Ginette Candelario explains in *Black behind the Ears*, in the Dominican context the meaning of racial difference—and by extension “blackness” and “whiteness”—is encoded within a broad and ever-shifting spectrum (26). This does not mean, however, that “passing does not inhere within the Dominican Republic,” as Candelario concludes.

To the contrary, I believe *Malas hierbas* invites a reframing of passing in view of the fact that citizenship in both the Dominican Republic and Haiti has been defined in racial-juridical terms—that is, as I previously noted, as “Constitutionally white” and constitutionally black, respectively. Certainly, the mulatto identity of the novel’s Haitian elite affords them a greater

degree of privilege, mobility and, thus, “passability” than their dark-skinned compatriots. But, it is also clear that *Malas hierbas* conceptualizes racial difference in post-Fanonian terms, such that race becomes a signifier of one’s humanity. More concretely, I contend, *Malas hierbas* construes the racial-juridical difference between Dominicans and Haitians as the difference between being a living human and being undead.

If what distinguishes Dominicans and Haitians is their status as living human beings, I interpret the zombie’s assimilation as a form of passing life. Indeed, it is the zombie himself who discloses this correlation. In the process of searching for his cure, he arrives at a moment of fleeting but stark lucidity as to the nature of his zombification. “Analizándola con el retroscopio, entendí perfectamente lo que me sucedía y cómo nos engañamos y cómo el engaño, la farsa, es parte de la maldición del zombi. [Analyzing it with the retroscope, I understood perfectly what happened to me and how we deceive ourselves and how deception, farce, is part of the zombie’s curse]” (218), he declares. Among several passages that bespeak the zombie’s capacity to dissimulate his living death, this one in particular explicitly equates passing with zombification. Building on this passage, I develop my interpretation of *Malas hierbas* in light of the construction of Haitian-Dominicans as passing subjects in Dominican legal discourse.

The publication of *Malas hierbas* coincides with the revival of protracted debates about the status of [second-generation] Dominican citizens of Haitian descent. Notably, these debates brought into the view the fact that the Dominican Constitution of 1966 denies the right of citizenship to children born on Dominican soil to foreigners “in transit” (*Sentencia* 11). In 2013 and 2015, following the novel’s publication, this constitutional proviso drew the global attention of legal scholars and intellectuals (among them Pedro Cabiya), who noted it deliberately targeted the Dominican-born offspring of Haitian migrant workers. In doing so, the constitutional proviso

effectively related second-generation Dominicans of Haitian descent to a state of transience. But, I conjecture, the constitutional proviso implicitly also construes [naturalized] Dominican bodies as passing or passable—that is to say, as impostors in transit whose movement must be stopped, detected, and exposed. It is no coincidence that *Malas hierbas* also integrates elements of the detective genre into its speculative framing of passing, as evinced by the appearance of Dominican police who clarify and expose Dionisio's true origins.

The implications of Haitian-Dominicans' confinement to a state of juridical transience may be gleaned from the work of Sara Ahmed, who underscore that passing—as concealment, deception, and dissimulation—ultimately enables the passing subject to enter spaces that would be otherwise forbidden to them. Accordingly, Ahmed defines passing “as the literal act of moving through space (in which there is no moment of departure or arrival)” (SE 128). Here she encapsulates the meaning of transience as state of perpetual motion that, paradoxically, leads nowhere. Framed differently, while passing grants the passing subject access and conditional membership in forbidden spaces, in actuality, the passing subject can never really cast off of their originary identity; and, as a consequence, they can never comfortably inhabit the consciousness of the other identity to which they aspire. Extrapolating Ahmed's reading of passing to my notion of “passing life,” I would argue the passing subject remains in a state of ontological and biopolitical transience as strangers in the place they home. It follows, then, that while passing allows marginal subjects to provisionally attain membership in a political community, the [passing] citizen can never fully inhabit the experience of being and feeling alive. Thusly, as a zombie, Dinisio passes through life but cannot inhabit and dwell in it.

Indeed, notwithstanding his ability to move unnoticed in Dominican society, he remains in its ontological borders. In presenting the zombie's ontological liminality, *Malas hierbas*

undoes the ligature between living Man and the citizen clothed in the *logos* that is constitutive of the rational subject. “El zombi quiere estar entre los vivos, quiere ser uno de ellos, quiere volver a *pertenecer* [the zombie wants to be among the living, he wants to be one of them, he wants to belong again]” (130, emphasis in the original), Dionisio affirms to his Haitian research assistant Isidore. Dionisio’s assertion might seem nonsensical since, by all accounts, he walks and exists the living, as any member of Dominican society. But, this, in fact, is the zombie’s point: he is a member but he does not belong, for to belong is to inhabit life. This distinction, I contend, is the difference between being an inhuman citizen (who enjoys membership in the nation-state) and being a living being (who belongs).

As a speculative narrative, *Malas hierbas* presents readers with several heuristics that account for the meaning of this inhuman citizenship. One of these is advanced in the novel’s concluding pages vis-à-vis the Dominican police, who form the legal intertext of the “scrapbook.” After taking readers through Dionisio’s fantastical journey in the search for life, the novel grants readers the opportunity to witness the zombie’s liberation—his true death, accompanied by a surprising caveat: the Dominican police disclose the zombie narrative is, in fact, an elaborate confabulation of a man who suffers from Cotard Delusion, a mental disorder characterized by the belief that a [living] person is actually dead or decaying. Still, notwithstanding the revelation of Dionisio’s delusion, *Malas hierbas* does not allow the clinical discourse to have the final say on the meaning of zombification. Indeed, the novel tacitly invites a critical stance toward the clinical discourse since it is given to us through the police, whose coarse way of expressing themselves and subtle gestures of anti-Haitian contempt do little to ingratiate them to the reader. Instead, the sense of cognitive estrangement wrought by the novel’s

all-too-clean, clinical closure compels readers to piece together the “scrapbook” of Dionisio’s hermetic autobiography by returning to the philosophical intertext.

The philosophical intertext of *Malas hierbas* reveals that Dionisio is the embodiment of what philosophy of mind calls a “phenomenal zombie”—hinted at vis-à-vis a chapter titled, *P-Zed* (109)—who lacks *qualia* (23). As noted philosopher of mind David Chalmers elaborates, the phenomenal zombie or “p-zombie” is a hypothetical articulation of a being who, for all intents and purposes, is physiologically alive: they are awake, they breathe, and they even possess a certain level of sentience (94). Yet, unlike fully conscious living beings, they lack “real conscious experience” or “qualia” (4). Qualia, by definition, denotes the phenomenal quality of life—that which cannot be ascertained through physical sensations or rational thought. It entails the universal ability to qualitatively describe “what it is like” to have a subjective experience—for example, what it is like to be a living human being. Accordingly, it is not citizenship that allows one to inhabit life but consciousness. Still, philosophy of mind betrays a glaring nearsightedness in its failure to interrogate why zombification happens to account for the phenomenal experience of many living in the New World Caribbean. In *Malas hierbas* zombification seems not a hypothetical but, in fact, a real manifestation of sociopolitical forces at work in Dominican civil society.

Alternatively, Sylvia Wynter, whose work on the relationship between human consciousness and culture I discussed earlier in this chapter, can partially aid our interpretation of the novel’s philosophical intertext. Synthesizing Chalmers through a post-Fanonian lens, Wynter argues the “subjective experience” that is constitutive of qualia must be socially and historically grounded “within the terms of our present culture’s conception of what it is to be

human...and in the terms of the sociogenic principle” (“Towards” 46).⁷³ In the context of this chapter, I previously noted, I read citizenship as a political practice made manifest through cultural narratives. But, Wynter continues—this time, invoking W.E.B. Du Bois’ idea of double consciousness alongside Fanon, Western culture engenders a black Caribbean subject whose “subjective experience” of what it is like to be human is divided. Put another way, we might say the subjective experience of Cabiya’s zombie is divided given the predicament of being a citizen of Haitian-descent in a political community wherein anti-Haitianism forms the basis of citizenship.

Oscillating between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, *Malas hierbas* holds these divided positions in tension, demonstrating how Haitians’ cannot shake off the stigma of zombification, regardless of what side of Hispaniola they find themselves.⁷⁴ But, as I will show, the protagonist’s re-birth as a zombie in Dominican territory suggests that his zombification is a consequence of being granted [conditional] membership, as an exile, in the Dominican Republic. From this vantage point, *Malas hierbas* enacts what can be considered a literary “repatriation,”

⁷³ To be clear, Fanon’s sociogenic principle—encapsulated in his now-classic pronouncement, “Beside phylogeny and ontogeny stands sociogeny” (*BS* 11)—posits that humans’ sense of “what it is like” to be human is not only informed by the mere fact of our biological birth (phylogeny and ontogeny) into the human species but, in Wynter’s words, by the “qualitative mental states” configured within in a culture (sociogeny) where to be fully human *qua* Man is to be *not* black.

⁷⁴ Writing on the transformation of the zombification as a symbol of suffering endogenous to Haitian folklore, Anthropologist Franck Degoul explains that, with the U.S. occupation of Haiti from 1915-1934, the zombie became inscribed in North American popular culture as an exogenous symbol of Haitian cruelty and barbarism (24-26). Given that the United States’ presence in Haiti partially coincided with its occupation of the Dominican Republic, the U.S. buttressed neocolonial agenda in Hispaniola—and the Caribbean, writ large—by using this trope of Haitian zombification to influence Dominicans’ already tenuous relationship with Haitians. It worked, for, soon enough, Dominicans came to fear that they too would be turned into zombies in close proximity to Haitians (31).

of the zombie to the Dominican side of the borderland, even as it retains elements of the zombie's foundational connection to Haiti.⁷⁵

Indeed, naturalization is interconnected with novel's representation of the zombie as a passing subject. As Dionisio's autobiographical voice recounts, owing to the meticulous care he has given to his postmortem body, the zombie has been able to stave off the decay of living death:

Las costosas fragancias, lociones y cosméticos (especialmente formados para nosotros, los muertos vivientes, por laboratorios que hace mucho tiempo descubrieron ese nicho del mercado y lo explotan sin misericordia) y demás productos de sobrevivencia y camuflaje a los que estoy esclavizado, me garantizan una considerable libertad de movimiento...Mi vida es un simulacro tan perfecto (21).

[The costly fragrances, lotions, and cosmetics (especially formulated for us, the living dead, by laboratories that long ago discovered that market niche and exploit it without mercy) and other products of survival and camouflage to which I'm enslaved, grant me considerable freedom of movement...My life is such a perfect simulacrum.]

This passage plays on the multifarious yet interdependent connotations of being and appearing "natural," both as a form of life and as the legal idiom to describe the process of attaining citizenship. From Dionisio's perspective, a zombie becomes natural in the Dominican Republic

⁷⁵ In Haitian folklore the idea of the zombie emerges as a way to make sense of the dehumanizing experience of black enslavement in the plantation Americas. As legal historian Colin Dayan elaborates, the zombie personified the enslaved Black subject had been reduced to "a soulless husk" (37), an insentient being incapable of rational thought and affective relations.

through the cosmetic concealment of his postmortem skin. The usage of cosmetic camouflage, an allusion to the notorious practice of skin bleaching in the Caribbean, accrue to him a semblance of natural life insofar as they allow him to pass unnoticed as a “compatriot”—that is, a Dominican citizen. Yet, the ability to pass as a human being *qua* citizen is encoded within the consumptive context of neoliberal citizenship.⁷⁶ Globalization, emblemized by the presence of multinational pharmaceutical company Eli Lilly in Dominican territory, has made it such that acquisitive power now marks the distinction between Dominicans and Haitians. In these terms, the artificiality of material goods overrides the materiality of skin as a signifier of racial difference, because skin alone cannot be trusted to tell the truth about who is Dominican and who is Haitian. Naturalization, like the “natural” look, can be feigned through acquisition. But, as Wynter warns, in a neoliberal society the recognition of human life is also contingent on the capacity to accumulate capital in the name of freedom (“Unparalleled” 10). Of course, it is a misguided sense of freedom. While Cabiya’s postcolonial iteration of the zombie has the accoutrements of membership in the nation-state, as it turns out, his condition is not so different than that of his colonial forbearer laboring in the plantation economy. Enslaved to camouflage, he only has a false consciousness of life.

This feeling of enslavement informs Dionisio’s interactions with other zombies, with whom he fails to establish communal bonds. Dionisio, it turns out, shares the misfortune of zombification with an underground collective of impostors, who hide out in a bar (in reality, the mental asylum where Dionisio and others suffering mental disorders receive treatment).

Explaining the nature of this collective, Dionisio calls it everything but a community:

⁷⁶ As sociologist Néstor García Canclini elaborated in his groundbreaking text, *Consumers and Citizens*, the “capacity to appropriate commodities (15)” is immanent to the practice of citizenship, so much so that it appears to override voting and other civic practices.

Una o dos veces por semana me reúno con otros zombis en una cantina de un siniestro complejo habitacional en las afueras de la ciudad...Esas ocasiones...nos proporcionan la rara oportunidad de relajar la guardia; durante unas cuantas horas eliminamos la tensión que nos produce pasarnos el día pretendiendo estar vivos. No nos une la amistad, ni siquiera la solidaridad, sino la desgracia común de no estar totalmente muertos...o totalmente vivos (22-23).

[One or two times a week I get together with zombies in a bar of a sinister residential complex in the outskirts of the city...Those occasions...give us the rare opportunity to let down our guard; for a few hours, we relieve the tension of spending the day pretending to be alive. Neither friendship, nor even solidarity, unites us, but the shared misfortune of being neither completely dead...nor completely alive.]

Here, Dionisio reveals what, to him, coheres the community of the living: friendship and solidarity. These two qualities, Dionsio suggests, form the basis of human life; they represent the promise of belonging to which the zombie aspires. In the absence of these qualities, the zombies seem to be bound to one another by a burdensome necessity.

But Dionisio's description of the bar/mental asylum also gestures toward the colonial plantation, where enslaved black bodies *qua* coexisted in a state of social death. As Orlando Patterson writes in *Slavery and Social Death*, what distinguished the slave from other human beings was the fact that he existed simultaneously as a stranger *and* insider—meaning, he existed within a circumscribed community—but, nevertheless, “ceased to belong and had been expelled from normal participation in the community because of a failure to meet certain minimal legal or socioeconomic norms of behavior” (41). Writing on the plantation in *Poetics of Relation*,

Édouard Glissant paints an allegory of living death to describe the violence genesis of Caribbean society. Notably, Glissant invokes the metaphor of “abyss,”—first, as a symbol of the slave ships, in which living and breathing enslaved Africans were crammed side-by-side with the cadavers of their compatriots; and second, as a symbol of the sea, in which enslaved Blacks—whether living or dead—were thrown to lessen the weight of the cargo. Turning his retrospective gaze to the land, in the Americans, he identifies a third permutation of the abyss in, what he later calls the “Plantation matrix” (73) of the Americas. In this plantation, the bodies of the dead and the living, transported as chattel, coexisted side by side “under a sentence the sentence of death (6).” This death sentence corresponds with the loss of community or social death. In her reading of Glissant’s *Poetics*, Guillermina De Ferrari puts this in stark, tangible terms in her interpretation of the plantation “as a society built exclusively on an aleatory and largely involuntary coexistence (“The Ship” 186).”

In its contemporary historic and sociopolitical context, *Malas hierbas* points to the residual trauma of social death on the plantation, establishing parallels between Dionisio’s description of the zombie collective as the coexistence of the misfortunate. As passing subjects, I suggest, this gathering of zombies can imitate life yet they can never evolve into a legitimate community within Dominican society. His ability to exist as a passable Dominican citizen is contingent on the negation of solidarity and friendship with other Dominicans of Haitian-descent and Haitian exiles. Effectively, they are strangers both to each other and to their Dominican cohorts; for community is constituted by friendship and solidarity—that is, by a concept of relationality or, as the zombie later notes, by the ability to put oneself in the other’s place. Although zombified bodies touched in what De Ferrari calls a state of “aleatory togetherness,” this touching did not necessarily give way to self-affirming affective relations necessary for the

establishment of human solidarity. Concealed under camouflage, the zombie protects himself from the touch of a stranger.

Ultimately, in alluding to the residual trauma of plantation slavery, *Malas hierbas* suggests that the zombie must confront his self-hate—his disavowal of his Haitianness—to be cured of his zombification. He finds this, primarily, through the touch of his research assistant and the compiler of the fictive scrapbook, Isidore, a second-generation Dominican citizen of Haitian descent. As the compiler of the scrapbook that is *Malas hierbas*, Isidore's role in the text is that of a bridge—similar to the metaphoric embrace we see in *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées*—between Haitian and Dominican society. We see her freely and openly as a Dominican citizen, without having to renounce her Haitianness. And her openness becomes the condition of possibility for Dionisios' liberation from a state of living death. Following an erotic encounter between Isidore and Dionisio, he learns for the first time that living is the capacity to put himself in the place of another (181), by giving up his life as a gesture of love. It is in this moment, Dinisio tells us, “Dentro de mí se agitó una persona extraña, una persona que pretendía cosechar percepciones [Inside of me stirred a strange person, a person who could conceive perceptions]” (181). Against the familiarity of the inhuman, in this state of affective vulnerability, Dionisio encounters human life in himself as he would a stranger. When Dionisio awakens to consciousness, he awakens to love, and meets his true death (and, thus, life) at the hands of another zombie bent on exposing him. Ultimately, the novel's ending shows, a new, stateless man is born.

Haitian-Dominican Relations as a “Horror Romance”

In closing, I would like to consider how the affective rhetoric of speculative texts shape

the contours of an alternative political community. In proposing love as the source of political liberation for the Haitian-Dominican inhuman—a source of contempt and an emergent community of strangers whose alternative foundational fictions mobilize a hybrid affective rhetoric that is the “horror romance.” Retrospectively, it seems to me that the classic foundational fictions that form the basis of Latin American and Caribbean post-emancipation nation-building projects must necessarily be counterbalanced by narratives of horror, for the erotic rhetoric they advance in defense of the postcolonial nation-state can only be sustained by remaining fearful of the potential threat of an outsider who has infiltrated the inside of the nation-state. As Sara Ahmed argued, what intensifies and gives shape to this sense of fear is the possibility that the state will fail to detect threats who “pass their way into the community” (*SE* 124) under the guise of an impostor. Thusly, narratives of racial-juridical passing—as seen plainly in *Malas hierbas* and in the cross-border intermingling depicted *Le Peuple de Terres Mêlées*—can simultaneously function as horror fictions. Now, while love and fear seem to exist at opposite ends of the affective spectrum, in actuality, the rhetoric of narcissistic love and horror that undergirds classic foundational work fictions work in concert to shore up the legitimacy of the nation-state project in its current form. At the same time, as horror romances—a genre in which the object of horror evinces their vulnerability to love and, by extension, their humanity—Philoctète and Cabiya’s novels presents the horrifying not as love’s antithesis but, rather, as the object of political love’s transformation from enclosure to an open embrace. It is romance of horror, I contend, that *Le Peuple de Terre Mêlées* and *Malas hierbas* articulate the ethos of new humans who, in embracing what is horrifying in oneself and another, create a liminal space for oneself and a community of strangers within the state.

Conclusion

In this dissertation, I set out to both analyze the representation of citizens as strangers in contemporary Spanish and French Caribbean literature, and identify what in everyday Caribbean political practice informs the thematic of political estrangement in these literary works. I interpret the stranger, against the more characteristic definition, as a person who resides within the nation-status from which they derive their juridical status and their biopolitical identity as human beings and citizens. Still, I suggest, although they are born within or naturalized into the political community as citizens, in theory, the nation-state construes them as strangers by excluding them from the political practices of the state and denying them the right to representation, in some form or other. Through an extended reading of three national and transnational case studies—Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic (in relation to Haiti), I suggest that anxieties about affirming, defending, and imposing a vision of sovereignty influenced by forces of globalization, neocolonialism, and neoliberalism, leads the nation-state to deny, erase, and conceal the particularity of citizens in the aforementioned Spanish Caribbean countries. I consider how nation-states’ subsume the body politic under a portrait of uniformity, a universal language, and a racialized notion of a universal humanity derives from their desire to shore up their legitimacy and make themselves impervious to foreign aggression. Overall, I argue, the nation-state’s erasure and concealment of difference in the body politic—the disavowal of citizens’ right to representation—animate three responses in Spanish and French Caribbean literature written since the nineteen-eighties until the 2010s.

I devote my first chapter to exploring how Cuban citizen-strangers are allegorized as symbolically stateless subjects in novels by Cuban author Ena Lucía Portela and three key writers—Yoani Sánchez, Orlando Luís Pardo Lazo, and Claudia Cadelo, who form part of a

dissident social media collective known as the Blogósfera Cubana Alternativa (“The Alternative Cuban Blogosphere”). Although Portela and the blog collective make their case through markedly distinctive genres of writing that bespeak differences in their authorial legitimacy, they all seem to agree that the Cuban government’s disingenuous defense of a crumbling reflects a world that has not come and will not come. In my reading of their works, I explore the correlation possession of juridical documentation and the ability to be published on paper as an author. These texts betray a tension between the sovereign state who “edits” citizens’ reality and citizens who struggles for the right to author themselves as they see fit.

My reading of the various meanings of paper in Cuba allows me to segue into an exploration of how Puerto Rico’s is juridical (mis-)read both by non-Puerto Rican citizens of the United States and on literary depictions of Puerto Rican existence. I consider how the United States imposes its sovereignty upon Puerto Rico, as part of a history of neocolonial aggression, while synchronize Puerto Ricans within U.S. political discourses. From this perspective, I devote this chapter to analyzing how Puerto Ricanness is construed as an untranslatable and strange language in texts by Eduardo Lalo, Giannina Braschi, and Luis López Nieves. Because of this, this chapter serves as a reflection on both the status of Puerto Rico, the place of Puerto Rican literature in the U.S., Latin American, and Caribbean literary canons, and the relevance of Puerto Rican writing to the everyday life of the citizen on an island.

My third chapter takes a markedly different direction from the previous two chapters, while remaining faithful to thematic of strangeness through a reading the figure of the inhuman in the speculative fiction of Haitian writer René Philocète and Puerto Rican-Dominican writer Pedro Cabiya. My aim in this chapter is to show how these speculative works destabilize the belief, in political philosophy, that citizenship legitimizes as person’s humanity. To this end, I

focus on how the fear of being perceived by the international community as a rogue and, in particular, black republic like Haiti leads the Dominican Republic to legitimize its sovereignty by defining its body politic as “constitutionally white.” In turn, the exercise of Dominican sovereignty requires erasing racial difference such that citizens engage in forms of racial self-definition that do not correspond to the reality of the black and mixed race bodies. In this distortion of reality, Dominican citizens lose consciousness of their humanity. Ultimately, Philoctète and Cabiya’s texts propose restoring and emancipating the human in a nation whose people have been dehumanized through a legacy of genocidal violence.

All in all, at the end of these three bodies of writing, we find no resolution but, instead, citizens’ acceptance of their strangeness. Indeed, I argue these texts define Caribbeanness, writ large, as an ontology of strangers who remain unsettled. In the texts, Caribbean citizens find comfort in their strangeness, a position from which they act as liminal yet sovereign citizens beyond the consent of the nation state. In his essay, *L’Intrus* Jean-Luc Nancy defines the stranger not on the basis of knowledge but on the basis of their approach: the strange is one who comes and whose coming never ceases. In his words, “Once he [the stranger] has arrived, if he remains foreign, and for as long as he does so—rather than simply ‘becoming naturalized’—his coming will not cease; nor will it cease being some respect an intrusion” (1-2). In the context of the postcolonial Spanish Caribbean, I find that citizen’s strangeness to intrude upon the meaning and power of the sovereign nation-state, a political community inherited from the legacy of European colonialism. In intruding upon the Law of the sovereign, in standing at its doorway, I see the condition of possibility of a Caribbean community that is yet to come.

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