

FAMILY ACROSS THE SEAS: ASIAN DIASPORAS IN THE AMERICAS

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ABSTRACT

My dissertation, *Family Across the Seas: Asian Diasporas in the Americas*, explores literary depictions of Asian immigration history in contemporary women's literature and creates conversations between Caribbean literature, Asian American literature, and Latinx literature. This dissertation compares multigenerational literary works that portray extended depictions of Asian Latin American and Asian Latinx immigrant experiences. My dissertation draws on literary works from Caribbean literature (Mayra Montero's *Como un mensajero tuyo*), Latinx literature (Cristina García's *Monkey Hunting*; Angie Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee*), and Asian American literature (Elaine Castillo's *America Is Not the Heart*; Karen Tei Yamashita's *Brazil-Marú* and *Circle K Cycles*). Through a close reading of multigenerational literature on Asian (Latin) American immigrant experiences, my dissertation examines how literature becomes an ideological tool for writers to depict the experiences of Asians and the Asian diasporas in the Americas and their negotiations of identity and belonging. This dissertation highlights the overlapping and intertwined histories of the Spanish and U.S. empires, the transoceanic crossings of people of Asian ancestry, and the racialization of Asians in the Americas. In my dissertation, I extend the geographical scope of "America" to "the Americas," which include the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States. By doing so, I acknowledge the historical connection between Asia and the Americas. Using Junyoung Verónica Kim's Asia–Latin America as a method, the dissertation centers on the Global South and literary representations of Asian immigration experiences in the Americas. This dissertation engages with history and existing works on the Asian presence through the analysis of the multigenerational literature.

To my family

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

—I don't eat sugar, Don Chan said, —It's tragic how something so sweet killed so many.
—I could never do anything right by you. Esperanza took a bite from a cookie.
(Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 168).

The above scene comes from Dominican American writer Angie Cruz's novel *Let It Rain Coffee* (2006), the sweeping family saga that follows multiple generations of the Colón family dispersed in time and the spaces of the Dominican Republic and New York. The excerpted dialogue conveys an emotionally tense atmosphere shared by Chan Lee Colón de Juan Dolio, the Chinese patriarch of the Colón family, and his daughter-in-law, Esperanza Colón, as they continue to grieve the loss of their son and husband, Santo. At this moment, they are heading to a juvenile correction facility in New York where Bobby, their grandson and son, is currently held. Chan Lee and Esperanza's conversation on the bus leads to a tense exchange of words that reflect their dated history of resentments and conflicts. As a multigenerational family narrative, *Let It Rain Coffee* discloses the undermined histories of racialized diasporas in the Americas and colonialism within the family history. Parting from sugar's general property of sweetness, Chan Lee describes sugar as "killing," which lies much beyond its nutritional impacts on health. In his disposition against sugar, Chan Lee alludes to its materiality and significance as an agricultural commodity and reflects on the staggering exploitations of human labor and land extraction that sustained the European colonial enterprise in the Americas. On the contrary, Esperanza takes a bite of the cookie in active resistance to his claim, consuming and indulging in the manufactured sweetness created from sugar.

Sugar is a material culture of the transatlantic slave trade and indentured migration that constructed a racialized division of labor in the Americas (Lowe, *Intimacies* 41). In her introduction to *The Intimacies of the Four Continents*, Lisa Lowe uses the materiality of sugar to underscore the importance of the colonial intimacies (of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and Europe). According to Lowe, the knowledge of colonial intimacies from Western imperialisms and the formation of the Americas is essential “in order to recognize that this particular violence continues to be reproduced in liberal humanist institutions, discourses, and practices” (41) in settler colonial and postcolonial states today. Lowe cites a commentary from the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz’s book *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (*Contrapunteo Cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, 1940) to describe sugar as one of the material legacies of colonialism in the West Indies, a product of human labor extracted on American soil (*Intimacies* 1). Lowe writes:

Fernando Ortiz described ‘people from all four quarters of the globe’ who labored in the ‘new world’ to produce tobacco and sugar for European consumption. Observing that sugar linked the histories of colonial settlers, native peoples, and slave labor, followed by Chinese and other migrants, Ortiz commented that sugar was ‘mulatto’ from the start. (*Intimacies* 1)

Lowe expands on Ortiz’s description of sugar as “mulatto,” using the same word that describes people of mixed racial ancestry (African and criollo [of Spanish descent]), summons the embedded history of colonialism and violence. In addition, Lowe’s commentary of Ortiz credits the contribution of Asian immigrants in the Americas as indentured laborers among those of the Indigenous and enslaved Africans in the plantations of the Caribbean.

My dissertation, *Family Across the Seas: Asian Diasporas in the Americas*, examines the history of Asian diasporas depicted in contemporary women’s

multigenerational literature. This dissertation offers interdisciplinary analyses of literary works that center on Asian immigrant experiences in the Americas. From the critical examination of the history of global Asian diasporas, my dissertation analyzes the racialization of Asian identity and belonging in the Americas and bridges the disciplinary divides between Latin American Studies, Asian Studies, and Asian American Studies. This dissertation examines tropes of negotiating identity and belonging through the close reading of multigenerational literary works that make legible Asian (Latin) American immigrant experiences. The primary works depict the landscapes and people of South Asia and non-Hispanophone Latin America, which are often excluded from the conversations on Asian and Latin American Studies. This dissertation examines the intertwined histories of global migrations by centering the Global South and its diasporas using Kim's "Asia–Latin America as a method." Kim joins the academic scholars who call "attention to the epistemic violence that underlies the gap of knowledge in the structures of knowledge production and the focus on the West as the privileged site of global modernity" in the domain of academic and historical knowledge ("Asia–Latin America" 101). Using Asia–Latin America in the framework, the dissertation delves into Asian experience in the Americas through the construction of global modernity that created "a cacophonous topography where spaces, peoples, economies, societies, and cultures overlap, crisscross, interchange, and come into conflict" as well as the historical erasures ("Asia–Latin America" 101). Similarly, Lisa Lowe in *Immigrant Acts* writes that the topos of immigration is crucial for Chicanx and Latinx formation as in the United States as well from their subjectivity as the racialized *other* (178n6). In my analysis of literary works, I take interdisciplinary approaches to feature the many crossings of people

of African and Asian ancestry through the colonial systems of enslavement, indenture, and displacement.

By expanding the geographical scope of my project to include the Caribbean, South America, and the United States, I highlight the historical connection between Asia and the Americas from the sixteenth century into the present. Though this dissertation does not fill the void between Asian, Asian American, Latin American, and Latinx Studies, it identifies the areas that draw attention to the need for cross-disciplinary dialogue to locate and describe the undermined history of Asian Americas and the global Asian diasporas. Through the analysis of the multigenerational literary works that enter into conversation with Asian immigration history in the Americas, I demonstrate how writers' literary conversations with history and existing documentation become instrumental in making visible the presence of Asian diasporas and their contributions.

Through the discussion of literary works in conversation with history, this dissertation presents the shared and overlapping histories of empires and migration, tracing the characters' movements and their negotiations of identities. Foregrounded in Kimberlé Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality, I examine intersecting identities of Asian, Latin American, and Latinx by incorporating methodologies from decolonial, post-colonial, feminist, and critical race theory. Movements and crossings are not exclusive to Asian (Latin) American literature, as they are commonly found in other ethnic literature that brings light to the crossings and people on the margins of society. My focus on the crossings of Asia and the Americas is informed by M. Jacqui Alexander's *Pedagogies of Crossing*, which accounts for the afterlives of colonialisms and imperialisms in the construction of modernity. *Many Middle Passages: Forced*

Migration and the Making of the Modern World, edited by Christopher et al., brings together the passages and “experiences of slaves, indentured servants, transported convicts, and coerced migrants of all kinds” (2). Rediker et al. describe the Middle Passage as “an old maritime phrase, dating to the heyday of the Atlantic slave trade [that] designated the bottom line of a trading triangle, between the ‘outward passage’ from Europe to Africa and the ‘homeward passage’ from the Americas to Europe” (1). This triangular passage connecting Africa, the Americas, and Europe transported millions of African people on an oceanic voyage across the Atlantic Ocean (Rediker et al. 2). Colin Palmer writes:

[The Middle Passage] was and is a metaphor for the suffering of African peoples born of their enslavement, of severed ties, of longing for a lost homeland, of a forced exile. . . . It is a living and wrenching aspect of the history of the peoples of the African diaspora, an inescapable part of their present impossible to erase or exorcise” (qtd. in Alpers 20).

Other passages similar to the Middle Passage include *kala pani* (black water) across the Indian Ocean used for convict transportation by the East India Company,¹ migration, and the Yellow Trade that brought indentured laborers from southern China to Cuba and Peru (Hu-DeHart, “La Trata” 166). This dissertation begins with acknowledging countless losses and continuous dislocations from overlapping and intertwined histories of the Spanish and U.S. empires.

In my dissertation, “Asian Americas” is both a geographical and imagined site of inquiry. Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita describes “Asian America” as a political construct, “a *naming category* to recognize the immigration and participation of

¹ Anderson, Clare. “Convict Passages in the Indian Ocean c. 1790–1860),” *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, edited by Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus, and Markus Rediker, pp. 129-149.

Asian and Pacific Islander peoples in American society and political life” (597, my emphasis). When Yamashita quotes this line from her essay “Literature as Community” (2018) in her acceptance speech for the 2021 Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters (DCAL), Yamashita tweaks the definition of Asian America of “a naming category” to “an *imagined* space” (“National” 6:11–6:27, my emphasis). María DeGuzmán presents a similar concept that describes the movements and convergences of Asians and Latinx. DeGuzmán, in the final chapter of the book *Spain’s Long Shadow*, introduces the term “Latinasia,” which acknowledges “the enormous influx of Asian immigrants and the movement of Latina/o peoples across the Americas, south to north and west to east” over the last three centuries (301). Susan Thananopavarn focuses on the site of “LatinAsia” as a contact zone “where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other” (Pratt 34), to study literary and cultural productions produced by Latinx and Asian American writers from the convergences. The images of LatinAsia and Asian America originate from their ideological and geopolitical standpoints that recognize the crossings and movements. Literary works reconstruct the shared histories, stories, and memories of immigration and cross-racial and ethnic intimacies between Asian Americans and Latinx, “the two fastest-growing ethnoracial minority in the United States” (Kang and Torres-Saillant 545).² According to Kang and Torres-Saillant, Asian Americans and Latinx “have historically shared spaces of collaboration and discord, tension and solidarity, intimacy and misrecognition” (545). Their article, “Somos Asiáticos,”³ considers “moments of significant rapport between segments of the two pan-ethnicities as they have *collaborated*

² Le-Khac writes: “Together, they have experienced “explosive growth [...] in the past fifty years [...] that their presence can no longer be ignored” (6)

³ Trans. “We Are Asians.” Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

or quarreled across planes of difference” (546, my emphasis). In addition, Kim conceives Asia–Latin America as “a site of struggle and dissensus” that “brings into contact differing forms of power-knowledge and elucidates the workings of the politics of knowledge and the politics of our lack of knowledge” (101). For Kim, Asia–Latin is “a cacophonous topography where spaces, peoples, economies, societies, and cultures overlap, crisscross, interchange, and come into conflict” as well as the historical erasures (“Asia–Latin America” 101) to describe the “cacophonous intimacies” of Asians and Latinx in the Americas. Long Le-Khac in *Giving Form to an Asian and Latinx America* studies the literary form of short story cycles to inquire into the racial formation in the United States. By comparing Asian American and Latinx fictional narratives of Cold War Migrations, His work concretizes his vision of community and the potential for solidarities of Asian Americans and Latinx. Le-Khac focuses on the historical convergences from the shared history of global capitalism that contributes to the “crucial challenges and entangled fates” (6). Through the discussion of inter- and cross-cultural affinity as well as tensions, this dissertation investigates how Asians are racialized across the Americas through the literary works that invoke the stories of intimacies, convergences, and solidarities, as well as conflicts and tensions.

Family and Nation

This dissertation study analyzes the creation, dispersion, and reunification of families to describe how literature becomes an ideological tool for writers to insert and make legible the experiences of Asians and the Asian diasporas as part of a broader national history. My study departs from the focus on family and nation to examine the depictions of Asian experiences in the Americas from a cross-disciplinary perspective through multigenerational narratives that extend beyond the geography and the traditional canon of Latin American literature. Jessie Reeder in *Forms of Informal Empire: Britain, Latin America, and Nineteenth-Century Literature* echoes the linguistic connection between *nation* and family: “Despite its surge in the second half of the nineteenth century, the idea of the nation as a family was hardly new. The word ‘nation’ has its roots in the Latin *natio*, or ‘birth,’ which points up to the overlapping ideologemes—filiation, nativeness, community, belonging—that animate both the family and the modern nation-state” (120). In “Family Feuds: Gender, Nationalism, and the Family,” Anne McClintock points to the etymology of the word *nation*: “The term ‘nation’ derives from ‘natio’: to be born. We speak of nations as ‘motherlands’ and fatherlands.’ Foreigners ‘adopt’ countries that are not their native homes and are ‘naturalized’ into the national family. We talk of the Family of Nations, of ‘homelands’ and ‘native’ lands” (63). The connection between family and nation is evident in Latin American literature and is visible from the foundational fictions. Romance and family are intrinsically connected, as Benedict Anderson writes in *Imagined Communities*: “[T]he family has traditionally been conceived as the domain of disinterested love and solidarity” (160), analogous to that expected of its people in order to establish and maintain a nation’s sovereignty.

The novel *El Periquillo Sarniento* (*The Mangy Parrot*), by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, published in 1816, is a work of foundational fiction of Mexico written prior to its independence from Spain (Sommer). *El Periquillo Sarniento* is the first Latin American novel, and it is also the first Latin American novel to describe Asia and people of Asian descent. The author depicts Manila Galleons to and from different parts of Asia and Chinese characters through the life of the picaresque protagonist, Pedro Sarmiento (nicknamed “Periquillo Sarniento,” “a Mangy Parrot”). Throughout the novel, Pedro transforms into the ideal citizen of the emerging Mexican nation through his mischiefs and obstacles that take him to East Asia, in the form of punishment. After eight years of detention in the Philippines, Pedro encounters an imagined space on the Pacific Ocean on his way back home. Pedro experiences a shipwreck, and serendipitously lands on the island of *Saucheofú*. Designed as Lizardi’s ideal society on the Pacific Rim, this fictional island is created from the author’s research, as Koichi Hagimoto writes:

“Fernandez de Lizardi’s narrative of the Philippines and China in the novel is based on the sixteenth-century text, *Historia de las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres del gran Reino de la China, Espaha Misionera*,⁴ written by Juan Gonzalez de Mendoza” (391).⁵

The author takes Pedro across the seas to employ Asian topography as the setting for his conversion. For Aníbal González, Asia becomes an empty stage for Lizardi to project his ideal emerging nation and model citizens: “If for Periquillo life in Mexico was like being on a crowded stage in a play in which all the leading roles have been distributed, the

⁴ Translated by R. Parke as *The History of the great and mighty Kingdom of China and the Situation Thereof*.

⁵ “Juan González de Mendoza’s 1585 history of China” (De Alba-Koch 297). Hagimoto and De Alba-Koch reference Edgar C. Knowlton Jr.’s article.

Orient is conversely a nearly empty stage, an almost blank space” (30, cited in Hagimoto 391). The island’s picturesque scenery and status as a free country exert its utopian character and make it accessible for Lizardi to sketch a blueprint of the imagined Mexican nation. Beatriz De Alba-Koch emphasizes *Saucheofú*’s utopian character as “the perfection of Western society” (297). The island thrives on legalism as a political and economic strategy to establish order and encourage productivity of its residents from strict penal codes (De Alba-Koch 297). Additionally, Pedro encounters characters of Chinese descent during and after his imprisonment in the Philippines, *Limahotón* and *Tután*, who play an active role in his life as his respected mentors. They attribute characteristics of wisdom, impartiality, benevolence, and virtue as they guide Pedro through his phases of transformation. The novel ends with *Limahotón*’s migration to Mexico, as he accompanies Pedro on his return journey home across the seas. *Limahotón* brings a full pocket of pearls, showing his wealth and intellect to think of a strategy to transport his possessions across the globe. The novel creates and bifurcates the exoticized image of Asia as adorned with wealth on one hand and wisdom on the other.

In the late nineteenth century, modernist writers influenced by the French Enlightenment and Parnassianism used recurring images of Asia as their artistic inspiration (Tinajero, *Orientalismo* 16). Hispanic modernist writers’ tendency to use the Orient as artistic inspiration reiterates a more generalized Western Orientalism. Araceli Tinajero asserts that modernist writers use arts, culture, spiritual values, and religious systems such as Buddhism and Hinduism to create their romanticized, exoticized Oriental fantasy as an alternate perception of reality (*Orientalismo* 16). The fables from the Hindu and Persian literary canon, which later became *A Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian*

Nights, influenced many of the writer's early depictions of Asia in his short stories. Darío objectifies the East as a place of material desire and nostalgia.⁶

Rubén Darío in the collection *Azul...* presents archetypical objects from Asia and the Near East, commonly referred to as *japonerías* and *chinerías*,⁷ objects or ornamentations from Japan, China, and their surrounding countries in East Asia.⁸ The artistic value of these items stems from its exotic origin and evasiveness. Darío's short stories often portray a collector of art to critique their blind fascination, leading to the accumulation of exotic artifacts from overseas. The short story "El rey burgués" (trans. "The Bourgeois King") offers constructive criticism of the king's disparagement of poetic arts. León Chang Shik adds that the king is merely a collector and a squanderer who abuses his power to dwell on the artifacts without understanding their value and symbolism (43). Darío presents a similar character in the short story "La muerte de la emperatriz de China" ("The Death of the Empress of China"). Its protagonist Recaredo is a sculptor and an aspiring polyglot who expresses his desire to learn Chinese and Japanese. Similar to the king in "El rey burgués," Recaredo is a collector of items from the regions of Japan and China (Yokohama, Kyoto, and Nagasaki, Japan; Nanjing and Beijing, China). In contrast to the king's distinguished rooms for Greek and Asian arts, however, his collection is limited to poor quality, inauthentic pieces alongside his

⁶ The protagonist of the short story "El humo de la pipa" (trans. "The Smoke from the Pipe") in Darío's *Cuentos completos* describes "Orient" as an object of desire and nostalgia.

⁷ Trans. Japoneries and Chinoiseries

⁸ In the discussion of Hispanic Orientalism, Tinajero emphasizes the goods that Europe imported from the Far East. This interest corresponds with the capitalist vision of Europe. Exported items included cotton, silk, walnut, cinnamon, mint, rice, white and colored wrapping papers, toys, ink, fans, red dye, parasols, games, musk, and more. (Tinajero 79).

creations in his small studio. A critical aspect of the short story revolves around a statue named “the Empress of China,” which portrays the racial phenotypes of an East Asian woman with tightly tied hair and narrow eyes. The description of her mysterious, “Sphinx-like smile” contains another orientalist reference. While the statue illustrates an effort to balance Asian and European art (Tinajero, *Orientalismo* 7), “the Empress of China” commodifies and exoticizes Chinese and East Asian women as an inanimate object of beauty and a souvenir. The story concludes with Recaredo’s wife throwing and breaking the sculpture.

In another short story, “La pesadilla de Honorio” (“Honorio’s Nightmare”), Darío challenges the dream-vigilance imagery. For Tinajero, these artistic interventions present an alternate reality in Hispanic modernist writings (*Orientalismo* 16). Honorio’s dream of “la tiranía del rostro humano” (“the tyranny of the human face”) illustrates the manifestation of fantasy and the supernatural. Under the sky fading from the “gentle color of Oriental gold,”⁹ Honorio sees the faces of Pierrot, Europeans, and the Chinese thinkers Lao-tse and Pou-tai and masks from Greek and Japanese Noh theatre (Japanese dance-drama), and the images of the seven deadly sins until he eventually collapses from exhaustion (Mapes y Darío 241). Fernando Cid Lucas writes that Darío was drawn to Japanese art forms like calligraphy, printmaking, and screens that reflect “the aesthetics and the spirit of Japanese scenery” (“...estampas (*ukiyo-e*), biombos y sobre todo

⁹ “Y fue entonces la irrupción de las Máscaras, mientras el cielo se desvanecía un suave color de oro oriente” (Mapes y Darío 240).

caligrafías, que muestran la estética y el espíritu de la escena japonesa” 3).¹⁰ Darío reimagines Japanese artistic forms without having a direct contact with the culture.¹¹

Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges showed a more direct approach in adapting oriental culture from his interest in world literature. Borges’ curiosity about the continuous popularity of Chinese Buddhism led to self-studies, various publications and research manuscripts on Buddhism. Borges gains a deeper understanding of the tenets of the religion its derivatives, such as Japanese Zen Buddhism.¹² Borges’s essay “El budismo” (“Buddhism”) opens with the history of the religion. The author’s intensive exploration of religion begins from his profound interest in and access to the cultures of Asia and the Near East apart from arts, including religion, philosophy, and literature. The author shows great awareness of the concepts of time and dreams obtained from his childhood readings of canonical literary works such as *A Thousand and One Nights* (*Arabian Nights*) and *Hung Lu Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*; 1791) by Chinese writer Cáo Xuěqín (曹雪芹). In his writings, Borges juxtaposes of literary canons from the Near East and East Asia. *A Thousand and One Nights* (*Arabian Nights*) and *Hung Lu Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*) contribute to his writing.

¹⁰ “sí se sintió atraído por algunas estampas (*ukiyo-e*), biombos y sobre todo caligrafías, que muestran la estética y el espíritu de la escena japonesa. Leyendo ‘La pesadilla de Honorio’ tampoco podemos afirmar que se trata de un *cuento japonés*; algunos dirán que *orientalizante*, al estilo de *Vathek*, ya que un rey asirio, personajes chinos y japoneses desfilaran por sus sueños.” (Cid Lucas 3, original emphasis)
Trans: “[Darío] was attracted to prints (*ukiyo-e*), folding screens and, above all, calligraphy, that demonstrate the aesthetics and spirit of the Japanese scenery. Reading ‘Honorio’s Nightmare,’ we can neither say that it is a *Japanese story*; some will say that it is *orientalizing*, in *Vathek*’s style, since an Assyrian king, Chinese and Japanese characters would parade through his dreams. (3, original emphasis)”

¹¹ Cid Lucas argues that Darío has not attended a Noh performance: “Hasta donde yo sé, Darío no asistió a ninguna representación de teatro Noh” (3)
Trans: “As far as I know, Darío did not attend a single Noh theater performance.”

¹² In the essay “Budismo,” Borges provides an overview of the Asian religion that existed before Christianity and revolved into many popular forms.

In *Siete noches*, a collection of essays and conference proceedings, Borges discusses his childhood fascination with the book *A Thousand and One Nights* and its concepts of time and dream. Borges criticizes the English translation of the title as “Arabian Nights” which conceals the significance of the eternity in the collection. Borges writes: “Quiero detenerme en el título. Es uno de los más hermosos del mundo, tan hermoso, creo, como aquel otro que cité la otra vez, y tan distinto: un experimento con el tiempo” (“Las mil y una noches” 61).¹³ In his titular essay “Las mil y una noches” (“A Thousand and One Nights”), Borges discusses the significance of the number that comes from the story of survival of the woman storyteller Scheherazade from her spouse and Persian king, Shahryār (“Las mil y una noches 61). Adding one to a thousand is synonymous to “infinity,” as Borges argues: “Decir mil noches es decir infinitas noches, las muchas noches, las innumerables noches. Decir mil y una noches es agregar una al infinito” (Borges, “Las mil y una noches” 61).¹⁴ Using the metaphor of infinite nights, Borges creates a recurring sequence of dream-vigilance and infinite possibilities between choices and life and death. Borges depicted the multiverse using the narrative structure of *mise-en-abyme* (trans. placement in abyss) to have multiple stories within a story. Likewise, Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, described this narrative structure of *mise-en-abyme* as *la caja china* (Chinese boxes; boxes in a box) that illustrates multiple, often interpolated, stories within a story.¹⁵

¹³ “I want to pause over the title. It is one of the most beautiful in the world” (Borges, “The Thousand” 566). Borges then compares it to another possible title for the collection: “An experiment with time.”

¹⁴ “To say *a thousand nights* is to say infinite nights, the many nights, the countless nights. To say *a thousand and one nights* is to add one to infinity” (Borges, “The Thousand” 566).

¹⁵ similar to matryoshka doll, there are boxes inside a large box, similar to a concentric circle.

Borge's short story "El jardín de senderos que se bifurcan" ("The Garden of Forking Paths") connects the question of interpreting literary texts to the margins of society. Borges' accounts of Arab and Chinese literary canons offer a valuable contribution to understanding his use of oriental elements. "The Garden of Forking Paths" shows direct influence from one of the Chinese literary canons *Hung Lu Meng* (*Dream of the Red Chamber*, 紅樓夢). The short story's title ("The Garden of Forking Paths") recalls the length and cadence of *Hung Lu Meng*'s English translation, *Dream of the Red Chamber*). The uniqueness of Borges's approach includes his reference to a character from *Hung Lu Meng* and the leitmotiv of infinite dreams. Borges' protagonist, Yu Tsun, shares his name with a secondary character from the Chinese novel *Hung Lu Meng*. Yu Tsun in Borges' short story is a Chinese spy who works for post-WWII Germany, who experiences social exclusion as a Chinese man living in England. To prove his worth as a reliable spy against the country that relegated the role of spy to him, the protagonist wants to prove how "a yellow man could save his armies" (2) by communicating the location of an English artillery to his Chief in Germany. His plan involves killing an innocent man named Stephen Albert to announce the name of the city, Albert, in newspapers. Although some of Borges' knowledge of East Asia comes from his direct interactions with the cultures and its people, the characterization and portrayal of Yu Tsun in the short story still upholds stereotypes against Chinese men. Yu Tsun is a spy, a common stereotype associated with East Asians to deduce them as unassimilable citizens holding dual allegiance. Also, his encounter with Stephen Albert creates a dilemma for the protagonist. Yu Tsun's target, Albert, is a sinologist of European descent.

Albert is the only character who shows awareness and understanding of Yu Tsun's cultural, linguistic, and familial background.

Despite their contribution to the study of Asians in Latin American literature, many prior Latin American literary works contained exoticized, aesthetic interpretations of Asia. Women's voices were also notably absent, as foundational fictions and works of Hispanic Modernism and the Latin American Boom were written at the hands of the privileged male elites. Kathleen López writes: "*Mestizaje* or racial mixing as a political project has worked to silence the presence and contributions of people of African and Asian descent while favoring intermixing among European and indigenous" ("Asian Dimension." "Asian-Latin American Literature," as Junyoung Verónica Kim writes, does not fit into the "prescribed boundaries of academic disciplines [...], questioning disciplinary borders and dominant epistemological frameworks, such as those of area studies and ethnic studies" ("Writing Asia-Latin America" 58). In this dissertation study, I focus on the literary works that portray the immigrants of Asian descent who have been excluded from the dominant narratives and often portrayed as "the racialized other" through "a thoroughly Orientalizing narrative" (Tsang, "Yellow Blindness"). Turning from canonical Latin American literary works that further contribute to the exoticization of Asia, this dissertation study focuses on multigenerational literature written by contemporary women authors who depict Asian immigrants as integral part of family, presenting alternative images of Latin American family and identities. I argue that their work resists colonial and post-colonial characterization and brings forward the histories of Asian immigration and other minoritized groups. This dissertation will focus on the literary productions that center people of Asian immigrant diasporas and their

experiences in the Americas, reading fiction as an alternative type of documentation. Kim presents language as a challenge to the interdisciplinary study of Asian-Latin American and Asian Latinx literature:

The question of language becomes especially pertinent in the case of Asian-Latin Americans (or Asian-Latinx peoples) and Asian-Latin American literature. Language, as something of a proxy for race, has been deployed not only to differentially include and exclude certain populations from partaking in the sociopolitical and cultural life of the nation, but also create entire ethnic/racial/national categories that were hitherto nebulous and precarious. (“Writing Asia-Latin America” 68)

This dissertation project centers on literary productions of Asian American and Latinx writers who present the modern history of Asian America, who “explore the Asian dimensions of Caribbean Latina/o racial, ethnic, gendered, and class identities and pose a challenge to foundational discourses of national and cultural identities based on *mestizaje* and syncretism that serve to subsume and erase the Asian presence” (López, “Asian Dimensions”). Reading together primary works on Asian Latin American experiences, I engage with Asian American and Asian Latin American literary and cultural studies to study the currents of Asian migration to the Americas and compare the racialization of Asians in the Americas.

Asian Immigration to the Americas

The history of Asian immigration to the Americas has been “largely hidden in plain sight” (Hu-DeHart and López 10) in contrast to a common misconception that describes Asia-Latin American cultural and economic encounters as contemporary. Asian immigration to Latin America dates to the colonial period and the Spanish colonization of Asia and the Americas (Hu-DeHart and López 10). Spain established trade routes between the former Spanish colonies across the Pacific Ocean. Debbie Lee-DiStefano

writes: “[T]he Manila-Acapulco Galleon Trade (1565–1815) initiated contact and exchanges between Asia and Latin America that would be constant into the modern day” (2). By the sixteenth century, the Philippines became the center of sea trade with the Manila galleons, also described as *Naos de China* (“The China Ships”), which transported raw materials, goods, and people. Manila-Acapulco Galleons connected the trading ports in Acapulco in the Viceroyalty of New Spain and Manila in the Spanish East Indies and the Philippines. Historian Evelyn Hu-DeHart describes Manila as both “an extension of New Spain” and “part of the evolving Americas” (“Integration and Exclusion” 92) for two reasons. Hu-DeHart writes: “Spaniards from Mexico in the Americas (then called New Spain) colonized Las Filipinas” (“Integration and Exclusion” 91). Then, the city of Manila was administered through the Viceroyalty of New Spain in Mexico City, not directly by the Spanish crown, strengthening the connection between colonies in Asia and the Americas. For this reason, I include the Philippines and Filipinx in the dissertation to discuss intersecting identities and overlapping histories of Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism in the Global South. Ignacio López-Calvo describes the Asia-Latin America relationship as a transpacific dialogue on the cultural, political, and economic agendas between the two global peripheries that experienced imperialism (*Alternative Orientalisms* xiv).

The dissertation’s focus on family underscores the contributions of Asian immigrants in the Americas through the multigenerational literary works that present characters of Asian descent as integral parts of the family against the dominant narrative of exclusion and otherness. Debbie Lee-DiStefano writes: “Asian immigrants, regardless of their longevity, permanence, or contributions, are often placed in the category of

perpetual foreigner” (3). As the racialized others in the United States and Latin America, Asian immigrants became targets of discriminatory laws at state and federal levels against the “Oriental Problem” (E. Lee, “The ‘Yellow Peril’” 537). Historian Erika Lee asserts that the Yellow Peril narrative propagated the description of Asian Americans as “inassimilable aliens who brought economic competition, disease, and immorality” and “perpetual foreigners,” regardless of their citizenship and lengths of stay (“Yellow Peril” 537). World War II marked a change in the treatment of Chinese and Japanese Americans. López asserts:

The Japanese occupation of China from 1937 to 1945 and China’s alignment with the United States during World War II transformed the treatment of Chinese migrants in the Americas. Despite impediments to communication and transportation, diasporic Chinese were pulled closer to their homeland through a series of broad-based, anti-Japan resistance movements. (206)

The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 created a basis for racial discrimination against people of Asian ancestry in the U.S., and anti-immigration policies led Asian migrants to the South. Robert Chao Romero’s research on Chinese immigration to Mexico also highlights the historical importance of the Exclusion Act, drawing a wide range of data from the archives in China, the United States, and Mexico. E. Lee writes: “Chinese immigration was described in familiar catastrophic terms, such as the ‘yellow wave,’ the ‘yellow plague,’ and the ‘Mongol invasion’” (“Yellow Peril” 547). These terms perpetuated Anti-Asian rhetoric and stigma that contributed to violence and codified discrimination. Fredy González’s research documents the struggle of the first Chinese immigrants and their descendants’ search for identity and recognition in Mexican society. Jason Oliver Chang exposes the history of institutionalized discrimination that provides grounds for the condition of Asians as perpetual foreigners and diaspora in *Chino: Anti-*

Chinese Racism in Mexico, 1880–1940. Variations of the Spanish word *chino/china*

became a pan-ethnic generalization of the Asian experiences in the Americas. Lok C. D.

Siu writes:

[E]thnicity remains the most salient form of self-identification (besides national identity) among Asians in Latin America. Nevertheless, the tendency to generalize Asian identity is still common. In many Latin American countries, with the exception of Brazil, the terms *chino* and *china* are often used broadly by non-Asians to refer to all people with an East Asian phenotype. (202)

In Brazil, the terms *japonés* and *japonesa* are more commonly used to generalize East Asians, reflecting the long history of Japanese immigration to Brazil and South America.

The term “Asian American” was conceived in 1968 by student activists Yuji Ichioka and Emma Gee, who founded the Asian American Political Alliance (AAPA) at the University of California, Berkeley as a unifying force that would bring together student protestors of various Asian ancestries. The student activists recognized the need for coalition building during the Asian American Movement, a grassroots sociopolitical movement against U.S. military interventions and imperialism in the 1960s–1970s. It was also created to replace the capitalized noun “Oriental,” which carried disparaging and derogatory connotations. The noun was also used intentionally in documentation to describe and identify the people of Asian descent in the United States to reflect anti-Asian sentiment in the early twentieth-century United States (“Yellow Peril” 537). After the construction of the U. S. Transcontinental Railroad, which became the highlight of Manifest Destiny, Chinese laborers became targets of institutional racism. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 stopped all immigration of Chinese laborers and led to more anti-Asian sentiments in the United States. In 1979, The *L.A. Times*’ stylebook made a significant, meaningful change impacting Asian American communities by advocating

the “use of Asian-American in place of Oriental” (Fuhrmann), following the Asian American Movement (1960s–1970s).¹⁶ In November 1993, the *L.A. Times* “removed the hyphen from all such terms as it distributed wide-ranging new guidelines on ‘ethnic, racial, sexual and other identification’” (Fuhrmann) and proposed four new guidelines under its entry on “Asian Americans” without the hyphen.¹⁷ The following guidelines appear as an image file (scanned version of the original) in Fuhrmann’s article:

- 1.) Asian American is the preferred term for citizens of Asian descent. If the information is relevant to the story, try to specify the nation of origin.
- 2.) Asia covers a lot of territory, and it often is most appropriate to use a more specific term, such as Japanese American, Chinese American or Korean American.
- 3.) Do not use Oriental when referring to groups or persons, except in the proper names of organizations.
- 4.) In headlines, use Asian Groups or Asian American. Asians should be a last resort because it may mislead the reader.

Other news outlets and publication manuals had already begun to remove the hyphen in Asian American and similar terms on the basis that it communicates partial citizenship of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Americans.

Another recent change to the term “Asian American” was initiated by the current and former presidents of the Association for Asian American Studies (AAAS) at the peak of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic that also brought exponential increases in racially motivated crimes against people of Asian descent. In May 2021, Shirley Hune,

¹⁶ However, references to the word “Oriental” were only removed from federal law on May 9, 2009, when President Barack Obama signed Her Bill 2438, the bipartisan bill sponsored by New York Congresswoman Grace Meng.

¹⁷ Journalist and professor Henry Fuhrmann’s 2018 article “Drop the Hyphen in Asian American” was credited by *AP*’s Stylebook editor Paula Froke and *Buzzfeed*, which dropped the hyphen in 2019 and 2018, respectively (Wang; Editor’s Note, Fuhrmann), as well as the AAAS.

professor and former president of AAAS, directed a letter to the style editors of *The New York Times* (NYT) to remove the hyphen from “Asian-American” when referring to American people of dual heritage. Hune’s letter was endorsed by twenty-two former and current presidents of the organization.

Organization of the Chapters

In this dissertation, I cross-examine multigenerational literary works that surface Asian Latin American and Asian Latinx family histories alongside national and global history. The phrase “family across the seas” in the title of the dissertation means “family overseas,” which also implies movements of people to start or join a family overseas.¹⁸ From the study of the becoming and emergences of multigenerational families of Asian and Latin American descent in literature, this dissertation expands the terrains of Asian America and the definitions of *latinidad* (Latin American identity). DeGuzmán writes: “The paradigm for Latina/o identity is thus heterogeneity and alterity in integration. . . . *Latinidad* is a heterotopia, a Chinese encyclopedia of differently inflected nationalities and ethnicities coming together and mixing in space and time, not the whitewashed ‘utopia’ of conforming sameness” (DeGuzmán 301).¹⁹ Even here, DeGuzmán uses the fictional metaphor of a “Chinese encyclopedia” from Jorge Luis Borges’ 1942 essay “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins.” As Kim points out, the racial stratification in Latin America excluded Asians from the narrative of hybridity and transculturation as the racial Other in the innerworkings of the racial stratification (“Writing Asia-Latin

¹⁸ The title *Family Across the Seas* follows the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA Publication Manual, 7th edition), that allows writers to capitalize prepositions that are longer than four letters in titles.

¹⁹ The preface of *Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (1966) by French philosopher Michel Foucault begins with a reference to the taxonomy of “a certain Chinese encyclopedia” that divides animals into fourteen categories.

America” 58) and the construction of *latinidad* (Latin American identity). This dissertation expands the discussion of *latinidad* through the close reading of literary works that depict Asian Latin American and Asian Latinx experiences.

The first content chapter (Chapter two), “Family Histories Told from the Outside: Locating Chinese Cubans in Literature,” focuses on the multigenerational novels written by two non-Asian women writers, Mayra Montero and Cristina García. The writers re-introduce Chinese immigration history in Cuba by inserting narratives of Chinese indentured labor and depicting interracial alliances created between Chinese and Afro-Cubans. In an interview with the writer Scott Shibuya Brown, García criticizes forced labor from slavery and indenture while acknowledging their contribution to the creation of Cuba’s modernity: “It’s disturbing how the island’s vibrant culture was forged under such brutality” (259–260). Montero’s *Como un mensajero tuyo* (1998; *The Messenger*) and García’s *Monkey Hunting* (2004) share the depiction of the Chinese indentured labor and interethnic alliances created from marriage and religious hybridization of Chinese folk religions and Afro-diasporic spiritual and religious practices like Santería/Regla de Ocha. Lukumi religion “provides a space wherein Afro-Chinese and Chinese-Cuban practitioners, along with Chinese material culture” (“Yellow Blindness” 15). The novels depict interracial alliances created between Chinese and Afro-Cubans contribute to Cuba’s multiethnic culture and identities, as well as intra-Asian tensions. On various occasions, the novels refer to the Santería/Regla de Ocha and Chinese religious practices and material culture to reflect on practices of inter-diasporic cross-fertilization (as an alternative term to describe religious syncretism). Martin A. Tsang writes:

Inter-diasporic cross-fertilization is a way of understanding intergroup contact and how it is mediated by and through religion and belief,

requiring understanding of the material, philosophical, and cultural forms of religious members. Seemingly disparate and misunderstood elements and identities lose their foreignness and become familiar in every sense of the world. (“Yellow Blindness” 30–31)

This phrase “inter-diasporic cross-fertilization” conveys a sense of familiarity as the words fertilization, like conception, is associated with reproduction. To this point, Luisa Ossa writes: “The religious syncretism between Santería and Chinese spiritual beliefs and traditions presents a harmonious relationship between mulattoes and Chinese” (“Babalawos chinos” n.p.). Guan Gong, celebrated as a god of war in Chinese folk religion, became part of Santería as San Fan Con (López, “One Brings Another” 105). Cubans of Chinese and African descent became part of the tradition as active practitioners and spiritual leaders (*babalawos*). *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*) and *Monkey Hunting* make a valuable contribution to documenting the Chinese diaspora in Cuba, each presenting a Chinese patriarch who comes to Cuba in the late nineteenth century through the Yellow Trade against Chinese Cubans’ “historical absence in literatures concerning identity making and community formation processes” (Tsang, “Yellow Blindness” 13).²⁰ The first-generation Chinese brings his history, culture, and traditions to Cuba. Though not without tension, I argue that the novels’ discussion of Asian immigration and the characters’ negotiations of identity as Cuban, Afro-Chinese Cuban, and Asian Latinx portrayed by diasporic and non-Asian writers are critical moments of Asian visibility.

²⁰ Kathleen López’s book *Chinese Cubans: A Transnational History* offers an eye-opening account of immigration history. The book opens with the story of a Chinese boy who was kidnapped and brought to Cuba as an indentured laborer under a forced contract.

Chapter three, “Home Away from Home: The Past and Present of the Japanese Brazilian Diasporas,” analyzes the third-generation Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita’s *Brazil-Marú* (1992) and *Circle K Cycles* (2001). Yamashita bridges the early history of Japanese migration to Brazil and the modern history of return migrants who are the descendants of Japanese immigrants. *Brazil-Marú* (1992) is a multigenerational family novel intertwined with the history of Japanese immigration to Brazil. *Circle K Cycles* is a multi-genre writing that includes Yamashita’s personal essays and short stories on the return migrations of Japanese Brazilians. Japanese migration to South America began as the migration of coffee plantation workers in 1908. After World War II (1939–1941), Japanese and Japanese Americans in the Americas experienced institutionalized discrimination and extended confinement in Japanese American concentration/internment camps. This chapter describes another dominant Asian presence in a non-Hispanophone country, shifting the contours of what is commonly understood as Asian America to include Brazil and Japanese Brazilian communities in Japan.

Chapter four, “Cultivating Networks of Care: The Latinx of Asia and America,” establishes a dialogue between the Dominican American writer Angie Cruz’s *Let It Rain Coffee* (2006) and the Filipinx writer Elaine Castillo’s *America Is Not the Heart* (2018) from their shared depiction of care and care work. Cruz and Castillo portray two U.S. cities with significant Asian American populations. Cruz’s *Let it Rain Coffee* (2006) brings forth Chinese experiences in the Dominican Republic and New York, and its description of transnational movements resonates with that of García’s *Monkey Hunting*. Castillo’s debut novel *America Is Not the Heart* (2018) takes place in the San Francisco Bay Area. The subtitle of this chapter (“The Latinx of Asia and America”) comes from

Anthony Christian Ocampo's book *The Latinos of Asia: How Filipino Americans Break the Rules of Race* on racial and cultural identities of Filipinos and Filipinx. The inclusion of the Filipinx in the dissertation is also in accordance with Sony Coráñez-Bolton's description of the Filipinx as:

[T]he product of multiple conversations since the emergence of the interdisciplinary field of critical ethnic studies [which includes]: the structural relationship of transmisogyny to US imperialism, the increasing relevance of critiques of settler colonialism to US ethnic formations and scholarship, and the comparative understanding of the intersection of Spanish colonialism and US imperialism. ("A Tale" 286)

In this final content chapter, I take an interdisciplinary approach from critical ethnic studies to analyze *Let It Rain Coffee* and *America Is Not the Heart* together. The novels share their depictions to make legible the lasting impacts of hybridized colonial encounters from three centuries of Spanish rule and U.S. imperialism (Lowe, *Immigrant Acts* 118), and of dictatorship on the racial and cultural fabric of the Philippines and the Dominican Republic. Zooming in on the historical, cultural, and intergenerational traumas that require care and strengthened solidarity, this chapter illustrates how shared and overlapping histories of Spanish colonialism and U.S. interventions after the Spanish-American War of 1898 appear in the countries and diasporas.

The plot of multigenerational literature transitions between the past and present, using different characters as focal points to portray multiple perspectives. The chapters of *Family Across the Seas* discuss belonging, continental intimacies, and cross-racial solidarities, as well as cacophonies and tensions created from convergences in the making of Asian Americas. Through the examinations of Asian Latinx and Asian Latin American families presented in the literary works, I demonstrate how the multigenerational family narratives portray the violence and generational traumas of colonization and "supplement

forgetting with new narratives of affirmation and presence” (*Intimacies* 40). Through the examination of literary texts, this dissertation demonstrates how literature brings communities together and creates a space for healing through the creation of family.

CHAPTER 2

FAMILY HISTORIES TOLD FROM THE OUTSIDE: LOCATING CHINESE CUBANS IN LITERATURE

De Noro Cheng [...] saqué los ojos y el pelo, por eso la gente me apodaba «chinita».
A mi madre no le gustaba que me dijeran así, saltaba siempre muy ofendida
y decía que su hija se llamaba Aida.
(Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 30)

From Noro Cheng [...] I got my eyes and hair, and that's why people called me 'Chinita.'
My mother didn't like it when they called me 'Chinita,' she always became very offended
and said her daughter's name was Aida.
(Montero, *The Messenger* 13)

An early scene of Cuban-Puerto Rican writer Mayra Montero's novel *Como un mensajero tuyo* (The Messenger, 1999) gives a snapshot of the gendered racialization experienced by the novel's Chinese Afro-Cuban protagonist, Aida Petirena Cheng. She is called *Chinita* (trans. "Little China girl"), composed of the noun *China* or *china* (China or Chinese) and the diminutive suffix *-ita*,²¹ a term used to generalize women with East Asian phenotypes in Spanish-speaking countries.²² While diminutives in Spanish can be used to communicate endearment under the guise of affability, *Chinita* here functions euphemistically. The nickname infantilizes Aida and collapses her humanity into a comment about race and ethnicity. Domitila Cuervo, Aida's mother, addresses the violence as she confronts and challenges rampant racism in language and society. The adverb "always," used to describe Domitila's act of defiance, also takes into consideration the countless incidents of racialized and gendered violence the mother and

²¹ The suffix *-ito/-ita* functions as a diminutive to denote an object's smallness or weakness in size or quality.

²² "Chinese" or *chino/china* became an umbrella term that overlooks the diversity of people of East Asian heritage by relying on racialized phenotypes (Siu 202).

daughter have experienced. Domitila vocalizes and claims her daughter's rightful name as both an act of reassurance for her daughter and a self-consolation, that one day, people will call Aida by her name (Montero, *The Messenger* 13). This action exemplifies a disposition of a marginalized woman in support of another woman facing discrimination from her own position of marginality.

In this chapter, I convey the image of Domitila to analyze the depiction of the Chinese migration in Cuba from two diasporic Cuban women writers, Mayra Montero and Cristina García, who present the history of the early Chinese immigration to Cuba. The histories of Chinese indentured labor and the Transatlantic slave trade become an integral part of the family's history. Incorporating the genre of multigenerational literature, the writers present an alternative image of a Cuban family with a multiracial, multiethnic family started by a Chinese patriarch. In this chapter, I capture moments of created shared affinities as well as tensions created between Chinese migrants and Afro-Cubans from the early history of Chinese indentured labor in the Caribbean from the close readings of Mayra Montero's novel *Como un mensajero tuyo* (1999, *The Messenger*) and Cristina García's novel *Monkey Hunting* (2003).

Montero's and García's multigenerational narratives underscore the individuality of distinct family members, showing the diversity of Cuban diasporic experiences concerning the construction of their identities. Memory and orality play an active role in the dialogues between histories and narrations in *Como un mensajero tuyo* and *Monkey Hunting*. Oral storytelling appears in the narration as an act of preserving and remembering family legacy. The chapters of *Monkey Hunting* alternate between the family members, and this focus on each family member highlights the multiplicity and

uniqueness of individual family members. In the interview with Ylce Irizarry, García highlights the significance of individual memory: “Everyone has his or her version of Cuba. Everybody—and I mean that collectively, including the exile community and Cubans in the diaspora—claims Cuba and makes its history his or her own, just as everyone does in families” (“An Interview” 179–180). The oral quality of the narration provides alternative versions of Cuban history through its characters, diversifying the historiography of Chinese immigration. Amy Parziale writes: “García brings into relief the ways archives simultaneously reveal and obscure individual histories and how literature contends with archival limitations through witnessing” (938). Parziale describes *Monkey Hunting* as a “counter-archive” to describe García’s insertion of personal histories to appear within the “institutional archives” of history. The narrations also disclose the traumas that lead up to a family’s end or dissolution.

The final section of this chapter explores foods and food cultures at the intersections of identity. In both novels, food appears as a critical element that inserts the Chinese presence in Cuban culture that interrogates operations of power and privilege. García elaborated on the connection between food and culture in the interview with Irizarry: “It is often said that the gateway to culture is food! I began there and was trying to work deeper down. My interest in cultural mixing began when as a child I loved that disparate foods could be brought together” (“An Interview” 181). García illustrates the process of cooking and culinary fusion to describe the becoming of Cuban culture. The kitchen in *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*) and *Monkey Hunting* is an experimental site of encounters and transculturation. Just as culinary practices involve incorporating ingredients from different countries and recipes from various cultures, the

discussion of food in the novels depict processes of transculturation and transnationalism. Moreover, the characters express their biases and prejudice against other ethnic groups through their preferences through their taste buds. In many religions and spiritual practices, cooking and sharing are a vital part of religious observances. Through the analysis of the novels' depiction of religious syncretism/inter-diasporic cross-fertilization and religious pluralism, I will explore the significance of the Chinese in the making of Afro-Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha.

Locating the Origins: Chinese Indentured Labor in the Caribbean

Chinese indentured labor existed in the Caribbean prior to the Yellow Trade. In 1806, the British ship *Fortitude* brought two hundred Chinese indentured laborers to the Caribbean following many efforts to find contracted workers in different countries (López, *Chinese Cubans* 16). After the British Parliament banned the Atlantic slave trade and renewed the anti-slave trade agreement with Spain on September 23, 1817, however, the ban on the Atlantic slave trade fell short “due to the expanding plantation economy of Cuba and the legal limitations on British ships arresting foreign vessels suspected of slaving” (López-Calvo, *Imagining the Chinese* 5). British and Cuban elites saw Chinese indentured laborers as “the source of labor replenishment, delaying the crisis that would have set in with the end of the slave trade, and making it possible for the plantation economy to continue to prosper” (Hu-DeHart, “Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba” 83). The importation of Asian indentured laborers contributed to the advancement of the Western economy, which depended on plantation agriculture and sustained the Cuban economy based on the export of raw materials. Domestic problems in China also encouraged the migration of Chinese nationals who viewed the indenture as an enticing opportunity:

Overpopulation, natural catastrophes, and the dreadful economic conditions of the country made the prospect of migration attractive. Along with these factors, the political instability invited workers to dream about a better life elsewhere. Wars and rebellions plagued China during the nineteenth century: the Opium Wars with Great Britain (1839–1843, 1856–1860), the Taiping Rebellion (1850–1864), the Sino-Japanese War (1894–1895), and the Boxer Rebellion (1898–1900) against the imperial government of the last Chinese dynasty, the Manchu (also Qing; 1644–1912). It has been estimated that about one million southern Chinese had migrated by 1875. (López-Calvo, *Imagining the Chinese* 4)

López-Calvo lists the conditions and impacts of natural disasters and wars that encouraged overseas migration. However, while many Chinese men entered the indenture system voluntarily, many also fell to this violence unknowingly as victims of abduction and human trafficking. The Yellow Trade and Chinese Indentured labor flourished in the Caribbean and the Americas during the intermediary period between the abolishment of the transatlantic slave trade and emancipation in the 1830s. Asian indentured labor in the Americas began in 1834 and peaked from 1853 to 1866 (Lowe, *Intimacies* 25). Slavery in Cuba was finally abolished by royal decree in 1886, making Cuba “the last country to abolish slavery in Spanish America” (Galván 214).

The two words that compose “Yellow Trade” hint at the nature of the transnational movement implicated with the system of power, as it objectified and commodified a racial group as a brand of new laborers. Chinese indentured laborers’ contracts required a five-year service in the British colonies and an eight-year service in Cuba and Peru (López, *Chinese Cubans* 6). Indentured laborers were also called *coolies*, a pejorative word from the British tradition to refer to Indian and Chinese workers (Hu-DeHart, “Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba” 38; Yun xix). For historian Lisa Yun, term *coolie* as a whole “generalizes Asian laborers in a spectrum of ethnic cultures, histories,

material conditions, and political contexts” (7).²³ In her work *The Coolie Speaks: Chinese Indentured Laborers and African Slaves in Cuba*, Yun explains the significance the word: “The use of ‘coolie’ here posits a radical reexamination of liberal philosophies and assumptions regarding contracts and freedom, positing the coolie not only as a comparable to the slave, but also as being enslaved by the very structures of ‘free’ society and ‘contractual’ society based upon concepts of self-ownership” (xxi). For Yun, this labor practice “generalizes Asian laborers in a spectrum of ethnic cultures, histories, material conditions, and political contexts” (7). For Lowe, the term both identified and obscured the boundary of enslavement and freedom during the period when emancipation did not lead to freedom for enslaved Africans who remained in the plantations (*Intimacies* 24). According to historian Evelyn Hu-DeHart, 125,000 Chinese men came to Cuba through Yellow Trade (*La trata amarilla*) as indentured laborers from 1847 to 1874 (“Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba” 38).

Chinese indentured laborers offset the workforce shortage and sustained Cuba’s capitalist economy in the second half of the nineteenth century (López-Calvo, *Imagining the Chinese* 9). The beginning of the Yellow Trade coincided with a pivotal moment in the Cuban economy. The importation of Chinese laborers contributed to the advancement of the Western economy, which depended on plantation agriculture. Yun explains the correlation between the importation of Chinese indentured laborers and the growth of sugar production in Cuba:

²³ Acknowledging the disparaging origin of the word *coolie*, I opt for the term indentured labor or worker throughout my writing unless I am directly quoting from sources.

By the 1840s Cuba had become the preeminent producer of sugar in the world (161,000 tons), accounting for 21 percent of world production—outdistancing Jamaica, Brazil, and Puerto Rico. From the 1840s to the 1870s Cuba leapt forward with even more phenomenal growth precisely during *the period when Chinese coolies were introduced and installed on Cuban sugar plantations*. (12, original emphasis)

Asian immigration in the Caribbean coincided with a pivotal moment of change in Cuba's agricultural economy to rise as a significant sugar producer, with large-scale sugar and coffee plantations that depended on human laborers (Hu-DeHart 39). The Chinese indentured laborers contributed to Cuba's economic growth and allowed Cuba to meet the increased demands for sugar and raw materials. Chinese indentured laborers in Cuba became the "most visible embodiment of transition in Cuba" (Yun 156) for their intermediary stance between the agrarian economy and modernization. However, the importation of Chinese indentured laborers did not change the labor structure of Cuba's plantation-based economy that depended on coerced labor; it only endorsed it. The practice of forced labor marks the history of Western intervention and human trafficking in the development of the global economy. Indentured migration of Chinese laborers peaked when it was deemed more financially profitable in Cuba. Yun states: "In crude terms, the coolies were easier to procure and cheaper to purchase, making them an enormously profitable commodity. Furthermore, they could be bought in as indentured laborers, but eventually used as slaves" (17). Cuban poet and literary critic Nancy Morejón recalls in her essay "Race and Nation": "The Chinese, brought to the New World in a supposedly 'new' coolie concept of slavery, soon felt the opprobrium of slave exploitation" (qtd. in Yun and Laremont 100), suggesting a breach of contracts and inhumane labor conditions Chinese indentured laborers experienced in Cuba.

Chinese indentured laborers appeared in Cuba's political discourse with ambiguity as both free and forced laborers. Lowe writes: "The Chinese were instrumentally used by the British Atlantic slave system as "a figure, a fantasy of 'free' yet racialized and coerced labor, at a time when the possession of body, work, life, and death was foreclosed to the enslaved and the indentured alike" (*Intimacies* 24). Yun writes: "Cuba's Chinese coolies constitute a unique history of a mass movement of resistant labor being forcibly shipped to Cuba where slavery had not been yet abolished. Slavery did not expire until 1886 in Cuba, over forty years after the arrival of the Chinese" (11). Numerous factors contributed to the British and Cuban elites' preference for Chinese workers. Economic reasons were the driving force behind the importation of Chinese laborers. Also, the preference of Cuban elites and white residents lays grounds for the discussion of race in Cuba's national project prior to its independence. Yun writes: "As the African presence increased in Cuba, alarmist sentiments arose among resident whites concerning the color disparity" (11). López-Calvo points to the problem of race and colorism from the perspective of Cuban elites who identified Chinese as both "white colonists" and replacements for enslaved plantation laborers of African descent (*Imagining the Chinese*). The Chinese "were deemed more desirable in the 'whitening' of the nation" (López-Calvo "Interethnic Alliances" 2), even though they first appeared in the racial imagery of Cuba as "threats to public safety and health," (López, "Historicities" 84). These dual perceptions of Chinese immigrants proved to be a problem for racial taxonomies across the Americas (Tsang, "Yellow Blindness" 25). Chinese indentured laborers were first described as *colonos asiáticos* (Asian settlers/colonists) (Hu-DeHart, "Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba" 42). Mauro García Triana and Pedro Eng Herrera posit

that Chinese laborers were first called colonists “because they arrived under an eight-year ‘contract’ and received a monthly wage of four pesos” (xxxiv). Their contract required a five-year service in the British colonies and an eight-year service in Cuba and Perú (López, *Chinese Cubans* 6).

However, the terms and conditions did not protect Chinese laborers from violence and malpractice. López Calvo writes: “Although Chinese were often considered white colonists in legal terms, the planters and most of the population saw them not as wage laborers but as the continuation of the slave trade (this time from another distant, strange race)” (*Imagining the Chinese* 8–9). This categorization as white was also contested, as López-Calvo points out: “Although Chinese were often considered white colonists in legal terms, the planters and most of the population saw them not as wage laborers but as the continuation of the slave trade (this time from another distant, strange race)” (López-Calvo, *Imagining the Chinese* 8–9). The Yellow Trade elongated the system of forced labor by introducing a new pool of workers from Asia to work as coerced laborers in plantations. Likewise, Yun argues: “The coolie was not simply a ‘replacement’ for the slave. Coolie and slave economies were clearly concomitant and coproductive,” as Chinese indentured laborers worked alongside enslaved Africans in the plantations (7). The discrepancy between the status of the Chinese as both “free” and “indentured” demonstrate that the Chinese in Cuba were subject to racialization after the needs of the Cuban elites and the global demand for raw materials grown and harvested in the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas.

The Yellow Trade ended in 1874 after the Chinese government sent out an investigation of the living conditions of Chinese citizens in Cuba after “voluminous and

troublesome reports of extreme abuses” (Hu-DeHart, “Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba” 53). According to Hu-DeHart, these 1,176 testimonies from Chinese indentured laborers came to be known as “Chinese Emigration. Report of the Commission Sent by China to Ascertain the Condition of Chinese Coolies in Cuba” (“Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba” 53). According to Yun and Laremont, the document contained accounts of abroad Chinese citizens “being tricked or kidnapped to Cuba against their will and their subsequent inhumane treatment in Cuba” (100). These early documentations of firsthand accounts and interviews revealed inhumane labor conditions and cases of abuse experienced by the Chinese indentured workers and were instrumental in ending the Yellow Trade.

The Family Archive: *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*)

Como un mensajero tuyo (1998) was written by Mayra Montero, a Cuban-Puerto Rican writer who has resided in Puerto Rico since childhood. Montero describes herself as a Pan-Caribbean author who writes about various islands in the Caribbean, including Haiti in her novel *Tú, la oscuridad* (*In the Palm of Darkness*, 1995). Montero started her career as a journalist and later published short stories and novels of various genres, including *La última noche que pasé contigo* (*Last Night I Spent with You*, 1991), *Del rojo de su sombra* (*The Red of His Shadow*, 1992), and most recently, *La mitad de la noche* (*The Middle of the Night*, 2009). The narration of *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*) consists of the protagonist Aida Petirena Cheng’s memoir transcribed by her daughter Enriqueta Cheng. They are the co-authors of the memoir. The author of the book (Montero) marks the shift in narrations between Aida’s testimonies and Enriqueta’s interventions. Enriqueta inquires, proves, and challenges Aida’s testimonies within the

narrations. The mother and daughter conclude the story together as the co-authors of the story, as Enriqueta writes: “Nos sentamos a escribir el cinco de marzo de mil novecientos cincuenta y dos [...] y terminamos ocho meses más tarde, el dieciséis de noviembre. Esa noche, al filo de las nueve, pusimos juntas la palabra fin” (*Como un mensajero tuyo* 23).²⁴ For Paul Humphrey in “Gods, Gender, and Nation,” the orality communicates hybridity:

However, rather than conceptually situating the narrative back inside patriarchal notions of historiography, the content and oral nature of the accounts and the context within which they take place further indicate that it is a recognition of heterogeneity, rather than gendered binaries and counterpoints, that will inscribe Caribbean women into history. (122–123)

The author marks shifts in narrations in italics for Enriqueta’s investigations of the events surrounding Aida and Enrico Caruso and the explosion of the National Theater. The beginning scene of *Como un mensajero tuyo* begins with the end—with a man’s visit to Enriqueta Cheng’s residence on Amargura Street (Calle Amargura), where Enriqueta disposes of the manuscript of her mother’s memoir, handing it to a visitor. The first chapter takes place during Cuba’s Special Period in the Time of Peace (1991–2000, *Período especial en tiempos de paz*), an extended period of emergency declared by Fidel Castro. Cuba faced an economic downfall following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Henken 155). Cuba and the Soviet Union had a long-term sugar supply agreement that sustained the Cuban economy despite conflicting U.S.-Cuban diplomatic relations and the embargo (Pérez-López 126–127). According to Pérez-López, the Special Period of Cuba consisted of “delays and shortfalls in imports of oil, raw materials and machinery from the Soviet Union and the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe and loss of

²⁴ “We began on March 5, 1952, [...] and finished eight months later, on November 16. That night, just at nine o’clock, we both wrote the words “The End” (Montero, *The Messenger* 8).

financial assistance from, and markets in, these countries for Cuban exports” (“The Cuban Economy” 508). The “For Sale” sign displayed on the window of Enriqueta’s home on Amargura Street serves as a reminder of the moment in Cuban history when the concept of private property existed. During the Special Period, a house without an heir was soon occupied by another family or families when its last owner dies (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 15–16). The isolation experienced by the generations of Enriqueta’s family parallels the novel’s portrayal of Chinese settlers (*paisanos chinos*) who live on the outskirts of mainstream Cuban society. Aida’s observation of Chinese immigrants in Chinatown consists of their otherness (despite Aida’s Chinese roots), emphasizing their detachment from society.

The novel’s storyline takes the historical event of the explosion at the National Theatre in Havana, Cuba, on June 13, 1920, and the disappearance of Enrico Caruso, the opera singer who then performed the lead role as an Egyptian general named Radamès in Verdi’s opera *Aida*. According to the *New York Times* article published the day after the accident, the explosion came during the second act of the opera *Aida*, though it was timed for the last scene. Caruso rushed out of his dressing room in his costume and left the building with the help of Rudolfo Bracale, the theater’s manager (*New York Times*). In an interview with Manuel Prieto, Montero describes the plot of *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*), in an interview following the publication of the novel:

I took this anecdote [of the bombing of the National Theater] and built a story around it—which has since turned out to be not so fictional at all—in which Caruso is helped by a Cuban woman, a *mestiza* who is half mulatto and half Chinese. They fall in love and she bears him a daughter. After the novel was published I started to hear rumors that, in fact, Caruso had fallen in love with a Cuban woman in those months he spent in Cuba.” (90, original emphasis)

Montero's novel fictionalizes the days following the bombing and Caruso's disappearance from the public eye with Aida, a 27-year-old Chinese Afro-Cuban seamstress. Aida's memoir begins five months before the explosion, with the news of ominous signs her godfather, a *babalawo*²⁵ named José de Calazán Bangoché (also known as his nickname, Cheche) received during divination reading. Calazán had heard Aida's name from *ékeule*.²⁶ While reading Aida's future, he hears from *Ifá* (divination) that a man is coming to coronate her (initiating her into the religion) and is coming to die. Domitila is disturbed by the impending danger surrounding her daughter and must seek help from male figures outside her house. Two men exert paternal influence over her family: Calazán, a spiritual leader (*babalawo*) and Aida's godfather, and Yuan Pei Fu, also a spiritual leader (*babalawo*) who is later disclosed as Aida's biological father.²⁷

When the narration begins, Enriqueta introduces her and her mother's Chinese, Lukumi (Yoruba), and Spanish heritage:

El nombre de mi madre era Aida Petrirena Cheng—yo también llevo su apellido—, hija de Noro Cheng Po, un emigrante chino que se hizo comerciante en Cuba, y de Domitila Cuervo, parda que a su vez nació de los amores entre una negra de origen lucumí que se llamaba Petrona, y un español cuyo nombre nunca supimos, pero sí el apellido, aquel Cuervo con el que reconoció a su hija. (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 23)

My mother's name was Aida Petrirena Cheng—I have the same last name—and she was the daughter of Noro Cheng Po, a Chinese immigrant who set up a business in Cuba, and Domitila Cuervo, a mulatta who was a love child, too. Domitila's mother, a black Lucumi woman, was named Petrona, and her father was a Spaniard whose first name we never found

²⁵ a religious priest and spiritual leader of the Afro-Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha

²⁶ a chain usually made of coconut shells or wasp shells used during the ritual. According to Domitila, *ékeule* never sings (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 29).

²⁷ At the same time, Domitila goes to a church and leaves an offering to Saint Flora (Montero, *CMT* 41). Domitila's reliance on various religious systems reflects her state of desperation regarding her daughter's safety. At the same time, it emphasizes the pluralistic nature of the Afro-Cuban Santería as a belief system that hybridizes Catholicism, Yoruba belief systems, and Chinese folk religions and ancestor worship.

out, though we did know his family name: that was the Cuervo with which he recognized his daughter. (Montero, *The Messenger* 8)

Enriqueta introduces Aida and her father, a Chinese immigrant named Noro Cheng Po. Aida and Enriqueta receive their last name from Noro Cheng, and Aida identifies Noro Cheng as her real father even after she discovers her biological father: “Pensé en mi madre y en Noro Cheng, que era mi padre en los papeles y que sólo en ese instante comprendí que era también en el corazón”²⁸ (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 234). Despite her Chinese heritage and ties to Noro Cheng, Aida distances herself from the Chinese identity and holds her judgment towards the Chinese community in Havana’s Chinatown. As a child, Aida senses the lack of affection between Domitila and Noro Cheng, and she describes her family as “una familia sin besos” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 31).²⁹ Domitila describes Noro Cheng was an undesirable yet the only viable option for the poor mulatta woman to marry. Noro Cheng desired to bring a woman from China, someone of his racial and ethnic background.³⁰ Noro Cheng’s marriage to Domitila comes in exchange for the family’s financial stability and safety assured by Yuan Pei Fu, and the house on *Calle Amargura 75* (75 Amargura Street). Noro Cheng and Domitila’s marriage deal hints at transactional aspects of the marriage system based on a mutual agreement. The meaning of the street name *Amargura* (bitterness) seemingly reflects the emotion felt by the three characters bound in the contract and the

²⁸ “I thought about my mother and Noro Cheng; he was my father on paper and, I realized it only then, he was also my father in my heart” (Montero, *The Messenger* 193).

²⁹ “My family never was a family that kissed” (Montero, *The Messenger* 14).

³⁰ Noro Cheng’s past summons the history of “picture brides.” Chinese and Asian laborers invited women from the homeland after receiving their photos via mail.

institution of marriage.³¹ Aida observes the couple's discontent as the result of their loveless marriage, leading to a speculation that Yuan Pei Fu might be her biological father, even though she does not have a logical support for this claim until much later.

Even after Noro Cheng's death, Domitila keeps her ties to the Chinese community, entering Chinatown and Yuan Pei Fu's estates freely and interacting with Chinese residents. Aida describes the people of Chinatown and Domitila's acting role as the master of the house and a family member: "Esos chinos no nos miraban a los ojos, hablaban bajito o no hablaban, pero trataban a mi madre como si fuera una más de la familia. No había mujeres en aquella casa y ella se comportaba como si fuera la dueña" (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 38).³² This scene hints at the bond, interethnic alliances created between the women of the Cheng family and the Chinese community members as affinal kins from Domitila's relationship with Noro Cheng and Yuan Pei Fu and Aida's partial Chinese ancestry. At age fifteen, Aida enters Yuan Pei Fu's home to make her first offering to *Sanfancón*, an *orisha* (deity) of the Santería/Regla de Ocha riding on Yuan Pei Fu's body.³³ During that time, Yuan Pei Fu passes his family legacy onto Aida. This history becomes part of Aida's memoir with the help of her daughter Enriqueta, who transcribed this story. Through Yuan Pei Fu's tales, Montero depicts the Yellow Trade and highlights the history of Chinese immigration to Cuba:

³¹ In the opening scene of the novel, Enriqueta's visitor enters the house on Amargura street and comments: "Amargura isn't a good name for a street" (Montero, *The Messenger* 8). Enriqueta responds: "Of course it isn't, [...] but you must understand, it doesn't matter anymore" (Montero, *The Messenger* 8).

³² "Those Chinamen wouldn't look at us in the eye, they mumbled when they talked or didn't talk at all, but they treated my mother like one of the family. There weren't any women in the house, and she acted as though it was hers" (Montero, *The Messenger* 12).

³³ Also written as San Fan Con. According to Tsang: "The name "Sanfancón" is particular to Cuba and it can be argued that it refers to a specifically Cuban composition of the Chinese deity" ("Yellow Blindness" 27)

Luego se acuchillaba a mi lado, y me contaba la parte triste de la historia, que comenzaba en El Barco de la Muerte, durante la Décimo Segunda Luna, a los cuarenta y seis años del emperador Tu Kong. El barco era la fragata *Oquendo*, y la fecha de lunas y emperadores, el 2 de enero de 1847. Más de trescientos chinos salieron ese día desde Cantón para venir a trabajar a Cuba. Yuan Pei Fu tenía en ese entonces ocho años y viajaba con su padre, que era el custodio de una imagen de Cuang Cong. (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 39)

Then he would squat beside me and tell me the sad part of the story that began on the Ship of Death, during the Twelfth Moon in the forty-seventh year of the Emperor Tu Kong. The ship was frigate *Oquendo*, and the date of moons and emperors was January 2, 1847. The day when more than three hundred Chinese left Canton to come to work in Cuba. Yuan Pei Fu was eight years old then, and he traveled with his father, who was the guardian of an image of Cuang Cong. (Montero, *The Messenger* 21–22)

Yuan Pei Fu's arrival story places the family within the context of Chinese immigration history in Cuba. The year of Yuan Pei Fu's arrival as a child passenger and the name of the ship *Oquendo* match the historical records from the first dispatch of Chinese indentured laborers. Hu-DeHart states: "An agreement was sealed sometime in 1846 between Zulueta and Company in London and the British in Amoy, a treaty port in Fukien Province, South China. On June 3, 1847, the Spanish ship *Oquendo* docked in Havana with 206 Chinese on board, after 131 days at sea. Six died at sea and another 7 shortly after arrival" ("Chinese Coolie Labor in Cuba" 40). The author's use of historical records creates verisimilitude, giving validity to the contribution of Chinese folk traditions in the practice of Afro-Diasporic religion Santería/Regla de Ocha. Cuang Cong (全琮)³⁴ is a renowned historical and literary³⁵ figure who served as a military general

³⁴ Translates to "Lord Guan (Yu)" (Tsang, "Yellow Blindness" 27). Also spelled: *Guan Gong* and *Quan Cong*

³⁵ Cuang Cong's story appears in the 14th century Chinese literary canon *The Tale of Three Nations* (三國演義), also translated to *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Tsang, "Yellow Blindness" 27).

during China's Three Kingdoms period (200–280 AD) and was worshipped in Chinese folk religions. He is depicted as “a historical figure turned deity,” becoming “the most popular god for the Chinese during the Qing dynasty (Tsang, “Yellow Blindness” 27). In Montero's novel, the Chinese passengers of *Oquendo* prayed and made offerings to Cuang Cong to wish for a safe voyage. The narrator describes Yuan Pei Fu's father as an active practitioner of the religion as the guardian of Cuang Cong's image. During the voyage, an illness sweeps the boat and kills 96 people, including Yuan Pei Fu's father. Before his death, Yuan Pei Fu's father entrusts the image of Cuang Cong to his son as his successor, as Aida recalls: “Noventa y seis cadáveres tuvieron que tirar al mar, y el padre de Yuan Pei Fu estuvo entre ellos, pero antes de morir, él le encargó a su hijo que cuidara de la imagen de Cuang Cong” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 39).³⁶ Yuan Pei Fu's father entrusts the spiritual commitment as image bearer of Cuang Cong to his son before his death, and this image plays a significant role in Yuan Pei Fu's future upon arrival.

Villagers of Havana gather at the port of Regla to watch the docking of *Oquendo*.³⁷ Wearied Chinese survivors of the death voyage are confronted with mocking villagers, who laugh at their chains and distressed appearances. Aida recalls: “La gente, al principio, se reía: era la primera vez que veían *esclavos chinos*, encadenados como negros, pero más andrajosos y desesperados, con los ojos hundidos y los pies hinchados por el agua de mar” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 39, my emphasis).³⁸ The scene

³⁶ “In the middle of all those men was a child, a little boy carrying an image that looked like Changó to the people of the Lukumi nation” (Montero, *The Messenger* 22).

³⁷ On March 6, 1847, the first ship carrying Chinese indentured laborers arrived at Regla. (Tsang, “Yellow Blindness” 25).

³⁸ “At first the people laughed: it was the first time they had seen *Chinese slaves* chained up like blacks, but even more ragged and desperate, with sunken eyes and their feet swollen with seawater” (Montero, *The Messenger* 22)

describes the Chinese laborers as coerced and enslaved. In the midst of ridicule, the child Yuan Pei Fu captures people's attention. The image of Cuang Cong, elicits a different reaction from the crowd: "En medio de esos hombres había un niño, un chiquito de pelo largo que cargaba con una imagen que a los lucumíes de nación se les pareció a Changó" (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 39).³⁹ The Afro-Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha is a pluralistic belief system that merges Catholicism, Yoruba (Lukumi) belief systems, and Chinese folk religions and ancestor worship traditions. Changó is an *orisha* (deity) that controls weather and thunder, equivalent to the Catholic Saint Barbara.

From this scene, Montero fictionalizes the specific moment in which the revered Chinese figure Cuang Cong becomes part of Cuban culture as *Sanfancón*. Aida has introduced Yuan Pei Fu as "el dueño de la espada y de los truenos" (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 38).⁴⁰ The sword and thunder are Changó's symbols as well, which makes Sanfancón concurrent to the syncretic triage composed of Saint Barbara (Catholicism), Changó (Yoruba worship), Cuang Cong (Chinese folk religion). In contrast to other Chinese men bringing labor, Yuan Pei Fu brings the legacy of Cuang Cong to Cuba. Yuan Pei Fu's status is elevated from an orphan to the bearer of Changó's image, with the right transferred from his father before his arrival. As the bearer of *Cuang Cong/Sanfancón's* image and the "*babalawo chino*" (Chinese priest), Yuan Pei Fu holds "la virtud de los negros mezclada con la virtud de los dragones. El resultado de esas dos virtudes era un

³⁹ "In the middle of all those men was a child, a little boy carrying an image that looked like Changó to the people of the Lucumi nation" (Montero, *The Messenger* 22)

⁴⁰ "[t]he owner of the sword and thunders" (Montero, *The Messenger* 20)

guerrero envuelto en humo: Sanfancón” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 38).⁴¹ This depiction of Yuan Pei Fu describes Sanfancón’s power in the realms of African, Asian, and American continents. Through Yuan Pei Fu’s death voyage, Montero brings attention to the history of the Yellow Trade and Chinese indentured laborers in Cuba.

Montero illustrates tensions between the practitioners of Santería/Regla de Ocha and a hierarchy established according to the origins of spiritual powers. The Afro-Cuban *babalawo* Calazán and Yuan Pei Fu’s conversation leads to the conclusion that they serve the same deities: “Los santos son iguales en todas partes, son los mismos en China que en Guinea” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 39).⁴² In this scene, Calazán’s decision to use a diminutive “aquel chinito descarriado”⁴³ to describe Yuan Pei Fu’s past reflects the level of disrespect to relegate the Chinese in Cuba, concentrated in Chinatown, an ethnic enclave (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 40). Nevertheless, Domitila reverts to Yuan Pei Fu over Calazán when she detects impending danger surrounding Aida to trust the Chinese *nganga* (artifact) over the African when she says: “—Calazán no puede hacer más—insistió mi madre—. Y lo que no puede la *nganga* negra, siempre lo ha podido la *nganga* china” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 38).⁴⁴ Domitila counts on the strength and wisdom of *paisanos chinos* (translated to *Chinamen*), as *Sanfancón* is described as

⁴¹ “the power of the blacks mixed with the power of the dragons. The result of those two powers was a warrior surrounded by smoke: Sanfancón” (Montero, *The Messenger* 20–21).

⁴² “The saints are the same everywhere, they’re the same in China and in Guinea” (Montero, *The Messenger* 22)

⁴³ “That [...] scared little Chinese boy” (Montero, *The Messenger* 22).

⁴⁴ “And what the black *nganga* can’t do, the Chinese *nganga* always can” (Montero, *The Messenger* 21).

the strongest *orisha* (deity) in the Afro-Cuban Santería.⁴⁵ This scene exemplifies the power dynamic with the religious syncretism that creates a stereotype of Chinese related to magic and healing power. Montero also illustrates the division when Aida introduces herself to Tata Sandoval. The *babalawo* of Congos in Cienfuegos responds: “—De apellido chino [...] Por Camajuaní hay un montón de chinos, tienen su *babalawo* para ellos” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 186–187).⁴⁶ Through the character of Yuan Pei Fu, Montero creates moments of cross-cultural intimacies through the religious practices and struggles from the division in religious practices between Chinese and Afro-Cubans.

Similarly, Montero introduces another intertextual element in the novel in the discussion. Opera, a European art form considered part of elite culture, juxtaposes with the Santería/Regla de Ocha.⁴⁷ Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi’s opera *Aida* is a story of an Egyptian general named Radamés and an Ethiopian princess named Aida. The star-crossed lovers fall in love despite their difference in social standing coming from Egypt’s attack on Ethiopia. The chapters of *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The messenger*) are titled (in Italian) after a line from Verdi’s opera. Also, Aida and Enrico Caruso personify the syncretism of religious faiths that originated from the four continents. Aida has Chinese, Lukumi (Yoruba), and Spanish heritages, and Enrico is Italian. Humphrey writes on the juxtaposition of Verdi’s opera and the religious storytelling (*pataki*):

⁴⁵ “Chinese power” (my translation. The word *paisano* translates to peasants. In Cuba, Chinese indentured laborers were classified as *paisanos chinos* (Chinese settlers). This term was used to refer to Chinese migrants even after the end of the Yellow Trade.

⁴⁶ “A Chinese last name [...] There’s a lot of Chinamen around Camajuani, they have their own *babalawo*” (Montero, *The Messenger* 151).

⁴⁷ Ossa writes: “The opera is an environment for Cuba’s elite, of which Aida is not a part, and therefore she is viewed as not belonging” (8)

[Montero's] reinterpretation of classic oral texts such as Verdi's *Aida* through Afro-Cuban religious traditions in *Como un mensajero* and her incorporation and rewriting of certain myths or *pataki* (didactic storytelling to teach religious principles) from Santería, Vodou, Gagá, and Abakuá both celebrate the heterogeneous nature of the Caribbean and re-emphasize the hybrid nature of her historical discourse. (123)

Intertextual elements from the opera *Aida* first appear in the protagonist's name (Aida Petrirena Cheng) and Enrico Caruso's role as Radamés in the opera at the moment of the bombing. Aida embodies different cultural and racial identities and engages with Caruso from destiny.

Physically, Aida's body is the mediator between the clash of the three cultures as a woman who shares the racial background of her Chinese father and mulatta mother of lucumí origin. Spiritually, water is Aida's element, making her Yemayá's spiritual daughter. Aida declares: "Éramos dos mujeres: Yemayá y su montura, ella y yo contra la voluntad de los demás *orishas*" (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 184).⁴⁸ In the Afro-Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha, the *orisha* (deity) Yemayá's power stretches over waters and oceans. Her power symbolizes maternal love, as she is described as the mother of all *orishas* in her unique position to "speak for other *orishas*" (Tsang, "A Different Kind" 118). When Yemaya "rides" the horse, Aida experiences a spiritual possession. The religious syncretism, which Tsang also describes as an inter-diasporic cross-fertilization to describe its process, adds another layer to the interpretation of the novel's intertextual elements. As Changó is the *orisha* (deity) of thunders and described as both Yemayá's lover and son (Humphrey 123), Aida cares for him while he runs from assassination threats. Aida feeds and cleans Caruso like a mother, though the care is unreciprocated. In

⁴⁸ "We were two women: Yemayá and the horse she had mounted, the two of us against the will of the other *orishas*" (Montero, *The Messenger* 149).

addition, Enrico's attraction to Aida becomes stronger when the couple crosses the waters, as Aida is reminded of her spiritual connection to Yemayá:

Se aferró a mí en esa forma espiritual, algo que tuvo que ver con lo que nos pasó en el viaje. Ten presente que todo el viaje se realizó por el agua, que es mi element; el reino de Yemayá; el lugar donde tiro, pero también recojo. En ese mar, en esa noche tranquilita, se despertaron los aparecidos chinos, todos los fantasmas del vapor *Oquendo*; y los aparecidos negros, todos los que llegaron junto con mi abuela Petrona, lukumí de nación. (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 213).

He clung to me in a spiritual way: it had something to do with what happened to us on the trip. Remember, the whole trip was on water, and water is my element, the kingdom of Yemayá, the place where I cast out but also gather in. On the ocean, on that quiet night, all the Chinese phantoms awoke, all the ghosts from the steamship *Oquendo*; and the black phantoms, all the ones who came with my grandmother Petrona of the Lukumi nation. (Montero, *The Messenger* 176).

Aida creates the connection to Yemayá through her element, water. The ocean is haunted by the ghosts of the Chinese and Africans who have lost their lives on the sea. Rebeca L. Hey-Colón writes in her first book, *Channeling Knowledges: Water and Afro-Diasporic Spirits in Latinx and Caribbean Worlds*:

Like the rest of the *orishas*, Yemayá arrived alongside her children in the so-called New World because of the transatlantic slave trade. This experience forever altered her presence in the Americas. While in Nigeria Yemayá's worshippers associate her with sweet waters and the River Ogun, across the Atlantic she is venerated at the ocean (Sellers 132). (35)

The ocean is Yemayá's kingdom, the burial site that holds their memories as Yemayá embraces the bodies of African and Chinese people who have lost their lives on the sea.⁴⁹ As a woman of Chinese and Lukumi origins, Aida is spiritually connected to the people

⁴⁹ Mayra Santos-Febres' poem, "20. Aquí al fondo danzan concejales—," in her poetry collection *boat people* describes the sea as city of the dead of inhabitants who drowned in the Caribbean Sea. See Chapter one of Hey-Colón, *Channeling Knowledges*.

who have crossed the oceans on the *Oquendo* (the first Chinese boat during the yellow trade) and countless other boats.

Many Dreams of Cuba: *Monkey Hunting*

Cristina García was born in Havana and raised in the United States. García also started her writing career as a journalist, then became the author of seven novels, including *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), *The Agüero Sisters* (1997), *A Handbook to Luck* (2007), and *Here in Berlin* (2017). García also published many anthologies, children's books, young adult novels, poetry, and a nonfiction book titled *Cars of Cuba*. García's motivations for *Monkey Hunting* (2003) correspond to her interests in Cuban history and the Chinese experience in Cuba. In her interview with writer and professor Scott Shibuya Brown, García described her memory of a Chinese-Cuban restaurant in New York as the event that inspired her to write the novel:

When I was growing up in New York, my parents took me to my first Chinese-Cuban restaurant on the Upper West Side. A Chinese waiter came over, took our order in Spanish, and to my utter delight, I was able to get Cuban black beans with my pork-fried rice. I thought this was the greatest thing that ever happened to me. But when I asked my parents how and why the Chinese and the Cuban dishes could go together like this, they couldn't tell me. ("Conversation" 257–258)

In García's words, *Monkey Hunting* is an effort to explain how the two cultures came to be part of the cuisine (258). García brings attention to the cultural proximity and the lack of knowledge of Chinese immigration history in the Americas to describe her work as her "continued rebellion against the whitewashed version of Cuban history" ("An Interview" 181). García creates "a 120-year dialogue between Cuba and Asia" (Cho 2) to highlight the contributions of the Chinese in Cuba. *Monkey Hunting* explores Cuban history through the lenses of four generations of an Afro-Chinese Cuban family spread across

Cuba, China, Vietnam, and the United States. The expansion of the Chinese immigrant diaspora contrasts with *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*)’s placement of its Chinese characters in the enclosed space of Chinatown and the isolated Cheng residence on Amargura Street.

In *Monkey Hunting*’s opening chapter, “Origins,” a young village farmer named Chen Pan is found at Amoy (current day Xiamen), located in the Southeast coast of China and one of the main ports of embarkation during the nineteenth century. Chen Pan’s personal histories and the circumstances that lead to his signing of the indenture appear within the framework of global and national histories. Early scenes of the novel illustrates the history of the Yellow Trade from the recruitment of Chinese indentured laborers. Chen Pan initially comes to Amoy hoping find work but loses all his money to gambling and entertainment. He accepts an invitation from an unnamed man in a Western suit who provides a romanticized and hypersexualized vision of Cuba. To recruit Chen Pan, he describes the magical power of water in Cuba, fishes that jump straight from water into the frying pan, and women comparable to the Chinese emperor’s mistresses:

Chen Pan wanted to believe everything he said. How the drinking water in Cuba was so rich with minerals that a man had twice his ordinary strength (and could stay erect for days). That the Cuban women were eager and plentiful, much lovelier than the Emperor’s concubines. That even the river fish jumped, unbidden, into frying pans. Suddenly the world seemed larger and more unfathomable than Chen Pan had imagined. (García, *Monkey Hunting* 5)

These stories illustrate the tactics employed by western trade companies to entice and force young Chinese men into indenture: a small deposit and promises of hypersexualized fantasy associated with Cuba, its women, and flora and fauna. This alternate vision of Cuba reverses the exoticization of Asia found in earlier Latin American literary works.

Fully convinced, Chen Pan decides to leave China and his family for the promised wealth in Cuba, that “[h]e would go beyond the edge of the world to Cuba” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 6). The recruitment is also an opportunity to break free from the cyclical life by departing from the place where “the future was always a loyal continuation of the past” (70). In contrast to the poverty and the barrenness of his wife, Chen Pan’s vision of Cuba presents another chance in a life filled with wealth and fecundity:

If all went well, Chen Pan speculated, he could return home a wealthy man, perhaps a stronger man if the story about the drinking water wasn’t a lie. Then he’d build a splendid house by the river, huge and on stilts, better than any in his village’s memory. He’d buy two or three more wives, comely and fecund as hens, found his own dynasty. At the end of his life there would be four generations of Chens living under one roof. (García, *Monkey Hunting* 5–6)

Chen Pan’s imagination of Cuba provides a counter-narrative to the Oriental fantasy that mystified the Eastern world from the days of the Silk Road Trade, reversing the Orientalist myths to romanticize the Eastern world. Chen Pan does not return to China, and most of Chen Pan’s dreams are left unfulfilled. However, Chen Pan accomplishes his dream of starting four generations of his family in Cuba.

Chen Pan’s transoceanic voyage depicted in *Monkey Hunting* is just as traumatic as Yuan Pei Fu’s voyage in *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*). Chen Pan’s romanticized version of Cuba quickly dissipates with hostile conditions and violence against Chinese men on the boat. At first, people on the ship had formed a community, entertaining each other with stories and jokes, exchanging and selling their items, and sharing food prepared by their wives. The scene further dehumanizes people. The horrific condition of the ship resembles a pigsty, and Chen Pan merely recounts the incidents of homicides and suicides. This voyage resonates with the perilous conditions and horrors of the Middle Passage with numerous cases of murders and numerous suicides of Chinese

men. Chen Pan offers detailed summaries of death cases on the ship, including a young Chinese man's suicide with a chopstick and people resorting to drinking urine and getting killed for asking for water due to unquenchable thirst and lack of clean water. Chen Pan's dream of Cuba immediately turns into a nightmare, and protagonist grows "increasingly regretful" for chasing his faulty dreams (García, *Monkey Hunting* 16). The narrator describes suicides as an "illness" without a cure, and even the illustrious sorcerer of herbs on board could not save people from it (García, *Monkey Hunting* 14). There are even more cases of death after the voyage. Yun describes the suicides of indentured plantation laborers as a collective movement against workplace violence: "Positing a cultural predisposition for suicidal depression is unsatisfactory, most obviously in regard to testimonies that suggest suicide as collective protest and workplace sabotage" (148). Death was a way to break from coercion for many.

When Chinese indentured laborers arrive at the port, plantation owners strip and examine Chinese men for strength. Plantation owners and their hires cut off Chinese men's queues, devastating their cultural practice. Chen Pan grows weary and immediately regrets the decision to come to Cuba. Out of shame, Chen Pan describes himself as a nationless man who is no longer able to complain about his situation overseas after he has become uprooted and displaced from his birthplace.⁵⁰ On his first day on *La Amada*⁵¹ plantation, Chen Pan realizes that he has been deceived: "From his first hour in the fields, it was clear to Chen Pan that he was in Cuba not as a hired worker but as a slave, no

⁵⁰ "Chen Pan burned red with shame, but he didn't complain. Who was he now without a country?" (García, *Monkey Hunting* 21).

⁵¹ In reference to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, a novel that reconceptualizes the enslavement of Africans in the United States.

different from the Africans. That he'd been tricked into signing his life away" (García, *Monkey Hunting* 24). There, he recognizes the status and purpose of the Chinese in Cuba to work as plantation laborers: "Now there was no question of his purpose in Cuba. He was there to cut sugarcane. All of them were. *Chinos. Asiáticos. Culis* [indentured laborers]. Later, there would be other jobs working on the railroads or in the copper mines of El Cobre, five hundred miles away. But for now[,] what the Cubans wanted were strong backs for their fields" (García, *Monkey Hunting* 21). The novel disrupts certain racial stereotypes associated with Asians by centering Chen Pan, but it exposes other stereotypes. Chen Pan characterizes Africans by highlighting their physical attributes the first time he meets them. The narrator describes:

Chen Pan had never seen men like this. Twice as wide as him, with thighs thick as oaks. Teeth that could grind his bones. Others as tall as two Chinese, with notched spines he could climb like a pine. The Africans' skin seemed to darken the fields—reddish black skin or blue-black skin or skin brown as bark that gave off a smell of the woods. Most of the slaves had a spiderweb of scars on their backs, or strips of pink flesh still raw from the overseer's whip. Chen Pan watched a slave catch honeybees with his tongue, swallowing them like a bear. He claimed they didn't even sting. (García, *Monkey Hunting* 23)

In this early scene, Chen Pan dehumanizes Black bodies he sees on the plantation. He associates their physical attributes with the wildlife and compares them from the perspective of a Chinese man to exoticize the Africans as the racial Other. Furthermore, other Chinese laborers make racially charged assumptions to insult enslaved Africans and ostracize Chen Pan for befriending them: "The other Chinese ridiculed Chen Pan. They said they wanted nothing to do with the Africans. They said the black men were liars, that they stank like monkeys and stole their food. But Chen Pan paid them no mind" (García, *Monkey Hunting* 26). However, the presence of the mutual enemy binds the communities

together. The Chinese and the Africans share the hatred for the white criollo overseer called “El Bigote,” who poses violence to them (García, *Monkey Hunting* 27). Even though no one mentions the killing out of fear of punishment, the African community openly pays respect to Chen Pan after he kills *El Bigote* with a stone. Chen Pan heroically removes a mutual threat to the coerced laborers, which captures women’s attention (García, *Monkey Hunting* 33). This scene from *Monkey Hunting* portrays the shared burden of forced labor that fosters the creation of interethnic alliances and conflicts coming from co-existence and cohabitation.

After the indenture, Chen Pan’s success is measured by the wealth he accumulates from the antique store “Lucky Find.” He sells “chinerias and japonerias” (cultural artifacts and memorabilia from Asia) to Europeans, who mindlessly purchase them at expensive costs. Chen Pan purchases Lucrecia and her son Víctor Manuel from Don Joaquín Alomá, who has reduced them as labor tools to add to the workforce and populate the plantation. However, there is the unusualness of a former coerced laborer to purchase a woman and engage in the slave trade, regardless of his motive to save her.

Yolanda P. Martinez focuses on the gendered violence against the female body:

Lucrecia is a female body violated and imprisoned by the national discourse of slavery Cuba, where (black) women’s reproductive rights were left to the desires and dictates of men. Moreover, Lucrecia is a figure who serves as an image of the reproducer of the nation when, after losing her first child, she engages in her progenitive capacity with Chen Pan giving birth to a whole generation of “brown children with Chinese eyes who spoke Spanish and a smattering of Abakuá (García 2003, 209). (Martinez 86)

The depiction of Lucrecia as Chen Pan’s helper and common-law spouse, however, attests to the gendered and sexualized imagery of women of African ancestry, as Lucrecia is the daughter of the *cimarrones*, and was sold to slavery by her brother. Chen Pan, too,

queries: “If he bought the girl and paid her a small salary, would she still be considered a slave?” (67–68). Lucrecia’s purchase adds to Chen Pan’s personal and material wealth, as suggested by the Spanish word *lucro* (profit) in her name.

Lucrecia is an example of the *china mulata*, described by López-Calvo as an exoticized and fetishized woman character, “the black ally who expresses sympathy, solidarity, or even marries the Asian character” (“From Interethnic Alliances” 1).⁵² Lucrecia and Chen Pan create a family together without the legal boundaries of marriage. Chen Pan also welcomes her son Víctor Manuel into his family amid Lucrecia’s preoccupation about Chen Pan’s motive for purchasing the mother and baby together. Chen Pan’s attachment to the boy resonates with the desire for a male heir from his Chinese wife’s barrenness. Chen Pan celebrates the baby’s first birthday with festivity and encourages Lucrecia to start her own candle-pouring business to save money for *coartación* (coarctation), to purchase her own freedom and that of her son. However, she decides to stay with Chen Pan, even after the *coartación* following her son’s death. Lucrecia and Chen Pan become the parents of three children: Desiderio, Lorenzo, and Caridad. The name “Caridad” resonates with that of the patron saint of Cuba, the Virgin of Charity (La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre), who represents hope and salvation. In the Afro-diasporic religion Santería/Regla de Ocha, La Virgen de la Caridad is syncretized with the *orisha* (deities) of rivers *Ochún/Oshún*, the sister of Yemayá. Chen Pan is introduced to Santería through oral storytelling and fortunetelling during the indenture. After a Chinese indentured laborer named Tiao Mu becomes the first successful

⁵² *La mulata achinada* from Tsang’s article: “La mulata achinada: Bodies, Gender, and Authority in Afro-Chinese Religion in Cuba” is a Chinese Afro-Cuban woman who embraces her Chinese identity in the context of religious representations.

cimarron,⁵³ the Africans use stories to teach Chen Pan about the *orishas* (deities) Ochún and Yemayá: “The Africans claimed that Ochún had protected Tiao Mu, that the river goddess had turned him to mist before sweeping him off to the safety of her sister, Yemayá, who ruled the blue seas” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 37). Like *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*), *Monkey Hunting* incorporates *pataki* (didactic storytelling) of the Afro-Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha in the discourse to describe the progression of events.

Food Metaphors and the Kitchen as the Site of Encounters

Food becomes one of the central symbols in *Como un mensajero tuyo* and *Monkey Hunting* to discuss the characters’ identity and belonging by showing integral connections between food and people. According to E. N. Anderson: “Food as communication finds most of its applications in the process of defining one’s individuality and one’s place in society. Food communicates class, ethnic group, lifestyle affiliation, and other social positions” (171). Food’s primary function remains as sustenance, but there is also the aspect of bringing pleasure to one’s palate. However, food also carries a social function of uniting individuals and communities and evoking a sense of identity and belonging. Food unites but also separates people within and outside of the community. In the context of religion, it nourishes one’s body and spirit. In Afro-Cuban Santería, cooking becomes a vital part of the religious ritual. Likewise, the cooking process incorporates the four natural elements (fire, water, air, and earth) to mix and combine ingredients. Elizabeth Pérez writes in *Religion in the Kitchen*: “Practitioners

⁵³ From this one successful case out of many unsuccessful cases of a Chinese cimarron, Chinese indentured laborers gain more respect from other enslaved Africans on the plantation (García, *Monkey Hunting* 38).

talk while they cook. . . . Practitioners define their traditions as moral-ethical communities through the informal genres of communication that accompany food preparation” (2). Ceremonial rites often involve cooking the recipes handed down from ancestors and sharing the food around the communal table as practitioners prepare meals for the living and the deceased family members, and the deities.

The names of dishes often contain connotations of union, such as a Central American *casado* (translated to “married” or “married man”), a complete meal made of a combination of rice and beans with other dishes served on the same plate. Returning to Cristina García’s experience with the Chinese–Latin American cuisine in New York as the inspiration for *Monkey Hunting*, there is a dish called 全家福 (*quán jiā fú*), a popular dish in Chinese and Chinese American cuisine that includes a variety of ingredients. The name of the dish translates to “happy family” or “family portrait,” capturing the essence of its meaning as a dish families prepare for the Chinese New Year to wish good luck. Like *ajiaco*, *quán jiā fú* communicates the assemblage of distinct people who together and characterize a group, whether it is a family or the body of a nation.

In *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*), food comes into the early part of the narration to distinguish the characters’ backgrounds and mark racial, ethnic, and cultural differences between people based on their culinary practices. Aida describes her parents, Noro and Domitila Cheng. Aida’s descriptions of the Chinese come from her memories of foods and smells. Aida’s description of Havana’s Chinatown involves the memories associated with food, places, and people occupying the ethnic enclave: “A esas horas, la mayoría de los chinos estaba fuera, vendiendo lo que vendían ellos: dulces que se llamaban ‘orejones’, figuritas de ajonjolí o maní tostado, y un pescado de carne negra,

lo mismo fresco que salado, algo asqueroso que a mí me parecía que no se usaba para nada bueno” (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 40).⁵⁴ In her account, Aida uses derogatory words like *stench* and *disgusting* to describe Chinese foods, disclosing her racial stereotypes against the Chinese migrants of Havana without taking into consideration her Chinese heritage. While she builds an affective relationship with Noro Cheng, then known as her father, she still holds prejudice against the Chinese in Cuba. Aida narrates: “De chiquita, me apegué mucho a mi papa. *No me importaba que fuera chino*, ni que escupiera contra las paredes, ni que apestara a lo que apestan todos ellos: a un vegetal que comen” (Montero *Como un mensajero tuyo* 31, my emphasis).⁵⁵ Aida’s memory of the Chinese laundromat workers of Havana’s Chinatown is associated with food consumed by them (noodles) and the heat that killed many Chinese workers. Her disparaging descriptions of the foods and the smells communicate her denial of her own Chinese identity from self-exclusion, as she views Chinese identity as external to herself.

Food metaphors also describe Enrico and Aida’s romantic relationship. The couple meets in the kitchen of Hotel Inglaterra for the first time when Enrico enters through the hotel’s side door, leaving lasting impacts on Aida’s life as her European lover. The kitchen is the experimental site of encounters and convergences. Another reference to food shows the couple’s differences after Aida and Caruso leave Havana for a coastal city named Cienfuegos. While not knowing the exact health conditions, Aida craves sweets. At this time, she is pregnant with Enriqueta. Even in the situations where

⁵⁴ “At that hour most of the Chinamen were out, selling what they sold: the tried peaches they called ‘ears,’ little figures made of sesame seeds or roasted peanuts, and a fish that had black flesh whether it was fresh or salted, a disgusting thing that I didn’t think was used for anything good” (Montero, *The Messenger* 23).

⁵⁵ “I didn’t care that he was a Chinaman, or would spit against the walls, or smelled the way they all smell: like some vegetable they eat” (Montero, *The Messenger* 14).

Enrico and Aida flee from the death threats, Enrico continues to demand the exclusive food products he enjoys. Caruso still finds his cognac mixed with milk necessary as his personal remedy to alleviate his symptoms. Enrico's accompanist, Salvatore Fucito, brings a cup of milk blended with cognac and cigarette all the way to Cienfuegos. During that time, Aida provides foods for Caruso while she is starving. Aida alleviates her pregnancy-induced morning sickness with turrón, a nougat candy originated in Europe, although at the time she does not realize that it is caused by her pregnancy. Aida recalls: "En un puesto de la calle paré para comprar turrónes, que eran de semilla de marañón y que aliviaban la náusea. Él fumaba y no quiso comer, pero a mí, que aún no sabía que estaba embarazada, ya me estaban entrando los antojos, antojo de comer turrón o de beber guarapo. Todo lo que quería era dulce" (Montero, *Como un mensajero tuyo* 231).⁵⁶ Aida's craving for nougat during her pregnancy serves as an attempt to escape from her misfortune, with the word *dulce* (sweet) to directly contrast the name of her street, Calle Amargura from the word *amargo* (bitterness). While the ill-fated lovers find remedies from foods and products of European origin, they do not share common interests or appetites. The only thing they have in common is their role as personifications of Yemayá and Changó in the illustration of a *pataki* (didactic storytelling).

In García's *Monkey Hunting*, Chen Pan's voyage begins as a festive bazaar before becomes into another scene of "death voyage." The passengers are seen entertaining each other with stories and jokes and selling, sharing, and exchanging the items and foods their mothers and wives prepared. Men exchange and sell chicken feet, pumpkin seeds, boiled

⁵⁶ "He was smoking and didn't want to eat, but I did; I didn't know yet I was pregnant and I was beginning to get those yens, a yen to eat nougat or drink sugarcane juice. Sweet things were all I wanted" (Montero, *The Messenger* 190).

eggs, turnips, and opium from home (García, *Monkey Hunting* 8). Chen Pan comes emptyhanded, so he only watches other men having sticky rice balls and packets of seeds packed by their wives. These meals are the final visible reminders of their wives left in their home country.

The festive bazaar on the water quickly falls into terror. Chen Pan and his shipmates complain about the rations (grueling beef jerky and rice), and thirst (García, *Monkey Hunting* 9). When they demand more drinking water, they receive beatings from the British crews. The thirst forces Chinese passengers to engage in self-destructive and irrational behaviors, as the narrator describes: “Chen Pan watched men drink their own urine, lick moisture from the walls of the ship. A few swallowed seawater until their stomachs swelled and they choked in their own filth” (9). The salt content in urine and seawater only exacerbates the thirst, while the demands for drinkable water from the Europeans on the ship lead to violence. The image of unquenchable thirst describes the situations of the laborers on the ship who left China for dreams of Cuba, only to find themselves in deprivation from the sea-crossing. After Chen Pan becomes a free man, he hears from new immigrants that the conditions have not improved. The narrator describes: “There were mutinies on the high seas. Death voyages. Devil ships. On one journey, there was nothing to eat on board except rice. *They thought we ate only rice!*” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 62, original emphasis). The narrator interrupts the tale with an exclamation to highlight a cultural misunderstanding between a bread culture and a rice culture, to assume rice is the only food consumed by the Chinese.⁵⁷ The new immigrant’s story illustrates the differences between Eastern and Western culinary cultures.

⁵⁷ On a side note, the word “rice” is synonymous with “food” in many East Asian languages. García’s use of black humor is analogous to the question posed by the eighteenth-century Zen poet Ryōkan Taigu (1758-

Monkey Hunting portrays two women characters of Cuba and Vietnam who resist U.S. imperialism and military intervention abroad by showing their preferences and aversions to certain foods. Domingo's mother Idalia Quiñones is described as a Cuban nationalist who served as the "president of the Guantánamo chapter of the Cuban Physicians in Solidarity with Vietnam Brigade" and in the Bay of Pigs (*Monkey Hunting* 254). Idalia's fear of another American intervention leads to arguments with Pipo, who works on a U.S. military base as a cook (García, *Monkey Hunting* 55).⁵⁸ After the revolution, Domingo's mother refuses to consume all American foods, even the ones cooked by Pipo. Similar to Aida from *Como un mensajero tuyo*, Domingo's romantic partner, Tham Thanh Lan, develops cravings and aversions related to pregnancy. The narrator begins the chapter "Incense" with the descriptions of her health conditions:

For the first few months of per pregnancy, Tham Thanh Lan ate only bitter foods. Pickled melons. Quail eggs in salted vinegar. Dirt-encrusted roots she collected on the outskirts of town and boiled to make soups. She spread fish sauce on everything, including the Neapolitan ice cream Domingo brought her from the PX. He offered her American treats—peanut butter and saltines, Oreo cookies, hamburger meat. But all these foods nauseated her. (*Monkey Hunting* 203)

Food cravings during pregnancy are related to the body's natural protective mechanism to draw substances that can alleviate pregnancy symptoms like nausea and vomiting. While Tham Thanh Lan's craves bitter foods, she develops food aversions to "American foods," the foods that come from the country that invaded Vietnam. She also demands that

1831). The poet questions the ever-present consumption of rice in his poem "Everyone Eats": "Everyone eats rice / Yet no one knows why/ When I say this now/ People laugh at me" (qtd. in E. N. Anderson 1).

⁵⁸ "On weekends Papi had brought home sirloin steaks, buckets of mashed potatoes, and buttered peas from the officers' events. [...] That was before the revolution. Afterward, Mamá refused to eat any of the Yankees' food—even when Papi donned his chef's hat and grilled cheeseburgers for Domingo's tenth-birthday party. Domingo often fell asleep to his parents' bitter arguing" (García, *Monkey Hunting* 55).

Domingo coat his lips with fish sauce before kissing her, just as she spreads fish sauce on everything she eats.

Lucrecia's kitchen becomes a site of transculturation through her culinary experiments that incorporate unlikely food ingredients. *Ajiaco* is an open stew of Taino origin made of varying ingredients seasoned with Cuban chili pepper (ají). The ingredients are cooked over fire for an extended period of time, as they combine to create a unique flavor while retaining their distinctive flavors. This dish serves as an illustration of the transcultural Cuban identity explored by the renowned Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz. In his article "Los factores humanos de la cubanidad" ("The Human Factors of Cubanidad"), Ortiz uses *ajiaco* as a metaphor to describe the formation of Cuban identity. This concept is distinguished from the "melting pot" metaphor that suggests the image of integration. Instead, the ingredients in *ajiaco* combine to form a new dish without dissolving completely and losing their distinct flavors. The culinary process communicates Cuba's rich ethnic and cultural diversity. Ortiz writes:

Cazuela singular la de nuestra tierra, como la de nuestro ajiaco, que ha de ser de barro y muy abierta. Luego, fuego de llama ardiente y fuego de ascua y lento, para dividir en dos la cocción; tal como ocurre en Cuba, siempre a fuego de sol pero con ritmo de dos estaciones, lluvias y seca, calidez y templanza. Y ahí van las sustancias de los más diversos géneros y procedencias. ("Los factores" 4)

An unusual pot, this land of ours, just like the pot of our *ajiaco*, which must be made of clay and quite open. Then, the lively fire of the flame and the slow fire of the embers, to divide the cooking in two, just as happens in Cuba, always under the fire of the sun but with the rhythm of two seasons, rains and dryness, heat and mild weather. And therein go substances of the most diverse types and origins. ("The Human Factors" 461)

Ajiaco underscores the parallel between its culinary process and the construction of Cuban identity by highlighting the culinary process that involves a diverse array of

ingredients and spices combined and cooked for a stretch of time. Ana Zapata-Calle also establishes a connection between Lucrecia's *ajiaco* and Ortiz's metaphor: "Cristina García retoma la famosa metáfora culinaria [...] para definir la cultura cubana como una realidad transculturada caracterizada por la heterogeneidad de elementos culturales" (182).⁵⁹ According to the narrator: "In her opinion it was better to mix a little of this and that, like when she prepared an *ajiaco* stew. She lit a candle here, made an offering there, said prayers to the gods of heaven and the ones here on earth. She didn't believe in just one thing" (129). The narrator compares Lucrecia's openness to different cultural ideals and her inclination to incorporate different ideas, as her pluralistic approach to different religious belief systems, just as she keeps Buddha's altar next to the statue of Yemayá to honor her mother.⁶⁰ While Ortiz minimizes the Chinese role in the making of Cuban identity, García inserts and restores Chinese contribution through Lucrecia's absorption of Chinese identity and the preparation of *ajiaco*.

The chapter "A Delicate Luck" concludes with the narrator examining Lucrecia's negotiation of identity as Chinese: "Sometimes Lucrecia questioned the origin of her birth, but she didn't question who she'd become. Her name was Lucrecia Chen. She was thirty-six years old and the wife of Chen Pan, mother of his children. *She was Chinese in her liver, Chinese in her heart*" (García, *Monkey Hunting* 138, my emphasis). Lucrecia adopts Chen Pan's last name to confirm her self-imposed and negotiated identity as Chinese. López-Calvo writes: "In fact, Lucrecia's worldview has become so Sinicized

⁵⁹ "Cristina García retakes the famous culinary metaphor to define Cuban culture as a transcultural reality characterized by the heterogeneity of cultural elements" (182; my translation).

⁶⁰ Bótanicas (religious supply stores) in the United States "sell images of Buddha, Guan Yin, and Guan Yu, or Sanfancón" alongside images of Afro-Atlantic religious deities (Tsang, "Yellow Blindness" 28).

that she is able to figure out the riddles of the *charada china* better than her Chinese common-law husband, Chen Pan” (*Imagining the Chinese* 112). The significance of the phrase “Chinese in her liver, Chinese in her heart” in *Monkey Hunting* rests in the connection between the two important organs, with the heart pumping blood and the liver filtering blood from the digestive tract. Also, the combination of the Chinese words *heart* (心; xīn) and *liver* (肝; gān) formulates the word 心肝 (xīngān; *heart and liver*) that translates to *conscience* and *an expression of endearment*. By assigning an ethnic identity to the blood-forming and blood-filtering organs crucial for human survival, Lucrecia claims Chinese identity.

García’s food narrative gives voice to the ethnic group that was once marginalized in the depiction of the Cuban nation through Lucrecia’s *ajiaco*. In her interview with Irizarry, García speaks against racial stigmas surrounding Chinese immigrants in Cuba:

It still irks me when relatives say there were no racial problems in Cuba or that the Chinese only had laundromats in Cuba. They deny or dismiss the enormous cultural contributions of the many migrants to the islands. They don’t see that without these contributions, we would not have the continually evolving, fascinating creature that is Cuban culture.” (“An Interview” 181)

Therefore, *ajiaco* in *Monkey Hunting* elevates the positioning of the Chinese through Lucrecia’s portrayal as *la china mulata*. This Afro-Cuban character who becomes an ally to the Chinese migrants in Cuba (López-Calvo, “From Interethnic Alliances” 1). Chen Pan begins questioning the authenticity of his Chinese identity as he listens to his friends’ stories (*Monkey Hunting* 83). Chen Pan’s negotiation of identity as Chinese Cuban is reminiscent of Lucrecia’s adaptations of Chinese culture. Ortiz describes Asians as the group that has contributed the least to the making of Cuban national identity (*cubanidad*):

Los asiáticos, entrados a millares desde mediados del siglo último, han penetrado menos en la cubanidad; pero, aunque reciente, no es nula su huella. Se les imputa la pasión del juego; pero ya era nota de cubanidad antes de que entraran los chinos. Acaso han propagado alguna costumbre exótica, pero escasamente. (“Los factores” 14)

Asians, who came by the thousands since the middle of the nineteenth century, have penetrated less far into cubanidad; but, although their trace is recent, it is not absent. They are often said to be responsible for Cubans’ passion for gambling; but this passion was a sign of *cubanidad* before the arrival of the Chinese. They may have spread some exotic custom or other, but scarcely. (“The Human Factors” 477)

In turn, García’s characters redefine *cubanidad* (Cubanness) by emphasizing the link between the past and present through the negotiations of multiple identities that contribute to its constant redefinition and renewal:

From the past, the characters inherit certain things; in the present, though, they create narratives for themselves or are swept up by circumstances and events. What strikes me more is the notion of Cuban identity—the rigidity involved in that. I am interested in how Cubans are constantly defining each other and what it means to be Cuban. (“An Interview” 180)

The history of the Chen family provides context to the family legacies that persisted through the generations and continue to shape the present and future of the family.

Chen Pan’s fourth-generation descendant Domingo Chen was born in Cuba as a Chinese Afro-Cuban. Although he has never been to China, he serves in the U.S. military and is in a relationship with a Vietnamese woman he met while serving in Vietnam.

Domingo’s migration to New York and his employment are significant, as New York becomes the site of culinary fusion after the Prohibition of Coolie Trade Act of 1862 and the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 with Chinese immigrants’ attempts to assimilate into mainstream society with restaurant business. Domingo works as a cook in a Chinese Cuban restaurant called “Havana Dragon,” a name that combines Cuba’s capital and the mythical creature associated with Asia. Domingo remembers the legacy of the Chinese

grandfather Chen Pan and tries to reconnect with his roots. His familiarity with Afro-Cuban culture is also generational, as he learns about *Santería* from his father: “[Pipo Chen’s] mother used to compare the planets to the *santos*. Venus was Ochún. Mars was Changó. And Saturn with all its rings of knowledge was the serene Obatalá” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 44). Lucrecia teaches the stories of *orishas* (deities), fulfilling her maternal role as an educator and transmitter of beliefs (Martinez 86). This religious knowledge is passed down from Pipo to his son, Domingo. Martinez argues that mothers carry: “the implicit contradiction of being the pillar of the family as a transmitter of essential values while at the same time sustaining paternalistic discourses. It slows down the process of women’s own emancipation while maintaining heterosexual national ideologies” (86). Domingo draws connections to his Afro-Cuban ancestry through music, religion, and storytelling.

Chen Fang is the only woman narrator of *Monkey Hunting*, as her use of the first-person “I” reinscribes women’s perspectives in family history. Chen Fang is a character who owns a plethora of identifications as the granddaughter of Chen Pan and the daughter of Lorenzo Chen. Chen Fang’s narration appears to be an active pursuit to etch herself into the histories of the Chen family. According to Lysik, it is the first-person narration that contributes to the novel’s orality:

Orality in *Monkey Hunting* manifests itself within the narrative structure consisting of fragments telling separate yet interconnected stories of a dispersed family across generations, continents and centuries. Oral quality is reinforced through the dominant first-person narration of various protagonists, occasionally sprinkled with third-person narration (4).

Chen Fang shows an active approach to negotiating her identity as a queer Afro-Chinese Cuban woman in China. She internalizes her thoughts to create an understanding of her

surroundings as she becomes subjected to unwanted circumstances stemming from her gendered identity. Chen Fang is rejected by her mother at the moment of her birth, to be described as “yet another mouth to feed” for being born as a girl. Chen Fang narrates: “When I was born, the midwife, soaked to her elbows in birthing blood, called out: ‘Another mouth to rice!’ My mother was so distraught that she dropped me on my head” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 89). As Martinez posits, the gendered expectation is also imposed from one woman to another woman, as previously seen from the dynamic between Chen Pan’s mother and wife in China for her failure to produce a male heir: “Chen Fang’s oppression is endemic and integral, deriving not only from the unequal distribution of power between men and women but also between women and women” (87). Chen Fang’s mother reduces her existence as yet another mouth to feed. Chen Fang’s father, Lorenzo Chen, abandons his wife and three daughters when he returns to Cuba after his period of studying Chinese traditional medicine in China. Chen Fang’s mother hides her daughter’s gender so that Lorenzo can continue to send his financial support to the family in China. Yolanda P. Martinez writes:

Chen Fang’s impersonation of a boy allows her to enter a hierarchical space composed by and for men, proving “the extensive set of restrictions and expectations regarding women which made it virtually impossible for them (women) to participate in the elaborate networks through which men climbed the social and political ladder of success” (Hamlisch 2000, 217). (84)

The change in Chen Fang’s gender identification reassigns her roles, opening the gateway to the freedom of education: “And only I, of my sisters, went to school. My father sent extra money for this purpose, to educate his oldest son” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 90). While she has access to education, Chen Fang is liberated from gendered traditions like foot binding and learning domestic chores. When she ceases to study, however, she is

forced to resume the traditional role of women as mothers and wives to reserve her place in the nation (Martinez 85). Martinez writes: “Chen Fang’s fertility is representative of the nation as a sign of both prosperity and virility” (85). However, the stories that follow Lu Chih-Mo’s birth show how the patriarchal social order is maintained by women as well. In Shanghai, Chen Fang continues her male ancestors’ legacy to become a literature teacher who teaches classics and modern literature to children of diplomats and Chinese and foreign industrialists. When the Cultural Revolution of China begins, Chen Fang is accused of being associated with capitalism and espionage, as her heritage and connections to foreign students make her a likely culprit, leading to public humiliation. Chen Fang’s fellow teachers report her for “contaminating” her students by teaching authors like Kipling, Dickens, and Flaubert, and for “brainwashing young minds to think for themselves (the irony of this made me laugh aloud)” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 228). She spends three years in prison, yearning for Cuba and the family reunion at this moment of hopelessness. Chen Fang narrates:

Listen to me. I am old and very weak, but I want to live in the world again. This is my plan. If I survive, I will search for my family in Cuba. There is a street called Zanja in the eastern part of Havana where the Chinese live. Surely someone will have heard of my father, Lorenzo Chen, the fine herbalist? And I must teach myself Spanish! Who knows if my Cuban family can speak Chinese?” (García, *Monkey Hunting* 232–233)

Chen Fang’s dream of Cuba also parallels with Chen Pan’s imagination of Cuba at the time of his recruitment, but her dream includes meeting with and reconnecting to her family in Cuba. Chen Fang and her ancestor share the romanticized vision of Cuba of riches and freedom. Chen Fang’s vision includes the romances, women’s rights to choose whom to love:

There were other tales about Cuba. How fish that rained from the sky during thunderstorms had to be shoveled off the roads before they rotted. How seeds dropped in the ground one day would shoot up green the next. How gold was so plentiful that the Cubans used it for buttons and broom handles. And when a woman fancied a man, she signaled to him with her fan. In Havana, the women chose whom they would marry and when. Everything I heard about Cuba made my head revolve with dreams. How badly I wanted to go! (García, *Monkey Hunting* 91–92)

During her imprisonment, Chen Fang's affective ties to Cuba motivate her to survive in the hopes of going to Cuba, as she sings the lyrics of a Cuban bolero in Spanish. Chen Pan's tales of richness (fish jumping into frying pans) and romantic passion (with strength and the abundance and willingness of Cuban women) also appear in Chen Fang's version of Cuba as raining fish, magical seeds, gold buttons, and romance. However, Chen Fang's story ends with her dreams of Cuba without any foreshadowing of her future life. Tamar Mayer writes: "[I]n the intersection of nation, gender and sexuality the nation is constructed to respect a 'moral code' which is often based on masculinity and heterosexuality" (12, qtd. in Martinez 83). As a woman character who stands at the intersection of gender and nation, she is subject to gendered violence and expectations without protection from her family and countries.

Conclusions

Como un mensajero tuyo and *Monkey Hunting* portray the Chinese immigrant diasporas from the perspectives of the generations of a Chinese Afro-Cuban family, and their focus on individual characters' development sheds light on marginalized voices in Cuban history. The discussion of family creates unity and connection, as the stories are passed from one generation to the next, and the ancestors and their legacy are remembered and repeated by the descendants. *Como un mensajero tuyo* describes the history of Chinese immigrant diasporas in their contained space of Chinatown, a

periphery within Cuba's capital. At the last stage of her life, Aida's daughter Enriqueta is alone in the house on Calle Amargura. She decides to give away the manuscript she co-authored to a stranger who does not see the value of the memoir despite the effort she and her mother placed into it. The stagnation and isolation of Aida's family parallels the novel's portrayal of Chinese immigrants who remain on the outskirts of Cuban Society. *Monkey Hunting* unearths the Chinese immigration history in Cuba with Chen Pan's migration and the four generations of the Chen family. García presents an alternative version of Fernando Ortiz's culinary metaphor through Lucrecia's joyous mixing of Chinese and Afro-Cuban cuisines in her making of *ajiaco* with Chinese ingredients. Chen Pan's family expands to China, Cuba, Vietnam, and the United States, but their dispersion also signals the loss of home and continued negotiations of identities.

What distinguishes the narrations of *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*) and *Monkey Hunting* is their focalization. The family in the prior novel is comprised of women: Domitila, Aida, and Enriqueta. The male characters surrounding the family remain outside of the house. However, they are still connected to the family as religious guardians as in the case of José de Calazán, a *babalawo* (religious priest of Afro-Cuban Santería) described as Aida's godfather, and the Chinese *babalawo* Yuan Pei Fu, later revealed as Aida's biological father. *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*) focuses on the generations of women characters (Domitila, Aida, and Enriqueta), identified by Enriqueta's introduction of the memoir.

On the other hand, the narration of *Monkey Hunting* centers around male characters, with the exception of Chen Fang, Chen Pan's granddaughter in China. The novel begins with the story of Chen Pan, a twenty-year-old farmer in China at the time of

the narration, who will become the Chinese patriarch of the family he starts in Cuba. The first three chapters closely follow Chen Pan's recruitment as an indentured laborer and his life in Cuba's sugar plantations following a transoceanic crossing. The fourth chapter shifts to the fourth-generation descendant, Domingo Chen, who lives in New York after serving in the Vietnam War. Chen Fang appears in the sixth chapter, "Middle Kingdom," as an English literature teacher in Shanghai, China, but García attributes the character of individuality and authority to Chen Fang as the only character whose story is narrated in the first-person voice.

The depiction of the diversity of the Chinese-Cuban characters contrasts with episodic or singular appearances of Asians in the earlier literature that uses a token character to summarize Asia. *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*) and *Monkey Hunting* discuss characters' formation and negotiation of identities, revealing the hybridity of identities. The term "Chinese Cuban" does not appear in both novels, considering how often the external view of the interracial characters categorizes them as Chinese, regardless of their adherence to the Chinese roots. Despite the lack of terminology, the characters from these novels negotiate both Chinese and Afro-Cuban identities to formulate a self-perceived identity. The historical dialogues create space for the Chinese and the Cubans of Chinese descent. García writes: "Memory is a reflection of our own fiction about our lives. Writing characters really means writing the fiction they would write about their own lives" ("An Interview" 183). *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*) and *Monkey Hunting*'s focus on individual characters and their experiences defies the single narrative of the Asian presence in the Americas as the novels bring together the shared experiences.

CHAPTER 3

HOME AWAY FROM HOME: THE PAST AND PRESENT OF THE JAPANESE BRAZILIAN DIASPORAS

On November 17, 2021, author and professor emerita Karen Tei Yamashita received the Medal for Distinguished Contribution to American Letters (DCAL) at the 2021 National Book Awards Ceremony. At this event celebrating “individuals who have made an exceptional impact on this country’s literary heritage” (National Book Foundation),⁶¹ author Viet Thanh Nguyen introduced the Yamashita as “an international writer, an American writer, and not least of all, an Asian American and Japanese American writer [whose books] travel across many borders, while always putting at the center the stories of diverse peoples in the Americas, including, those of Asian descent” (National Book Foundation 0:07–0:38). Yamashita’s works expand the boundaries of geography. In the words of Nguyen, America “meant more than just the United States” (National Book Foundation 1:05–1:10) for the author who wrote on transnational immigration experiences across the Americas. This chapter expands the conversation by describing another dominant Asian presence in a non-Hispanophone country from the examination of Yamashita’s works of multigenerational literature. Yamashita’s trilogy of Brazil-Japan migration includes her first two novels *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Brazil-Marú* (1992), and *Circle K Cycles* (2001) (Sheffer). Yamashita often refers to *Brazil-Marú* as her “first novel,” though it was published two years later, it was written before *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) (“Speaking Craft” 178). As a

⁶¹ In 2020 and 2021, the National Book Awards Ceremony was held online due to the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, in accordance with public health emergency direction and restrictions, and government-initiated lockdowns.

work of historical fiction, *Brazil-Marú* follows the story of the first wave of Japanese immigrants and their descendants. *Circle K Cycles* (2001) consists of a multimedia collage of travel blogs, short stories, photographs, newspaper clippings, public announcements, and publications, and continues the story of Japanese Brazilian migrations through the lives of their descendants who return to Japan as overseas workers (*dekasegi*). I probe into the image of circles to discuss family, community, and transnational migration circuits of migration in Yamashita's trilogy of Japan-Brazil, focusing on *Brazil-Marú* and *Circle K Cycles*.⁶²

Karen Tei Yamashita is a third-generation (*sansei*) Japanese American writer born in Oakland, California, and raised in Los Angeles, California.⁶³ Yamashita's maternal grandparents migrated to San Francisco from Nagano prefecture in Japan, becoming the first-generation (*isei*, 一世) Japanese immigrants in the United States (Tatsumi 62). Yamashita's parents are second-generation (*nisei*) Japanese Americans (*nisei*) born in the United States. Yamashita writes across genres, including numerous plays, novels, short stories, and memoirs. Her most recent book, *Sansei and Sensibility* (2020) is a collection of short stories that travel across United States, Japan, and Brazil. The stories engage

⁶² Japanese has three writing systems: Hiragana (平仮名, ひらがな) and katakana (片仮名, カタカナ) are phonetic sets of characters, and kanji (漢字), adopted Chinese characters. In hiragana and katakana, a small circle (°) is placed on the right-above corner of a letter to mark a change in pronunciation to create an aspirated sound. This accent mark is called handakuten (半濁点) or maru (丸, circle). Circles also appear in Japanese writing to mark an end or an opening, and changes in phonetic shifts and syntax as punctuation marks. Many Japanese punctuation marks are circular. A maru (丸, circle) or ten (点, point) signals the end of a sentence as a period, and a group of three circles placed in a row (。。。) functions as an ellipsis. Circle also marks an indeterminacy or possibility by indicating a gap in knowledge. A large open circle, and typically two large circles (○○, called maru-maru) serve as a blank space or a placeholder.

⁶³ *Sansei* is a combination of the words *san* (three, 三) and *sei* (generation, 世) in Japanese (*kanji*). Yamashita was born in Oakland, California. Yamashita's maternal grandparents migrated to San Francisco from Nagano prefecture in Japan, becoming the first-generation (*isei*, 一世) Japanese immigrants in the United States.

with Jane Austen's fictional characters, as hinted by the author's humorous replacement of the word *sense* in Austen's title *Sense and Sensibility* (1811) with *sansei* (third-generation Japanese American).⁶⁴ One of her recent works, *Letters to Memory* (2017), is a memoir and the Yamashita family archive. Yamashita documents her family's lives and stories as an unofficial family historian. The memoir is also a testament to many Japanese bodies forcibly separated across the continental United States in Japanese American internment camps from 1942 to 1945. During WWII, President Franklin D. Roosevelt released an executive order to remove and relocate Japanese and Japanese Americans regardless of their citizenship status.

Yamashita also pens experimental works like *Anime Wong: Fictions of Performance* (2014), a multi-authored book described as a "memory book of performances," and *Circle K Cycles* (2001). Yamashita's novels include *I Hotel* (2010), *Tropic of Orange* (1997), *Brazil-Marú* (1992), and *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990). The novels *I Hotel* and *Tropic of Orange* bring light to other Latin American and Asian immigrant diasporas in Los Angeles. Yamashita's oeuvre reflects her lifelong investment in the topic of Japanese diasporas as a writer and researcher, and her earlier works *Brazil-Marú* and *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* follow the history of Japanese migration to Brazil. Together with *Circle K Cycles*, Yamashita highlights transnational movements of Japanese immigrant diasporas between Brazil and Japan. Yamashita describes the personal articles from February to August 1997 as "a kind of writing that can only be produced at the moment and on site" ("Twenty Years" 1–2). These posts were initially posted on cafecreole.net and are still accessible online. The fictional aspects

⁶⁴ In a Jane Austen Conference, Karen Tei Yamashita discussed her sister Jane Tomi's fascination (not only from the shared name) with Jane Austen, which influenced Yamashita ("Sansei and Sensibility").

of the book, as well as the short stories, were written after the author returned from Japan (Yamashita, “Twenty Years” 2).

Yamashita’s study on Japanese immigration history expands both geographically and generationally. As a college student, Yamashita studied abroad in Japan, acquiring language skills while researching Japanese immigration and her own family history, which began as a personal query into family history in Japan and her self-awareness as Japanese. While preparing for another research fellowship, the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship (awarded in 1975), Yamashita learned about Japanese immigration to Brazil, which changed her direction. In an interview with Terry Hong, Yamashita describes when she decided to go to Brazil: “After writing a research proposal, I realized I didn’t want to return (to Japan), at least not immediately. But I kept thinking how I might still use this language skill. Someone told me there are Japanese populations in other parts of the world. Japanese in Canada? No, I couldn’t go into more snow. But Japanese in South America?” (Interview by Terry Hong) This discovery led Yamashita to Liberdade in São Paulo, a former Japanese settlement that still exists as Brazil’s Japantown. Yamashita meets scholars of Japanese immigration to Brazil, and her new research project transforms into a comparative study of the Brazilian Japanese community and the Japanese American community (Interview by Terry Hong).

Yamashita, a third-generation Japanese American, often experienced partial inclusion in the United States and Japan. However, Yamashita found Brazil to be a welcoming space that embraced her perceived identity as neither fully American nor Japanese. In Brazil, she was often recognized as a Japanese Brazilian. She still had to prove her Japanese identity by way of demonstrating knowledge of family history from

the surviving Yamashita family registry. In recognition of her privileged position as a traveler and researcher, Yamashita in her dialogue with Lisa Yun recalls: “I think I have also had to retain a healthy respect for my role as a stranger/outsider, perhaps an adopted daughter. After all, I did my research at the time with limited language skills—a very linguistically-broken Japanese and a conversational and vernacular Portuguese” (“Critical Dialogue” 204). Yamashita’s ethnographic interviews conducted in Japanese and later in Portuguese contributed to her understanding of Japanese Brazilian immigration history and were translated to her writings in English (Interview by Terry Hong). Her one-year research project extends to a nine-year stay in Brazil (Interview by Murashige 321). Yamashita launches her professional writing career during this time (Yamashita “Speaking Craft”). In 1975, the short story “The Bath” was published in the *Amerasia Journal* as the first-place winner of its first short story contest (Interview by Terry Hong).⁶⁵ According to Takayuki Tatsumi: “Karen started writing fiction [during her stay in Brazil], especially “Asaka-no-miya,”⁶⁶ the 1979 winner of the first place of the James Clavell American Japanese Short Story Contest” (62). The manuscripts of her short stories, including “Asaka-no-miya,” “The Orange,” and “Madama B” can be found in the Karen Tei Yamashita Papers, housed in the University of California, Santa Cruz’s Special Collections and Archives. Yamashita’s archive holds 108 boxes and approximately 3,791 digital files from 1980 to 2014 (Tang et al. n.p.). According to Annie Tang et al. at the Karen Tei Yamashita Archive writes: “Yamashita’s short stories explore a diverse set of topics, including the Japanese diaspora and technology, and

⁶⁵ “The Bath” also appears in Yamashita’s latest publication of short stories, *Sansei and Sensibility* (2020).

⁶⁶ Trans. “Prince Asaka’s palace”

consider the intersections of race, gender, love, and stereotype.” (n.p.) Yamashita also started drafting her experimental performance pieces, which were later published in her collection *Anime Wong* (Tang et al. n.p.).

Yamashita’s first two novels, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* (1990) and *Brazil-Marú* (1992) are also influenced by Yamashita’s stay in Brazil (Tang et al. n.p.). During her fellowship in Brazil, Yamashita drafts the novel *Brazil-Marú* (1992), a multigenerational family narrative in Japan and Brazil. The novel is intertwined with the history of WWII and the ratification of the Immigration Act of 1924, also known as the Asian Exclusion Act, in the United States. The author revises and rewrites the novel five times after Yamashita returns to the United States to combine and highlight the experiences of the hundreds of people she interviewed in Brazil. The novel is divided between multiple characters who tell a segment of the commune’s history intertwined with their personal histories. In both works, immigrants negotiate the meanings of home, family, and belonging.

Brazil-Marú follows the history of Japanese migration to Brazil through the generations of four Japanese Christian families who migrate to the forests of São Paulo. The novel begins in 1925 with the protagonist Ichiro Terada giving verbal accounts of the departure of six hundred Japanese passengers to the coastal city of Santos in the state of São Paulo. Most passengers are contract workers, and Japanese Christians form a small fraction of passengers going to Brazil as landowners. The families come together in a village named *Esperança* (“Hope” in Portuguese) and establish an agricultural cooperative (a commune) where settlers share responsibilities and profits. Ichiro describes the settlers and the commune using the image of a dot: “We [colonists] were a

small, inconsequential dot on a virtually unmapped area” and “the tiny seed of a small beginning” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 13). Ichiro’s analogy first compares the small size of the commune with the vastness of Brazil’s forests and its story as “one story among many” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 13). As the narration progresses, the “small, inconsequent dot” called Esperança expands to a circle as the stage of the novel. The circularity reflects characteristics of unity and collectivity to Esperança as a community, while the circle’s property of closedness creates a border. The dwellers, except the leaders, limit their contact with other Japanese communities composed of contracted laborers, indigenous communities surrounding the forests, and Brazilian cities. However, as the commune operates on self-sustaining ideologies as a close-gated Japanese community, it has limited access to Brazilian infrastructure, culture, and education.

Circularity in Yamashita’s Japan–Brazil Trilogy

The title of Yamashita’s first published novel, *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest*, creates many connections to circularity. The novel’s title contains the word “arc,” which can form part of a circle but not a circle.⁶⁷ The narration of *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* follows the protagonist Kazumasa Ishimaru, a former railroad engineer of Japan Railways (JR) who leaves Japan for work opportunities in Brazil. The novel begins with the child Kazumasa Ishimaru being struck by a piece of ball-shaped debris from an unknown place that becomes the narrator, witness, and agent of the story. This sphere-shaped object is called “Ishi-maru” with a hyphen to distinguish it from the protagonist’s name Ishimaru. The sphere whirls and twirls before Ishimaru’s forehead as his personal satellite despite many attempts to remove it. Before his migration to Brazil, Kazumasa

⁶⁷ The cover of the first edition of the novel contains a curve, a rainbow (arco-íris in Portuguese).

works as a railroad engineer and supervisor of Japan Railways (JR). His job entails maintaining passengers' security. Japan's advancement in automation and safety technology led to a job reduction at the JR, reducing Kazumasa's workflow into simple, repetitive tasks. For Kazumasa, Brazil is a country that is still in great need of skilled railroad engineers like him. One of the most important train lines of Japan's subway network is Japan Railway's Yamanote Line (山手線, *Yamanote-sen*).⁶⁸ This circular line loops Tokyo's major city stations. Also, he wants to stop hearing his mother's concerns about his revolving satellite, that he just cannot remove from his head. Kazumasa is familiar with the Japanese presence in Brazil from watching NHK⁶⁹ documentaries, and knows a Japanese Brazilian, his cousin Hiroshi. He is greeted with a position at the São Paulo Municipal Subway System. Ishi-maru (the floating sphere), too, gravitates towards the place of its origin (Matacão), across the globe (or through the mantle, to the other end of the globe) in Brazil.

At numerous conferences, Yamashita clarified the origins of the names Ishimaru and Ishi-maru. In her talk "Call me Ishimaru" (which references *Moby Dick*'s opening line "Call me Ishmael") presented at the conference of the Melville Society of Japan and published in *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies*, Yamashita describes herself as "a writer influenced and fascinated by Melville's work" (64). In this article, Yamashita traces the origin of the characters' names to Ishmael. In Melville's *Moby Dick*, Ishmael is the name of the first-person narrator who wanders among sea creatures. Yamashita describes that the name Ishimaru in *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* contains both

⁶⁸ Tokyo has three subway systems: Japan Railways (JR), Tokyo Metro, and Toei Subway.

⁶⁹ The Japan Broadcasting Corporation (*Nippon Housou Kyoukai*, kanji: 日本放送協会)

Japanese *and* Judeo-Christian meanings, as “round stone or perhaps rolling stone, the gesture toward the nomadic and the castaway Ishmael as the son of Abraham and Hagar, exiled to the great desert to sire another tribe, an opposing people under the same God” (Yamashita, “Call Me Ishimaru” 64).⁷⁰ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Ishmael himself is an outcast who leaves his birth family as he is an illegitimate heir to the Israelites to start his own tribe as the progenitor of the Arabs. Ismael in *Moby Dick* drifts on the ocean on his boat without a home with his desire to conquer nature by killing a whale. The Japanese language adds another meaning to his name. In Japanese, the name *Ishimaru* (kanji: 石丸) is formed by the word *ishi* (meaning “stone,” hiragana: いし, kanji: 石) and *-maru* (meaning “circle,” hiragana: まる, kanji: 丸), a suffix commonly attached to boy’s names. When spelled backward, the word *maru-ishi* (hiragana: まるいし, kanji: 丸石) is created. Brazilian Portuguese adds to the construction of meaning, as both *maru-ishi* and *matacão* translate to “boulder.” Kazumasa Ishimaru and Ishi-Marú of *Through the Arc of the Rain Forest* become part of the Japanese Brazilian diaspora.

The novel *Brazil-Marú*’s title comes from the name of the passenger boat “Brazil-Marú.” The name combines the English word *Brazil* (as the Portuguese spelling would utilize an *s* in place of the *z* in the country’s name, as *Brasil*) and the Japanese suffix *-maru* (まる) meaning circle. The names follow the Japanese custom of “christening” a boat, the nautical tradition of (re) naming the boat and making good wishes for its safe passage. In Japan, it is common to name vessels and ships using the suffix *-maru*. One interpretation of this practice comes from the cultural practice of attaching the suffix -

⁷⁰ The word diaspora originates from the translation of the word diaspeirein in the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament): “You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven,” (ESV Bible, Deut. 28:25) which describes the dispersal of the Jews.

maru to the names of boys and personal items to express endearment, a practice popularized in the Edo Period (1603–1867). Another theory about the tradition underscores the word’s meaning of circularity, as Chris LaLonde writes: “In linking Brazil and Japan with the name, *-maru* being the traditional Japanese ending for both commercial vessels and warships, *Brazil-Mar*u gives voice to the desire for the ship’s safe return to Japan” (61). By naming a ship *-maru*, the boat carries the desires of sailors and passengers to return home safely. Attributing the meaning of circle, the name *-maru* constellates a circular path that leads one back to their place of departure. The boat’s name also has a direct historical connotation to *Kasato-mar*u, the passenger boat that brought the first 781 Japanese contracted workers to Santos–São Paulo, Brazil, in 1908 (Shoji and Matsue, n.p.). At the opening scene of the novel, Brazil-mar

u brings six hundred Japanese migrants, mostly contract workers, to Santos–São Paulo.

Yamashita’s later publication, *Circle K Cycle*, is a book of “fictional ethnography” (Yun, “Critical Dialogue” 204). *Circle K Cycles* picks up *Brazil-Mar*u’s loose end, creating a full-circle moment. Its title contains both “circle” and “cycles.” Another reference to the circles appears at the beginning of the book. “Circle K” is a chain of convenience stores in Japan.⁷¹ Yamashita used to live in a neighborhood with a Circle K store on every corner (*Circle K Cycles* 16). Yamashita describes how Japanese people’s lives are about “circling K’s” (*Circle K Cycles* 16). Kon-binis have become part of the everyday lives of the people living in small rental spaces in Japan as an extension of their “personal refrigerator, bathroom cabinet, office, library, and banking service” (Yamashita, *Circle K Cycles* 16). Yamashita adds another cycle of K’s to the narration of

⁷¹ Japan’s convenience stores are called kon-bini (コンビニ) or konbeni (コンベニ) from the romanization (*romanji*) of the word “convenience.”

the book to depict the lives of Japanese Brazilians who came to Japan as *dekasegi*⁷² (overseas workers) working so-called “three K jobs”⁷³ equivalent to “three D jobs”: “dirty, difficult, dangerous jobs ” that local Japanese people refuse to have (Yamashita, *Circle K Cycles* 32).

Japanese Migration to Brazil

The first page of *Brazil-Maru* is dedicated to a brief introduction to Japanese Brazilian migration and the novel for readers. The introduction also situates the novel within broader discourses on U.S. and Latin American political histories leading up to the arrival of the first Japanese migrants to Brazil. Kandice Chuh contends that the discussion of the United States in Yamashita’s published works is prompted by the necessity to “facilitate U.S. interest in these non-U.S.-based histories and stories” (300). Yamashita contextualizes the history of Japanese immigration to Brazil by connecting it to the history of Japanese exclusion in the U.S., a history more familiar to U.S.-based readers. In the preface, Yamashita claims: “Japanese immigration to Brazil has followed patterns of their exclusion from the United States” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Maru* xix). In 1907, the Gentlemen’s Agreement between the Japanese Empire and the United States was established after the growing number of Japanese people faced discrimination and school segregation in California (Takai 36). A diplomatic arrangement was an action to appeal a segregation order against the San Francisco Board of Education, which led to a diplomatic confrontation (Patterson 391–392). David S. Patterson writes: “The issue of

⁷² In *Sentiment, Language, and the Arts: the Japanese-Brazilian Heritage*, Hosokawa describes the first wave of Japanese migrants to Brazil as “short-term migrant workers” (*dekasegi*) whose “temporary stay had become prolonged indefinitely” (19). Though the word applies to all labor migrants, the word *dekasegi* is now primarily used to refer to Brazilian Japanese workers in Japan.

⁷³ *Kitanai* (汚い), *kitsui* (危険), and *kigen* (きつい)

Japanese in San Francisco schools was only a surface grievance of a much deeper economic and cultural problem. It was in short a catalyst for exposing San Franciscan citizens' deep-seated prejudices and growing fears. The city had earlier discriminated against the Chinese" (392). The Japanese government agrees to limit the migration of male laborers to the continental U.S. by reducing passport services, only allowing new migrations of wives and children of return migrations. In 1908, the first 800 Japanese migrants arrived at the port of Santos–São Paulo with the signing of an international agreement between Japan and the U.S. (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* xix). In 1924, the Exclusion Act, also known as the Immigration Act of 1924 and the Johnson-Reid Act, blocked further immigration from Japan. Weinberg calls the year 1924 the end of the "era of 'gentlemanly' relations between the two nations, as the Immigration Act of 1924, which includes the Asian Exclusion Act, banned all further Japanese (and Asian) immigration (36).

In the novel, the passengers of *Brazil-Marú* first show disappointment with the Exclusion Act, as it is implied that had it not been for anti-Asian immigration policies, the anticipated destination for Japanese immigrants would have been the United States that already had Japanese populations from labor migrations. The families purchase a plot of land in the forests of São Paulo, lot number thirty-three: *Esperança*⁷⁴ (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 7). Ichiro migrates to Brazil with his grandmother and three younger siblings. He is the son of Kiyoshi Terada, a licensed pharmacist, and Sei, a trained midwife and Kiyoshi's second cousin. Ichiro describes this marriage as one "that must

⁷⁴ Hope in Portuguese

have seemed a logical one to their families” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 5), which also speaks to the restrictive nature of the commune.

Many of Brazil-marú’s passengers also traveled out of their personal and economic interests, often to escape from their hardships in Japan. Many passengers included “second sons without rights of inheritance” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 6) as it was customary for the eldest son to inherit wealth and continue family business, (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 6). In the 1920’s, poor tenant farmers struggling with rising taxes, students unable to find work amid strikes in the cities (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 6). Furthermore, the Great Kantō earthquake on September 1, 1923, caused a debacle in Honshū (the largest island off the southeast coast of Japan) as many lost their homes and employment. According to historian Max M. Ward, this “7.9-magnitude earthquake struck the Tokyo-Yokohama region, starting multiple fires that spread over the next forty-eight hours. It is estimated that over 100,000 people perished in the earthquake and subsequent fires” (36). Aside from poverty and lack of opportunities, Japanese Christians also faced persecution from the Japanese government. After the earthquake, several political and social activists were wrongfully blamed as the cause of natural disasters, crimes, and insurrection motives (Ward 36). Elizabeth Espadas refers to the history behind the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 as a driving motivator for Christian families like the Teradas in the novel. Espadas writes: “Educated Christians with socialist sentiments, who could become vulnerable targets for government repression during such times of crisis” (56). The Japanese government feared the creation of groups that could potentially pose a threat to the regime. It launched political and legal actions targeting socialists, “the Korean national independence movement, as well as Christians and new

religions” (Ward 25). Many innocent people were murdered or detained by the Military Police under martial law (Ward 36). Yamashita portrays the internal factor that contributed to the migration of people in the margins of Japanese society.

From the start of the voyage in *Brazil-Marú*, Ichiro becomes aware of the differences in the passengers’ social and economic standings and tensions between passengers and sets himself and his family apart from the rest of the passengers. Contracted workers scrutinize and gossip with prejudice about the Christian and educated colonists who have the prestige and means to pay for their trips and their new beginning in Brazil (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 12). Child Ichiro also uses a language that reflects his feeling of entitlement when he describes a social hierarchy between the passengers: “My family was different from the other Japanese on the ship. We had paid for our passage and were destined to settle land we had bought, while the contract workers were committed to several years of labor to pay for their passage” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 7). Contracted plantation workers on the boat have incurred a debt to pay for their trip and enter labor contracts to work in São Paulo’s coffee plantations. The arrangements for Japanese migrants have been collaboratively administered and facilitated by Japan’s Imperial Immigration Company⁷⁵ and the Brazilian government (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 7). Like other Asian contracted workers in the Caribbean and Latin America, Japanese workers were brought to work in coffee plantations, as coffee was Brazil’s major export in the nineteenth century.

Prior to the arrival of Japanese laborers, only European immigrants were invited to Brazil as part of the nation’s project to “whiten the race” after the termination of the

⁷⁵ Equivalent to Kaigai Kōgyō Kabushiki Kaisha (KKKK) or Overseas Development Company in Nishida 21–22.

transatlantic slave trade in 1851 (Nishida 20; Adachi “Constructing” 104). However, many European workers often ran away and sought legal protection from consulates “after finding out how bad the physical conditions were on the plantations and how hard the work was” (Adachi, “Constructing” 104). The Japanese did not form part of Brazil’s project of “whitening” the nation that extended to European immigrants only (Nishida 20) but were still brought to Brazil from the government’s initiative. The Brazilian government actively recruited overseas workers to work for fazendeiros,⁷⁶ even “changing the immigration law of 1889 that prohibited Asians and Africans to immigrate to Brazil.” (“Constructing” 104). As in the case of Chinese indentured laborers in the Caribbean and the rest of Latin America, Japanese contracted laborers became victims of breached contractual obligations once laborers arrived. Adachi writes in “Brazil: A Historical and Contemporary View of Brazilian Migration”:

Soon [Japanese indentured laborers] started to work in the coffee plantations, and they found many differences between their expectations and their experiences. On coffee plantations, the social status of the new immigrants was about the same as that of the former slaves. They worked side by side with former slaves and lived in quarters formerly used by slaves. These immigrants found themselves in near slavlike conditions, a proposition they had not bargained for. (20)

Asian indentured laborers worked alongside the enslaved people in plantations throughout the Americas. The indentured labor in Brazil only lasted two years, from 1810 to 1812, partly from the Brazilian elites’ “fear of ‘mongolizing’ the country” (Nishida 20) by importing East Asians into their settler colonial state. Many Japanese migrant workers stayed, despite the labor conditions and reduction of yields from the overproduction of coffee beans that led to Brazil’s economic downfall from overproduction and the

⁷⁶ Portuguese: plantation owners

Brazilian currency dropped in value (Nishida 20; Adachi, “Constructing” 104).

According to Mieko Nishida, the Brazilian government advocated an immigration policy that required “prospective emigrants in Japan to form appropriate immigrant families, each made of three to ten members, headed by a married patriarch” (24). The Brazilian government required migrants to travel in family units because plantation owners believed married men were likely to stay for longer periods of time than single men (Nishida 24).

Yamashita takes this piece of history into the unnamed passengers of the ship *Brazil-marú* and introduces alternative family models created as a result of this law. Young Ichiro narrates: “The Brazilian government required that contract labor enter Brazil in family units, but this was not always how things worked out. Unknown to government authorities, immigrants, when necessary, created family units, oftentimes mixing and matching relatives and friends and strangers” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Maru* 7). In contrast, Mizuoka stands free from the restriction to travel as a family unit as a landowner. According to Nishida, some migrants “hurriedly got married for the sake of immigration. Others followed the traditional Japanese custom of adoption called *yōshi*, adopting young adults, usually nephews and nieces or the children of friends or neighbors, to create suitable families, sometimes just on paper” (24). Yamashita illustrates examples of *yōshi* through young Ichiro’s eyes, as he notices how many family units have been just created and forged out of necessity. For example, a boy named Kōji was “borrowed by his bachelor uncle to complete a family unit” (Yamashita, *Brazil-Maru* 7). Kōji becomes an additional family member to complete his uncle’s unit as a “*kōsei-kazoku* (incorporated family members) or *tsure-kazoku* (companions to the family)” as an

adopted son (Nishida 24). A woman complete stranger to Kōji's family also joins this unit to get away from an unwanted marriage (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marū* 7), displaying the irony that the woman enters an unwanted marriage in order to escape from another. This creation of familiar ties appears in a fleeting moment earlier in the novel and parallels another creation of a family-like community in Brazil.

Despite the differences in social standings coming from their status as contracted laborers and land-owning Christian colonists, Ichiro also notes similarities between the groups in their hopes and aspirations: "But we were all alike in our expectations of Brazil: the promised wealth of the coffee harvest, the vastness of the land, the adventure of a new life. And I think most of the immigrants were alike in thinking that they would return [...] to Japan with certain wealth, stories of adventure, and the pride of success" (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marū* 7–8). Ichiro's observation notes that the ultimate dream for many Japanese migrants is to return home with success despite the differences in economic standings.

"A Small, Inconsequential Dot":⁷⁷ The Commune

The families in *Brazil-Marū* include the Terada family, the scholar Shūhei Mizuoka, and the Uno family. The families have migrated from Japan, following Momose-sensei (Teacher Momose), a Christian evangelist in the United States. Ichiro describes Momose-sensei as Esperança's founder, as he promoted Brazil as the promised land when the migration to the United States halted. Anti-Japanese sentiments and institutional racism in the United States led him to an arrangement of concession from the state government of São Paulo to allow agricultural migration of Japanese immigrants to

⁷⁷ "We were a small, inconsequential dot on a virtually unmapped area" and "the tiny seed of a small beginning" (*Brazil-Marū* 13).

cultivate rural Brazil (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 6). Momose-sensei's language contains connotations of conquest to describe Brazil as "virgin forests" and "infinite spaces" that must be conquered to create a harmonic Christian utopia away from home (Chuh 625). Momose-sensei presents his pursuit of colonial enterprise, seeing "*destiny* in [his] vision of Brazil as holding the future for Japanese" (Chuh 300, my emphasis) to justify colonization as a divine right and gift given to the chosen (Japanese Christians). In the Terada family, Kiyoshi and Sei's professions not only provided financial grounds for the migration as landowners. Their professions also allow the family to settle into the commune system, as their specialties in healthcare are essential to the daily needs of the new settlement.

Esperança is described as "one isolated colony in the middle of nowhere [...]" connected to other Japanese colonies by occasional communications from other travelers" (*Brazil-Marú* 68). The commune emulates a "Japanese village" (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 20), the word that closely resembles the Japanese word *furusato*, which Chika Watanabe describes as the place in which humans live in harmony with other humans and nature. According to Watanabe:

Furusato refers to a particular image: one's ancestral home in an idyllic village in rural Japan, nestled between mountains and thick forests, surrounded by lush rice paddies and punctuated with the rhythms of "traditional life" as experienced through multigenerational households and seasonal village customs. (89)

As overseas Japanese colonies, communes maintain Japanese traditions and "demonstrate their Japaneseness, overtly and covertly" by limiting encounters with Brazilian culture (Hosokawa 4). Jinqi Ling describes the Japanese migration to Brazil as both "the emigrants' struggle for economic survival in a new country as displaced victims of

Japan's modernization programs, and their unconscious participation in the extraterritorial activities of Japan's imperial expansion, disguised as emigration" (32).

Ling also asserts that the Japanese Empire's colonizing mission in South America started even earlier for purposes of both migration and commercialization:

In reference to prewar Japanese emigration to South America generally, Ayako Hagihara and Grace Shimizu observe that, as early as 1897, Japanese government officials, politicians, and intellectuals were already strategizing how to acquire overseas colonies in South America in order to establish markets or territories for Japan's commercial products and surplus population. (35)

Both voluntarily and involuntarily, some Japanese migrants with economic means co-opt with the government to colonize a tract of land as a Japanese colony (*koronia*). The word *koronia* is the romanji⁷⁸ of the Portuguese word *colônia*, which Hosokawa describes as the term used by Japanese immigrants to describe a self-contained Japanese community that maintains the Japanese language and customs (xii). As the commune Esperança launches, the villagers find business models that would help them gain autonomy and take out loans together to pay for its expenses, incurring debts together:

As soon as there were enough families congregated in Esperança and producing more than their personal needs, family heads gathered to pool resources for proper storage, seeds and tools, and to bargain for the best prices. And from the very beginning, all families in Esperança joined in association to make and get loans. The co-op became the economic and political heart of Esperança. (Yamashita, *Brazil-Maru* 20)

However, the communal aspect of the cooperative makes Esperança vulnerable to internal threats such as corruption. Kantaro, who worked towards building Esperança's financial foundation during his youth, emerges as the commune's new leader. Kantaro has brought his innovative ideas to the commune, purchasing chickens to begin a chicken

⁷⁸ Romanization or alphabetization of Japanese

farm and bringing baseball, the most popular sport in Japan, to São Paulo. Yamashita presents the sport as a Japanese pastime, and that helps the Esperança commune open its door to the external communities. However, as the leader of the commune, Kantaro equates his personal wealth with that of the commune and ends up exhausting the commune's funds on himself and his mistress in São Paulo. The commune falls into debt and goes bankrupt, putting all colonists in debt because, as a cooperative, the commune's profits and debts are shared by all colonists.

The closedness of the commune also limits its youth's intellectual growth, as children and young adults do not have access to education above the secondary level, which is only available outside of the commune. In the epilogue, Guilherme, the final generation of Esperança and the narrator of the final chapter reveals that "Until Kantaro Uno's death, youth in the original commune had not received any education beyond middle school" (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 244). Yamashita provides an exceptional case with Ichiro, who breaks away from tradition and receives education from Brazilian schools. Ichiro also reads and writes in Portuguese, an ability he describes as invaluable to him. His access to education is from his father's provision, as Ichiro recounts his memory: "I am grateful to my father for this. He urged me to get the tools to live in a new country, a country which he knew and I began to realize would be the only place I would ever call home" (Yamashita, *Brazil-Marú* 70). Ichiro can be considered a generation 1.5, in the liminal phase between the first and second generations, offering possibilities for

both the first- and second-generations.⁷⁹ Ichiro's assimilation into Brazilian culture comes with the acceptance of Brazil as *home*⁸⁰ and access to secondary education.

***Dekasegi*: Return Trips Home as Overseas Workers**

At the end of the *Brazil-Maru*, Guilherme predicts the end of the commune that “grows year by year smaller and more elderly in its membership” and the fate of the younger generations who cannot find steady work in the cities (Yamashita 244). Two generations after the migration, Ichiro, as an older man, shares a concern that has reached all Japanese migrants without prejudice. Though born and educated in Brazil with honors in architecture, Ichiro's granddaughter is “one of over 150,000 Japanese Brazilians who are currently in Japan working as menial labor” due to job scarcity in Brazil (Yamashita, *Brazil-Maru* 244). Though she was born and educated in Brazil, she cannot find a stable job. The best option for her and other Japanese Brazilians is to return to Japan, the ancestral homeland.

The Japanese who traveled half the globe to Brazil to seek new opportunities see their descendants returning to their home country as a *dekasegi*⁸¹ (*dekassegui* in Portuguese; from Japanese 出稼ぎ [でかせぎ]), an overseas worker. Her return to Japan as *dekasegi* at the end of the novel illustrates the circuit of labor migration that runs between Brazil and Japan. The first page of *Circle K Cycles* is dedicated to a “*Dekasegi* Starter Dictionary,” in which Yamashita identifies keywords to describe each generation of

⁷⁹ First-generation immigrants who come as children or adolescents accompanied by their parents/guardians. Ichiro migrates to Brazil with his family at age nine.

⁸⁰ Ichiro again becomes visually aware of the depth of the Terada family's interactions with the outside world when groups of Brazilians who have received Kiyoshi's help come to his funeral to give their condolences (*Brazil-Maru* 72).

⁸¹ 出稼ぎ, overseas workers in Japanese

Japanese immigrants, like *issei* (first generation), *nisei* (second generation), *sansei* (third generation). This section prepares readers with less familiarity with terminologies on the Japanese diaspora. Yamashita presents these words with graphics and explanations, as the Japanese words are combinations of nominal numbers (*ichi* [一, one], *ni* [二, two], *san* [三, three]) and the Japanese word *sei* (世) that means generation. Yamashita defines *Nikkei* as a person “of Japanese ancestry and lineage: belonging to the Japanese tribe; however, some dictionaries translate this word to mean Japanese emigrant, or even Japanese American” (*Circle K Cycles* 10). Yamashita defines *dekasegi* as Brazilian overseas workers of Japanese descent (*Nikkei*) “who leave their homes, usually to work in factories in distant cities, to support their families” (*Circle K Cycles* 14).

Dekasegi and foreign laborers live in the shadows of mainstream society.

According to Yamashita, Japanese Brazilian *dekasegi* are captured in the cycle of three K’s—*Kitanai* (汚い), *kitsui* (危険), and *kigen* (きつい)—in manual labor “designated as dirty, difficult, dangerous” that native Japanese people refuse to take (*Circle K Cycles* 32). *Dekasegi* experience deplorable life circumstances from working three K jobs, but they are considered “replaceable” because there will always be other migrants who can take over their jobs.⁸² Yamashita writes: “*Dekasegi* are known to work long hours, six, even seven-day weeks, taking on overtime without holidays for months on end. Many have or may return to Brazil with their savings to start businesses or to buy property” (*Circle K Cycles* 14). *Dekasegi* migrations began in the late twentieth century when Brazil experienced “chronic recessions [...] caused by its continued economic

⁸² Yamashita writes: “They are the same people in Japan as they were in Brazil, but there are new and different uses for their lives. And if the bank clerk loses his fingers or the grandmother suffers a heart attack, there is another clerk with fingers, another grandmother with a heart” (*Circle K Cycles* 32).

dependence on North America” (Ling 60), forcing young Brazilians to look for jobs externally. In 1990, the Japanese government also passed an immigration law to meet its labor demands:

Both government and business hoped to find a way to replenish the loss of unskilled factory labor, but in doing to also replace non-Japanese foreign workers with the *more familiar faces* of Japanese descendants who should, it was thought, integrate more easily into Japanese life and society. In short, it was a solution probably well-intentioned but perhaps purely in favor of race. (Yamashita, *Circle K Cycles* 13, my emphasis)

The Japanese government facilitates migrations of Brazilians of Japanese descent over other ethnic and racial groups as they are culturally and ethnically closer to the Japanese. Japanese Brazilians enter Japan as racialized laborers who resemble domestic Japanese in appearance but are still considered foreign due to their citizenship and culture.⁸³ For Chuh, the portrayal of labor in Yamashita’s works “clearly engages Asian American literary traditions” (621–622). The repeated trope of labor sheds light on a specific type of immigrant labor in Japan that is considered both domestic and foreign. Labor migration is dependent on the two countries’ socioeconomic conditions, causing a constant tug-of-war to pull laborers from one country to another.

Conclusions

Yamashita’s inscription of the Japanese immigration history in *Brazil-Marú* and *Circle K Cycles* highlights the presence of Asian diasporas. The inclusion of Asian presence changes the contours of “Asian America” as an imagined site of inquiry. The author has described Asian American literature as a literature that “asserted its grounding within American continental history, but it has always been referential to the crossing of

⁸³ A transcription of a store announcement in *Circle K Cycles* exposes the ongoing prejudice against foreign laborers in Japan: “Attention shoppers and clerks! Foreigners have entered the premises. Shoppers, please take care to secure your personal belongings. Clerks, please watch for possible theft of merchandise” (47).

oceans” that have been “the result of colonialism, racism, and war” (National Book Awards).⁸⁴ By focusing on these crossings, Yamashita moves the geography of Asian America to include Latin America, challenging the hemispheric and literary borders that designate a “field” as Chuh writes: “The centrality of Brazil to Yamashita’s creative work immediately marks its eccentricity to the usual regimes of US American literature” (621). Yamashita makes the histories of Japanese immigrant diasporas in Brazil legible in literature. Yamashita’s inscription of the Japanese immigration history in *Brazil-Marú* and *Circle K Cycles* highlights the presence of Asian diasporas.

For Yamashita, home is a transient object of longing that can be created, found, and lost. Japanese poet Murō Saisei’s (1889–1962) poem begins: “[H]ome is what you long for when you’re far away⁸⁵” (xi, qtd. in Hosokawa). During World War II, the U.S. government failed to offer protection to its Japanese citizens, sending even U.S.-born Japanese (with U.S. citizenship) to internment camps, a reality experienced by Yamashita’s parents and relatives. Yamashita writes: “And these rights of citizenship connect us together across ethnicities and races. So that my family’s trauma of wartime incarceration is also connected to the indigenous rights of Native Americans, to African slavery, to the Chinese coolie trade, to the treacherous crossing of the Mexican borderlands” (“Fictions of Magic” 165). Yamashita’s works engage with the people who have traveled across the waters for opportunities between Brazil and Japan and their

⁸⁴ Her speech resonates with the opening of her essay “Literature as Community: The Turtle, Imagination, and the Journey Home,” which begins with a question from Min Hyung Song, a professor of English, whether Yamashita considered herself an Asian American writer.

⁸⁵ furusato wa tōki ni arite omou mono’ ふるさとは遠きにありて思いふもの
The original title of Shuhei Hosokawa’s book *Sentiments...* alludes to this poem (Hosokawa xi). Its Japanese title is “*Tōki ni arite tsukuru mono* 遠きにありてつくるもの [and] means ‘home is what you make when you’re far away’” (Hosokawa xi)

negotiation of belonging across time and space. Though not explicitly stated in Yamashita's works, all passengers of the ship Brazil-maru have been part of the "circle K cycle," circling four K's.

CHAPTER 4

COLONIAL CONDITIONS: THE LATINX OF ASIA AND AMERICA

Are Filipinos Asians, Pacific Islanders, Hispanic, or Latinx? The U.S. Census Bureau defines *Asian* as “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam” (U.S. Census). The Census Bureau uses the standards on race and ethnicity from the 1997 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to classify race (U.S. Census). While this classification centers on geography, sociologist Anthony Ocampo uses the phrase “Latinos of Asia,” which is also the title of his book, to describe the Philippines and examine the identity formation of the second-generation Filipinx immigrants in California through their negotiations of ethnic identity. Racially categorized as “Asian” on the U.S. census, Filipinx diasporas in the United States appear in the discussions of both Asian and Latin American immigrant diasporas. Roberto Chao Romero and Kevin Escudero’s article on Asian Latinos” identify the group before listing policy implications that impact Asian Latinx coalition building and advocacy. They classify “Asian Latinos” under a wide array of categories:

The first category consists of Asian Immigrants from Latin America. . . [T]he second major group of Asian Latinos is comprised of persons born in the United States of cross-cultural Asian Latino parentage. A third, smaller category of Asian Latinos includes Filipinos who blend into Latino communities capitalizing upon their Spanish surnames and Familiarity with the Spanish language (Lai and Arguelles, 2003). [...] [A] fourth category of Asian Latinos is made up of descendants of Puerto Rican immigrant laborers who went to Hawaii during the late nineteenth century and intermarried with Native Hawaiians. (120)

Their third category, “Filipinos who blend into Latino communities” (Romero and Escudero 120), emphasizes the cultural kinship created between the immigrants from the Philippines, racially categorized as “Asians,” who interact with Latinx communities from similarities in linguistic influences, last names, and religion (6).

My inclusion of the Philippines and Filipinx identities in the discussion of Asian Latinx identities in a work categorized under “Asian American Literature” is to cross-examine the implications of both Spanish colonization and U.S. imperialism over historical erasures. Paula C. Park writes in *Intercolonial Intimacies*: “Through these two discourses, writers and intellectuals from both sides of the Pacific were inspired to construct a new language and alternative worldviews, which had a history, rooted in 1898, of being employed to resist the political and cultural impositions of the new global power that was the United States” (146). This challenge responds to with Coráñez-Bolton’s and Javier Morillo-Alicea’s call to: “reevaluate the conceptual maps that may keep us from seeing the connections between seemingly incommensurable worlds” (qtd. in Park 9). *Let It Rain Coffee* and *America Is Not the Heart* enter in dialogue with the lasting impacts of Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism. In the context of the Philippines, María P. P. Root writes: “[T]he traumas associated with colonization that lasted almost 400 years scarred us all, regardless of our nativity, language, class, or gender. Trauma fragments and fractures the essence of our being and self-knowledge; it disconnects us from each other” (qtd. in de Jesús 32). These cultural influences experienced in the modern-day Philippines reverberate in the Dominican Republic and other former Spanish colonies in Latin America.

Angie Cruz's *Let It Rain Coffee* presents a multiracial, multiethnic family living in the Dominican Republic and New York City through the eyes of its characters. One of the novel's central characters is Chan Lee, a Chinese Dominican man who arrived in the Dominican Republic as a stowaway and became part of the Colón family. As an older man, Chan Lee decides to go to New York, where his son Santo works as a taxi driver and his wife, Esperanza, is a caregiver for other families. Even though he suffers from complications of Alzheimer's disease and aging that increase his own need for care, he assumes responsibility for his grandchildren, Bobby and Dallas, especially after the unexpected death of his son. In contrast, Esperanza's grief leads her to dream of American country living, as seen on the American television series *Dallas*. She struggles to maintain financial health and falls into credit card debt from materialistic consumerism.

The plot of Elaine Castillo's debut novel *America Is Not the Heart* centers around the members of the De Vera family in the Philippines and Milpitas, California. Just as in *Let It Rain Coffee*, each chapter of *America Is Not the Heart* alternates between the perspectives of the novel's central characters. The main storyline centers around a queer woman character named Hero De Vera, a former student of medicine and medic cadet in the Philippines' insurgent group, who leaves behind her home country for the opportunity to restart her life in Milpitas, California. There, Hero joins her aunt and uncle to care for their daughter, Roni, who suffers from Eczema, a chronic skin condition that creates other difficulties in friendships and at school. Hero's responsibility as Roni's caretaker is just one of various examples of care work in the novel.

To study the cross-ethnic and inter-racial convergences and alliances, I examine the notion of care in the contexts of family and immigration in *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005)

and *America Is Not the Heart* (2018). I use Evelyn Nakano Glenn's definition of caring as "the relationships and activities involved in maintaining people on a daily basis and intergenerationally" (3) to explore the topics of care and care work. Like many words in the English language, care is both a noun and a verb. Care is a crucial element of survival based on human interactions that sustain collective resilience, fortify community strength, and build coalitions across class, race, and ethnicity. Applying the definition of care as the provision for and attentiveness to another's physical, emotional, or economic needs, I demonstrate how the novels illustrate the expansions through the creation of alternative kinship that surpass blood and legal ties. The novel portrays moments of loss and situations where the family of origin can no longer provide care for its members.

To establish a connection between care and care work, I begin this chapter with the shared histories of Spanish colonialism and American imperialism experienced by the Dominican Republic and the Philippines. I discuss how the novels enter a dialogue with their impact on racialized women laborers in the care sector. Colonial conditions cause generational traumas, and the gendered dimensions of care work as lasting impacts of Western imperialisms on the islands' culture and society, culminating in the characters' migrations to the U.S. in the novels. *Let It Rain Coffee* and *America Is Not the Heart* also feature care workers, including healthcare professionals, caregivers, parents, and relatives in care for other family members. At the same time, the novels describe tensions between family members and their individual social, economic, and political circumstances as members of racialized diasporic groups.

The final section will focus on the notion of care in the novels' depiction of the extension of family through the creation of fictive kinships. Here, the responsibility to

care expands from family to community that reciprocates in giving and receiving without any affinal or sanguineous ties, challenging the limited construction of the traditional notion of family indispensable for citizenship and care and is protected within the boundaries of the law. Fictive kinships play an active role in immigrant communities, as the boundaries of family stretch to Others as well. The novels provide examples of both affinal and fictive kin relationships their characters experience, blurring the boundaries of family. At the same time, the novels portray the shortcomings of fictive kinship through limitations. While the affective bond is strong, the system of enduring violence and power of the state does not recognize this relationship and offer legal protection.

This chapter pursues a line of inquiry that centers on the Asian experience in the Americas from the intertwined histories of global migrations to discuss the novel's presentation of the Philippines and the Dominican Republic's shared and overlapping histories of Spanish colonialism and U.S. interventions after the Spanish-American War of 1898 in the nation-states and their diasporas. Focusing on the presentation of family and the notion of care, I discuss the construction and negotiations of intersectional identities. I argue that both authors make legible the lasting impacts of Spanish colonialism, U.S. imperialism, and dictatorship on the racial and cultural fabric of the countries and the historical, cultural, and intergenerational traumas that require care and strengthened solidarity.

Sugar and Spice Islands: From Extraction to Migration

The Dominican Republic and the Philippines share histories of Western interventions, beginning with the Spanish colonization of Southeast Asia. The Spanish colonial rule in the Philippine Archipelago in 1521 coincided with Ferdinand Magellan's

landing and Hernán Cortés' conquest of the Aztec Empire (Arrizón 121). On the one hand, Arrizón argues that Spain "did not transform the archipelago into a 'Hispanic' nation" (125) due to the dominance of pre-colonial Asian culture. Conversely, Spanish colonialism influenced the Philippines' "food, language, fashion, values, customs, and traditions" (Arrizón 141). The Philippines was more closely associated with the New Spain (Mexico). Arrizón asserts that the archipelago governed "via the vice-regal outpost of Mexico for two and a half centuries. From 1565 to 1815, the intercontinental links between the two colonies bordering the Pacific Ocean were so close that the Philippines often became identified as a colony of Mexico, not Spain" (124). The historical connection describes colonial intimacies.

To discuss the impacts of Spanish colonialization across the seas, Carole Boyce-Davies, in her transdisciplinary work *Caribbean Spaces: Escapes from Twilight Zones*, introduces the term *archipelagization* as an entry point to study the pattern of colonial conquest to exercise their powers overseas (3). Here, Boyce-Davies attests to the geographic resemblance between the archipelagoes. She compares the landscapes of "Spice Islands" in the Indian Ocean archipelagoes with the landscapes of "sugar and spice islands" in the Caribbean, referring to the natural resources extracted from the archipelagoes (3). Boyce-Davies describes the islands as laboratories for the hybridization of people and plants, leading to exploitations of natural resources and human resources to depict the moments of intra-racial connections as well as extractions and violence (3). Parreñas and Siu argue that colonization marginalizes and racializes the autochthonous populations (15), leading to labor extraction to satisfy the demands of people in the colonizing state. Glenn also creates a connection between colonization and

paid care work based on using coercion as a recruitment method (7; 184–185). By directly connecting to other labor systems that existed under colonization, Glenn’s statement calls caregiving a racialized, gendered, and coercive form of labor akin to “slavery, indentured labor, and debt bondage” (7). Glenn acknowledges this link when she writes: “[C]aring has been associated with lack of freedom, with caring labor drawn from those restricted by slavery, indenture, colonialism, caste, social and spatial segregation, and other systems of exclusion and containment” (184–185). Colonial exploitation of environmental resources in the colonized states led to the creation of a new racialized labor group, mainly comprised of women of the Global South.

On the gendered nature of care work, Glenn also posits that women already hold “triple status duty to care, on the basis of (1) kinship (wife, daughter, mother), (2) gender (as women), and (3) sometimes race/class (as members of a subordinate group)” (7). Gender intersects with other identity markers that together create more responsibility for women to provide care. Arrizón describes gendered care work in connection to the Spanish colonization of the Philippines and Latin America:

As in Latin America, the colonial structure in the Philippines imposed a dichotomized, gender-based division of labor: men became the producers, inhabiting the public realm, while women became the reproducers, inhabiting the private/domestic arena. This separation of men and women into different social spheres introduced the complementary gender archetypes of machismo and marianismo. (140)

In this quote, Arrizón highlights the gendered dimensions of care work, noticing how the care sector is formed by women, especially subjugated women, women of color, and immigrant women (184–185) as a result of the colonial system that contributed to the gendered nature of care work. However, other identity markers affirm women’s role in providing care as paid and unpaid labor. Mignon Duffy et al. write: “While the paid care

sector as a whole is dominated by women, there are important cleavages within the sector based on class, race, ethnicity, and citizenship” (5). Cruz’s and Castillo’s novels make visible tensions within each character’s negotiations of identities from their connection to class and ties, places of origin, and citizenship. The discussion of racial phenotype (skin color) contributes to the discussion of the racialization of Asian and Latin American diasporas in the U.S. context.

Care labor and motherhood are inherently devalued as “domesticated” labor. Even though caregivers handle some nursing responsibilities, caregivers have become devalued and unappreciated for various reasons. There is a significant wage gap between caregivers, nurses, physicians, and other care laborers due to differences in required training and education. Glenn writes: “With the growth of formal health care systems in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, family caregivers of all classes, races, and ethnicities lost much of their authority, and their traditional knowledge became devalued” (40). The institutionalization of care labor enforces paternalistic control to professionalize skilled labor and devalue maternal and domestic labor. Hence, Glenn describes paid care work in domestic settings as “doubly coercive... [and] part of a property relationship that denies the independent personhood of the worker and vests property rights in the employer” (149). Care becomes materialized as a paid service that will not be reciprocated by those who pay for it. Glenn writes: “Unlike a family member, the home-care worker is not owed the kind of reciprocity that is due to a family member, and the employer does not incur the kinds of obligations that are incurred toward family members who provide services” (149). Care workers in practice without licensure are depreciated from achieving higher education and practicum. Compared to the

professional training of medical professionals in formal health care systems, caregivers' specialty in traditional knowledge becomes undervalued.

The religion adds another layer to the gendered dimensions of care for women in the Philippines and Latin America. Jeane C. Peracullo writes on the significance of the Virgin Mary in the creation of gendered expectations for women in the Philippines: "The cult of Mary, which depends on her being both a mother and a virgin, is an instrument used by colonialists to subdue their subjects" (145). In *Saints of Resistance: Devotions in the Philippines under Early Spanish Rule*, Christina H. Lee provides an overview of the development of Catholicism and the installment of important saints under the Spanish colonial system of the Philippines: "Spanish officials had adopted this advocacy of Mary as their patron saint because they believed that she protected the trade galleon and the economic bloodline of the Philippine colony on their roundtrip trans-Pacific voyages to Acapulco" (101). Religion becomes a tool of control, with the figure of the Virgin Mary enforcing sacrifices of women and mothers. In the Philippines, women who work as overseas nurses embody a gendered prototype of the Virgin Mary. In the image of "Pieta," Mother Mary holding the dead body of her adult son "provides a magnificent background for a self-sacrificing and passive mother" (Peracullo 139). The image of Filipina women portrayed in media juxtaposes the traditional role of caregiving and providing for the family as overseas workers. In her article on the Philippine's representations of the Virgin Mary and women, Peracullo writes: "It can be claimed that Filipino women's internalized expectations of a *good woman or mother* are colonial vestiges that are very deeply burrowed in the cultural psyche of the people" (145, my emphasis). Hence, the figure of self-sacrificing mothers imposes divergent demands to

provide physical care (maternal and emotional) and financial support as workers in the labor force. The images of a “good woman” both limit and empower women:

These images are, at first glance, contradictory inasmuch as they represent Filipino women being tied to their traditional roles as mothers and caregivers. Yet, such images are also representations of empowered Filipino women as Overseas Filipino Workers. These images suggest that workers live these contradictions and they negotiate with them, all the while refusing to be held down by stereotypes of what it means to be a woman. (Peracullo 140)

The power of the Virgin Mary in a predominantly Catholic society forces women into traditional roles as both domestic caregivers and breadwinners to care for the family. At the same time, Women’s place in care labor provides access to education and entrance to the workforce, even if that requires them to go outside of the country to provide for their families actively (Peracullo 141). While the image of Pieta enforces self-sacrifice, the figure also offers protection to overseas mothers, as Lee writes: Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, also called Our Lady of Antipolo, is recognized “as the protectress of travelers and especially the Filipinos who work overseas” (101). Hence, care work also enables the subversion of the patriarchal family model, allowing women such as being active providers (Arrizón 132). Women’s participation in care labor empowers women to re-imagine their role as mothers (Lee). Women challenge the culturally constructed image of a “good woman,” holding contradicting characteristics to be active and passive, weak and strong, as mothers and financial providers working as overseas workers to care for their families.

The Influence of U.S. imperialism in the Care Sector

In 1898, the United States placed the Philippines under its rule after Spain ceded sovereignty of its colonies Guam, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines as a result of losing

the Spanish-American War (Bankston and Hidalgo 130). Carl L. Bankston III and Danielle Antoinette Hidalgo write: “The Philippines was a Spanish colony from the second half of the sixteenth century until the end of the nineteenth, when Filipino independence forces rose against the colonial power” (130). With the Health Professions Assistance Act in 1976, designed to educate, train, and attract professional immigrants, more nurses migrated to the United States. Lisa Lowe describes the postcolonial state of the Philippines as a result of “U.S. commodity capitalism” (*Immigrant Acts* 118). The policy provided visa and residential status to professional nurses from the Philippines and the Global South. Bankston and Hidalgo assert that the obtainability of care professions from the Philippines was a direct result of U.S. imperialism in Asia: “Again, the connections between the United States and the Philippines created by the invasion and long occupation meant that the Philippines was training nurses ready for work in the United States and it was therefore an ideal setting for recruitment (Bankston 2006)” (133). The gender-based divisions of labor persist with the U.S. involvements in the Philippines with the establishments of military bases. Moya Pons argues that the U.S. involvement was “under the pretext of saving lives” (338, qtd. in Al Shalabi 2). Nursing programs in the Philippines directly served U.S. interests as a system in place to educate and export nurses overseas after WWII. As Bankston and Hidalgo write:

The Education Exchange Act of 1946 began what would later become one of the most important sources of Filipino migration to the United States: nurses. . . The difference between living standards in the two countries encouraged many nurses to stay after two years, and the demand for nurses in the United States made it relatively easy for them to find work. (131)

The program was designed to attract foreign nurses and make it easier to study and gain work experience in the United States for two years and stay permanently in the U.S. after

obtaining the licensure (Bankston and Hidalgo 131). The post-war conditions, the immigration act, and the familiarity with North American culture attracted Filipinx nurses to migrate, as they were considered high-skilled professionals trained and educated in English (Bankston and Hidalgo 132–133). With the U.S. nursing program, women became visible in the labor force through waves of migration.

Family Across the Seas

In *Let It Rain Coffee*, Chan Lee's first voyage from China to the Dominican Republic is reminiscent of the Middle Passage and the Yellow Trade, also referenced in *Monkey Hunting* and *Como un mensajero tuyo (The Messenger)* with details of the harsh conditions during and after the voyage. For Juanita Heredia, the Colón family gives "respect to voyages from Africa and Asia to the island shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti and then to U.S. mainland" (85). With Chan Lee's full name, Chan Lee Colón of Juan Dolio, the author alludes to the Chinese legacy in Dominican history and its indigenous, African, and Spanish roots. Virginia Arreola posits:

Cruz makes the traditionally acceptable connections to Spain (Colón, a direct reference to Cristobal Colón and the encounter) and Taíno origins (Juan Dolio was formerly "El Corral," a Taíno settlement in pre-Colombian times) of the Dominican Republic, established in foundational myths, including the exclusion of blackness, but she adds the often-ignored history of the country's connection to China, through the character's first names, "Chan Lee." (331)

From Don Chan's character, Cruz hints at the pre-colonial Taíno presence, Spanish colonization, the histories of the Chinese indentured labor in the Americas, and Haitian and Dominican political conflicts. For Hey-Colón, the inclusion of Chan Lee "underscores the importance of acknowledging undocumented Asian migration to the Dominican Republic, [moving] beyond strict historical and geographical constructs"

(*Channeling Knowledges* 156n4). Don Chan lives the history of the colonial enterprise built on coerced labor in the Caribbean and the Americas that resulted in the death of racialized laborers from Africa and Asia, as well as his connection to Haiti as an adoptee of a Haitian Dominican man. Each of Chan Lee's trips exemplifies a type of migration (first, secondary, and return migrations) across the seas. Each migration across time and space allows him to (re)unite with his family spread across the Americas. Hey-Colón describes water as an essential element that interweaves the themes of family, migration, and transnationalism with the discussion on diasporas and nations in Nelly Rosario and Angie Cruz's novels:

Through their uses of water, these authors re-write and re-imagine seminal elements such as identity and history while never losing sight of the importance of the diaspora to the 21st century nation. They question migration, family, and transnationalism, all the while encouraging the creation of new understandings of the past in order to transform the future. ("Transformative Currents" 26)

Water connects the family dispersed over generational and geographical divides. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Lok C. D. Siu define diaspora as "an ongoing and contested process of subject formation embedded in a set of cultural and social relations that are sustained simultaneously with the 'homeland' (real or imagined), place of residence, and compatriots or coethnics dispersed elsewhere" (1). The characters' departures from their place of residence to a new country interweave national and global histories within the family history narrative.

Chan Lee's first transnational journey from China took place in 1916 when the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic began. Hey-Colón highlights the role of the sea in connecting the trips, as she writes: "With its uncanny ability to surpass the boundaries of time and space, the sea connects a migration that took place early in the

20th century (Don Chan's) to those closer to the 21st" ("Transformative Currents" 12).

While taking place in the 20th century, his first voyage serves as a reminder of the Chinese indentured labor in the Caribbean and South America in the first half of the 19th century. Chan Lee sweeps up on the shore of a small coastal village in the Dominican Republic called Juan Dolio, potentially due to a shipwreck. His intended destination is unknown, and it remains unclear. The reference to indentured labor appears in the arrival story, as he is most likely to be a younger passenger on one of the boats that transported Chinese indentured laborers to the Caribbean and other parts of Latin America. Don Chan is rescued by Don José and Caridad Colón, who welcome him into the family. Don José is a Dominican man of Haitian descent.

Dominican Republic and Haiti are the only countries in the Caribbean that share an island. Its northernmost border starts at the Dajabón River (Río Dajabón) in the Artibonite (Artibonito) Valley (García-Peña 93).⁸⁶ Lorgia García-Peña in *Borders of Dominicanidad* writes that the dichotomist view of the island "shaped how the two nations and the relationship between them were imagined, and continue to be imagined and produced, across the globe" (7) after Haitian independence in 1804. Dajabón River is also known as the Massacre River (French: *Rivière du Massacre*). Although commonly associated with the 1937 Massacre, the Massacre River was named after an armed conflict between French and Spanish forces in the eighteenth century (Hey-Colón,

⁸⁶ Hey-Colón uses the term "rippling borders" to describe the fluidity and particularity of aquatic borders (rivers, oceans, and bodies of water) (See Hey-Colón, "Rippling Borders in Latina Literature"). In *Channeling Knowledges*, Hey-Colón writes:

My concept of rippling borders emerges from the need to address the particularities that arise when water is made to serve as a border. . . . our current global reality scripts borders as "static" spaces that can be opened, closed, and patrolled. On the other hand, rippling borders operate in a way that renders visible the futility of these measures as they are constantly moving and sometimes even violently changing. (116)

Channeling Knowledges 140). This connection is evident when García-Peña writes that “the genocide of *rayanos* and ethnic Haitians that took place from October 2 to October 8, 1937, near the fatefully named Massacre River in the northern borderland” (93). The physical and epistemic violence against Haitian Dominicans is allegorized and “becomes a vehicle for the nation’s bordering, which is reinforced through the constant, but indirect, repetition of the traumatic event in literature and history” (García-Peña 14).⁸⁷ *Rayanos* in the borderlands⁸⁸ and Afro-Dominicans also experience this violence (García-Peña 7). García-Peña writes: “During the early years of the foundation of the Dominican Republic (1844–65), the United States supported the idea of Dominican racial superiority over Haiti and disavowed Haiti as racially inferior and thus unfit for self-government” (García-Peña 7).

Let It Rain Coffee presents Haitian-Dominican characters: José Colón, a fisherman and the father to Chan Lee and Caridad. His biological daughter, Caridad, is a namesake of La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre, the patron saint of Cuba. Hey-Colón writes: “As patron saints with Afro-diasporic spiritual iterations, La Virgen de la Altagracia and La Virgen de la Caridad del Cobre offer refuge to island-based and diasporic communities” (*Channeling Knowledges* 139). Don José occasionally collects and buries the bones of dead drifters he finds during his walks on the beach. When Chan Lee is lost and displaced, Caridad and Don José offer him refuge. Caridad asks Chan Lee:

—Where do you come from? She poked at little Chan’s unfamiliar face, his hair so shiny it looked blue in the sun and his eyes small as the eye of a needle. Little Chan pointed at the tiny bird flying behind her, leaping from

⁸⁷ García-Peña affirms that the Dominican state silences this history despite standing evidence from witnesses and historical records (231, no. 5).

⁸⁸ “*rayano*: A person from the geographical area of the Haitian-Dominican borderland also known as the Línea Fronteriza” (García-Peña ix).

tree to tree, chirping its monotonous song. The emerald bird lifted its head to expose its red throat and pink feathers as it prepared to mate. (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 94)

Caridad's descriptions of Chan Lee consist of his racial phenotypes that convey "unfamiliarity" to her. In his response to Caridad, Chan Lee silently points to a bird, an animal known for migrating across lands and seas. His gesture symbolizes his status as a displaced migrant. Chan Lee's vision of his past does not consist of either his affiliation with a nation-state or his intended destination because he does not remember his past no matter how hard he tries (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 96). However, his Asian phenotype not only reveals his racial identity but also his condition of non-belonging to the villagers. Also, the gap in Chan Lee's memory creates different external speculations to project onto his identity, as the traveling workers of Juan Dolio try to guess his intended destination before reaching the Dominican Republic. Caridad later becomes Chan Lee's wife. The undertones of incest commonly found in the foundational fictions of Latin America reappear in this relationship to both criticize the normative structure of family and center a diasporic character as the patriarch of a multigenerational, multiracial Dominican family.

To develop the notion of care in the family making in *Let It Rain Coffee*, I return to Chan Lee's arrival in 1916. Chan Lee's status as a castaway from China indicates his condition of displacement from his country of origin and his intended country of destination, as well as the Dominican Republic. Chan Lee's arrival alludes to the transnational movements in Dominican history. Hey-Colón writes that Don Chan's "'birth' in the novel connects tidalectically with many other events. The Cuban balseros, the Haitian bot pippel and the Dominican yola phenomenon are all mirrored in this

moment” (“Transformative Currents” 12). Haitians were among those who were “imported” to the Dominican Republic during the U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915–1934)” (Al Shalabi 11). In reaction to Chan Lee’s “birth” on the Juan Dolio beach, traveling workers in Juan Dolio draw from their prior knowledge of transnationalism, as the narrator details: “Traveling workers explained to Don José that Little Chan looked like the Chinos from Panamá. –Cuba, hombre. –You’re a Chino from Cuba, said another. – There’re a whole bunch of Chinos in Jamaica. That’s where you’re from. They had shiploads heading to Jamaica to work the cane” (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 96). This debate hints at the continued dependence on Chinese laborers in the Americas. Chan Lee comes to the Caribbean because of labor, even as his race and ethnicity mark him as “other,” just as Asian labor in the development of the Americas did not change their assessment as “inassimilable aliens.”

Don José’s approach to Chan from the beginning contrasts with that of the villagers, who questioned his origin and intended destination and even tried to purchase him. Don José does not perpetuate the same racial prejudice against Chan Lee, as his encounter with Chan Lee is his first encounter with life on a beach that has perpetually displayed signs of death. In contrast to the villagers, Don José refrains from asking the boy too many questions and gladly accepts Chan Lee into his family, raising him alongside his daughter Caridad. In the following scene, a villager approaches Don José to ask to purchase Chan Lee. As he does so, the man also denounces Haitians in the Dominican Republic, unknowingly attacking Don José’s Haitian roots: “I had a China boy myself and he died. It was not the best investment I made, he only worked for me for six years. You see, the China boys have a special skill for work, and they’re not lazy or

cause trouble like the Haitians” (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 100). Even though he is a little boy, Chan Lee is seen as laborer possessing “special skills.” This man offers Don José a pouch, an old horse, and a watch “for this boy who doesn’t have any meat on his bones,” yet who can serve as his *investment* (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 100, original emphasis). Don José firmly rejects the man’s offer, responding: “He’s not for sale. The boy is my son, Don José said, glaring at the man sternly, and for the first time in his life, he could imagine killing a man. That day, Don José understood that little Chan was not safe around people hungry enough to steal him away and sell him for a profit” (100). Don José resists the violence against Chan Lee because he is aware of racial disparity in the Dominican Republic. Depicted as a dark-skinned Dominican man of Haitian origin, Don José is also subject to contempt and suspicion from Dominican villagers: “The neighbors looked at them and whispered about the odd couple, a dark, tall man and a small Chinese boy. – They laugh at me, little Chan said, wondering why people pointed. –No, no, little Chan, they don’t understand how special you are” (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 98). Don José demonstrates his care of Chan Lee as his adopted son. Cruz writes: “Little Chan tried very hard to understand Don José and slowly picked up words, like *mar, sol, tierra, luna, pescado*. Together they’d laugh at their misunderstandings. Months and months passed and little Chan no longer looked for ships, in search of his parents. Don José was his new family” (96–97). As Chan Lee becomes part of the Colón family and takes the last name, he loses his connection to Chinese identity and learns from Don José. As the sea brought together Don José and Little Chan, Chan Lee’s first words in Spanish came from nature.

Chan Lee's second transnational journey occurs after Caridad's passing, which prodded him to leave home.⁸⁹ After the death of his wife Caridad, Chan Lee embarks on the journey to reunite with his son Santo and his children. As he follows a new family after the loss of his biological family from the voyage as a child, Don Chan reacts to loss by following another family member. Hey-Colón writes: "[Cruz's] inclusion of Don Chan's character directly connects with other Caribbean experiences at large, creating a space for regional dialogue that expands into the Latino/a world, since for many of these voyagers the final destination is, in fact, the United States" ("Transformative Currents" 12). Chan Lee travels to New York, where his son Santo is a taxi driver and Esperanza a caregiver. Kang and Torres-Saillant describe Chan Lee's arrival to the U.S. as a result of postcolonialism: "Since the novel covers a shorter chronology than that of García's text [*Monkey Hunting*], we see Don Chan coming to New York, dragged by the push-and-pull forces that have continued to drive Dominicans from the homeland without abatement since the 1960s" (555). Rasha Al Shalabi also points to the United States for the political divide (2–3). Cruz's narrative expands the narrative of immigration by portraying family reunifications from migrations and the characters' return migrations "home" or to the country of origin. Chan Lee's third trip consists of his return migration to the Dominican Republic, the place he considers "home." In addition, Chan Lee is not traveling alone for the first time, as he is traveling with his daughter-in-law and grandchildren to reunite with his friends in the Dominican Republic.

As raw materials grown in plantations of the Caribbean became coveted commodities to be indulged by consumers in the Global North, Don Chan and

⁸⁹ Esperanza also ends up in the U.S. via Puerto Rico after securing her rights to live in the U.S. as the mother of Dallas, born in Puerto Rico.

Esperanza's debate goes beyond a dispute over tastes. The father-in-law's comment, "It's tragic how something so sweet killed so many" (Cruz 168), alludes to the history of coerced labor; as a person of Chinese ethnicity in the Caribbean and Dominican citizenship raised by a Haitian Dominican father, Don Chan, now a newcomer to the United States. His perspective defends Dominicans and racialized minorities in the Global South. In contrast, Esperanza immigrates to the United States for the dream of middle-class Texan suburbs from the television series *Dallas* as a fan of American pop culture. She shows a consumeristic approach to cultural products of the Global North against Don Chan's claim as she bites into the cookie.⁹⁰ Esperanza migrates to the Global North (United States) as an aspiring middle-class housewife and consumer from her dream of middle-class Texan suburbs from the television series *Dallas*. Esperanza's indulgence in sugar and cultural products contrasts with Don Chan's abomination of sugar as a Chinese Dominican political activist.

Let It Rain Coffee's depiction of Chan Lee's daughter-in-law, Esperanza Colón, draws the lives of working-class Dominican immigrants in the U.S.: "In tracing every step of Esperanza's way, so to speak, the novel succeeds in depicting a compelling portrait of the Dominican New York that both humanizes and brings visibility to this marginal figure" (Moreno 104). García-Peña defines Dominican New York as "Working-class Dominican migrants and their descendants who live in United States urban Dominican enclaves" (ix). Esperanza is a working-class immigrant in New York who actively shows her fascination with Western culture and follows American consumeristic trends from beauty and pop culture, straightening her natural hair and watching American television shows.

⁹⁰ "I could never do anything right by you. Esperanza took a bite from a cookie." (Cruz 168).

Esperanza risks her life to move to the Global North, first to Puerto Rico during her pregnancy and to the mainland after giving birth to Dallas, whose name comes from the name of the American television series about an affluent American family in Texas.

Esperanza contrasts sharply with Chan Lee and his spouse, Caridad, whose name serves as a reminder of the Virgin of Charity (La Virgen de la Caridad). La Virgen de la Caridad is the patron saint of Cuba and is an important religious figure to the diasporas in the Caribbean. Esperanza comes from a family of economic and social privilege due to their proximity to political power. The U.S. military interventions in the Dominican Republic are responsible for the political corruption of the dictators Rafael Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer, as both have received military training and endorsements as presidential candidates from the United States (Al Shalabi 2–3). Chan Lee’s opposition to the political regimes of Trujillo and Balaguer and the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic shaped his resistance to American culture on the island and in the United States. At the other end of the political spectrum, Chan Lee forms a secret organization called “Invisible Ones” with his peers. This organization denounces Joaquín Balaguer’s regime. His ideology collides with that of Esperanza, who continues the legacy of her family’s alliance with the regimes established with the help of the U.S. government. This family history links her fascination with the Global North: “Esperanza was from the de los Santos clan. Many of the men in her family worked for Trujillo, and throughout the years supported his predecessor, Balaguer” (18). In the Dominican Republic, the influence from the U.S., or “*Northamericanization* coalesced and increased its pace after the end of the era of Trujillo and the phenomenon ‘took off’ after 1966” (qtd. in Al Shalabi 4, my emphasis). Both Trujillo and Balaguer are responsible for the ethical and economic

downfall of the Dominican Republic, as Balaguer used loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to reconstruct the country (Al Shalabi 3). The economic crisis creates displaced laborers without employment in the cities, forcing their migration. The dynamic between Don Chan and his daughter-in-law Esperanza is complicated by the political divide in the Dominican Republic, as well as their distinct views of U.S. imperialism and consumerism. Even though Esperanza drops her family name (de los Santos) when she marries Santo, her class privilege continues to define her character, contrasting with that of her father-in-law. Al Shalabi adds: “While Esperanza uses the pronoun ‘we,’ she differentiates herself from the rest of the Dominicans; her reflections and aspirations suggest an assumption of superiority on her part” (4). The complicated family dynamic weakens the solidarity between the members.

Esperanza’s “American dream” comes from the show *Dallas*, an American television series aired from 1978 to 1991 in the Dominican Republic. Her fascination with aesthetics is in tune with Pessar’s argument that “[t]he visual images of life in the United States that Dominicans on the island receive[d] via cable and advertising remain strong inducements to migrate” (40). U.S. cultural influences include goods and entertainment through radio, television, and motion pictures (qtd. in Al Shalabi 4).⁹¹ According to Stuart Hall, the dominant groups’ ownership of media allows them to “subject the masses to ideologies which form the social relations and make them appear natural” (347–348). Hence, the “Good Neighbor Policy” of the United States is a political strategy that leads to the popularity of entertainment and pop culture in the Dominican

⁹¹ Though mentioned briefly, in *America Is Not the Heart*, Miyazaki Hayao’s animation film *Lupin III: The Castle of Cagliostro* (1979), and other Japanese animated films, are also frequently played in Rosalyn’s salon.

Republic. As such, *Dallas* creates a fictitious image of idyllic American suburbs that contrasts with the political instability of the Dominican economy from the country's history of foreign invasions from Spain, Haiti, and the United States. Al Shalabi writes:

Esperanza's dream of going to the United States, accumulating a fortune and living at the same standard as the characters of *Dallas* is conceived at the beginning of the 1980s when Dominicans were migrating to the US in ever increasing numbers due to the severe economic crisis caused by Balaguer's government. (3)

Esperanza experiences feelings of pleasure and even "redemption" for her to start saving to travel to the U.S. Cruz writes: "Esperanza watched la Loca's TV as if she had been touched by the gospel. In desperation, behind Santo's watch, Esperanza saved up penny by penny for her trip to Dallas" (*Let It Rain Coffee* 16–17). For Ien Ang: "Pleasure in *Dallas* is therefore associated with the pleasure of the freedoms of entertainment, in which people feel released from the prohibitions and demands of society" (21–22).

During her second pregnancy with Dallas, Esperanza leaves her husband and three-year-old son Bobby behind under Doña Caridad and Don Chan's care. To reach the mainland United States, Esperanza first goes to Puerto Rico. Esperanza migrates during the later stages of her pregnancy, risking her health, as well as that of her baby, to have a chance to give birth overseas. Her choice is likely to come from her desire to have an "anchor baby," a child born with birthright citizenship under non-citizenship parents. Esperanza takes advantage of the Fourteenth Amendment that guarantees birthright citizenship and equal protection to anyone born on U.S. soil, regardless of parental citizenship and resident status.⁹²

⁹² The interpretation of the U.S. Fourteenth Amendment (adopted in 1868 after the American Civil War) formed the basis of the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* in 1898. The ratification of the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) resulted in the institutional discrimination of and denial of U.S. citizenship to U.S. citizens of Chinese descent and U.S.-born Chinese Americans.

Esperanza works as a maid and caregiver in Puerto Rico and New York, providing direct care. Esperanza quickly learns that as a caregiver, she cannot be invited for a coffee with a patient's wife, who has hired Esperanza so she can go to work. While working as a caregiver for another Latin American immigrant household (Cuban), Esperanza quickly becomes aware of the boundary established by the paid relationship between herself and her employer, "who kept saying, –These Dominicans are keep making a mess around here" (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 9). Through this scene, Cruz places on display the tension between members of Latinx immigrant communities and the nature of paid care work that hinders solidarity.

When Chan Lee arrives at Santo and Esperanza's apartment in New York City, he criticizes Esperanza's attachment to material wealth by saying she is "more like a moth. Attracted to the lightbulb, plain and pesty" (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 13). While Chan Lee denounces U.S. interference in re-establishing the Dominican democratic system (Al Shalabi 2), he also criticizes the amount of labor enforced on Santo and Esperanza in the United States: "You want to live to work or work to live? From what I can see, both of you live to work. What's the point to live at all?" (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 48). While labor is necessary for the family's survival in the U.S., Chan Lee is against the aspects of Western culture that favor excessive productivity and consumerism, as he was also brought to the Americas as a commodity. After Santo dies at work from a taxi robbery, Chan Lee continues to live with Esperanza, Bobby, and Dallas in New York City.⁹³

⁹³ After the passing of Santo, the connection between Chan Lee and Esperanza as a family is evident through their shared last name and the children. On American kinship relations, Leahy Johnson writes: Once a marriage has produced offspring, in-laws become affinal relatives who are defined not only by the order of law but also by their recognition of a biological link to the child. Hence, when the legal basis of the relationship is dissolved, there remains a relationship based on a common biological link (88).

Esperanza and Chan Lee remain connected as affinal relatives, sharing responsibilities in childcare, even though Bobby and Dallas assume they should take care of Chan Lee in Santo's absence.

Let It Rain Coffee portrays Esperanza actively participating in American consumerism that incurs debt. After the death of Santo, she loses control and fails to care for her mental and physical health while trying to purchase items and services for herself. Cruz writes: "The more she bought, the more insatiable she became" (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 33). She emulates scenes from the television show, gilding fabric and furniture to make them look gold. Esperanza "had wanted to get some brocade fabric to make curtains like the ones she had seen on the TV show *Dallas*. And some gold paint to paint over all the wood frames and old lamps. She loved gold" (31). Though adding a gold covering does not change the composition of the material, Esperanza assesses the privilege she enjoyed in the Dominican Republic, even in her limited financial circumstances. Esperanza's dream of material wealth is antithetical to Chan Lee's community building at Los Llanos: "an agricultural social cooperative established in large part by her father-in-law, Don Chan. By portraying moments of tension between family members, the novel presents hindrances and limitations of blood and legal kinship in forming solidarity, even when the family is together. Esperanza's American dream is fully shattered by a serendipitous encounter with Patrick Duffy, the actor who played Bobby Ewing in *Dallas* on the New York City subway. The narrator describes Esperanza's excitement: "She went into her purse to look for a photograph of Bobby and Dallas to show him how he was partly responsible for everything that had happened in her life" (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 247). However, the narrator marks a shift from Bobby

Ewing's indifference to Esperanza's story. The actor Patrick Duffy distances himself from the character he played: "Bobby Ewing wasn't as handsome as [she] imagined. Seeing him changed everything. She wasn't going to Dallas, or California for that matter. Over sixteen years in Nueva York, hoping to live her dream, and suddenly someone turned on the lights and she was awake" (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 253). Through this encounter (not her experiences in the U.S. as an immigrant care worker), Esperanza recognizes she has been holding onto a fictional character from a television show.

The end of the novel portrays the family's return migration home. Hey-Colón describes his memory as "a destabilized metaphorical stream of images whose ultimate north becomes a return to the Dominican Republic" (13). Chan Lee's "north" is thus not the cardinal direction that usually refers to the U.S. for Latin American migrants, but home in the Dominican Republic. It is important to note that his home is not in China, as it was for the Chens in *Monkey Hunting*. Here, Chan Lee expresses his feeling of "situated loyalties," which Rhacel S. Parreñas and Lok C. D. Siu define as "how immigrants express feelings of affinity and loyalty to the place from which they are geographically displaced and which provides the imaginary space of an idealized home. Yet, this imaginary space is always in flux and changing, and it can represent more than one place" (15). Applying this definition, Chan Lee's desire for a return migration resonates with that of "those who left not of their own free will, but out of necessity" (Hey-Colón, "Transformative Currents" 13). Chan Lee's home has already shifted from China to the Dominican Republic, proving that home is not a permanent, fixed geographical location for diasporas.

Historical Overlaps in *America Is Not the Heart*

In *America Is Not the Heart*, Castillo references the U.S. presence in the Philippines that followed the country's independence from Spain. The novel is set in the 1980s and 1990s in the Philippines and the U.S. It tells the story of a diasporic Filipino family based in Milpitas, California. Apolonio "Pol" De Vera and Pacita "Paz" De Vera have migrated to the United States from the Philippines. They have one young daughter born in the U.S., Geronima "Roni" De Vera. Geronima "Hero" De Vera, Pol's niece, comes to Milpitas from Northern Luzon, the largest island of the Philippine archipelago. Hero accepts Pol's invitation to restart her life with his family in California after suffering from physical and psychological traumas due to political and social circumstances. The novel's timeline overlaps with the post-Cold War period and the Communist uprising in the Philippines. Castillo makes visible the multitudes of identities that emerge through the intersections of class, race, socioeconomic status, and gender. First, the family's last name, "De Vera," communicates the class privilege and Spanish ancestry. The De Veras are descendants of Spanish landowners and Chinese merchants engaged with Ilocano natives of the Philippines. Pol takes pride in being a member of the De Veras clan, which "[...] descended from a tangle of Spanish landowners, Hokkien merchants, and most thickly and undeniable, native Ilocanos" (Castillo 60). The connection to Hokkien identity (dispersed in eastern and southeastern China) is reinforced by Hero, who describes her grandmother as someone who is a "descendant of upper-middle-class sangley mestizos, their ancestors Hokkien-speaking merchants who'd made their wealth in the Philippines during the colonial period" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 56). The word "sangley," from the Chinese word for the *merchant*, refers to the family's

connection to Chinese merchants in the Philippines during Spanish colonialism. After the migration, however, the De Veras do not enjoy the privilege and protection coming from bearing the De Vera last name.

All three adult members of the De Vera family have connections to care work. According to Castillo, questions of health in the novel reflect corporate and neocolonial history, as illness often results from inheritance, genetics, or heated political tension (“A Conversation with Elaine Castillo” 6). Paz, Pol, and Hero have all pursued a career in medicine and provide childcare for Roni. Hero was a medical cadet and a medical student; Pol was a successful surgeon in the Philippines before coming to the United States. Paz continues to work as a nurse in the United States although she has obtained her nursing degree in the Philippines. However, the characters’ experiences as immigrants are as different as their professions, and their relationships with each other take a different turn in the new country. For example, Pol’s medical licensure and certifications from the Philippines are not legible to U.S. institutions. He tries to regain his status and provide for the family financially. However, the institutional measures prevent him from practicing medicine in the United States with the training from the Philippines. In contrast, Paz’s migration as a foreign-trained nurse makes visible the U.S. government’s partiality to create more pathways to immigration and employment to nurses while imposing institutional barriers to foreign clinicians who gained education and training overseas in non-U.S. institutions. This circumstance creates a reversal in the gender roles in the family, as Paz’s profession as a nurse is valued over Pol’s inability to practice medicine. Pol’s healthy body and years of experience working as a physician in his home country do not guarantee his reentry to the field of medicine. As he fails to export his

licenses and certifications from the Philippines, the lack of paperwork disqualifies him from working as a licensed surgeon in the United States. Pol holds onto his documents and attempts to regain access. During this process, he works outside of healthcare system as a security guard. Eventually, Pol leaves the United States for a brief period out of his frustration and discouragement after having failed multiple times.

Through the family history of the De Veras, Castillo demonstrates how race can add another dimension to the class system in the Philippines, where fair skin becomes the standard of beauty and indicator of class as it is associated with the whiteness of the Spanish colonizers. In Hero's description of Grandmother Geronima, her beauty is synonymous with whiteness: "Famously beautiful meant she was white-white-white, practically lavender, or at least she appeared so in the retrato⁹⁴ of her that hung in the De Vera home" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 56).⁹⁵ As Vicente L. Rafael writes in *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History*: "[U]nlike the United States, but more like Latin America, mestizooness in the Philippines has implied, at least since the nineteenth century, a certain proximity to the sources of colonial power" (165). The fairness of one's skin forges a connection to mestizo identity and a claim to Spanish lineage that elevates one's social standing in the Philippines. According to Arrizón, wealth also allows an adaptation of racialized identities that makes way for the creation of the class system:

Moreover, there was a close connection between an individual's financial status and the degree to which her/his adopted racial identity was legitimized by others—the wealthier you are, the more likely you will be

⁹⁴"Portrait" in Tagalog, synonymous to the Spanish word "retrato."

⁹⁵ Hero and Roni both receive the first name "Geronima" after Lola (Grandmother) Geronima, given her legacy in the De Vera family. Later in the book, Paz reveals that Roni's name also comes from Hero.

accepted. Hence, by breaking down racial stratification, the mestizo people transformed the caste system into a system of classes. (Arrizón 126)

Here, Arrizón identifies the connection between wealth and skin color in seeking external validation, clarifying that race and phenotype add another dimension to the class system. Another example of the discussion on phenotypes appears at the beginning of the novel where Castillo employs an unidentified second-person narrative voice. The first line of the novel assures that the fairness of Paz's skin is capable of saving her from her upbringing marked by poverty, hunger, and illness:

So you're a girl and you're poor, but at least you're light-skinned—that'll save you. [...] Growing up, everyone says you're stupid, you're clumsy, you get into at least one fight a week, and even your light skin, while universally covetable, is suspicious; your father often accuses your mother of having taken up with a Chinese merchant or Japanese soldier or tiso⁹⁶ businessman while he was away. Did that happen? You don't know.
(Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 3)

The voice describes Paz's fair skin as both "covetable" and "suspicious." Paz experiences interethnic racism from others who describe Paz as the product of her mother's infidelity with a lighter-skinned foreigner (either Chinese, Japanese, or mestizo) because her socioeconomic standing does not render signs of wealth nor class equated with her skin color. This voice also describes Paz's circumstances coming from being in a place that places more value on her skin color than on her education in determining her future success (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 3).

In contrast to her fair skin tone that symbolizes social privilege, Paz's economic poverty prevents her from seeking medical intervention for her tooth decay. As Paz suffers from discomfort and pain, she covets her neighbor's gold tooth. For Paz, a gold tooth is not just a piece of precious metal, but proof of one's access to treatment and

⁹⁶ Mestizo of Spanish descent

healing from suffering. Paz eventually saves enough money to go to an affordable dentist (not the one who treated her neighbor), and she also receives a gold tooth. However, her elated joy is short-lived; Paz is forced to wear dentures for the rest of her life when the procedure fails and ends up destroying her teeth, roots, and gums. Teeth are often a class marker, but unlike skin color, it is a class marker directly related to health, safety, as well as financial health. While the cost of dental services varies widely, untreated teeth issues can result in more throbbing pain and more medical attention, and more visits to the dental clinic incur in bills. A career in care work allows Paz to depart the country and allows her to escape from childhood poverty. From this, Castillo demonstrates the disequilibrium between providing care and receiving care.

Overseas Parentage: To Care for Family Overseas

The characters of *Let It Rain Coffee* and *America Is Not the Heart* cross the seas to (re)unite their families. Their engagement in acts of care also gives them a purpose to stay close to their family as a form of recovery. Both novels present alternative models of kinship that consist of care and acceptance to patch up broken family systems, and community replaces biological and legal familial ties. As displacements from their place of origin become a condition for the expansion of family, the community of care expands from family to community members who reciprocate the care as fictive kins to substitute one's family of origin. In his secondary migration to the United States, Chan Lee is confronted by an immigration officer at the New York airport. Although the citizenship and identity documented on his passport should be internationally recognized, he is questioned. Cruz writes:

—What were you doing in the Dominican Republic? The officer asked with a question mark on his brow line. He repeated himself in broken

Spanish. —I was born there. The officer eyed him. For the first time in a long time, Don Chan caught a glimpse of his own reflection. He never cared to look into a mirror back home, but from the quick look he caught of himself in the officer's eyes, Don Chan realized that his Chinese face was confusing the officer holding the Dominican passport. (*Let It Rain Coffee* 6)

The question “What were you doing?” is initiated in Spanish and follows the pattern of interrogation at the immigration counter. However, from this dialogue, the officer also assumes Don Chan's status as a visitor or a foreign national in the Dominican Republic. From this questioning, Chan Lee also becomes aware of his racial identity and phenotypes, and he refuses to look at himself in the mirror as denial to see his countenance that resembles his otherness. Chan Lee first lies (“I was born there”) from the desire to identify himself as Dominican and point to his citizenship indicated on the passport. However, when the officer gazes into his eyes, Chan Lee shares his arrival story, a story of his origin:

—My wife found me on the beach when she was four years old. And as if I was some kind of alien, she poked at my hair and said... —*Who are you?* And I said, —*Chan Lee, yo soy Chan Lee.* I couldn't remember anything but my name. It was 1916. I was six years old, washed up on the shores of Juan Dolio. If my wife were alive, she could prove it to you. (Cruz 6, original emphases).

Without Caridad, however, Chan Lee lacks a witness to this story who can testify it for him, and the story does not match the arrival scene, as Chan Lee points to the migrating birds when Caridad asks his origin.⁹⁷ The interaction between Caridad and Chan Lee at the scene of his arrival closely resembles the immigration counter, as he is asked about

⁹⁷ —Where do you come from? She poked at little Chan's unfamiliar face, his hair so shiny it looked blue in the sun and his eyes small as the eye of a needle. Little Chan pointed at the tiny bird flying behind her, leaping from tree to tree, chirping its monotonous song. The emerald bird lifted its head to expose its red throat and pink feathers as it prepared to mate. (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 94)

his origin. When Cruz describes that Chan Lee feels that he is treated “as if [he were] some kind of *alien*” (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 6, my emphasis), the word “alien” connotes both otherness and non-citizenship. “Alien” is a synonym for both extraterrestrial and foreigner. Chan Lee is reminded of his status as a perpetual foreigner in both the Dominican Republic and the United States, as a Chinese man with a Dominican passport entering the United States for the first time. When he leaves the airport, he experiences winter for the first time: “He pretended the cold didn’t bother him and that he had been in an airport many times, that the snow piled by the curb was not a novelty” (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 7). Pretending has become Chan Lee’s way of confronting anxiety from Caridad’s death as well as his fear of manufactured machines at Las Américas Airport, where he begins his trip in Santo Domingo.

Even though Chan Lee came to the United States to care for his grandchildren, his health rapidly declined from age and illness (Alzheimer’s disease). He also continues to grieve the loss of Caridad. Cruz describes Chan Lee from the perspective of Esperanza: “While they walked, Esperanza looked over at the frail Don Chan and felt the burden of his skeleton on her back. She knew very well the smell of a human being who no longer cared to mask his scent with cologne and deodorant, who no longer had the energy to bathe” (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 93). Esperanza’s description of Chan Lee’s health as “frail” that not only comes from age but also from the devastation of the loss of Caridad and the grief left unprocessed. Although he came to be the father to Santo and Esperanza as the patriarch of the family, in truth, his condition calls for medical and psychological attention. His presence is ignored by Esperanza, Bobby, and Dallas, even as he tries to provide care as the family’s elder.

Although it is easy to deduce his memory as a sign of age and Alzheimer's disease, selective memory has always accompanied Don Chan. Chan Lee shows signs of memory loss as early as 1916 when he first landed in the Dominican Republic. Cruz writes: "Although there was very little he understood, he knew there was something different about him, that he belonged somewhere else. No matter how hard he tried, he could not recollect one memory from the first years of his life" except his name (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 96). His memory loss also allows him to fill it with new memories in the Dominican Republic as a member of the Colón family, to create new narratives with new networks and communities. Chan Lee's memory loss does not prevent him from caring for his children and grandchildren in his new setting. When Chan Lee discovers a letter from the school district about Dallas because she regularly cuts school, he makes a note ("Follow Dallas") and decides to walk after her. Cruz writes: "Something told him he should go after her. He wanted to tell her something before it was too late. Soon, he would no longer be able to walk the streets of Nueva York without a companion. . . . She was in trouble. He was sure of it. He had to warn her" (*Let It Rain Coffee* 194). With his memory loss, Chan Lee depends on his notes and instincts to care for his granddaughter, showing his willingness to provide care.

Chan Lee continues to remember the generational traumas experienced by Dominicans. Although there are a very few references to Haitian experiences in the Dominican Republic in the novel, Don Chan recapitulates the history of the Massacre of 1937 to his son and grandchildren in the United States as an incident that serves an example of how one's own body part can betray one. Don Chan says: "You could barely say your name and I was asking you to say the word *perejil*. *Perejil*. Try and say that

word, Santito. Try and say the word. See if you could roll your r's or if your tongue betrays you" (Cruz, *Let It Rain Coffee* 160, my emphasis). In 1937, Trujillo ordered the military to kill Haitians at the border, and the method to distinguish Haitians from Dominicans was language, using the pronunciation of the word *perejil* (parsley).⁹⁸ Atkins and Wilson describe the racial divide in the Dominican Republic through the description of Trujillo's dictatorship and his obsession with the whitening of the race: "Trujillo's dictatorial control helped perpetuate the mythical cultural and racial image of the Dominican Republic, one he believed was appreciated by and consistent with the views of U.S. civilian and military decision-makers in a racist U.S. society with legal racial segregation" (Atkins and Wilson 78). Despite his fleeting memory, Chan Lee remembers the violence from Trujillo's dictatorship. Edith Wen-Chu Chen's study on Chinese Dominicans in the United States expands on the racialized identity of Chinese Dominicans in the Dominican Republic and the United States by combining ethnographic study and history. According to Chen, "Alongside the ethos of *blanquear la raza* and restrictive immigration policies against 'Mongoloids,' Chinese immigration was encouraged" (26, original emphasis) in the Dominican Republic during Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship (1930–1961). Although the Chinese were part of Trujillo's campaign of "whitening of race," Chan Lee teaches his descendants the trauma of the Massacre of 1937 against Haitians and Dominicans wrongfully killed during the campaign. He teaches

⁹⁸ García-Peña describes the massacre as an event that uses the Spanish language as "a method of identification" and authentication of Dominican identity (149–150). See "*Rayano* Consciousness," Chapter four of García-Peña's *Borders of Dominicanidad*: "One of the methods of identification consisted of asking the potential victim to pronounce the word *perejil* (parsley), the assumption being that Kreyòl speakers would not be able to reproduce it in "proper Spanish." Failure to produce the Spanish r and j sounds, often a difficult task for nonnative Spanish speakers, became a death sentence. Thus, the Spanish language, rather than race, was often the deciding factor in the atrocious killings." (García-Peña 149–150)

this history to his descendants, as he has learned from his Afro-Haitian Dominican stepfather to reserve the family history.

In *America Is Not the Heart*, Hero is portrayed as a character who has always shown care towards others. She pursues a medical career in the Philippines out of her respect for her uncle Pol. However, her decision sparks conflict with her parents, especially her mother, who asks Hero to reflect on the gendered view of the profession. Hero's mother, Concepcion, sees being a physician as a man's profession and the medical field as a "masculine world." Hero's queer identity further complicates the tension between mother and daughter; she openly emulates Pol by wearing his cologne, leading to her mother's reproach because "[a]n adolescent girl, smelling like a playboy, it was unthinkable" as well as the fact that she finds the profession "*unbecoming of a woman*, not least of all a De Vera woman" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 55–56, original emphasis). Hero breaks the gendered boundaries by pursuing a medical career.

Throughout her medical study in the Philippines, Hero loses her health and connections to her family. She directly experiences and witnesses the cruelties of Ferdinand Marco's regime due to her participation in the New People's Army (NPA). This Communist insurgent group confronted Marcos' the armed police forces. Martial Law leads to the organization of the Philippine Constabulary Metropolitan Command (PC). From 1965 to 1986, President Ferdinand Marcos rules as president and dictator. With the implementation of Martial Law (1972–1983; Proclamation No. 1081), outspoken individuals and political opponents were detained, tortured, and killed, and Marcos stayed in power. Jose Angelo Lorenzo S. Gomos and Maria Luisa S. Saministrado describe Marcos' dictatorship as "one of the bloodiest regimes in the

country, with at least 70,000 imprisoned, 34,000 tortured, and 3,240 killed” (334). The novel uses intertextual elements to convey the conditions induced by the dictatorship: “Martial law means curfew at nine o’clock, it means streets empty except for military jeeps, it means classes where there were once fifty pupils are now classes where there are forty-eight, maybe forty-six” (Castillo 11). While attending medical school in the Philippines, Hero is recruited to a Communist insurgent group called the New People’s Army (NPA) and participates in Hukbalahap guerillas, which Gomos and Saministrado explain as “a rebel group that sprung from freedom fighters who engaged in combat against the Japanese as retaliation for the latter’s invasive atrocities against civilians, soldiers, comfort women” (338). Hero leaves medical school to join the NPA as a medical cadet, politicizing her education and training. When Hero is captured by the Philippine Constabulary Metropolitan Command (PC), the rumors of her being a member of the “De Vera” family offer her protection. Castillo writes:

After it had been confirmed that the prisoner who spoke Ilocano and said she was only a country doctor was, indeed, a De Vera daughter, and therefore closely related to a family friend and relative through marriage of Marcos, she’d been immediately released from the camp, two years after she’d been taken. Amends were made to the De Vera family for the oversight. (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 93–94)

While her social standing offers some protection leading to her discharge, two years in captivity leave Hero with permanent injury and disownment from her parents and nation for rising against Marcos’ political regime. Hero’s efforts to care for her nation result in the loss of caring family and health. The PC interrogators intentionally maim Hero to prevent her from further participation in the insurrection. According to the narrator: “They’d broken both her thumbs, in the camp, right at the base, near the joints. That was

where it was hardest to heal—thumb function made up around half of the entire function of the hand” (93). Hero also knows how difficult it is to heal a broken hand:

When she was younger, Pol said that hand trauma posed the most difficulty for an orthopedic surgeon; to turn a hand to what it had been pre-injury was nearly impossible, considering the complexity of the hand, the network of tendons, nerves, bones, muscles, veins, soft tissues, the fine movements and the intricate mechanics that made them possible. (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 93)

This injury and hand tremor are detrimental to her future success as a doctor. Like Pol, Hero will likely be unable to practice medicine legally in the United States. She never finished medical school, and her hand injury and traumas ended to her medical career.

After she comes to the United States, Hero continues to suffer from both physical and psychological traumas she brought from the Philippines. When Roni and Hero meet for the first time in Milpitas, Roni immediately notices Hero’s finger injury. Castillo writes: “When Roni was folded into the footwell, she asked Hero, What’s up with your thumbs? Hero stiffened, looked down at her thumbs on the steering wheel, their positioning” (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 66). While it is disheartening for Hero to realize the complexities in healing, this conversation reminds her that it is easier to fix a broken heart from the disownment and rejection from her family and country than a broken hand, as she has experienced both damages (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 93). Hero remembers a class on how bodies heal from traumatic injuries:

Every traumatic injury is different, because every body is different: every fracture, every strained muscle. One patient will be able to walk on a leg that another patient will die with. These instances are not miracles, but the order of the day. The diagnosis is not a life sentence but an aphorism: a starting position, a jumping-off point. Once we accept that, the rest is elementary, dear Watsons—the rest is just our job. (Castillo 165)

This lecture on individual differences in feeling impacts from trauma is reminiscent of Elaine Scarry's work *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, published in 1985. Scarry writes: "Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story, and the story that it tells is about the inseparability of these three subjects, their embeddedness in one another. Despite its resistance to and breakage through language, when it gains a voice, physical pain can tell a story" (3). Scarry's words express the inexpressibility of physical pain in language, as one's pain cannot be felt by or transferred to another.

Despite her traumas, Hero engages in activities to care for her family. Hero's injury and the lack of documentation do not prevent her from taking care of Roni. Roni's eczema is described as a chronic skin condition inherited from her family. The condition is traceable to that of her mother, Paz, who also suffered from eczema as a child. Roni's parents try to treat it through both traditional medicine (through faith healers or *bruhas*, coming from the Spanish word *brujas* [witches]) and Western medicine. Paz refers her daughter to traditional medicine even though both parents have dedicated themselves to Western medicine. Although Paz does not clarify her choice of treatment for her daughter, she leans towards faith healers to treat a chronic illness that hospital trips cannot cure completely. Also, by leaving her daughter under the care of women of her ethnicity, Paz delegates the responsibility to care for her affective kin in the community who share her cultural and linguistic background. Paz works busy shifts, and Pol sleeps during the daytime. The responsibility to care is thus transferred to *bruhas* and faith healers in the Bay Area. However, when Melba the faith healer cannot cure Roni's eczema, she declares

that it comes from a curse from someone jealous of Paz and that it will require someone with greater power to heal Roni:

It turned out Melba couldn't really heal Roni, or even begin to try; she wasn't strong enough of a bruha. [...] Melba was pretty sure it was a curse; her theory was that someone had been jealous of Paz, perhaps someone who had known her growing up, someone still in the Philippines, reaching out to take revenge through Roni's body. (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 71)

After this incident, Hero witnesses Pol and Paz's first argument over Roni's visits to the faith healers: "Pol had long declared them a waste of time that would only continue to drain Roni's already erratic energy. It was cruel to drag her up and down every Filipino house in the Bay area, subjecting her to gossips and charlatans. All for your superstitions, he said, the English word pointed and unsparing" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 81). Pol's use of English in the argument reveals his view of traditional medicine as a former medical doctor in Western medicine. Hero too recalls her upbringing growing up with eczema: "Hero had seen cases of eczema before; she'd had it herself when she was a child, the face in her baby photos slapped-red and raw. Everyone's baby photos looked like that, in the De Vera family" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 40). Roni's illness forges another type of familial bond through an illness passed down the family that "marks" her identity as a De Vera.

Hero's migration has multiple dimensions, as she is a political exile and a disowned daughter. The time in the United States provides Hero with the time to process her injuries through engagement with her affinal and fictive kin in the immigrant community, creating an extended chosen family. Valerie Francisco-Menchavez writes: "Communities of care function like immigrant social networks through mutual assistance in practical issues of migrant life," including "job hunting, housing, and various kinds of

support (emotional, financial, and practical) related to maintaining families left behind and the transition to a life abroad” (14). This term, “communities of care,” best describes the caring relationship between immigrants and diasporic Asians in Hero’s circle of friends who reciprocate the care for one another in the absence of biological family. In Milpitas, Hero assumes the role of Roni’s caretaker. Hero describes her experience escorting Roni to and from schools, therapy, and social gatherings in the Filipinx immigrant community as restorative and healing, as it became another kinship network for her. Hero also describes how the practices of care are echoed by the child Roni:

She’d never had the sense that anything she’d been asked to do since arriving in Milpitas was a chore. Rather than feeling as though she were Roni’s chaperone or babysitter, she was convinced that it was the other way around; that Roni’s presence was protecting her, shepherding her. The responsibility of being Roni’s caretaker was a pivot joint, a saddle joint, something that allowed the bones of Hero to rotate and flex, knowing its axis was fixed, though fragile. (*America Is Not the Heart* 164)

Hero’s relationship with Roni as her caregiver contrasts sharply with Don Chan’s care of his grandchildren. As Hero provides care for Roni, she recovers from her pain and traumas, and her acts of care are also reciprocated by the child. As Hero recalls her times escorting Roni to and from schools, therapy, and social gatherings in the Filipinx immigrant community, she describes the experience as guiding and protecting.

Hero’s uncle, Pol, also cares for her despite his struggles and limited circumstances. He paid for Hero’s hand surgery, and even invited her to his home amid his internal suffering with the unmoving progress on his licensure. After Pol and Roni’s departure to the Philippines, Paz also reveals a secret behind Roni’s full name, Geronima, which also happens to be Hero’s full name. Paz tells Hero:

At that time, [Pol] was sure you were already dead. At first, I didn’t want to name my first daughter after a woman who died the way Pol thought

you died. I thought it was bad luck. But I did always like the name, it sounded. Classy. And then the way he talked about you—there was never any other option. When she came out we knew it was her name. (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 373)

Roni's birth coincided with the time Hero was believed to have been arrested and killed by the PC. Regardless of Hero's situation then and the contempt from her parents, Pol decides to name his daughter after Geronima. In Milpitas, Hero meets a shop owner named Bebot for the first time, who creates a connection between the De Vera relatives with the name "Geronima": "—She's your *tocaya*, Bebot called. You have the same name. —Oh. Yeah. But I call her Hero. —Hero? Bebot repeated, laughing. Then she turned to Hero" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 52, my emphasis). Because they share the full name Geronima, they are *tocayas*, which means namesakes in both Tagalog and Spanish. In this introduction, Hero does not mention the nickname "Nimang," which she had used in the Philippines with family members. She restarts her life in Milpitas as "Hero" instead, forgetting a piece of her past to create new memories.⁹⁹

Creation of a Family

America Is Not the Heart demonstrates the expansion of the family through Hero's experience as a new immigrant in Milpitas, California. Hero joins her overseas family to become part of Pol and Paz's family and forges affective kinships with other immigrants she encounters. Francisco-Menchavez describes fictive kinship as "a form of transnational family operations" that portray circulations of care (4). Hero's connection to Paz and Pol facilitates establishing affective kinship with other community members. According to Jan Selmer and Corinna de Leon:

⁹⁹ The nickname Hero resembles the Spanish pronunciation of her first name Geronima, at the same time; at the same time, Hero begins her life in the United States as an individual on a clean canvas.

The traditional values have survived in the contemporary Filipino society, although to a lesser extent in urban than rural areas. The hallmark of contemporary Philippine society is the universe of kinship groups, in which group pressure is put into play throughout the various layers of the social hierarchy. The enlargement of a kinship network based on bloodlines occurred through the multiplication of compadres as quasi-relatives. (157)

The characters refer to each other using the Tagalog honorifics “Tito” and “Tita,”¹⁰⁰ which come from the Spanish words “tío” and “tía.”¹⁰¹ Honorifics precede one’s first name to reflect one’s familiarity. Selmer and de Leon write: “Elders are respectfully referred to as “Tito/Tita” (uncle/aunt), even when the parties have no blood relations” (159). When Hero meets a character named Bebot at her store in Milpitas for the first time, Hero learns that Paz and Pol are known to the community as “Tita Paz” and “Tito Pol.” Bebot’s use of the honorifics “Tito” and “Tita” reflect a fictive kinship created between them. Bebot asks a question with the English translation of Tita to refer to Paz as “Auntie Pacita”: “Are you gonna work as a nurse like Auntie Pacita?” (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 52). At the same time, this question reflects the expectation for Filipinx women to work as nurses in the United States, as well as the immigrants’ affective familial ties. The fictive kinship in the immigrant community blurs the boundary between legal and fictive kin relationships, from Bebot’s use of the diminutives “Auntie” and in the nickname “Pacita” (from Paz) that show endearment.

Hero also encounters Rosalyn, a second-generation Filipina woman who later becomes Hero’s lover. Hero’s first encounter is at Rosalyn’s salon, on the way to Roni’s appointment. Rosalyn introduces herself to Roni and turns to Hero to ask her name:

¹⁰⁰ Translated to “uncle” and “aunt” in Tagalog. It can be used to describe non-blood/legal relatives as well.

¹⁰¹ Also translated to “uncle” and “aunt” in Spanish.

Sorry, what's your name— Uh—Geronima. Roni's cousin. Hero, Roni interjected, pedantic. She—ah, calls me Hero. People call me Nimang. Tita Paz calls me Nimang— Hero was fumbling her words, but there was no helping it. She added, Tita Paz is Roni's mom—I know Auntie Pacita, Rosalyn interrupted. What do you prefer? (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 90).

When introducing herself to Rosalyn for the first time, Hero draws connections to their mutual relationships, including Roni. Hero's relationship with Paz as an affinal relative through Paz's marriage to Pol parallels Rosalyn's relationship with Auntie Pacita as her fictive kin. Paz is already established as "Auntie Pacita" in the immigrant community. The language communicates the performative aspect of belonging and community blurs the boundary between legal and fictive kin relationships, as Bebot's use of the diminutives "Auntie" and in the nickname "Pacita" (from Paz) that show endearment. One of the immigrants who is part of the community of care led by Rosalyn is a queer man called Lolo Boy. After his sudden passing from an unknown illness, Rosalyn rushes to the hospital when she hears the news:

At the front desk, she gave Boy's name, then remembered that of course Boy wasn't his real name, but she didn't know his real name. She was aware that she'd started alternatively babbling and freezing, claiming that she was there for the grandfather of Rosalyn Cabugao, the husband of Adela Cabugao, was there a Cabugao that had been admitted the night before—and then Jaime and Isagani appeared next to her, both of them in security guard uniforms. (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 328)

Despite not knowing his legal name, Rosalyn can trace him by recalling her biological relationships with her grandparents' established medical history with the hospital. This information successfully leads her to Lolo Boy. At his death, even Hero, a new immigrant, tries to put her stay in the United States at risk by trying to rush into the hospital without any identification, reflecting Hero's strong feelings for the community from the opportunity to re-establish her family from affective kinship presents a new

possibility. However, illness or death is a time when fictive kinships are denied by the state that requires proof of ties, which imposes another kind of violence. Hero and other immigrants displaced without family, there are clear limitations from the institutional violence preventing affective kins from taking care of each other at grave times of need. In *America Is Not the Heart*, Castillo rewrites foundational discourses that oppose model minority expectations commonly associated with Asian immigrants and their diasporas. Castillo presents alternative kinship models that include overseas families, affective kinship, and the chosen family.

Conclusions

My analyses of *Let It Rain Coffee* and *America Is Not the Heart* are based around the themes of migrations, family, memory, and care that take place in domestic and private spaces. The novels also demonstrate forms of affective kinship. At the same time, these acts of care also pass from one generation to the next to rebuild and reinstate social relationships. Just as Don José brought little Chan Lee under his wings, the Colón family continues his legacy of showing care towards a stranger by adopting Hush's baby girl. In *America Is Not the Heart*, Hero moves overseas to join the American branch of the De Vera family in Milpitas and the immigrant community where she finds home.

In the two novels, many characters migrate to the United States in hopes of pursuing careers in care work, while others make their way to the new country to (re)unite with their family and care for them. Their portrayals of women care workers in the paid care sector serve as a reminder of the history of Western interventions in the Philippines and Latin America that created gendered and racialized expectations for women to provide care as both mothers and overseas workers. Despite their physical and

psychological conditions, their responsibility to care for them gives them a reason to be in the new country. In *Let It Rain Coffee*, Chan Lee picks up his caring role as the grandfather in New York after the death of his wife, Caridad.¹⁰² In *America Is Not the Heart*, Hero restarts her life in Milpitas after she is pushed out of her biological family for her involvement in the insurgence against the dictatorship of President Ferdinand E. Marcos. Pol's invitation to care for his daughter, Roni (Geronima), creates an opportunity for Hero to reciprocate the care she has received from Pol. Hero's migration led to her recovery from past struggles, and her service to the De Vera family in Milpitas proved valuable as she provided for Roni's daily needs.

Lastly, *Let It Rain Coffee* and *America Is Not the Heart* complicate the notion of racial identity for Filipinx and Latin American immigrant diasporas. In the scene of Chan Lee's arrival in New York in 1991, Cruz demonstrates how Chan Lee's self-perceived identity as Dominican continues to draw suspicion of being the Other, even after he has gained Dominican citizenship. Chan Lee's self-perceived and legally documented identity as Dominican is challenged at the airport. His way of addressing this concern to the confronting airport officer is through storytelling, however traumatic the event was for him at the time. In *America Is Not the Heart*, Castillo brings up the question of race in the Philippines through interracial conflicts experienced by Paz and Roni. Roni's story at the end of the novel explores the relationship between Asians that reveals the question of pan-racial identity.

¹⁰² *Caridad* is the namesake of Cuba's saint patron, Virgen of Charity. Caridad shares the name with the daughter of Chen Pan in *Monkey Hunting*. In her interview with Alex Espinoza, she reveals that Caridad is also the name of her father's longtime lover and that the previous title of her novel, *Dominicana*, was *In Search of Caridad* ("Write the Book").

Through the second-generation Filipinx girl Roni, Castillo illustrates interracial conflicts between Asians that challenge the notion of pan-racial identity in creating a cross-ethnic solidarity. Hero's relative Roni is described as an energetic but feisty kid who with eczema. This chronic skin condition is a visible reminder of the family heritage. At the end of the novel, Roni spends months in the Philippines with her father. When she returns, she is "still as quick to fight as ever, and conspicuously darkened by her time away in the Philippines" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 391). Upon her return, Roni is immediately confronted by a Chinese classmate, Alison Tang, who challenges Roni's Asian identity, judging from the fairness of her skin. Alison argues that Roni has not been to Asia because the Philippines are not part of Asia and tells her: "Filipinos aren't real Asians. . . [they're] more like Mexicans" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 392). Alison's assertion makes Roni question her own perception of identity as Filipinx and Asian, a question Hero, a new immigrant, does not quite have an answer. Castillo writes: "Hero didn't know how to respond to that, and Roni kept going. —She said we're more like Mexicans. And the only girl I like in school *is* Mexican. Alicia Galvez. She lives in San Jose and I'm invited to her house whenever. Does that mean we're not Asians?" (Castillo, *America Is Not the Heart* 392, emphasis in the original). While Roni begins to wonder whether her friendship with Alicia Galvez disqualifies her from Asian identity, this moment presents a powerful moment in which Castillo imagines the possibility of Asian Latinx solidarity created between Roni and Alicia.

From the portrayal of family and an alternative family mode, Cruz and Castillo's novels reflect on the lasting impacts of Spanish colonialism and U.S. imperialism that question patriarchal family models that prioritize blood and legal kinship ties. From the

materialization of care, the novels portray the colonial conditions that produced racialized and gendered care labor. Interweaving the history within the generations of family history, the authors make visible the shared histories of Western imperialisms and dictatorship on the racial and cultural fabric of the countries and the historical, cultural, and intergenerational traumas that require care and strengthened solidarity.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I investigated the connection between family history and the history of global Asian diasporas in the site of “Asian Americas” as both a geographical and imagined site of inquiry. I analyzed the stories of Asian diasporas portrayed in women’s multigenerational literature that display moments of rapport and tension between Asian and Latin American diasporas “across planes of difference” (Kang and Torres-Saillant 546) from the voices of storytellers grounded in and outside of their culture. In the analyses of multigenerational literature, I emphasized cross-racial and interethnic solidarity to expand on the literary works’ depictions of networks of care, collective resilience, and community strength. The connection between Asia and the Americas and the formation of Asian Americas in the literary texts come with the recognition of the overlapping and intertwined histories of Spanish colonization and American imperialism in Asia and the Americas.

The introductory chapter presented the theoretical framework to examine the early history of Asian migration to the Americas, underscoring the significance and impact of the Middle Passage and other crossings of people of African and Asian ancestry. From the understanding of Lisa Lowe’s “intimacies of the four continents” and the historical overlaps, the content chapters inquired about the history of Western imperialisms in the Americas and Asia and presented the racialized division of labor. From the recognition of the uneven power structure in the afterlives of colonial systems of enslavement, indenture, and displacement in the Americas, the literary works on Asian diasporas reveal the conditions of loss and dislocation at the cost of global capitalism.

The literary texts make legible the history of coerced labor from bondage and indenture in the plantations of the Caribbean and South America that supplied global demand for raw materials. The selected primary works include literary texts written by diasporic writers with connections to South Asia, non-Hispanophone Caribbean, and South America, the regions often excluded in mainstream discussions of Asianness and *latinidad*. Chapter two of the dissertation, “Family Histories Told from the Outside: Locating Chinese Cubans in Literature,” compared the depiction of Chinese immigration history in Cuba, focusing on interethnic alliances, culinary culture, and inter-diasporic cross-fertilization in Santería/Regla de Ocha. Mayra Montero’s *Como un mensajero tuyo* (*The Messenger*, 1999) and Cristina García’s *Monkey Hunting* (2003) summon the labor history of Chinese and African diasporas in Cuba and highlight their contribution to the hybridization and the religious practices of the Afro-Cuban Santería/Regla de Ocha. The second chapter also compares the difference in perspectives, as the ending of the Caribbean novel *Como un mensajero tuyo* suggests the end of family history with Enriqueta as the last surviving family member, just as Havana’s Chinatown loses its standing as the cultural anchor for diasporic Chinese Cubans. *Monkey Hunting*, a Latinx novel written by the diasporic Cuban American Cristina García, ends with the death of the patriarch, Chen Pan. However, the novel generates more possibilities by portraying the descendants across the seas. Domingo Chen, Don Chan’s great-grandson in the United States, continues the negotiations of identity as an Afro-Chinese Cuban immigrant in New York. Chen Pan’s descendants live on their ancestors’ memory and teachings.

Chapter three, “Home Away from Home: The Past and Present of the Japanese Brazilian Diasporas,” centers around Japanese immigration to South America from the

works of Japanese American writer Karen Tei Yamashita, who connects the history of Asian migration to the U.S. and the history of Asian migration to Latin America. The novel *Brazil-Marú* (1992) depicts the first wave of Japanese immigration to Brazil, which consisted of plantation workers and a small percentage of landowners and their attempts to colonize the forests of São Paulo and establish a self-sufficient agricultural society. The end of the novel hints at the return migrations of Japanese Brazilians Yamashita depicts in the book *Circle K Cycles* (2001).

In the final content chapter of the dissertation, “Colonial Conditions: The Latinx of Asia and America,” I analyzed the gendered and racialized dimension of care work within domestic contexts and contemporary patterns of labor in Angie Cruz’s *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005) and Elaine Castillo’s *America Is Not the Heart* (2018). From the discussion of care, I discussed the convergences and conflicts experienced by Asian and Latin American diasporas created at the expense of global capitalism. This chapter centered on the negotiation of Asian Latinx identities and cross-cultural solidarity. Visiting the history of U.S. intervention in the Philippines and the Dominican Republic, chapter four of the dissertation discussed the characters’ uneven access to care while providing care as friends, family, care workers, and professionals.

In *Chicana/o and Latina/o Fiction: The New Memory of Latinidad*, Ylce Irizarry describes fiction as “[...] a discursive space within which individuals can explore—but not necessarily affirm—their ethnic cultures’ practices” (8). The literary works examined in the dissertation highlight the undermined history of transnationalism and Asian presence in the Americas. Focusing on the recurring image of family, I demonstrated how multigenerational literary works move away from portraying a tokenized Asian character

with exoticized phenotypes reflecting stereotypes commonly associated with the Otherness. Multigenerational literature expands the timeline to show generations of an Asian family from the beginning, presenting the “arrival story” of the first character who established the first international branch of their family. The extended narrative timeline invites the perspectives of different characters who reflect on their experiences.

Irizarry describes the significance of storytelling as the recovery of cultural memory: “We tell ourselves the stories of the parts of our roots in order to come into contact, creatively, with it. So this new kind of ethnicity—the emergent ethnicities—has a relationship to the past, but it is a relationship that is partly through memory, partly through narrative, one that has to be recovered. It is an act of cultural recovery” (19). The multigenerational literary works examined in the dissertation study make legible the history of Asians and Asian diasporas in the Americas. In the writing of multigenerational literature, the writers portray alternative kinship models, from common-law marriages, incorporated family members, relationships with fellow colonists in the commune, and adoption to the communities of care established with the chosen family in the absence of the family of origin. These alternative family models support cross-racial and interethnic solidarity, collective resilience, and community strength created in networks of care.

In many cultures, a family registry is proof of institutional recognition of kinship ties. However, it is also a privilege that often does not extend to those without a recorded family history or a traditional family. From the analyses of multigenerational literature on Asian immigrant experiences and various forms of families, I conclude that writers shift from drawing family trees that prioritize blood and legal kinship to presenting a global

map of family across the seas that includes not only biological and legal kinship but also affective and fictive kinship, reflecting on moments of cross-cultural solidarity for the Asian diasporas in the Americas.

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