7. Incarcerated Bodies: Angie Cruz' *Soledad*

[H]ow much goes on inside of walls. All these walls.
We live behind walls, even our own bodies are walls.
(Cruz 2001: 108)

7.1 Introduction

The debut novel of Angie Cruz, a Dominican-U.S. American writer, community activist, and the editor of the literature and arts journal *Aster(ix)*,[316] is subject of this final analytical chapter. She belongs to the younger generation of Latino/a writers and is often cited along with more acclaimed authors like Junot Díaz or Julia Alvarez. Of the four writers selected for this study, Cruz is the youngest and different to the others in that she herself did not migrate from the Caribbean but was born to Dominican parents in New York City in 1972. She grew up bilingually and biculturally in a poor working class environment in Washington Heights, a predominantly Dominican neighborhood in Manhattan's Upper West Side. Storytelling, the memories of the life in the Dominican Republic shared by her family, community life, and frequent travels to the Caribbean constitute parts of her identification as Dominican American. She studied English at the State University of New York (SUNY), Binghamton, where she received a BA in 1997, and obtained a MFA in Creative Writing from New York University in 1999.[317]

In an interview with Silvio Torres-Saillant, Cruz talks about the influence of her teachers Earl Lovelace and Carol Boyce Davies as well as of writers like Cristina García, Sandra Cisneros, or Toni Morrison, to whom she felt connected due to their shared status as minority writers (cf. Torres-Saillant 2003: 113-114).

316 *Aster(ix): A Journal of Literature, Art, Criticism* can be accessed via http://asterixjournal.com/.

317 Prior to her career as an author of fiction, Cruz worked in a fashion store in downtown Manhattan and finished a degree in design.

She also recounts how she became conscious of racist ideologies, not only in every-day life but also in the art scene, and her own marginalization as "a Latina" and "mulata" (ibid.: 112-113). What motivated her to become a writer was her wish to develop her own language through which to express the experiences both of discrimination as well as economic hardship, which resonates with the criticism of consumerism and dependency capitalism in her two novels *Soledad* (2001) and *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005). Her literary work tackles the complex dimensions of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in the Dominican Republic as well as in the U.S.-migrant society and within the diaspora community. It is further concerned with the quotidian, love interests, emotional involvements, and survival. Literary scholar Juanita Heredia describes Cruz as belonging to "a generation of authors in the twenty-first century who are concerned about the transnational representation of people of color in literature and society" (Heredia 2009: 107).

While Cruz' first novel circles around mother-daughter relations, the immigrant condition in "the urban ghetto" (Dalleo/Machadao Sáez 2007: 73) of Washington Heights, illness, and domestic violence, her second book, a family saga and migration story, is concerned in much more detail with Dominican history, the U.S. occupation, resistance to Trujillo's dictatorship, and the economic exploitation of the Caribbean through multinational corporations. In addition, the novel acknowledges through the diversity of its characters the traces of the African and Asian diaspora in Dominican society and culture. The affirmation of this particular aspect of Dominican identity is unusual given the fact that Blackness is openly rejected in the Dominican public discourse, which has to do, amongst other reasons, with the antagonistic relation to its neighbor Haiti (see 7.2), and to a lesser degree with diaspora identity politics that emphasize the distinction from African-American culture. Cruz says: "I never think of us as disconnected from the African experience. I mean we are African diaspora and it is just that we have suffered different geographic displacements. Someone told me the Dominican Republic was just one big plantation. [...] That's our history" (Torres-Saillant 2003: 113). Whatever she means by *the* African experience, the statement is important as it suggests a shared history of displacement, enslavement, and movement that unifies the Caribbean on the levels of the cultural, social, artistic, and literary. It establishes points of connection and frames for comparative analysis crucial for a diaspora poetics.

In this analysis, I focus on the novel's two protagonists, Soledad and her mother Olivia. In my reading, I foreground the topics of sexual labor, which I understand as a re-colonization of the Caribbean female body, and individual experiences of domestic violence. The analysis further elaborates on how the

novel develops a body politics in which nudity and apathy function as a rebellious act against gender inequality and too-strict social demands placed especially on women. That we need to understand body politics also in ethnic and racialized terms will be made clear by looking at Soledad's coming of age and her negotiating her identity between conflicting positionalities within the U.S.-American mainstream and the Dominican community. Different to the other three novels, Cruz develops the male characters in more detail. For this reason, I also pay attention to the representations of masculinity and stereotypes associated with Latino machismo that influence the socialization of girls and boys, men and women alike. The final sections take issue with the features of the coming-of-age genre especially its representation of subject development through body metaphors and corporeal change. Before moving on to the close reading of the novel, the following sections briefly introduce the historical background and socio-economic conditions of the Dominican Republic and the formation of the Dominican diaspora in the United States. Secondly, as in the previous chapters, I sketch out the emergence of Dominican-American literature and its relation to the tradition of the field of Latina/o literatures in the U.S.

7.1.1 The Dominican Republic and Diaspora Formation

For about 3,000 years before the *conquistadores* invaded the island in 1492 and renamed it Hispaniola, the Dominican Republic (as the eastern part is known nowadays) had been populated by the indigenous population of Ciboneys, Igneri, and later mostly Arawaks followed by Taínos and Caribes (cf. Moya Pons 1995: 18). The size of the population is estimated at about 400,000 by the time of the contact with the Spaniards, however nearly extinguished only decades later through diseases imported by the colonizers, mistreatment, and overwork. Hispaniola, meaning little Spain, then, indicates at least two things: European colonialism in the Caribbean and almost erasure of indigenous culture on the one hand, and, on the other, dominance of Spanish rule on the whole island, which is the second largest in the Caribbean, until the occupation by France and eventual independence of Haiti. Notably, Hispaniola plays a significant role in the African diaspora consciousness. Henry Louis Gates, jr., speaks of the island as the "birthplace of the Black experience in the Americas" (Gates 2011:

n.p.),[318] because it was the first location where a colonial outpost had been installed and to where enslaved African people were taken. Slave trade there started as early as in the 1520s.

Especially Dominican Republic's relation to Haiti as well as to notions of Blackness are noteworthy. Ceded to France in 1795, from 1805 onwards, Santo Domingo remained under Haitian domination until 1844 when independence was achieved.[319] Despite their geographical proximity and several attempts of (enforced) unification, the two neighboring countries could not be more different. While Haiti successfully fought for independence from French domination comparably early, re-building the nation based on a strong identification with their African roots, the Dominican Republic's emerging national identity was centered around the ruling white elite and proximity to *European-ness* and whiteness, based to a large degree on the antagonism to Haiti, rather than on anticolonial separatism from Spain (cf. Whitney 2011: 362). The Dominican Republic became the only Caribbean state to gain independence not from the colonizing 'motherland' but from another Caribbean state. Haitian rule of the island fed into sentiments of anti-Blackness and anti-Haitianism to such an extent that recolonization by Spain or U.S. annexation was preferred over the rule by the neighbor.[320] The remaining decades of the 19th century were characterized by *caudillo* politics, economic crises and political instability and fragmentation, a revolution in 1857, the first dictatorship under Ulises Heureaux, U.S. protectorate, and the collapse of sovereignty.[321]

318 This quote is taken from Henry Louis Gates' documentary on "Haiti and the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided" as part of the series "Black in Latin America," 51:25 min, (00:00:46-00:00:49). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fU3TWRKFtTA

319 Ever since their settlements on Hispaniola, both the French and Spanish fought over territory and land use, while at the same time fostering intercolonial trade. Especially the borderland between the two was a constant source and ground of conflict. As Moya Pons notes, "the border between the French and the Spanish colonies was never a simple line drawn up in official cabinets, but a living element in the social fabric of Española" (1995: 77). This is important to note, as this shows that reasons for later conflicts between independent Haiti and Dominican Republic can be traced back to the competitive constellation of the colonial opponents.

320 As a result of the constant fear of repossession by the so-called Black Republic, the Dominicans signed a degree with Spain in 1861.

321 Moya Pons argues that "Dominican politics had always been based on personalism and *caudillismo* because the population was primarily rural and illiterate, and their loyalty was only possible through a system of personal connections" (1995: 220; see also 165-183, 219-234). The *caudillo* is an authoritarian and charismatic leader figure and embodies a certain ideal of masculinity which is influential to a certain degree on contemporary machismo ideology.

The 20th century saw the beginning of U.S.-imperial interventions in the Caribbean. The occupation and military rule by the U.S. in the Dominican Republic lasted from 1916 until 1924 (about at the same time as in Haiti). The installation of the Dominican National Police and simultaneous disarming of the population facilitated the rise and power of the National Army during the dictatorship later. Nearly the entire trade and commerce was now realized with the U.S. and the sugar industry was dominated by foreign investors, which for the local economy meant dependency on imports and the demands of the global market and U.S. foreign policy.[322] As a result, "[t]he growing Americanization of the urban elite meant the adoption of new lifestyles and consumption habits completely alien to traditional Dominican modes of behavior" (Moya Pons 1995: 346).

The atmosphere of growth and progress, nevertheless, was accompanied by the revival of *caudillo* politics, leading to the rise of one of the cruelest dictatorships in the history of the post-emancipation Caribbean: the dictatorship of General Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, the *generalissimo* and self-proclaimed 'Padre de la Patria Nueva.' He came to power with force in 1930 to reign for three decades until his assassination in 1961. The historian B. W. Higman refers to Trujillo, who was also known for his *machismo*, as the most notorious, manipulative totalitarian dictator in the Caribbean and Latin America, "seizing control of the minds as well as the resources of the people" (Higman 2011: 259). He monopolized the business sectors and industry and tactically silenced or liquidated opponents with torture and terror.[323] Although a prospering urban middle class could emerge, the majority of the rural population lived in extreme poverty and only a small elite was able to accumulate wealth if they complied with Trujillo.[324]

322 This of course has left its marks on the population, the local culture, and practices of consumption oriented towards the trends in the United States.

323 Moya Pons confirms that "[f]rom the beginning, Trujillo's government was a regime of plunder organized to furnish him with total control of every economic enterprise existing in the country. As he achieved control of those enterprisesm Trujillo used the full power of the state to eliminate competition and establish monopolies" (1995: 359). The government of the United States continued to support Trujillo, because they regarded him "as a guarantor of political stability and as a better alternative to revolution" (ibid.: 357). Throughout Trujillo's rule, many opponents and intellectuals went underground or in exile, if they could.

324 Especially the sugar industry, where mostly Haitian workers worked under miserable conditions, was a source of capital accumulation. It was also under Trujillo in 1937 that the brutal murder of Haitians, especially of those living in the border region, took place.

The decades following the dictatorship were dominated by instability and conflicts. In 1965, another intervention by the U.S. led to civil war with some 40,000 U.S. soldiers entering the country to prevent the rise of another communist regime in the Caribbean.[325] Ever since the re-establishment of democratic rule, the two parties, *Partido de la Liberación Dominicana* and *Partido Revolucionario Dominicano*, have dominated political life. However, the return of president Joaquín Balaguer and his rule from 1966-78 has become known under the label of *neo-trujillismo*, likewise characterized by violence and terrorist acts. Equally, under Antonio Gúzman, a social democrat who was in office throughout the 1980s-90s, corruption, devalued currency, and a high inflation rate – at 60% in 1988 and up to 100% in 1990 (cf. Moya Pons 1995: 433, 443) – dominated a deteriorated Dominican economy and society. The consequences have been the country's subjection to the IMF-adjustment program, increased foreign aid, and large foreign investment, resulting in dependency capitalism. The economic situation and living conditions worsened to such an extent that by the early 1990s the majority of Dominicans were unable to bear the high prizes. For several months the population was left without basic food supply, electricity, water, and fuel, living, as Moya Pons writes, "the most depressing crisis in modern history" (Moya Pons 1995: 443). Many have been forced to migrate, mostly to the United States, but also to Venezuela, to Puerto Rico, or Europe. Whereas under Trujillo the majority of the exiled migrants belonged to the educated elite and intellectuals and were opponents of the regime, the post-sixties generation of migrants from the Dominican Republic comprised largely of the poor and working-class population. The succeeding governments have invested more in infrastructure and technological development, financial stability, and the creation of social programs, but have also been criticized for neoliberal economic policy, corruption, or paramilitary operations (the PRD especially).

Today, the Dominican Republic has a population of more than 10.5 million people. The Dominican population is heterogeneous in terms of ethnic, cultural, and religious identification and affiliation, comprising of a majority of persons of mixed European and African ancestry, of those who identify as Black and African or white and European, indigenous American, Asian (e.g. Syrian,

325 The operation of the "Inter-American Peace Force" is subject of controversial debate, since some regard the intervention as a violation of the charter of the UN. Another example of U.S. interventionism in the Caribbean with the aim to thwart the rise of communism is the invasion of Grenada in 1983 after the execution of Maurice Bishop.

Lebanese, Chinese), and a small minority of Sephardic Jews.[326] The question of ethnicity and ethnic identity (or ancestry) in the Dominican Republic is a difficult and contested one. Different to, for instance, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago, the Dominican Republic does not celebrate officially the multi-ethnic composition. Prejudice and stratification based on race are still prevalent in Dominican society. The idea of a national identity of *Dominicanidad* focuses to a large extent on the Spanish or European heritage, celebrating as well *whiteness* as an important marker of class and status and determinant of social relation (cf. Howard 2001). Although of African descent the great majority of Dominicans would not self-identify as Black or being of African descent,[327] but rather self-identify as *indio/a.*[328] The classification of *indio/a* in the Dominican Republic encompasses a complex set of racial identifications, ranging from *indio claro* to *indio oscuro* with "intermediate categories [...] such as *mulato*, *jabao*, *triqueño*, and others" (Itzigsohn/Dore-Cabral 2001: 323). In order to understand Dominican cultural identity, nationalism, and the society's obsession with skin color, the antagonistic history of the Dominican Republic and Haiti as well as the attachment to Spain, European culture, and Catholicism is important.[329]

326 "Social scientists generally accept the following percentages for classification of race in the Dominican Republic: 65% mulatto, 15% white, 15% black, 5% other" (Suriel 2005: 20). The Dominican Republic has decided not to include the category of ethnic and racial identification in the 2002-2010 census (cf. "La variable étnico racial en los censos nacionales": 22).

327 For a more in-depth discussion of how race is defined as well as of national identity and anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic, see, e.g., David Howard's *Coloring the Nation* (2001), in which he argues that Dominican racial identity "represents whiteness, Catholicism and a Hispanic heritage. It clashes dramatically with the popular Dominican image of Haiti – one of *negritud* or blackness, *vodú* and African ancestry" (2001: 17). The contemporary discourse of '*la raza dominicana*' builds on colonial dichotomies.

328 This renders inclusion within U.S. ethnic and racial categories based historically on a Black/white distinction more complicated. As Jo-Anne Suriel notes, with reference to Joseph Roach's concept of "surrogation" or the interrelation of memory and the performance of cultural identity as put forward by him in *Cities of Dead: Circum-Atlantic Black Performance* (1996), the problem attached to the racial construct of *indio/india* is one of forgetting the "genealogy of enslavement" on part of African descendants and erasure of the "history of violence" on part of the white population (cf. Suriel 2005: 29). She concludes "that the myth of the *indio* is a racist concept that materialized into the Dominican consciousness, *dominicanidad* is a racialized and exclusionary ethos as well" (ibid.: 32).

329 For decades Haitians have come to the Dominican Republic in search for employment. Many of these labor migrants have been exploited working on the sugar plantations or as domestic servants, however constantly threatened with forced re-

Migration in particular to the United States increased rapidly after Trujillo's death in 1961.[330] Between 1990 and 2000 the population of Dominicans in the U.S. grew by almost 90 percent to over 1.1 million, with a higher proportion of female immigrants than males (cf. Grieco 2004). The transnational ties between island Dominicans and diaspora Dominicans are relatively strong – considering, for instance, the circulation of capital and financial support. Remittances sent from the diaspora community in the United States is a major source of income for the Dominican economy, next to tourism, amounting to about 3.5 billion U.S.-Dollars in 2014 and 4.1 billion in 2016 (cf. "Migration and Remittances Data" 2017). In contrast, nevertheless, Dominicans living in the United States are more likely to live in poverty, have a higher unemployment rate, and a lower level of income and education than other minority groups.

In 2010, the Dominican population in the U.S. had a size of 1.4 million.[331] More than half of the Dominican immigrants live in the metropolitan area of

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patriation. A recent case in point constitutes a court ruling in 2013 that retroactively revoked citizenship for children born to foreign (Haitian) parents as early as 1929, thus stripping off citizenship rights of all Dominican persons of Haitian descent born after 1929, making them stateless people. The massacre of thousands of Haitians in 1937 was not only meant to clear the country of the Haitian presence, starting the "Dominicanization of the frontier" (Moya Pons 1995: 369), but was also part of Trujillo's racist ideology and cruel attempt at whitening the body of the nation, to 'protect' white *dominicanidad*, Hispanic and Catholic tradition, in short to dissociate from Blackness and things associated with Haiti and Africa. This is also crucial when considering the abominable condition of Haitian workers in the Dominican sugar industry, the so-called *bateyes*, and the recent juridical decision of the Dominican government. On the meaning, limitations, as well as contradictions of *Dominicanidad* with regards to, amongst other things, the racialization of the body and 'protection' of the national border, see the publication by Lorgia García-Peña (2016).

330 Torres-Saillant confirms the rise in numbers of migrants from the island to the United States: "The death of the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, whose government had limited the population's mobility to foreign destinations, the passage by the US Congress of the 1965 Immigration Act, which increased immigrant quotas from the Caribbean and other parts of the Third World, and the US military invasion of 1965 to 'prevent another Cuba' all figure as the principal causes of the 'great exodus.' With the cities of New York; Providence, Rhode Island; and Lawrence, Massachusetts, serving initially as their principal destinations, Dominicans soon formed neighborhoods mostly in the Northeast. By the late 1970s the New York City neighborhood of Washington Heights had become the mecca of Dominican life in the country and a hub of writers" (2013c: n.p.).

331 Table 6 in the report, *2010 Census Briefs*, provides details on the origin and racial identity of the Hispanic or Latino/a population in the U.S. in 2010. Interestingly, among the three Caribbean Hispanic groups of Cubans, Puerto Ricans, and Dominicans, the smallest proportion of those who self-identify as white is among those of

New York, mostly in the neighborhood of Washington Heights. Thus, the city has the largest community of Dominicans outside of the country. The report on "The Hispanic Population: 2010" uses the specifications Hispanic or Latino origin as ethnic label to refer to "a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race" (Ennis/Ríos-Vargas/Albert 2011: 2). Dominicans are counted among the Hispanic population, the country's fastest growing and largest ethnic minority group, counting 54 million people in 2013 (cf. Grosfoguel/Maldonado-Torres/Saldívar 2005: 5). Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, and Cubans comprise the largest group among the Hispanic population (cf. Ennis/Ríos-Vargas/Albert 2011). Persons who identify as being of Dominican origin are usually counted among "Other Hispanic or Latino" (ibid.: 3, Table 1). The classification of *Hispanic* came into use for the first time in the "Census of Population" of 1970 under Nixon after it had gained currency in the course of affirmative action policies throughout the 1960s. In addition, the term *Latino* became increasingly significant in political activism and as self-nomination especially and primarily within the Nuyorican (referring to the Puerto Rican diaspora in New York, here especially by the anti-fascist and anti-capitalist *Young Lords*) and Chicano movements, exclusive of e.g. Dominican immigrants, and as substitute for *Hispanic* (cf. Laó-Montes 2001: 4).[332]

A qualitative sociological study has found out that Dominicans in the United States tend to "reproduce their life on the island in the streets of New York City" (Itzigsohn/Dore-Cabral 2001: 324), thus contributing to the visibility and vibrancy of Latino/a culture in North America. New York is seen by some as a "global factory of latinidad" (Laó-Montes 2001: 1).[333] Taking U.S. census and

Dominican origin (29.6 % as compared to 85.4 % and 53.1 % among Cubans and Puerto Ricans respectively), whereas "some other race" is ranked the highest (46 % among Dominicans, 5.8 % and 27.8 among Cubans and Puerto Ricans). One explanation for the latter number may very well be the fact that in the Dominican Republic, the large majority of the population self-identifies as *índio*, rather than as Black or being of African ancestry (cf. Ennis/Ríos-Vargas/Albert 2011: 14).

332 On the genealogy of the terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latino,' see, for instance, Laó-Montes (2001: 4-5) and Immanuel Wallerstein who claims that "Latin@ identity is at the heart of a crucial geopolitical battle" (Wallerstein 2005: 36). Wallerstein uses the nonsexist, queer spelling *Latin@* to include persons of all genders and trans-persons from Latin America, the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, of Latin American descent, or who self-identify as such living in the United States.

333 Laó-Montes and Dávila, editors of *Mambo Montage*, define the discursive construction of *Latinidad* thusly: Based on "particular historical foundations, hemispheric linkages, and global projections" of and among Latin American and Caribbean people, it denotes a subject position or positionality characterized by "a multiplicity of intersecting discourses enabling different types of subjects and identities and de-

social construction of racialized ethnic identity aside, the process of *Latinization* and production and performance of *Latinidad* can be attributed as much to popular culture, literature, and art, as to the people, communities, social movements, and activism (cf. Dávila 2001a, 2001b). The following section sheds light on the emergence of *Latinidad* through Dominican literature in the U.S. and its labelling as Latino fiction.

7.1.2 Dominican Literature of the Diaspora and the Latino/a Label

The growing importance of the Latino/a label in the 1980s and 1990s has contributed to the increasing visibility of and the marketing of the literary output of a new generation of Hispanic writers in the United States, including successful authors like Sandra Cisneros, Junot Díaz, and Oscar Hijuelos. Following the boom of Latin American literature with its magical realism in the 1960s and 1970s, literary critics have started to talk about the "mini-boom" of U.S. Latino/a writing (cf. Christie/Gonzalez 2006: xiii-xiv). In her essay, with the significant title "On Finding a Latino Voice" (1995), Julia Alvarez writes that the publication of Moraga's and Anzaldúa's important collection *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, published in 1981 which includes several pieces by Latina writers, has paved the way for the emergence of Latino/a literature. Then, in the mid-1990s, more than a decade after the publication, she observes that "there was a whole group of us, a tradition forming, a dialogue going on. And why not [...], why couldn't we Latinos and Latinas have our own made-in-the-USA boom?" (n.p.). The 1990s were also an important 'feminist decade' for Latina women's writing: not only the creative voices of Alvarez or Cisneros, but Latina writers especially of the Hispano-Caribbean like Achy Objeas, Cristina García, or Esmeralda Santiago received wide recognition (cf. Heredia/Kevane 2000; Brähler 2013: 64).

The literature by Dominican authors in the Unites States has been in existence since at least the early twentieth century, with writers like Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884-1946), Andrés Francisco Requena (1908-1952), who was forced into exile and killed for his open criticism of Trujillo, essayist Salomé Camila Henríquez Ureña (1894-1973), or novelist Virginia de Peña de Bordas

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ploying specific kinds of knowledge and power relations" (Laó-Montes 2001: 3-4). Rather than seeing *Latinidad* as a fixed identity category, according to the editors, the term *Latinization* refers to a discursive formation and identification as a process that also involves transculturation.

(1904-1948).[334] This earlier generation has not received the same amount of critical attention as contemporary voices, mostly because they wrote in Spanish, similar to the 'post-sixties' poets like Marianela Medrano (*1964) and Yrene Santos López (*1963) who also publish in Spanish. The work of award-winning poet Rhina Espaillat (*1932), also exiled with her family, is important for many things not the least for its bilingual register. Interestingly, it has been predominantly women authors who first made a career writing in English (cf. Torres-Saillant 2013b: 429),[335] among them most prominently Julia Alvarez (*How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* [1991], *In the Time of the Butterflies* [1994], *Saving the World* [2006]), Nelly Rosario (*Song of the Water Saints* [2002]), and Loida Maritza Pérez (*Geographies of Home* 1999), or performance artist Josefina Báez. What distinguishes Dominican-American women's writing, according to Torres-Saillant, are the protagonists' "awareness of their racialization, social impediments, and cultural otherness with respect to a distant and indifferent mainstream" as well as "the memory of the Dominican past as a source of clarity and potential strength [...]. Reconnecting with Dominican history seems to be a strategy whereby their characters enhance their ability to cope with the ethnic, racial, sexual, and cultural antipathies they face in the United States" (Torres-Saillant 2013b: 432).[336] All these are clearly issues of major concern in migrant fiction as well as in Caribbean diaspora literature in general.

Angie Cruz' novel *Soledad* is subject of only a few scholarly publications.[337] This may be due to the great success of Alvarez or Pulitzer Prize winner Díaz, who draw attention away from less popular Dominican diaspora authors, but also due to the still marginal status of Dominican literature in more general terms. At the end of the twentieth century and despite the boom of Latino/a literature, Torres-Saillant and Hernández, for example, observe that "Domini-

334 On the early development and important figures of Dominican American literature, see *Literatura Dominicana en los Estados Unidos: Presencia Temprana 1900-1950* edited by Daisy Cocco de Filippis and Franklin Gutiérrez (2001). For an overview of Dominican-American literature, see Torres-Saillant (2013b).

335 Cf. Vanessa Pérez Rosario (2010). Juanita Heredia's *Transnational Latina Narratives* (2009) includes one chapter on Angie Cruz. Alvina E. Quintana's *Reading U.S. Latina Writers* (2003) features Julia Alvarez and Loida Maritza Pérez. A concise study devoted to women poets from the Spanish Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic, in the United States is Carlota Caulfield's "US Latina Caribbean Women Poets: An Overview" in Caulfield/Davis (2007).

336 *The Tears Of Hispaniola*, by Lucía M. Suárez (2006), is a comprehensive study of Haitian and Dominican diaspora literature and the role memory, home, and history play in these fictional texts.

337 See for instance Brüske (2013); Sandlin (2013); Francis (2010); Dalleo/Machado Sáez (2007); and Lago Graña (2004).

can literature in the United States continues to be a marginal cultural expression" (1998: 120). While this has certainly changed during the first decade of the 21st century, it should not go unmentioned that a significant number of edited volumes on *Hispanic* or *Latino* literature and culture have overlooked the literary achievements by writers from the *Hispano-Caribbean* and do not include *Dominican-American* authors at all.[338] The different terms mentioned in this last sentence already hint at the difficulties of categorizing literature, especially when based on ethnic ascriptions, and often confusing labels that cannibalize diverse cultural expressions and heterogeneous literary output. While I wish to stress the belonging of U.S.-Dominican literature to the field of Caribbean diaspora literatures (which as 'label' puts less emphasis on ethnic identity but rather emphasizes migration and the transnational connection to and routes of this literary tradition), it is important to point out its relation to the already established field of Latina/o literature in the U.S., also in terms of the symbolic and cultural capital associated with it.

Among literary scholars, there hardly exists agreement on the use of a common terminology. Whereas some studies use the denotation *Latino* and *Hispanic American* literature interchangeably, others argue against using the Hispanic label as it overly stresses the colonial heritage of Spain, a relation which in many cases is irrelevant. Yet others add a regional and linguistic specificity such as *Hispanic Caribbean* or *Latino Caribbean* to differentiate on the one hand from Anglo- or Francophone Caribbean and on the other from other Spanish speaking groups in the U.S.[339] All of these labels have the tendency to

338 See, for example, Torres-Saillant/Hernández (1998: 111) on the exclusion of Dominican writers from anthologies of Latina/o literature. Juan Flores, on the other side, notes the same form of exclusion for Puerto Rican literature when it gets subsumed under the umbrella term of Latina/o literature: "But along with the opportunities, for both recognition and potential creative sharing, there is for the Puerto Rican especially the pitfall of renewed marginalization and, on the other end, dilution of the collective experience" (Flores 2001: 203).

339 Examples are, among others, *The Hispanic Literary Companion* by Kanellos (1997), *The Latino Reader* by Augenbraum/Fernández Olmos (1997), or Marc Zimmermann's *US Latino Literature* (1992). The majority of contributions in the volume *U.S. Latino Literatures and Cultures: Transnational Perspectives* (2000), edited by Lomelí and Ikas, focuses mainly on the literary and artistic production by Chicanos/as. The volume features only one interview with Cuban American writer Uva de Aragón and one essay on the writings by Puerto Rican and Cuban American authors (the contribution by Manuel M. Martín-Rodríguez). The collection *Imagined Transnationlism: U.S. Latino/a Literature, Culture, and Identity* (2009), features writers who have roots in Haiti, Cuba, and Puerto Rico but not in the Dominican Republic. The contribution by Nicolás Kanellos in that collection is noteworthy for its schematic overview of Hispanic literature in the United States and categorization into native,

commodify ethnicity, homogenize cultural diversity and diasporic experiences, as well as gloss over privileges and structural dis-/advantages linked to race, class, language, citizenship and migrant status, and access to institutional support. In his discussion of Latino/a culture, art, and literature, Juan Flores elaborates on the initially challenging relations among the heterogeneous U.S.-Hispanic population with regards to differences in the access to (cultural) capital, institutional representation, and funding. He differentiates between resident, *lowercase latinos/as*, such as Chicano/as and Puerto Ricans, who were there earlier and more involved in the Civil Rights movement, and, on the other side, the immigrant (upper case) *Latinos/as*, such as Dominicans or Cubans, whose writing he blames as assimilationist and apolitical, who enjoy certain privileges associated with class and ethnic identity and receive more support by cultural institutions and through affirmative policies (cf. Flores 2001: 191-196).

The different labels are as much an academic, institutional decision and a marketing issue of the publishing industry and they constitute a political choice marking the belonging to and solidarity within ethnic minorities.[340] Latino/a literature usually subsumes the works by Chicano/a, Cuban American, Dominican American, Mexican, and Puerto Rican writers and artists.[341] The political dimension of the label is pointed out by Alvina Quintana who argues that the designation of *Latina/o* – a "panethnic category" (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 11) – is a

immigrant, and exile fiction (Kanellos 2009: 34). He analyses the text-immanent features and moves away from a strictly biographical reading of the novels.

340 Christie and Gonzalez, for instance, stress the insufficiency of labels, adding that "their meanings are dependent upon personal perspectives and cultural or political attitudes. We have to recognize that no label for any group of people is all-inclusive or entirely accurate and that many, in fact, can be demeaning and derogatory" (Christie/Gonzalez 2006: xiv).

341 Both categories, Hispanic and Latino/a, for a long time have predominantly referred to U.S.-Puerto Ricans and Chicanos/as. This has changed in the course of the "Latinization" not only of certain areas of New York but also of the art scene itself, according to Arlene Dávila. It now subsumes or is constructed around a variety of ethnic and cultural identities and set in relation to the Latin American background, simultaneously transforming the modes of representation and mechanisms of recognition. "A direct consequence of this continued identification between particularized groups and the forms and elements used to represent 'Latin' culture was that the role of Latin America, rather than the experiences of U.S. Latinos, was strengthened as the reference for authentic [sic] definitions of 'Latinness'" (Dávila 1999: 186). Similarly, the fiction produced by writers with a Spanish Caribbean background has often been compared to Latin American literature, especially its expression of magical realism since the boom and evaluated accordingly.

> strategic intervention aimed at highlighting some of the cultural and political similarities that emerge when individuals living in the United States are identified by the mainstream press under a 'Hispanic' label, signifying a European language rather than an ethnic or national point of origin. […] Although the terms 'Hispanic' and 'Latino' both make reference to categories of difference, it is only the latter that allows for a recognition of the cultural hybridization created by the European fusion with Indigenous, Asian, or African peoples. (Quintana 2003: 4)

The diverse experiences and ethno-cultural affiliations subsumed under the Latino label in fact defy any notions of an essential *Latinidad.* It is a useful category in a unified resistance to assimilationist tendencies by the U.S.-mainstream and can be used strategically based on a shared marginality for common claims for recognition.[342] Be it as it may, what is clear is that it establishes a sense of belonging and creates symbolic capital in the area of creative writing and ethnic literature. This Angie Cruz affirms by stating "that as a Dominican writer in the US" in her formation and success as creative writer she feels a "belong[ing] to a community" (Torres-Saillant 2003: 118). Dalleo and Machado Sáez note that Cruz' novel Soledad deals with issues of identity and ethnic belonging thereby negotiating street and mainstream culture:

> Amidst […] shifting literary alliances, lowercase Latino/a literature must negotiate several binaries: the street versus the market, the resident versus the immigrant, oral versus written, resistance versus mobility. *Soledad* references these divergent literary trajectories and places them in conversation to interrogate their points of harmony and dissonance. (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 90)

Cruz' writing oscillates between migrant and politically engaged fiction, Caribbean and African diaspora literature, as well as the demands of the mainstream market, thereby, however, never losing sight of individual and shared lived experiences that relate to migration as well as the body politics of gender, sexuality, and race.

342 Marta Caminero-Santangelo ascribes to the concept a certain flexibility and adaptability when thought of as multiple *latinidades* that is open for alliances and connections (cf. 2007: 28, 215).

7.2 *Soledad*: Sex Work and the Recolonization of the Body

Cruz' literary debut is not just an account of every-day life in the Dominican migrant community in New York. It is a novel that is as much about life in the Dominican Republic as is about being Dominican living in Washington Heights and the longing for social mobility. At issue are identity formations at the intersections of gender, age, heterosexuality, class, and ethnicity, and how they shape and often determine the characters' lived experiences of economic hardship, abuse, lost hopes, and unfulfilled love and desire. In an unchronological narration, that is permeated by several time lapses, the novel interweaves multiple coming-of-age, or 'coming-to-consciousness' stories, circling around mother-daughter relationships and home-comings. It depicts a young woman's internal struggles between two cultures, between family obligations and individual freedom, and between her aspirations to become an independent, bohemian artist, devoted daughter, and lover. It depicts another woman's suffering from a trauma that stems first from her sexual exploitation and loss of bodily autonomy, and second from territorial displacement and quasi disenfranchisement as wife and immigrant resident. The title of the novel not only places one of the two main characters in the center of attention, but also brings into focus another major theme in the novel: solitude. One way or another, all characters who are granted a voice are lonely despite the, sometimes overbearing, omnipresence of the family.

The narrative opens with the eponymous character Soledad's revelation of her dislike for her background and upbringing, but also her "guilt trip" (3) for having moved away from the "clutter" (8) of her family. Two years earlier, at the age of eighteen, much to the disapproval of her family, Soledad has fled from the confinements of Washington Heights to down town East Village, where she works at an art gallery. She shares a run-down flat with Caramel, a young woman from Texas, who in many respects is the opposite of her. When her mother, Olivia, falls ill she returns home being summoned by her aunt Gorda. Believing that this "prison sentence" (3) is only temporary she reluctantly begins to unravel the complicated relation to her mother. She thereby discovers the hidden secret of Olivia's past as sex worker in the Dominican Republic, linked directly to the sudden death of Soledad's father, Manolo. Eventually, Soledad makes peace with her family and her own self, which implies not only her need to negotiate her belonging to the community, but also to find comfort in her own body which she does during a temporary return to the Caribbean.

At issue are not only the spatial confinements of parental homes and the *barrio* but also the consumption of the female body in the context of sexual labor in the Dominican Republic of the 1970s and 1980s. At the age of fifteen, Olivia is forced into prostitution and unprotected sexual intercourse. There, she meets her future husband Manolo, who has bought her from her Swedish pimp, of which she is unaware and believes in them having a romantic liaison. When she discovers her pregnancy, she leaves with Manolo to New York City, knowing quite well that she cannot return to her parental home. Once there, Olivia is left mostly to herself and soon realizes that her partner is an alcoholic and abusive. The narrative then draws attention to domestic violence *vis-à-vis* a patriarchal body politics and Latino *machismo* that is supported within the family. Her sister Gorda, who has come to live in the city already earlier, and her parents, who are now residents of Washington Heights as well, turn a blind eye to her bruised body. Years later, when Manolo is already dead and Soledad moves out, Olivia keeps to herself and shuts everyone out; her memories overwhelming, she falls into a drowsy state similar to wake coma or apathy in which she moves about her apartment, but her spirits seem to be trapped.

The Caribbean is a prime example of a 'body economy.' We see how neoliberal policies foster a commodification of the body in the Caribbean and global capital becomes intertwined with sexual and economic desire. This has been the case during colonialism, staged on the enslaved body, and can now be observed in the rapidly growing industries of tourism and sexual labor. The novel, too, evokes the image of corporeal punishment of the enslaved, dispossessed body. "*I remember getting whipped with tree branches because the refrescos were for the guests who came by. I was only supposed to fetch them. I remember back to a time when I could walk on the beach without a pass from a hotel*" (221; italics in original). This quote belongs to Olivia who remembers when, as a child, she received a beating for drinking the refreshments reserved for tourists. Back then, the island had not been compartmentalized into restricted areas, the beaches belonged to everyone, access was not denied. With the development of tourism, the policing of the population intensifies, as Olivia notices and is made to feel. The country directs its resources to accommodate foreign visitors, while parts of the Dominican poor are socialized into serving their needs without intruding in the zones reserved for the tourists. Olivia, too, becomes part of this industry. At the age of fifteen, she leaves her parental home "to do tourismo" (49) in Puerto Plata, a town known for its large sex tourism industry.

The novel offers a critical perspective on the economic development and the emergence of the organized sex trade in the country and its effects on the indi-

vidual, in particular women.[343] The development of the tourism industry in the Dominican Republic was pushed in the second half of the 1960s. Against the backdrop of economic crises and austerity programs, the sex trade quickly emerged as lucrative sector in the tourist industry (cf. Cabezas 2009). It turned out that an exotic eroticism is a profitable produce made in the Caribbean complementing the marketed promise of sun, sand, and sea with sex, and attracting in particular white male tourists from Europe and North America. Sex work in itself needs to be seen as a legitimate occupation in which the body is employed as source of income. Under certain circumstances it involves agency on the part of the person who provides that service and is not necessarily exploitative, contrary to the arguments in particular by white, elite second wave feminists. Sexuality as currency provides women with socioeconomic security and upward mobility.[344] In "My Body is My Piece of Land," Sandra Duvivier argues for Black women's sexuality as "marketplace" (2008: 1105). She explains how sex in exchange for money can be an individual strategy of survival as the body is made productive as economic capital. The decision to use the body as capital is certainly a means to enact agency over the very same, it is, however, not completely detached from an economic imbalance and unequal power dynamics between the consuming and consumed body.[345]

While prostitution as sexual-economic relation and transaction can indeed be a liberating practice, as Kamala Kempadoo convincingly argues (cf. Kempadoo 1999, 2004),[346] Olivia's story is more complicated. The questions that need

343 See also Donette Francis' chapter on "Love in the Age of Globalized Sex Work, Secrets, and Depression" in *Fictions of Feminine Citizenship* (2010). Reading the sex worker's body in Cruz' novel, Francis asks if the sex trade is "best understood as the modern-day extension of slavery and bondage and is therefore a persistent narrative of coercion and domination? Or is sex work a space where laborers can sell their service for meaningful financial gain and thereby exercise empowerment in the global marketplace?" (116).

344 The focus on women's provision of sexual labor is not meant to imply that men do not engage in prostitution. While this needs further investigation, the novel takes issue with women's sex work only and so does this chapter.

345 Duvivier's analysis shows "the desperately drastic measures poverty-stricken people take to transcend their socioeconomic situation when no other alternative appears viable" (Duvivier 2008: 1107). And this is my point of critique and ambivalence: If sex work is the only alternative poor women and men have, I question its emancipatory value; on the other hand, a choice is really a privilege not everyone can afford, which makes sex work by choice a luxury, thus placing poor working women or men in an ever victimized position.

346 In the introductory chapter to *Sun, Sex, and Gold*, Kempadoo argues that prostitution under slavery was a means of survival and resistance to racialized power relations and subjugation (cf. Kempadoo 1999: 9).

to be asked are whether we can read her decision to engage in prostitution as empowering act of self-determination. What kind of social structures motivate (or force) her to sell her body and what are alternatives? Does she own her body in this transaction? Olivia's decision to leave for Puerto Plata is mainly motivated by the economic pressure and hardship the family suffers from. For better living conditions, her parents are willing to consider marrying their daughter off to one of her father's friends who lives in New York and has an eye on the girl: "Olivia could tell by the way Pelao would leer at her, and pat his big clumsy hands on her behind when she brought him a cold cerveza from the freezer, that Olivia's father was just waiting until she was old enough to marry her off. Things were becoming very hard for them" (47). Just like her sister, Gorda, and her husband earlier, "Olivia knew her parents were looking for ways to move to the States [as well]" (47). One way out of the misery is, as for many others at the time, a visa to the United States. Olivia's body is made to account for the economically suffering family, turned into a commodity in exchange for papers. At the same time, the friend from afar exploits the family's social status and financial situation, which demonstrates the perceived higher status of diaspora Dominicans over those 'at home.' Obviously to Olivia, "if she hadn't escaped she would have had to marry that man [...]. For Olivia, leaving home seemed like the better option" (47). Hence, it is patriarchal domination, and gendered forms of economic oppression, but also the man's desire for her adolescent body, that make her leave home in the first place.

Moreover, the novel takes issue with economic exploitation, foreigners' fantasies of an exotic sexuality, and colonial desire of discovery and possession. This is staged in the 'body economies' of prostitution and the model business. In the following quote, Olivia reveals how she gets tricked into prostitution believing she were to work as a fashion model. The resemblance between the stranger who lures her and her father's friend Pelao, the bald one, implies already that a better alternative may not be awaiting her.

> The Swedish man, balding head, rosy cheeks, who came through el campo one afternoon said he managed models around the world. He promised Olivia she would make enough money so she could buy a house. A house with a roof that wouldn't tear off every time a hurricane came through. [...] He said all she needed to do was look beautiful. With her green eyes, she would have no problem at all. (47)

Olivia embodies the ideal of the dark-skinned, green-eyed exotic beauty which the Swedish man makes her believe is desirable in the global fashion industry. Olivia sees an idealized image of a Western femininity, modernity, and success

realized in the image of the top-model. Yet, the model job, not unlike prostitution, needs to be seen within certain relations of dominance of selling and consuming the body. The body is exposed to the gaze and voyeurism of others, which, according to hooks, is racialized and exploitative (see chapter 3). To put it differently, in either case the practice of bodily consumption at the core of sex work and modelling is "another form of colonization of the female body" that ranks modelling and beauty pageants in relation to prostitution as "higher forms of physical objectification" (Mergeai 2014: 70), all of which are constitutive of a national body politics that relies on the productivity and desirability of its women.

She learns quickly that it is not a model career but the sex trade that awaits her, a false promise which according to Olivia's new colleague is in fact "not so far from the truth" (47). Luz tells her that "sometimes the men are really nice. They buy you pretty things and stuff" (48). She describes the occupation as economic gain, sexuality is a marketable good within the global marketplace and source of income that provides the women with consumer goods – "monetary gifts for her troubles" (48) – they are not able to afford otherwise. For Olivia, the prospect seems attractive, because it seemingly provides her with financial independence. With this in mind, Olivia bears the "licking, kissing, scratching" (48), imagines the intercourse "like eating a bad dinner" (47). In the same instance, she emphasizes her disgust and shame, hoping "that once it was over she never had to see them again; that they were going away to Europe, far far away" (48). Ironically, not only are her 'customers' mostly white European men but also the pimp, a Swede, who later sells Olivia to Manolo by fooling him to believe she is a virgin. On the one hand, this shows the value of the virginal body even within an industry that is built on actively engaging in sexual intercourse. On the other hand, it is an imperial twist in which foreign men sell local women's bodies to local men. This discloses the workings of the tourist industry in more general terms: Profit is generated within the country but enriches multinational companies outside of the Caribbean that profit from the exoticization of Caribbean bodies and the desirability of women who are labelled as Latina by ethnic discourses in the West. Tourism, meaning here the commodification, marketability, and sexual consumption of the sex worker's body, then, benefits neither the individual woman nor the country but serves neo-imperial claims of the global North. The female body enters a transnational exchange of goods but does not obtain full autonomy within this trading process. Not owning her sexuality, Olivia is never free to choose in the sense of the feminist statement 'this body is mine.' She and her *compañera* are forced into this trade – as teenaged girls, unprotected.

Sexual transaction takes place within the realms of the "coloniality of gender" (cf. Lugones 2010), which refers to the persistence of gender inequalities linked to colonial racist structures in the Caribbean. Kempadoo confirms this by stating that "[p]rostitution in the Caribbean is inextricably tied to the power and control exerted by European colonizers over black women since the sixteenth century" (Kempadoo 1999: 5).[347] In this continuity of difference and uneven power distribution, Olivia's body is made to appease "transnational consumers' desires" (Saborío 2012: 143) but is not granted the profit of it.

> Latinas are cleverly packaged as exotic beings easily consumed by foreign customers who are looking to experience a sense of otherness. This transnational market of consumers is exposed as a male-dominated system wherein those with economic means can condition the terms for sustainable profit. For Latinas, this purports that their bodies become representative of a mere resource for exploiting otherness, exoticism, and female sexuality. (Saborío 2015: 143)

Within the division of labor of the North-South divide, access to the body as commodity and the profit of it is granted only to those with purchase power. That these conditions may be damaging to the individual and her emotional well-being lies just under the surface of the narrative. Olivia is warned: "- Mujer, remember you're not here on vacation. No te dejes enamorar. She warned her that these men aren't looking for love but a short escape. - No, Luz, he's not one of them, he's one of us. He loves me for me" (50). Her differentiation of *us* versus *them* ties in with the colonial condition of 'otherness' which Olivia interestingly turns around. Sex trade within this tourist setting, then, takes place in racialized dimensions not devoid of (neo)colonial asymmetries of power in which the Latina, Black, or *mulata* body turns into the object of desire of white men. Sex tourism can thus be interpreted as neo-imperial attempt of "recolonization" (Alexander 2005: 25) of the lost territories via the female body.

When Olivia meets Manolo, she wishes she could "erase the eighteen men who had already traveled through her body in Puerto Plata" (49). The metaphorical journeys through her body commodifies it into a tourist site as part of a temporary all-inclusive package. In this transaction, Olivia lacks agency, she is forced into a submissive position in a sex trade that to her is damaging. Arguably, Olivia obtains a certain degree of autonomy and regains power over the

347 The objectification and simultaneous exploitation, which is officially promoted by the regional tourism board, is indicated in this quote: "The manufactured fantasy of the tropics intersects with racial/ethnic and sexual images to inform the understanding of European men about women and the experiences they encounter" (Cabezas 1999: 111).

men, her clients, through keeping a diary-like list in which she enumerates each client, his physical appearance, and date of encounter. The entries document the sexual encounters and mock her clients, granting her moral superiority and integrity. This written document, arguably, functions as a means of textual healing for the experiencing subject. The list materializes lived experiences and untold stories in a redemptive act of writing.

It is, however, not only the U.S. or Europe but also the Caribbean postcolonial state that is complicit in this enterprise of an exploitative body politics. Alexander notes that the "state actively socialized loyal heterosexual citizens into tourism, its primary strategy of economic modernization, by sexualizing them and by positioning them as commodities" (Alexander 2005: 29). Olivia's forcefully entering the sex trade then takes place within the context not only of neocolonial but also postcolonial patriarchal power structures which eventually excludes her from morality and respectability on which the ideology of the postcolonial state is built. Kempadoo describes the prostitute's body as "the sexually available, socially despised, yet economically profitable body" (Kempadoo 1999: 6). The time as prostitute leaves Olivia shamed and ultimately traumatized. She describes her work to her daughter, who asks how her parents have met, as "the kind of work I hope you never have to do" (19).

Despite providing income, sex work means for many women shame, contempt, and marginalization. Women working in the sex trade "routinely fuse the traditional dichotomy of public and private spaces. Consequently, they are suspect and are stigmatized [...]. [They] are the opposite of the *Dominicanas de su casa* (Dominican women of their homes)" (Cabezas 1999: 110). The body of the prostitute and her active sexuality disrupt hegemonic discourses on sexuality that demand women remain virginal and ascribe to them a certain passivity. The prostitute is feared to unsettle state-sanctioned matrimony and the nuclear household. She poses a threat to middle-class respectability, femininity, and citizenship, because she is poised with "potential disease [HIV], imagined as working class" (Alexander 2005: 53). This threat adds to the discursive construction of the prostitute body as criminal, dangerous, and undeserving of legal protection. Numerous studies show how sex workers are overproportionately subjected to police violence and vulnerable to the abuse by clients (cf. Cabezas 1999). This constant threat of being harmed is a means to control and regulate the prostitutes' bodies and the sex trade – laws that criminalize prostitution in some countries add to this.[348] While certain bodies are protected under citizenship laws, other bodies are criminalized and produced as

348 In the Dominican Republic, prostitution is legalized, which may not be that surprising when taking into account its economic importance for tourism.

noncitizens (the same regulation that is at work for homosexual (non)citizens, as I have argued in chapter four). Olivia's marginalized status and her threatening the respectable society is confirmed by Manolo who calls her "a witch, a vagabunda [...], una tremenda sucia" (135). Women who appear as too independent, like Baboonie in *The Swinging Bridge* or as revealed in the figure of the *lougarou* or the old hague (cf. Anatol 2015),[349] are ascribed an outlaw status.

7.3 Sleeping Beauty: The Incarcerated Body and Embodied Resistance

When I close my eyes I become invisible [...]. I can do anything I want. (Cruz 2001: 165)

Repeatedly, I have argued that woman's sexuality is a minefield and her body a potential site of shame. *Soledad* further proves this point in several instances. Olivia, for example, remembers how her cousin, Lolita, was raped when she was fourteen years old. Naming the girl Lolita is telling already: It points to a well-known narrative of erotic fantasies about adolescence sexuality and the seductive and seducing, guilty female body, a body for which some men apparently fall easily and become victim of their own desire. The young woman, who is violently ripped off of her virginity, brings shame over herself and her family for having sex out of wedlock. Different to Nabokov's Lolita, however, the girl here is married off to her rapist, thus sacrificed for the sake of propriety which allows her family "*to save her virtue*" (221; italics in original). The rapist prevents incarceration and gets away unpunished. Taking into consideration that individual subjects have the right of protection from sexual violence and bodily self-control – which sociologists refer to as "sexual citizenship" including amongst others the legal right of "bodily autonomy and integrity" (Richardson 2000: 114; see also chapter 4) – then Lolita's family but also the state fail in their duty to protect daughter and citizen from harm and sexual violence. Obviously, the right of protection does not pertain to all women. Being deprived of these rights, women like Lolita, who are victims of rape, or the prostitute, like Olivia, are degraded to minor subjects in a society that punishes the victim rather than the perpetrator of violence to maintain a respectable order.

349 See also Danticat's short story "Nineteenthirtyseven" in which a woman is persecuted and stigmatized as "*lougarou*, witch, criminal" (1996: 39).

Similar to Lolita, Olivia's body is positioned outside the realm of respectability and is forced into a partnership in her teenage years with a man she thinks she loves but barely knows. She is explicit about her shame – like Martine she does not fit the conventional models of femininity – and feels soiled and unworthy due to her engagement in sex work. Every time Manolo leaves her, she prays for him to return "and asked for forgiveness for being the kind of woman who doesn't deserve God's mercy" (65). She is a 'fallen woman,' which the story further underlines by her unwanted pregnancy and the uncertainty with regards to the biological father – it could be Manolo or any other client. Olivia's relation to Manolo discloses the double standards associated with sexuality. The pregnancy and prostitution would prove her loss of virtue to her family and the neighbors. In this condition she cannot return to her parents. While Olivia wonders whether she is still good enough for marriage, Manolo's moral integrity is never questioned. Societal strictures turn Olivia's body into the abject, improper, and unclean that threatens the meaning of purity attached to adolescent female bodies. Manolo, on the other hand, who actively engages in the sex trade, is still respectable, remaining suitable as husband and has his sexual virility proven.

Manolo, who lives in the United States, not only occupies the position of the patriarch and breadwinner but also embodies the promise for a better life in the diaspora. Pregnant with Soledad, Olivia, apparently without a valid visa, leaves with Manolo for New York. Manolo, in the belief that the child is his, obtains an American passport from another woman who resembles Olivia. Admittedly, he takes her away from the place, or the site of the traumatizing sexual encounters, she has wanted to escape from. At the same time, however, she is now completely reliant on him to marry her, because she is underage, does not yet speak the English language, and, above all, is now an illegal immigrant without a visa. The novel's plot, and strangely so, does not elaborate this fact further. Francis, too, confirms this point in her analysis of the novel by stating that "as an undocumented immigrant woman, Olivia's mobility is bound to Manolo, and she lives with the realization that she could be discovered and deported at any time" (2010: 128). Her illegal status makes her vulnerable not only to state authorities but also dependent on Manolo's benevolence. The novel here points out not only the vulnerability of migrant bodies inhabiting a liminal space but also the impossibility of return.

When Olivia gives birth to the baby and Soledad is not his "spitting image" (79), Manolo senses he has been betrayed both by the Swedish pimp and Olivia who made him believe he was buying 'into' a virgin body. The honeymoon is over soon, and the past embodied in Soledad continues to haunt them:

> He knew everything about her and hated her for it. For Olivia, Manolo was just a reminder of a past she wanted to forget. It was hard enough looking at Soledad every day. Since the day she was born, he watched her, waited to find a trace of himself in her and the paler she became, her nose, the shape of her eyes, her fine straight hair, neither Olivia's or his, Manolo lost faith in her. Olivia knew he felt humiliated. (140)

Manolo holds Olivia responsible for his humiliation. He drinks, is physically and verbally abusive, molests Gorda, Olivia's sister, and abuses Soledad to take his revenge. In this respect, the novel draws attention to domestic violence in one immigrant family and the cloak of silence that covers it. Olivia's family (by now the whole family lives in New York's Washington Heights) ignores the bruises. In another fight, when Olivia is unable to take any more, she pushes him out of the window. Soledad observes this and to protect her mother does not call the ambulance – that is when the silence between mother and daughter starts. The text never questions nor judges Olivia's action; she is not held responsible in a juridical sense. She is portrayed as the victim of her husband's blows and her family's ignorance (which she undoubtedly is). Her revenge is the expression of her feeling helpless and powerless, but makes her daughter complicit in the murder (of which she is certainly guilty). She addresses the reader as a way of confession and plea for forgiveness and compassion, which she also begs from her daughter (cf. 7). In this manner, Olivia transfers (symbolically) part of her societal shame, her original sin of being the 'fallen' woman, to Manolo who is now literally falling.

Guilt and constant pressure push her over the edge to the point that she retreats into herself and into complete silence, unable to leave her bed and interact with her surroundings.[350] The novel describes in several instances both her mental disposition as well as her bodily constitution providing different diagnoses for her state. Soledad assumes she might be "in a coma" (12). Another observation of Olivia's condition is provided by her sister's perspective who sees her "[s]leeping for four full days only getting up to go to the bathroom. […] She looks exhausted, as if the life was beaten out of her. She's not bruised

350 Arguably, her condition and the symptoms can also be connected to a trauma that the novel thus stages, see for instance Brüske (2013). This observation may further be supported by the image of haunting that is evoked, amongst other things, in this quote by Olivia: "I start to run until I realize no one's running after me, only the memories" (221). Persons suffering from trauma often have the feeling of being haunted by the memories of the painful event that they are unable to process consciously (Caruth 1996: 3). Moreover, the silence is Olivia's language of sexual trauma when considering that trauma escapes any linguistic pronunciation and coherent verbal formulation (cf. ibid.).

up the way Manolo would leave her after one of his fits, it's more like her spirit has taken a beating" (15). Obviously, Gorda has noted her sister's maltreatment at the hands of her husband but has remained silent. Interestingly, she differentiates between body and spirit or mind as she recognizes her current state as psychological malaise rather than as a bodily ailment. Gorda has seen a talk show on "women who sleep through depression. They want to die, they said, but they don't have the courage to go that far. They said depression is anger turned inward" (109). Clearly without a clue as with regards to Olivia's condition, a 'beaten mind' causes more confusion and outrage than the beaten body. The unity of the body and spirit seems to be disrupted which is symptomatic for a subject's alienation from the self and on a further level may be read as the enforced social isolation of the diaspora subject body.[351]

Whereas Gorda describes actual symptoms, Olivia's mother, Doña Sosa, is searching for the reasons behind the illness and finds them primarily in Olivia's loneliness and Soledad's moving out, which she discloses in a conversation with her niece:

> I'm not blaming you for leaving, but your mother has been very lonely and we think it pushed her to live in her dreams. […] She's heavy with so many thoughts. My poor daughter, every day, filled with hours with no one to look after, not a man, not a child. I truly think that algo pasa las mujeres cuando le dan demasiado tiempo para pensar. (12)

Although she says differently, she indeed does blame Soledad and her pursuit of independence for Olivia's condition but makes not a single reference to the abusive husband or his sudden death, nor everyone's faked ignorance of the domestic violence both Olivia and Soledad have experienced. Doña Sosa, who is represented as the strong matriarch (cf. 5), evokes a stereotypical image of feminine behavior, a character that materializes woman's only duty as mother and wife. Women, who have too much time to think, so it is suggested in the quote, are potentially dangerous for their own well-being in the first place but also to the status quo of obedience and allocated gender roles. That Olivia does not conform to a perceived norm is confirmed further by her mother's fear of her daughter becoming "a freak show in the neighborhood" (32). To keep the

351 Brinda Mehta describes how dislocation or psychic disorientation caused by exile or diasporic journeys may manifest themselves on the female body. According to her, "[t]he physicality of exile, as reflected in Indi-Caribbean women's writing, can be compared to a graphic inscription on the female body that reveals a particular cartography of dislocation in the form of actual symptoms of physical illness" (Mehta 2004: 159).

neighbors' prying eyes outside, Doña Sosa closes the shutters, that way closing in or rather incarcerating Olivia in the room and inside the ideological demands associated with the domestic space. Josefa Lago Graña writes on the confrontation of social systems of inequality in contemporary Dominican women's writing and concludes that "la imagen de la mujer tendida en la cama responde a la imagen de silencio y pasividad, identificables con la imagen tradicional de mujer en sociedades patriarcales" (Lago Graña 2004: 566).[352]

The incomprehensiveness surrounding Olivia's illness is further filtered through the perception of the teenaged Flaca, Olivia's niece and Soledad's cousin who is in constant dispute with her mother Gorda. Flaca, who seems to be the closest to Olivia, experiences her aunt's state as personal abandonment and reproaches her for it: "why you have to go zombie on me" (15). At the same time, she is afraid of her aunt's obvious irresponsiveness: "I don't like when her eyes are open. She looks like a walking dead person" (30). Both quotes illustrate the perceived degeneration of Olivia's body. Broadly speaking, the "zombie" embodies a deviation from the norm which in Olivia's case happens with regard to conceptions of gender, as pointed out above, and class or productivity – I refer to the non-working, non-productive body later on. The figure of the *zombi* (the original Haitian spelling)[353] here serves as trope for the demonization of the sick, psychological distressed body which is likewise feared and incomprehensible. Laënnec Hurbon describes the zombie as an already dead body, forcefully re-awakened, now semiconsciously living without free will (cf. 1995: 61). Olivia, in a state where she is not fully awake either, has been lacking autonomy since the day her parents decided to marry her off and she thereupon entered the sex trade where she met Manolo who took full control over her, "like he already *possessed* her" (50; emphasis added). If the process of *zombification* describes the robbery of a person's soul and appropriation of one's will, then Flaca rightly notes her aunt's condition as a result of her disenfranchisement as subject through the bodies and sexual whims of her former clients. In addition, the zombie is sometimes read in connection with slavery to portray 'labor slaves' and represent the social death of those enslaved (cf. Rath 2014: 13).[354] This is further emphasized by Olivia's ghostly appearance and the

352 "the image of the woman held in bed responds to the image of silence and passivity corresponding to the traditional image of the woman in patriarchal societies" (my translation).

353 In the misspelling of *zombi* as 'zombie,' the novel makes reference to Vodou and a possibly pop-cultural misrepresentation of the Haitian and African diaspora religion which is however not in the focus here.

354 Gudrun Rath notes the subversive potential and diversity of the figure of the *zombi*, because it can be inscribed with multiple meanings. This is due to the *zombi's* am-

symbolic chains of enslavement, mentioned by Olivia's sister: "[S]he's the family's living ghost," Gorda says. "Except she doesn't rattle chains" (177). Olivia's somewhat spectral body, while it may indicate the solitude the title of the novel unmistakably points out, evokes the marginal social figure of the migrant we have already encountered embodied in Martine in Danticat's novel ("the cold turns us into ghosts" is instructive here) and in Mona's father in Espinet's novel ("I look invisible to you?"). While Olivia's condition is source of worry and met mostly with misunderstanding, Gorda adds a certain degree of humor to cover up the family's helplessness. Olivia came to the U.S. by assuming another woman's identity, hence she is not only illegal but according to official record not even there. The (assumed) missing status as legal citizen would exclude her from full civic and social participation, meaning a kind of social death that in the novel is staged through Olivia's retreat to her bed. Her condition is subjected to the influence of social processes and cultural norms that reproduce her corporeality and temporary mental dysfunction as sick and ghostly, meaning abnormal and degenerated, or *zombified*.

Soledad, on the other hand, comments on her family's intolerance towards her mother's health and Olivia's attempts to conceal her condition: "My mother always has one ailment of another. But she always tried to hide it, especially around Gorda and my grandmother. They don't tolerate sickness. To them it equates weakness" (18). Health and fitness are part of a capitalist body politics that defines the worth of the body through productivity and economic contribution. If the body is evaluated according to its work force/, the unhealthy body becomes useless for the cycle of production and consumption. It does not fit a capitalist work ethos and stands in the way of the economic regulation of the working body and its productivity. Olivia, who takes the "luxury to lie in bed" (18), which she actually cannot afford, transgresses the demarcation of immigrant working class from the wealthy that happens through hard labor in opposition to idleness.[355] On the other hand, the novel reveals here the pressure on the immigrant to pursue and achieve the 'American dream.' The novel is

biguity and resistance to clear-cut categories floating in-between the conditions of life and death, subject and object, or human and non-human. She argues "er stößt auch ab, erregt Ekel, verkörpert das Abjekte ebenso wie das Unheimliche. Aufgrund seiner (Neo-)Kolonialgeschichte […] stellt er kulturelle Imaginarien von Gender und Race, Exotismus und hegemonialem othering ebenso zur Schau wie bioethische Debatten" (Rath 2014: 11).

355 The family misinterprets Olivia's condition as an active refusal to participate in the capitalist system of labor, efficiency, merit, and profit. This, in turn, proves their inability or unwillingness to read her condition – a result of the experience of violence – as something personal and psychological, as something of which they as silent family are also responsible of.

explicit about the hard work and the kinds of jobs Olivia and also Gorda as immigrant women are forced to do to make a living. Olivia's staying in bed gives her the opportunity to escape this and do something for herself: "*I don't have to go [...] back to work to pick anyone's garbage, scrub anyone's toilet, dust anyone's shelves* (page). It may be that what she has is a depression in response to her aversion to the can be interpreted as a labor slave with no free choice.

Indeed, for the longest time in the novel, Olivia is found either asleep or deeply immersed in her thoughts and dreaming. This is connected to her past experiences as sex worker and of domestic abuse, which she relives and ultimately successfully processes in her sleep.[356] The 'intrusion' of traumatic memories increases dramatically as Soledad moves out, leaving the *barrio* Washington Height for downtown Manhattan, which in Olivia's perception equals a symbolic death.[357] While for Soledad the separation from the family is an important step in her own individuation, Olivia reacts with complete social disintegration.

In addition to each character's diagnosis of her condition, I suggest that Olivia is in a state of apathy. She displays symptoms of sleepiness, irresponsiveness, and mental hyperactivity. In medical definitions, apathy is described as a lack of passion and participation accompanied by impulse disorder and affect disorder (cf. Pschyrembl 2014: 137).[358] The latter in particular refers to the impediment of affect-expression and addressability (cf. ibid.: 34). This is confirmed by Soledad's description of her mother's behavior as she takes note of how "her [Olivia's] body is doing what it needs to survive [...], takes itself to the bathroom, but her spirit is somewhere else all together [...]. She's living in this sleep state. She's nonresponsive. It's all very weird" (57). Olivia's constitution and reaction to her environment apparently departs from the normative or normalized perception of corporeal behavior. Also, the ways she engages with

356 Sexual trauma is a psychological distress caused by enforced sexual intrusion or unwanted sexual behavior (cf. Pschyrembel 2014: 2151). One may also want to refer back to Sigmund Freud's early theory of trauma. He considered a trauma to be a "Erlebnis, welches dem Seelenleben innerhalb kurzer Zeit einen so starken Reizzuwachs bringt, daß die Erledigung oder Aufarbeitung desselben in normalgewohnter Weise mißglückt, woraus dauernde Störungen im Energiebetrieb resultieren müssen" (Freud 1916-17); see also chapter 6.

357 Kuehner refers to the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of the North American Psychiatric Society in her explanation that post-traumatic stress disorder is interconnected with one's own or another beloved person's actual or possible death or severe injury (cf. Kuehner 2008: 39).

358 Affectivity describes the totality of emotional life and the state of mind including sentiments and drives. It regulates the personal perception of experience (cf. Pschyrembel 2014: 33-34).

her surrounding, or more accurately, how she refuses to interact with her environment differ from that what is expected of her.

When the narrative switches to Olivia's perspective, the reader learns how her mental distress manifests itself through her body rendering her immobile and inhibiting her speech. "*There are times my body feels hard and stiff like an old fruit rind. [...] I can't move my body at all [...]. When I'm touched I want to scream, but my lips can't move, not even to breath. [...] I feel as if I might lose them completely*" (25). She seems to have lost all control over her body and its functions. As if her body was punishing her, she has lost the ability to speak and express her will and thoughts. This paralysis and loss of voice not only stands in for the relationship with Manolo and her family, which was characterized by silence and silencing. It also symbolizes the voicelessness of the migrant subject confronted with a foreign language – of which "[s]he couldn't understand a word" (80) – and silenced in a cultural-political as well as civic sense. This quote, furthermore, when compared to the lines of the epigraph highlights the contrast between the migrant space of New York, on the one side, where she feels incarcerated in her apartment, and, on the other, her "*home in Dominican Republic*" (n.p.) to which she escapes in her memories that provides her with comfort and safety, evoked in the epigraph with "*bloody orange*," "*tangerine*," and "*seeds*." Quite contrary to the juicy fertility and vitality of the Dominican childhood home stands the image of the "old fruit rind" as a symbolic incarceration but also as reference to maturity and the aging body.

However, in her apathy Olivia's body is able to transcend spatial confinements and distance – this refers both to the room she lies in as well as the spatial separation of the Dominican 'home' and diaspora location. Moreover, only at a first glance it impedes interaction of the human body with her environment. Far from it, the state she is in provides her with a space in which she can let herself "die and live" (n.p.); hence, it functions as a corporeal and mental strategy of self-preservation turning sickness into a specific feminine space of becoming. Olivia's beautiful, sleeping body is positioned at the center of the narrative which is emphasized by the italic script that marks her thoughts and speech throughout the novel as well as the epigraph reflecting on her thoughts of home. The dream world she retreats to offers Olivia the possibility to imagine her life differently, especially her family's reaction to her abused body: "*In my dreams, me and my mother have long conversations. [...] And when we talk she's not looking away from my bruises*" (120). Here, in her dream-world, she has found a way to communicate and obtain recognition from her mother. The omnipresence of Olivia's body and the power she excerpts through her silence are remarkable. She not only calls her daughter back to the *barrio* to make

peace, she also summons the family and neighbors to her sickbed, who ask for remedies of all kinds and "*think [she has] powers*" (165). What she silently voices is a critique of domestic violence and the ignorance of said violence by the family and community who rather look away then interfere in domestic privacy and marital affairs. Far from remaining a passive, immobile body that is "resolving some things in her sleep" (9), as is revealed early on in the novel, she achieves autonomy and gains an authoritative voice despite or rather through her silence. As a matter of fact, it is Olivia herself who actively chooses sleep for herself as kind of haven; she shares with the reader that she "*force[s] [her]self into sleep, concentrate[s] on not feeling anything*" (25).

An obvious transformation from the moment she has been unable to move her lips to her active refusal to talk does indeed take place: "*When I close my eyes I don't have to speak or pretend I'm fine. [...] I become invisible and I can do anything with my time. [...] I can do anything I want*" (165). The earlier image of the loss of lips, symbolizing passivity and silencing, is contrasted with the active act of self-imposed silence and her refusal to speak.[359] In her apathy, she seems unresponsive to her surrounding, but quite to the contrary: Her choice to remain silent provides her with the power to do as she pleases and escape the confinements; she becomes not only invisible but invincible. When the neighbors pay a visit at her sick bed, the narration again is focalized through Olivia, lending her narrative agency, and offers the reader another glance into her mind to understand that she actively chooses to remain silent: "*They get angry because I won't speak or look at them when they talk to me*" (165). In a familial context in which children are raised with the knowledge not to "disrespect the elders" (12) but to do as they are told, the refusal to speak when being asked is a breach of etiquette. The punishment for disobedience, Soledad explains, is to kneel on sandpaper (cf. ibid). Precisely because of this disciplining measure and in defiance of the conventionally accepted meaning of silent women, her silence is outside of communal and societal control and turns into a form of passive resistance. Debra Castillo differentiates, and this is crucial, between silencing as "a condition imposed from the outside" and "silence freely chosen" (1992: 37). She bases this differentiation on Trinh T. Minh-ha's concept of silence "as a will not to say or a will to unsay, a language of its own" (Trinh T. Minh-ha 1991: 151). The silent voice can be resisting and subversive when women are "using the mask of silence to slip away. Silence, once freed of the oppressive masculinist-defined context of aestheticized distance and truth and confinement and lack can be reinscribed as a subversive feminine realm." (Cas-

359 On silence as a narrative strategy of resistance in women's writing, see Chancy (1997) or NourbeSe Philip (1997).

tillo 1992: 40). So, if visible marks like a woman's bruises are not seen or 'unseen,' audible voices and screams go 'unheard,' then in turn the silent language of the body becomes noticeable and just loud enough. Then silence is resistance.

Betsy Sandlin concludes that "Olivia has retreated from society and her family and withdrawn to her room and into her own world" (Sandlin 2013: 93). Lago Graña draws attention to the resignification[360] of the image of the sleeping beauty in Cruz' novel:

> El sueño no representa una imposición, una maldición que se cumple inexorablemente hasta el momento del rescate, sino que significa aislamiento, alejamiento del mundo enemigo, que coloca a la mujer en una posición de poder frente al hombre ya que la hace inalcanzable. El sueño transforma a la mujer de víctima del mundo masculino en dueña de un mundo propio, imposible de invadir por el hombre. (2004: 561)[361]

Far from being the sleeping "freak" of the neighborhood, she is a resisting subject, reclaiming agency to be in control of her own life on her own terms. She claims the right "*to retreat back into a world where I have control of what happens to me*" (120). She conquers "*a land I can call mine, made especially for me*" (226) – a room of her own, to speak with Virginia Woolf.

360 Michael R. Drescher (2017) defines "mythological resignification" as the literary practice of foregrounding silenced aspects in dominant civic myths, "a politically informed method of writing characterized by the appropriation, transformation, and reinstallation of a mythology" (8) – or, in the case of *Soledad*, the fairy tale of the Sleeping Beauty. "Narrative Emancipation" occurs by "returning to lost or distorted meaning" so that "old meanings can be refuted and new meanings can be installed" (12). Here, narratives are molded so as to include voices, identities, and histories which were theretofore silenced and marginalized. The work on such silenced aspects can thus offer the silenced historical subject a legitimized and legitimizing voice in the over-all structures of value-transmitting and identity-producing narratives (cf. especially the introduction and, for the intentions of the analysis at hand, chapter 4 in the study). A contemporary example for a resignification of the sleeping beauty myth can be found in Neil Gaiman's *The Sleeper and the Spindel* (2014).

361 "Sleep does not mean an imposition, a curse that inexorably holds until the moment of rescue, but signifies isolation, estrangement from the enemy world, placing her in a position of power against man now that she is unreachable. Sleep transforms the woman from a victim of the masculine world into the owner of her own world which for the man is impossible to invade" [my translation].

7.4 Que viva la Naturaleza: The Naked Body as Weapon

Olivia's body is wrongly perceived as dysfunctional and sick. In contrast to the non-sleeping woman's body which in Olivia's case is "beat up" with "broken bones" and heavy with "burden" (14), the sleeping Olivia is finally recovering from her dreadful past. She finds solace and tranquility in her apathetic state, a process noticed also by Soledad who observes her mother "breathing softly and peaceful" (14). Whereas formerly her body was rendered impure, constantly available, and guilty, Olivia is now distant and oblivious to the "drama that filled the house" (187). Lago Graña notes that in her sleep "Olivia permanece pura, distante, inalcanzable" (2004: 565).[362] Her withdrawal into apathy opens up a space for personal reinvention in order to clear off the soiled image of the whore and alleged murderer. In fact, she appears angelic to those around her: she recounts that her neighbors "*call me an angel*" (165); Victor finds that she "looks angelic in the light, the way it shines over her" (187); and Soledad, too, thinks that her mother "looks like an angel [...] and her skin, the color of tamarindo, glows in the candlelight" (14). The glow that frames her body like a halo underlines her appearance as angel or saint. Now the sleeping beauty, she transcends the image of the 'fallen woman' with her 'tainted' sexuality and approximates the image of "la Virgen María" (193).[363] Whereas in Danticat's novel, vodou spirit Ezili represents empowered womanhood, here, the Virgin Mary is a significant reference for Olivia as embodiment of a seemingly ideal femininity which in the end, as will become clear shortly, rather inhibits wholesome subject development than being a guiding force. The importance is reflected in the postcard of *la santa madre* that Olivia keeps for years in a tin box together with a few other personal belongings from her time in Puerto Plata. Among these things is also a list with the names and the physical descriptions of her former clients –the postcard and the list together symbolize the coexistence of the virgin and prostitute in one body. Although the image of the whore stands in seeming opposition to that of the Virgin Mother, both images conflate in Olivia. And, similar to Danticat's Martine, Olivia in uniting two apparently different sides of femininity renders this differentiation indeed obsolete.

362 "Olivia remains pure, distant, unreachable" [my translation].

363 Here, a comparison of Olivia to Nathanial Hawthorne's Hester in *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) suggests itself, especially in terms of their representation as 'branded woman' and saint, their angelic appearance, as well as their social exclusion and withdrawal as acts of dissent (cf. Drescher 2017: 65-80).

The extent to which Olivia's body blurs fixed images of femininity is further accentuated by her spectral, mysterious appearances. One night, she appears naked on the fire escape of her apartment building. "The sun has set, the full moon is out, it hits her face, her breast and thighs. Olivia is smiling, glowing in the moonlight like a firefly" (45). The moonlight functions like a spotlight that center-stages her nude body ready to break out. She leaves her retreat after dark and like the *soucouyant* (more than like an angel) she seems ablaze and about to fly away, which is emphasized especially by the reference to the 'firefly.' The following quote adds to the perception of a glowing body or body-in-flame: "Her skin is flawless, the color of amber with an inner light that shines through her skin. Her hair reminds [...] of black flames, falling down her back, twisting and turning around her head" (178). Whereas Olivia is mainly looked at as an angel, here the glow emanating from within her along with the flames can be associated with the figure of the *soucouyant* that Cruz here makes reference to. Particularly in the folktales of the Anglo- and Francophone Caribbean, she is known as old woman who sheds her skin, sucks blood from her victims, and flies through the night glowing like a fireball. Anatol notes a tendency in Caribbean diaspora fiction to use the *soucouyant* as a figure of female empowerment and resistance, which "can be interpreted as an image of cultural resistance to colonial ideology, but she can also be read as shoring up colonial notions of propriety and respectability" (2015: 14). In addition, she "occupies a space completely outside of the phallic order" escaping the "domestication of women's bodies" (ibid.: 23). While Olivia may not be completely outside of that space, she nevertheless appropriates or at least challenges it through her nudity and poses a threat to the respectable, proper order. She furthermore steps outside of the domestic realm in her attempt to escape over the fire exit. If Olivia's black, untamed mane reminds us of Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre* (1847) – Rochester's first wife, the 'madwoman in the attic' who is described as a 'goblin' and 'vampire' and who sets fire to the mason and flees her imprisonment in the attic of Thornfield Hall – or if we find parallels to the same character when she was still named Antoinette Cosway in Jean Rhys' rewriting of Bertha in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) – in which she is referred to as 'soucriant' – then Olivia's nudity and appearance as *soucouyant* can be placed in a tradition of women's resistance. Also, the two quotes above, which emphasize Olivia's beautiful, flawless skin glowing in the colors of "amber" and "tamarindo," constitute a celebration of the female body of color in distinction to whiteness. The manifestation of racial difference is explicit when read against Flaca's observation of the white female body. In her account, white women, or "las blanquitas," are

pejoratively judged as "[f]ugly white bitches" (44) or "freaking white girl[s]" (16).

Olivia obviously refuses the womanly ideal embodied in the angel and chooses to trespass norms of chastity and propriety when she presents her naked body publicly on the fire escape. "Her nipples like chocolate kisses. Naked [...], with her arms spread open as if she's about to fly. Her eyes are closed" (45). There is an explicit eroticism emanating from her in her somnambulistic state. Olivia's mother is outraged about her daughter's permissiveness already in an earlier scene: "[Y]ou should've seen your mother with las tetas afuera, wearing a tiger-print nightgown, her left nipple exposed. My grandmother, whispers when she says *tetas*" (10). Also at home, her nudity causes outrage and unease (cf. 187). Clearly, the naked woman's body is loaded with shame, is uncomfortable, should not be talked about, and needs surveillance. Olivia's presence in front of the apartment attracts the attention of the neighborhood. "A group of people are already gathering around below her" (45) and gaze at her nude, guilty femininity; the observant eye is always watching and judging. The outrage her nudity causes seems to contradict the otherwise oversexualization and perceived availability of the female body of color. Her exposed body is a social disruption which Olivia, however, achieves purposely. Their voyeurism and her nakedness enter in a dialectic of dis- and re-possession. After the time when her body and sex work had been 'elected' by clients, she now offers herself actively to the viewer and returns the gaze without shame. Of importance is the exclamation of one man who yells "Que viva la naturaleza!" (45), as it, and arguably so, evokes the revolutionary slogan 'Viva la revolución.'

The revolutionary potential that lies in the female body is apparently what makes it a source of fear. The display of the naked woman's body, a transgression in and of itself, functions as a sign of her anger and as an active mode of women's rebellion against the policing and disciplining of body and sexuality. The comparison of Olivia with a ghost made earlier further underlies this point. Female ghosts are perceived to be

> all the more terrifying because they have every bit of anger that makes living women sources of fear, but none of the societal restrictions. In this way, ghost stories are often protofeminist tales of women who, if only in death, subvert the assumptions and traditions of women as dutiful wives and mothers [...] by unleashing a lifetime's worth of rage and retribution. (Zeisler 2013: n.p.)

Contrary to Olivia's seeming passivity are not only her vivid thoughts, her actual mobility, and especially her naked rebellion but also the recurring dreams of flying. Similar to the novels by Danticat and Espinet, the motive of

flying is associated here with boundless liberty as well as with the wish to break out of restrictive conventions. Olivia communicates that her "*body wants to fly, pop into the atmosphere*" (220). The wish to fly in conjunction with Olivia's public display of her naked body is a signifier for her self-possession and her owning her intimacy. In one of her dreams, this is intertwined with the aspect of motherhood when a faceless child appears from between her legs. The child is naked, moves around like a bird, and encourages Olivia to break free: "*Mami, flying is not so hard. You just need to find the space for your wings*" (46). Olivia then starts to undress, "*to be naked like her. I like the feeling of wearing my own skin, to walk around like a new born and not to be afraid of what people think about me*" (46). It offers the possibility to come of age anew, to feel comfortable in her own skin. Her undressing and nudity are symbolic for a reversed process of becoming which eventually culminates in a symbolic renaissance when mother and daughter visit the Dominican Republic toward the novel's ending. It suggests a spiritual recovery enabling the subject to leave the past behind and opening a path to pursue one's own desire: "*There is so much I want. I want to erase all those years I lived with Manolo. I want my ears to catch the wind and carry my dreams into the clouds and let them rain over me so I can cleanse my spirit and start again*" (219).

However, that individual desire is often in opposition to collective demands inhibiting women from flying is made clear. As Olivia stands naked on the fire escape, she is just a nude public spectacle when seen from the outside; but when switching to Olivia's perspective, the narrative reveals that it is actually her attempt at flying, an attempt which is prevented. Just when she thinks she has found the space for her wings, she is held back: "*I [...] open my arms and I try and lift myself into the sky and before I can fly away Victor grabs me and takes me inside*" (46). The younger brother surely saves her from falling and covers her nakedness. Nonetheless based on a strictly binary gender hierarchy and patriarchal structures (which the novel in fact suggests) and taking into account his role in the family as the only man (conserving the paternal lineage), he embodies exactly those social restrictions women seek to overcome. The novel here takes on a feminist standpoint which corresponds to "an attempt to critique women's prescribed roles and the ways that these can bind and restrict one's 'flight'" (Anatol 2015: 28). That this point of criticism, which Anatol actually finds in the flying *soucouyant*, is applicable here, too, is stressed by Olivia's remark directed at her mother, Doña Sosa, "*I want to tell Mamá [...] that it's the golden Virgen María around her neck that keeps her from flying*" (220). If the Virgen María chained around her neck embodies respectable womanhood and status, it is this kind of judgmental categorization and social prac-

tice which binds women to the 'ground' and that Olivia grapples with (cf. Francis 2010: 126). "*I'm tired of hiding inside an apartment with gates so the burglars won't come in. I'm tired of running, I'm tired of letting what other people think of me, or will discover about me, control my life*" (221). Flying, or Olivia's refusal to accept boundaries and wish to break out, is subversive and liberates her from incarceration and her own angst.

7.5 In Solitude? Between Assimilation and Ethnic 'Dissociation'

Whereas, as Francis suggests, "Olivia's process throughout the novel is to *undo* her identity as sex worker," thereby disclosing "the difficulty of such a process of unbecoming" (2010: 128), Soledad finds herself in a process of becoming and self-discovery in which she is trying to construct her identity from those fragments that she has difficulties to fully relate to. The confusion Soledad feels about her own self stems from the uncertainties of belonging and unresolved fatherhood, but also from the pressure of the migrant community which is at odds with her wish of assimilation and integration into a white bohemian, down-town lifestyle; it may also relate to the rather ambivalent position of the Latina body within U.S.-American society. This conflict is particularly staged between mother and daughter, whose mutual estrangement inhibits their respective wishes for becoming and unbecoming. Their conflict is solved at the end of the novel when Soledad takes her still apathetic mother to the Dominican Republic, where in the cathartic moment of a cleansing ritual in a lake both women emerge from the waters to start anew. "And when I surrender to the warmth of the water, I feel the past, present and future become one" (226), Soledad recounts. What takes place during this bath is a corporeal transcendence of time and space; but in this magical-real moment we also find a spiritual superelevation along with a glorification of the Caribbean home space realized in its potential for healing. The temporary physical return is a characteristic feature of the diasporic novel to imagine movement in order to transcend distance and common also for coming-of-age novels as a necessary stage in the maturation process. In addition, in the final resolution of the conflict between mother and daughter, the novel envisions a successful coming-of-age story and the possibility of a completed subject formation that however needs to be nego-

tiated between island locale and diaspora territory as well as between shifting lines of affiliation.

Two years earlier, prior to Olivia's sickness (or rebellion), Soledad, eighteen years of age, moves out to Manhattan's East Village, "on the corner of 6th and A" (1). Similar to Olivia's feeling of being incarcerated (both by limited freedom of movement as well as by those norms that determine her body as unworthy and soiled), Soledad perceives the *barrio* of the Dominican community as too narrow and the family as too demanding and overbearing. When her mother falls ill, she is called back home but compares the stay with her family in Washington Heights to a "prison sentence" (3). This illustrates the restrictive setting and spatial confinement of Washington Heights, the "urban ghetto" (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 73) that Soledad desperately seeks to leave behind; this also resonates with Olivia's own weariness of hiding inside the barred apartment (cf. 221). Soledad's escape – "I was going to a place far away from my mother, from Washington Heights" (8) – is motivated both by the need to separate from her mother as well as by the desire to bring as much distance between her and the 'ethnic community' as possible. She further enacts the separation from maternal influence by taking off the earrings she received from her mother at birth, thus symbolically cutting off the umbilical cord (cf. 8). This rather typical coming-of-age motif – leaving behind parental control – signifies a necessary step in her development, seemingly bringing her closer to personal liberation and providing her with more freedom.

The constant surveillance inside the *barrio* is contrasted with the anonymity of downtown Manhattan. Whereas in the Washington Heights community everyone was prying, watching every move and judging, the new neighborhood now offers the chance to come and go as she pleases, "without fretting about a curfew or someone waiting up for me" (30). However, Soledad's move is met with reproach by her grandmother and aunt who implicitly blame her for her mother's condition (cf. 5, 12). Their reproach for turning her back on her family can further be interpreted as an accusation of betraying her own 'roots' and the ethnic community – which would explain the sense of guilt Soledad feels for moving out (cf. 3).

From a sociological perspective, Nancy Foner and Joanna Dreby investigate intergenerational relationships in immigrant families along with related tensions between parent and adolescent child. They point out that what often causes these tensions are the "cultural differences between parents' home-country values, norms, and behavioral patterns and the mainstream American culture to which their U.S.-born and -raised children are exposed and drawn"

(Foner/Dreby 2011: 547).[364] The assimilationist tendencies Soledad displays stand in stark contrast to "the importance of la familia" (4) that her aunt Gorda vehemently upholds, thus causing an intergenerational conflict. Against the alleged duty of 'ethnic loyalty' stands her attempted outgrowing of the community and wish foassimilation or integration into the mainstream. In this respect, the novel questions through a second generation migrant's perspective the very idea of origin and dismisses (in Soledad's farewell) the concept of a closed community and the necessity of being part of it.

The novel further reveals a conflicting relation between the first and second immigrant generation in connection to problems of belonging, assimilation, and identification. That it is not only the wish to separate from maternal influence but also profound confusion with regards to her identity and even embarrassment with regards to her place of residence (meaning 'ethnic background') that prompts her to leave is expressed in her "embroidering the truth about [her] living on the Upper Upper Upper West Side" (2). When being asked where she was from, she elusively replies 'from the Upper West Side' – as if "liv[ing] in the hood [...] make[s] you some substandard human being" (76) – to which her friend Caramel reacts with disgust, not understanding how she can even stand this area she calls "gringolandia" (2). This was Soledad's "way of keeping nasty stereotypes of Washington Heights out of people's minds" (ibid.), which in reality is located at the fringes of the Bronx.

In Washington Heights, the Dominican community populates an in-between-space located not yet in the Bronx (with a majority African American population) but not down-town Manhattan either. This is emblematic for the positionality of Hispanics or Latino/as within the ethno-racial make-up of the city and the U.S. Her 'ethnic dissociation' is further strengthened by her ignorance of the fact that the hip down-town area where she now lives used to be home predominantly to the Puerto Rican community. Here the novel alludes to the gentrification of this urban area, a process which marginalizes certain groups and obscures their cultural history. In their reading of the novel, Dalleo and Machado Sáez observe in Soledad the wish not only for *upward* but also *outward* mobility. They argue that "Soledad even decontextualizes the Lower East Side, absenting its Latino/a history as a Nuyorican neighborhood just a generation earlier. The desire to dissociate herself from the lowercase Latino/a ghetto moves Soledad to also fudge the details of her background" (91).[365] If

364 On family structures, intergenerational conflict, and so-called countercultures in immigrant families, see also Portes/Rumbaut 2001.

365 Dalleo and Machado Sáez refer to Juan Flores in the application of the concept of lowercase Latino/a identity.

gringolandia and the Lower East Side serve as manifestations of the cultural difference of mainstream America, Soledad in becoming an artist and delving into the apparently white-dominated Manhattan art scene finds herself seemingly in denial of her Latina identity which is at odds with her family's *Dominicanidad*. Sitting in overpriced cafés, sipping a fashionable cinnamon-flavored latté, and finding herself "among other university students, I feel like I've arrived" (67). Moving up while moving out or outward in terms of the mainstream culture of *gringolandia* versus the ghetto distances her further from an immigrant, working class identity found in the Washington Heights community.[366]

The counterpart to Soledad is her friend and roommate Caramel, a Chicana from Texas who "loves saying she's a lesbian" (89). Indeed, Soledad's ethnic 'dissociation,' which is emphasized by her whiteness, is contrasted to her friend's affirmation of a U.S.-Latina subjectivity. "Caramel thinks she has a certain *right to* the caramel-flavored things. She insists it helps her to get in touch with her inner *self*" (67; emphasis added). Her claim for autonomy of the self and the right to ownership she grounds in the myth of an essential or a 'true' kernel of identity which apparently lies within one's self. The assurance (access to that identity) prompts her to criticize Soledad for her shortcoming, which she finds confirmed in Soledad's preference for white men, her consumption habit of expensive products, but also in her work in the art gallery. It is also Caramel who points out the necessity of community and inter-ethnic solidarity to Soledad. Despite her emphasizing her distance to the Latino/a migrant community, Soledad admires Caramel's self-confidence, pride, and independence and wishes to "grow up to be like her. With so much strength, comfortable in her own skin, not caring what anyone thinks" (91). In expressing a positive relation to her body, Caramel, as Dalleo and Machado Sáez argue, "functions as a throwback to the Sixties political vision, voicing its ideological perspective to critique Soledad's assimilationist tendencies" (91). Here, the two authors refer to the political resistance inherent in the identity and standpoint politics of the queer Chicana feminist and Civil Rights movements, which they see embodied in the character Caramel.[367] She confronts Soledad with her lie about her background and urges her to embrace her origins, up-bringing, and be 'truthful' to her Latina identity prompting her to "say it like it is, mujer" (3). As a result

[366] Arguably, associated with this identity position is exactly that kind of symbolic capital that guarantees entry into the contemporary art scene of Manhattan.

[367] Caramel is the one character to really disrupt the novel's rather static performance of gender and sexuality and otherwise very strict heterosexual matrix.

> Soledad [...] guiltily shifts her identification from the upper-class locale of the Upper West Side to that of the Washington Heights barrio. This guilt is evoked by Caramel's signifying home in terms of community solidarity as opposed to class mobility, the barrio versus gringolandia. In addition, the guilt is also associated with a betrayal of one's cultural roots [...,] naming the ghetto as *the* authentic home-place. (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 92)

Soledad's attempt at making a home down-town, however, is not just for the sake of upward mobility but also corresponds to her want to blend in, an endeavor which clashes with Caramel's explicit aversion of *gringolandia* (cf. 2). Although Soledad does not completely understand her best friend's remark and dislike, she "just knew it was bad. It felt worse than being called a blanquita back home: a sellout, a wannabe white girl" (2-3). As these differences are clearly inscribed on her body, what resonates here as well is Soledad's self-alienation and apparent 'un-belonging' both to the Washington Heights area and to down-town Manhattan. Her estrangement is best illustrated by her saying: "Living uptown, and coming downtown to work every day, it's like being on two different planets" (57). Thinking with Bourdieu, we may detect a habitus conflict that stems from her being socialized in one place and moving about in a space characterized by a completely different set of behavioral rules; similarly, we may discern a cultural collision in Anzaldúa's sense, if we understand the barrio as a space of Dominican culture and *machismo*, and down-town as a space of high culture of art galleries and urban chique. The question that remains unanswered is whether Soledad will be able to bring the two together, to perform an act of transculturation.

Where Dalleo and Machado Sáez find in Soledad's guilt a cultural betrayal, her behavior may thus be further attributed to an identity crisis that only at a first glance relates to adolescent individuation. Soledad, ever since her father's death, is obsessed with the idea of having been 'switched' at birth, and holds "on to the fact that I don't look like my mother. Maybe our lips are the same, full and pink. But my hair falls pin straight, my eyes are smaller, shaped like almonds, and my skin is fairer" (6). The perception of her physical difference in comparison to the rest of the family and her whiteness is affirmed as well by her grandmother's observation: "Soledad, you and that gringo blood" (220). Resonating in Soledad's reflection on the missing similarity to her kin is indeed her own uncertainty about her origin and parenthood. However, at a second glance, it is also a reflection on the implications of a racialized, ethnic identity. Both statements in themselves do not indicate a preference for fair skin (as for example in the case of Martine and her skin bleaching in Danticat's novel); still, for Latinas in the U.S., the novel explicitly ascribes to whiteness a higher possi-

bility of a career and upward mobility. Caramel, for instance, is very critical when it comes to the recruiting and hiring practice of the art gallery where Soledad works, finding that "[t]hey hired you because you're not brown like me" (58). Here she hints at the structural discrimination on the job market where race functions as social marker and positioning putting People of Color at a disadvantage. Soledad's whiteness, Caramel claims, grants her entry into the white-dominated art world of downtown Manhattan. Within the community, though, the meaning of whiteness undergoes transformation in its demarcation from *Latinidad* and eventual exclusion. When Soledad returns to the *barrio* to look after her mother, she is hit by a water balloon her cousin Flaca and a friend throw from the roof of a house mistaking her for a "freaking [...] hippy white girl chick" (16). In this prank the girls define the limits of community membership and belonging on the basis of skin color and assumed social status. In what can be described as a body politics of ethnicity, race, class, and identification, the perception and ascription as "white chick" and her "gringo blood" mark her difference within her 'own' community and position/construct her as other vis-à-vis the Latina body and the 'brownness' of Caramel.

As a matter of fact, Caramel makes her aware of the whiteness of the art gallery and invisibility of the Latina body therein. "Everything is white, the walls, the ceilings" (56), as well as the owner of the gallery and artists promoted there. She is aware of the exclusion of the art work and the marginalization of Latina artist that Soledad does not see. Hence, she challenges her asking "When was the last time you saw a Latina artist in a gallery? [...] It's so far from our imagination. We [...] will end up like Frida Kahlo, paralyzed in some bed in perpetual pain waiting for our deaths to sell our paintings" (56). For Caramel, who criticizes the absence of Latina/o art, "it comes down to the politics of representation [...] see[ing] through the whitewashed artistic economy of the gallery" (Dalleo/Machado Sáez 2007: 92). In fact, Soledad has been hired as a receptionist but her wish to show her painting at the gallery so far remains unfulfilled because of the owner's concern that Soledad may "have some agenda on her ass" (89), hinting at the agenda of identity politics and representation. Suddenly, Soledad is not white enough. In this respect, Caramels comment, "God forbid they see two spics [sic] in here" (58), a remark that was intended to provoke Soledad; the explicit use of the racist "spic," pejorative for Dominicans, reveals not just a whitewashing but the discriminatory practice of the institution which is as much a problem of race as it is one of class. This corresponds to the incompatibility of the "two planets" Soledad has trouble to bring together. Caramel's question, "can you really see your abuelita or Gorda walk into this uptight gallery without feeling completely out of place" (56), hits the nail

on the head. "These places are traps. Don't you see there is no place for us to go from here? Soledad, we need to start our own thing, make our own rules, where the sky is the limit. A place where our mamis can come and visit and not feel like they don't belong" (57). Hers is then a plea for coalition building and an affirmation of a pan-*Latinidad*.

According to Caramel, Soledad does not fit into the white space of the gallery or upscale Manhattan society. According to Flaca, she is a white chick who does not belong to Washington Heights. Among the extended family in the Dominican Republic, additionally, she is again an outsider, though in a dominant, privileged position, primarily because of her passport and status, which constitutes yet another identity shift: in the Caribbean she is perceived as U.S.-American although her ethnic identity there officially marks her as not one of the mainstream. Dalleo and Machado Sáez elucidate the conflict Soledad has:

> Traveling to the Dominican Republic necessitates the recognition that Soledad will be viewed as an outsider, as a gringa who embodies the privilege and economic power of the United States. Soledad cannot escape her identification as a U.S. resident or the lens through which her island family will view her. (97)

She does not understand local ways to prepare food, perceives this as a state of underdevelopment as she is used to ready-made and processed food. The novel reflects on the status and prestige associated with the diaspora. It is obvious that the transnational connection is not void of asymmetries, resentment, and incomprehension. There is the pressure on those living in the North, perceived 'back home' as paradise, to provide for relatives. There is also a certain degree of superiority attached to the purchasing power which puts the apparently economically successful migrant in the position in which she is able to grant those at home a favor. The reality of the hardship lived through in the northern metropolitan centers and exorbitant costs to sustain a living usually remain hidden from those on the islands.

That Cruz is concerned also with the issues of anti-Haitianism and the racism within the Latino/a community against Blacks and African Americans can be seen, for instance, in Gorda's reservation towards Flaca's friend Caty who is *Haitiana* and Gorda "doesn't know about those people" (41). The novel contextualizes the attitude of anti-Blackness in the antagonistic relation of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Soledad's grandmother explains that "[i]t was rare to have a man like your father pick a woman like me as a wife. I mean, we were the kind that had a few too many feet in a Haitian kitchen" (186). What is hinted at here is the threat of 'racial contamination' of the *white* Dominican society through the Black Haitian body.

7.6 Muy Macho: Hegemonic Masculinities and Gender Trouble

The novels in this study have in common a predominately negative depiction of heterosexual masculinity and unreliable, violent men. *Soledad* adds to this through its representation of a mostly stereotypical Dominican manhood as well as its contrasting juxtaposition of the good and bad Latino man. Men are measured by their abilities to care for their women economically and sexually; the women define themselves mainly through their relationships with men and heterosexual desire. Similar to *The Heart Does Not Bend*, this narrative strategy brings with it a privileging of women's perspectives and subjectivity. The novel's ethical principal of gender justice is clear, since the good men are rewarded and the bad are punished, like Manolo who is pushed out of the window; Don Fernando, Olivia's father, who is bound to the wheelchair and dies; and Raful, Gorda's ex-partner, who is narratively death and never appears in person. Francis argues that through the novel's "internal critique of Dominican men exploiting Dominican women" as well as the attempt to relocate "violence as an everyday experience to which Dominican women are subjected," Cruz wishes to "pursue[...] the national and diasporic implications of 'machismo' in heterosexual relationships" (Francis 2010: 121).

The concept of hegemonic masculinities, according to Raewyn Connell (2005),[368] refers to the plurality of male gendered positions within a gender order or heterosexual matrix, to use Butler's terminology. This matrix prescribes certain practices and strategies of manly behavior to sustain not only authority and power within a peer group and in relation to other (subordinate) masculinities but also to attain and sustain domination over women.[369] The hegemonic ideal of masculinity among Latino men and women is referred to as *machismo*, an unstable performance of heterosexuality and virility shaped by a complex set of such interrelating factors as race, class, economic pressure, national belonging, and power.[370] Contemporary conceptualizations of manhood among Dominicans have emerged against the backdrop of coloniality, U.S. occupation, the Trujillato, and more recent transnational circulations. *Machis-*

368 See also Bourdieu (2001).

369 Studies on masculinity in the Caribbean are provided, for example, by Reddock (2004); Lewis (2007, 2003); Bucknor (2013).

370 Latino adult manhood, its production and representation, is subject of numerous fictional texts which either reaffirm or interrupt hegemonic interpretations of masculinity, as several scholars convincingly argue, cf. González (1996); Domino Rudolph (2012); Horn (2014); Cortés (2015).

mo is defined through norms, social practices, and perceptions that go along with tradition, Catholicism, as well as a rejection of non-normative sexualities and feminine behavior (cf. Horn 2014; Domino Rudolph 2013).[371] In her novel, Cruz does not take issue with homosexual desire among men, thus reproducing the silence surrounding homosexuality prevalent in hegemonic discourses on Latino masculinity.

7.6.1 Socialization in the Streets

The 'street' is the most important space for the formation of masculine subjectivity and the verification of manhood among Latino men (cf. Chevannes 2003; de Moya 2004b). The novel depicts the street as a highly dangerous and contested terrain where young men are supposed to stand their ground and prove themselves and their toughness in relation to other men. One important aspect of this street culture is the public performance of potent urban masculinity and 'badness' behavior that Soledad observes in Richie and his friends: "[l]ike tough men they inflate their chests and bounce them off each other" (77). The negotiation and reconfirmation of masculinity happens within the peer group. "The guys are probably gathering themselves in the alley so they can emerge in a pack, spit their way up the street as if they had to mark their territory everywhere they go, like dogs" (74). While this is a gendered ritual to demarcate the masculine space, it is also a drawing of ethnic boundaries and establishing belonging to a certain community distant from other Latino or minority communities and measured against white masculinity. The toughness attitude as virility is inseparable from machismo and demarcates this hegemonic form from a marginalized effeminate masculinity. The group and *barrio* here resemble a panopticon, a Foucauldian disciplinary microcosm in which the subject is

371 Dominican masculinity, obviously, cannot be broken down to singular stereotypes nor solely associated with aggressiveness and violence, while simultaneously depicting women as mere victims. Prevalent concepts of virile manliness have emerged during the *Trujillato*. A totalitarian notion comprehends masculinity as being monopolized by state authority, regulated by state power, and negotiated among men themselves. One of the dominant images is that of the *tíguere*, closely associated with Trujillo's perceived manliness and sexual prowess, the "*Ubermacho*" (Cortés 2015: 120). On the meaning and ambiguity of the *tíguere* and its association with politics as well as everyday life, see Krohn-Hansen (1996) and de Moya (2004a, 2004b).

under constant observation and has to adjust its own behavior according to the rules of the street.

The novel confirms the importance of the street on gendered socialization practices and a family's reputation in several instances. On the street, young men like Victor learn from elders how to behave like a man, to respect women, and listen when elders speak. Ciego, the blind, wise old man, is the patriarch who still rules the street. He is the heterosexual complementary to Doña Sosa: Whereas she is the matriarch who is in control of the kitchen (cf. 64), he is omnipresent in the neighborhood: "Ciego's making a butt print on the building steps. He's been sitting there so long the steps will stay warm all through winter" (170). He is also the counterpart to the abusive, alcoholic husband, and substitute father to Victor. Similar to the figure of Tiresias, he is in possession of a certain clairvoyance which further emphasizes his authority as mentor figure. His blindness provides him with sensitivity for his surroundings, especially women (cf. 38-39). Through him, the street is associated with the production and sharing of knowledge, a school of life, but also respect and dignity. In addition, it is through Ciego that the novel establishes an explicit link to Dominican history and Trujillo, because he has lived under the Trujillato and recalls the chaos that followed the dictator's assassination (cf. 167).

Both on the street and within the family the regulatory regimes of the gaze and respectability are intact. For girls and women, however, the street is not a sanctioned space. Gorda is worried for her daughter Flaca to get involved in the "shit around the block" (147) and warns her: "[D]on't let me catch you en la calle when it's dark" (43). At night, the urban ghetto transforms into a danger zone potentially affecting the safety of the daughter, in particular her sexual integrity. Flaca's "tramping around on the streets" (43) – the figure of the tramp being a social outcast – is a rebellious act against her mother and in more general terms against women's confinement to the domestic realms. The highly gendered territory of the streets are "culturalmente satanizado para la mujer, porque se considera un espacio masculino si la mujer sale a 'la calle' se considera que está 'compitiendo' con el hombre y se le descalifica 'moralmente' (entra a ser 'puta' o 'cuero') para así crear un muro a su inserción" (Vargas García 2010).[372] Thus, Flaca's presence on the streets, patrolling up and down as if she owns the block (cf. 125), is a transgression of strictly defined spaces and gender boundaries. That Flaca can be read as a transgressive character is con-

372 "The space of the street for women is culturally demonized. Being considered a masculine space, if a woman enters 'the street,' she supposedly competes with the male who then disqualifies her morally (as being a slut or a lady) so as to create a defensive wall to her insurrection" [my translation].

firmed by other teenaged girls who observe her street performance and "think she's in a gang" (44). Admittedly, the novel at this point does not unfold a narrative of Latino/a gang life and membership such as literary scholar Monica Brown elaborates on in *Gang Nation* (2002).[373] However, Flaca's alleged gang membership, when read alongside Brown, who posits gangs as an alternative or counter-environment for intervention and participation in culture and politics, is a sign for her longing for an alternative space of belonging – meaning outside of the home – but also her rebellion and an act of defending her site of self-actualization.

Flaca posits her body in relation to the urban street territory thereby declaring the space as her own. By "showing off [her] flat-chested, skinny-ass self on the block" (32), she not only enters into competition with *macho* men, she also proudly parades her pubescent body in the sexualized and racialized arena of the street, reclaiming it as her space for self-actualization. Soledad observes her cousin's slackness with envy, which translates into a judgment of Flaca's adolescent body as already sexually inappropriate: "Her spaghetti-strap tank doesn't hide her small nipples. Her breasts, too small to wear a bra, seem indecent without one" (125). Flaca's seeming indecency results from the strict rules of propriety Soledad has incorporated. Yet, Flaca does take pride in her body and feels comfortable in her skin. Carolyn Cooper coins the term "slackness" for working-class women's body politics and explicitly erotic gender performance enacted in the Jamaican dancehall culture in particular. In her definition, "a radical, underground confrontation with the patriarchal gender ideology [...], Slackness is potentially a politics of subversion" (Cooper 1994: 141). The confident, public display of the sexualized female body that can be observed in Flaca's case can be interpreted as a performative act of slackness. If we understand slackness to be part of what Deborah Thomas calls "ghetto feminism," meaning the emancipation of (especially lower class) women's sexuality from the private sphere along with the notions of respectability and decency (cf. Thomas 2004: 251), Flaca's performance, her empowering counter discourse of ghetto feminism, poses a challenge to hegemonic masculinity or "ghetto masculinity," a term used by Dalleo and Machado Sáez to describe homosocial male

373 Brown analyzes Latino/a novels and memoirs, such as Piri Thomas' *Down These Mean Streets* (1967), Monica Ruiz' *Two Badges: The Lives of Mona Ruiz* (1997), and Yxta Maya Murray's *Locas* (1998), thereby focusing on the phenomenon of street gangs and community building, emphasizing, amongst others, how loyalty, honor and a sense of belonging creates empowerment and an alternative space of oppositional politics against exclusionary models of citizenship and nationality – but also as a tragic space of violence, brutal rituals of bonding, or misogyny (cf. Brown 2002: 16).

bonding and hypermasculine practices of resistance among adolescent men in Latino communities in the face of economic disenfranchisement and migrant culture (cf. 85). Flaca is affirmative both of her Dominican identity and her femininity, which her printed shirt publicly demonstrates reading "DOMINICANS GO ALL OUT", and, unlike Soledad, self-conscious about her sexuality and the assumption that Dominican women are "the most beautiful women on the planet" (32).

Sexuality, beauty ideals, class, and race, nevertheless, complicate adolescent girls' socialization in the community and the urban space of New York City, where they need to compete especially with white girls in the fight for the sexual attention of "homeboys." Flaca, complaining about the arrogance displayed by white girls who enter 'her' territory, observes how bodily ownership and desirability are inextricably linked to whiteness leading to the denigration of the Latina body. "Fugly white bitches walking around here like they own the block 'cause homeboys treat them like they beauty queens just 'cause they blanquitas [...] looking at her like she's a piece of shit" (44). Beauty ideals are established through a positive evaluation of women's bodies through the attraction of the heterosexual male gaze on which women apparently depend. The power of the gaze of the "homeboy" reconfirms the status of the *macho* but interestingly also brings with it a revaluation or heightened appreciation of Latino working-class identity in the relation with white women who are apparently not from the *barrio* but seek the men's companion nevertheless. At the same time, affirmation and validation of manhood occur through the contact with women, whereas women are supposed to display a passive, receptive sexuality in order to meet moral standards. The streets offer a space for secret sexual experiences. The alleys provide Flaca with privacy to discover her sexuality with Pito, something that is impossible in her mother's small apartment. Although she is in control of how far they go in their sexual discovery, he openly takes pride in his conquest, wearing "a grin that screams success" (124), while Flaca is supposed to hide her arousal, anxious to "never get caught feeling all sexed up" (124).

7.6.2 Provider and Sexual Prowess

Time and again the novel makes explicit references to male sexuality. Phrases such as "men's dicks are always looking for a home" (210), here a somewhat nebulous depiction of what may be called a 'nomadic manhood,' comically at best, refer to men's supposedly innate bodily urges and prowess. The "home,"

metaphorical for vagina, implies compulsory heterosexuality, and, in its literal sense of the domestic space, a man's alleged need for a warm nest, which recalls the well-known stereotype of essential femininity in the 'Angel of the House' (which Olivia, for example, despite her angelic features cannot live up to, but Isabel, Victor's girlfriend provides with her warm, inviting sheets). Although there is much to be criticized about Cruz' employment of gender stereotypes, as the irony necessary to deconstruct the very same is often missing, a closer look reveals how men are caught between the pressure to testify their sexual prowess and the expectations to provide for women economically and emotionally. *Machismo* as the dominant cultural codex of manly behavior, honor, and virility obliges men to reconfirm their status through the sexual conquest of women.

Manolo is the embodiment of that aggressive *machismo*, revealing, in addition, the double standard associated with sexual autonomy leaving women at a disadvantage when it comes to the free expression of erotic desire. Manolo obtains the ownership of Olivia's body by literally buying constant access to her intimacy. Throughout the early phases of their engagement he forbids her to speak in public, decides for her what to eat, to drink, to wear, and when to have sex (cf. 50). Upon arrival in New York, the novel alludes to his criminal activities, which adds to his badness factor; this is also when the physical abuse of Olivia intensifies. The reasons for Olivia to stay with Manolo are her family's expectations, the need for a provider, and the pressure to remain in the realms of the respectable. Since Manolo is not the biological parent of Soledad and has not fathered another child, he is presumably infertile, which in a culture that values virility is regarded as unmanly. Soledad is the living proof of his wife's unfaithfulness, meaning his emasculation, so that he eventually takes revenge also by abusing Soledad when she is still a child. I am reluctant to read the aggressiveness, abuse, as well as his cheating as a coping strategy with regard to his lacking masculinity and the crippling effects of socio-sexual demands. However, Manolo compensates the loss of authority with hypermasculine behavior and violence to reestablish power. While women are valued for their sexual purity, men are defined as valuable providers through the size and action of their genitals, a measure, too, of male prowess. Gorda, in trying to pursue Soledad to let the ghosts of the past rest and forget about her father, shares with Soledad that the men Olivia had sex with "are stupid men. Men who need to take advantage of little girls because they have penises the size of my pinkie" (200). The equation of a 'small sized' penis with the inability to satisfy a woman (which supposedly proves a man's unsuitability as husband or

father) reveals what seemingly makes a man *muy macho*: What matters is the size of the penis to satisfy a woman.

A further performance of masculinity is expressed in the image of the tiger.[374] The Dominican *tíguere*, too, hunts in the urban "gender jungle" of Cruz' Washington Heights.[375] Richie, who counters Manolo's troublesome masculinity, is the good *macho* made flesh in his embodiment of the positive side of the *tíguere*, namely as a protector, provider, and comforter. This, however, escapes Gorda's attention who continues to dislike Richie for making her teenaged daughter, Flaca, fall in love with him. In her eyes, Richie is a "maldito tigre" (73), a predator, who according to de Moya is also known for his "chasing behaviour" and display of "male potency" (2004b: 79). Gorda, indeed, sees his potency or prowess as potentially dangerous, but contradicts herself by saying: "Ese tigre, can't even wipe his own ass, maldito mocoso" (106). She diminishes his adult manhood by calling him a *maldito mocoso*, a 'bloody brat,' unable to see the kindness of Richie's character due to her one-dimensional picture of what masculinity is supposed to mean. Gorda's comment, "men are hunters by nature, it's unnatural for them to want a woman who's easy prey" (101), is enlightening for the essential binary behind heterosexual coupling it conveys, which she obviously does not question. Her imagination of the tiger is very much formed by a Trujillo discourse of masculinity.[376] Men (or tigers) are ascribed the active part; for women it is unnatural to take the lead; hence Gorda's advice to her daughter to 'play hard to get,' that way ever remaining the passive object (the prey) of a man's desire (or his hunt). While the tiger hunts his prey in the urban jungle, the woman is the lioness in the den. The novel goes on with double entendre: She is in charge to prepare the 'meals' and keep the 'fire burning'; she decides when "to put the meat in" and makes sure to not "let him peek in your pots" (64). She is the seductress and lures men with her cooking skills.

Nevertheless, looking at the kind of masculinity the novel privileges, it becomes clear that it suggests the tamed, cuddly *tíguere* as valid part of Dominican American masculinity. The protagonist's desire for Richie ("Every part of

374 This perceived ideal type of masculinity emerged in the urban areas of the Dominican capital in the 1940s and 1950s. The 'typical' character traits of *el tíguere* are defined in detail by Lipe Collado in *El tíguere dominicano: Hacia una aproximación de cómo es el dominicano* (2002), see also Horn (2014: 45).

375 The term "gender jungle" is de Moya's (2004b: 79).

376 Trujillo was infamously known for his *machismo* and promiscuity. The masculinity discourse is furthermore intertwined with Dominican *caudillo* politics. Junot Diaz' *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) takes issue with this kind of body politics.

my body wants him to hold me right then") and her emotional need for the tiger's comforting embrace ("as if his arms can make me feel less scattered and lonely" [209]) responds to her hinting at a changing ideal of Dominican gender relations in the diaspora. The good *macho* knows how to nurture women emotionally, provide safety and comfort. Richie's adoration of the female is literally engraved on his body. His arm is decorated by a tattoo of his mother's portrait and he might actually "be the kind of guy who disproves [Soledad's] mother's theory about men" (125). If, as Maja Horn contends, the image of the *tíguere* departs from "a typical modern form of individualism but remains deeply embedded in kin and communal relationships" (2014: 45), then Manolo departs from this image and is bound to fail. Olivia earlier compares him to Hollywood's "Lone Ranger" and she "never trusted the Lone Ranger because his lips and words never met" (51). He rather embodies a Western, or rather the Hollywood-promoted ideal of individualism and manhood, "the loner/quiet type" that seems distant from that of the Caribbean, where "melancholic gravity of solitude is not hugely prized" as Jason Cortés argues (2015: 99). Hence, the tiger is the one who in the end dominates in the urban jungle; the tiger is keen enough to "outsmart the dominant system and its rules" (Horn 2014: 45). Richie is more likely to survive.[377]

The ambivalences in the formation of the masculine subject, arising from the regulatory regime of *machismo* along with the multiple expectations reinforced by men and women alike, put men under pressure. This becomes most visible in Victor. He is the only man left in the household after his father's death, enjoying his status of the spoilt son "about to hit thirty and won't leave my grandmother's pampering ways unless someone marries him and takes her place" (3). The first time his girlfriend Isabel visits, he is embarrassed by the way his mother and sister easily dominate their get-togethers, relegating him to the position of a child, thus emasculating him in front of his partner (cf. 177-179). He compensates this lack of masculine authority in the home through his performance of 'street badness' and verbal threats – "I'm gonna have to fuck you up" (35) – and the conquest of women – "I got myself enough pussy" (39). Several times, the narrative focus shifts to his perspective to reveal the pressure on him to perform sexually. He even wonders whether it is natural for men to repress sexual desire for other women and have intercourse with only one, thus

377 Horn concludes: "The tíguere is thus a transgressive answer from men 'below' to the constraints of the Trujillato, but also an echo of the new hegemonic masculine scripts enacted from 'above' by the dictator himself. Indeed, I argue that the tíguere is best understood as a response to the profound 'crisis of the subject' brought on by the Trujillato's reconfiguration of social relations in the country" (2014: 46).

questioning the nature of monogamy but also fostering a sexual double standard (cf. 176).

The proof of masculinity thus depends on the number of women men have intercourse with. Soledad, however, is disgusted by how he juggles women "around like a piece of meat" (61) but would not betray her uncle to his girlfriends. It is "part of a family code to protect each other, even if it feels wrong" (62), she says. The family, like the streets, is a further space for socialization and apparently a sanctuary of hegemonic masculinity in which a certain kind of manhood is reproduced; the family actively contributes to the transmission of culturally sanctioned gender roles and the preservation of the heteropatriarchal system. Although Soledad wishes for solidarity among women, a "kind of sisterhood" against male domination, the family provides safe ground for the deceit of apparently naïve women "who believe what they want to believe" (62) when it comes to men. The negative role models like his father or Manolo make Victor insecure about the kind of man he wants to become. He transforms from *mujeriego*, a womanizer, into a loving man, eager to get married and settle down. At the same time, however, that he is not eager to obtain the role of patriarch may hint at an alternative model of manhood among the younger generation of Dominicans in diaspora and the desire for breaking out of a tradition that is damaging both to men and women.

On the other hand, Victor in his active sexuality and desire for women demonstrates that the womanizer is not insignificant with regards to women's emergence as sexual subject and their developing a positive attitude towards their bodies. Victor is important for his celebration of women's bodies and sexuality, something the women in the novel are unable to do or do only secretly. Soledad, for instance, is uncomfortable in her body and Gorda only whispers shamefully "*down there* [...] as if just mentioning it is something that will send her right to Hell" (107). In contrast to the awkwardness surrounding the vagina and female body, references to male genitals are made outright as the text proudly spells out "penis," "sacks," or "pubic hair" (159); whereas the texts describes in detail Soledad's caressing of Richie, there is a striking discomfort to do so the other way around and the text gets lost in awkward descriptions by Soledad of Richie "searching for the places that make me hold my breath" (ibid.). Victor, of all characters in the novel, is the only one to actually name women's body parts and is infatuated by "Ramona's pussy," her "smell" and "her taste" (103). Like Ciego, he makes women feel desirable. He resists the text's obvious inability to spell out vagina or other female body parts.

7.6.3 Disenfranchised Masculinity

The *barrio* – "a war zone filled with cop killers, killer cops, crack dealers, gang members and lazy welfare mothers" (2) – is commonly associated with crime, unemployment, and bad housing, which is why Soledad usually refrains from telling downtowners her whereabouts.[378] In fact, unemployment and crime, seemingly predetermined, are part of the characters' reality in the *barrio*. The characters' employment in the low-wage sector hints at the precarious economic situations within ethnic communities and the often difficult access to white collar jobs. In the U.S. the promise of the good life in the North is proven false – this is seen also in the three previous novels, for instance in Espinet, where Da-Da is only a shadow of his former self. The diaspora for many turns into a place of lost hopes, as Ciego's migrant story reveals: "I wanted to do so many things. I wanted to come to the U.S. and be transformed, and when I got here and realized that men like me, like us, are treated like dogs in this country, that they got us, all medicating our lost dreams with mierda like Johnny Walker Black" (167). The experience of disenfranchisement makes life for many Caribbean migrants unbearably difficult as they face the realities of poverty and racism, and a remedy and compensation is found in alcohol and violence. The "burden of masculinity," according to Rudolph, is intertwined with racialized body politics and ethnic identity in the U.S., where an excessive Latino masculinity is placed in opposition to white, Anglo American passivity which translates into "a conflict between virile Latino bodies and Anglo-American social and economic capital" (74). This politics of segregation is visible in the 'body order' of an urban space divided in the bohemian, diverse downtown, the white middle class Jersey, and the criminalized Washington Heights dominated by Hispanics. The *barrio* is the site for drug trafficking, but where white people come to purchase drugs ("blanquitos from Jersey [...] are up here for one reason" (87)), and police violence is common ("cops, who are looking for trouble" (146)). The street renders the male body of color vulnerable, engendering and exposing him to violence.

Similarly, interpersonal relations and the choice of a partner, too, are restricted by this order. The extent to which gender, racialized, ethnic identities intersecting with class and capital complicate the status (and define the positionality) of Latino masculinity is disclosed in a conversation between Soledad

378 Doña Sosa spreads the news of another killing down the streets (60), which brings to mind the assassination of Malcolm X in the Audubon Ballrom that happened just around the corner of the *barrio* on 165th Street. In this context, Soledad's comment on how staying in Washington Heights for her is like a prison sentence, in addition, refers to the criminality in the area.

and Caramel. They discuss Soledad's taste in men, her alleged preference for whiteness, and her disapproval of men from the *barrio* influenced by the prevalent stereotypes of Hispanics as well as her own experiences living in Washington Heights. "You won't give Richie a chance 'cause he ain't white. She's wrong. It's because he's not my type, he lives in the hood. I want something better for myself" (76). Her initial rejection of Richie ("He's like some loser" (96)) results from her prejudice and her desire for upward mobility. She assumes that due to his origin he cannot fulfill this desire but is proven false in the end.

7.6.4 A Quest for Fatherhood?

While the novel for the most part is concerned with the estrangement of mother and daughter and their ultimate reconciliation, Soledad's unresolved quest for the biological father is another plot-driving element and raises further questions of masculinity. She remembers the many times Manolo "would say to [her] mother, Your daughter. Not *my* daughter" (195). The mystery regarding the fatherhood is met with Olivia's assurance of her own motherhood. Olivia's secret past, which involves her uncertainty with Soledad's parentage, is hidden until the moment Soledad finds a box with her mother's name on it containing photographs, a notebook, and a list with descriptions of men and dates – from May 17 until June 14: "[…] *Mayo 20 alemán gordo con olor de cigarillo* […] *Mayo 21 el francés lindo* […] *Mayo 25 el Americano, rubio* […] *Junio 14 Manolo*" (194-5). Soledad reads the list out loud wondering who these men are and "Why would my mother describe them this way? […] I picture each man. El francés, el griego, el Americano … otra vez. Otra vez. Why again? What again?" (194). What follows develops into a rather absurd and comical scene, but is intended to mark a serious moment in which the daughter relives her mother's traumatizing experience. In disbelief, she reads out the list and while doing so it not only dawns on her that her mother worked as prostitute; what also happens is that the men materialize in front of her:

> One by one, at a very slow pace, men with big fat stomachs, nasty teeth, hairy chests, balding heads, pigeon toes, smelly armpits, long beards, appear. And as if they have visited this apartment in the past, they sit down […] all naked, penises exposed con mucha confianza […]; there's a sepia cast to them all. An ancient photograph, an old memory. […] The men keep appearing. Naked, tall, short,

> lumpy, old and young men. And my father is also there. [...] We find him making the kind of face that reads revenge. [...] Maybe this is not real ... (195)

The apparition of the ghosts, according to Anne Brüske, constitutes an element of magical realism which marks "el momento en el cual los acontecimientos de Olivia se convierten en una experiencia compartida también por la artista Soledad, así que, por ende, la suerte de los dos personajes, el pasado y presente, se entrelazan definitivamente por este trauma transgeneracional" (2013: 95).[379] The ghosts painfully link mother and daughter to the Dominican home as well as to a shared experience of sexual violation – Olivia by her 'clients' and Soledad as child by Manolo.[380] The spectral appearances of the past still haunt the mother and apparently the daughter as well. Indeed, "the ghost is often an indicator that there are aspects of the past that are not quite finished," as Lisa Kröger and Melanie Anderson confirm (2013: x).[381] And although Olivia has tried to manipulate her memories by scratching out Manolo from family photos (cf. 19), he, as the other men, continues to impose his (naked) presence comfortably on them. Different to the function of Olivia's naked body as sign of rebellion and liberation (also of threat to propriety and respectability) the men's nudity stands in for an invasive *machismo* particularly in Manolo's case. Their exhibitionist confidence accentuates sexual virility and ultimately the hetero-patriarchal control exerted over women's bodies.

In her reading of the novel, Sandlin suggests that Olivia's own spectral appearance and her communication strategy, referring to her sickness and apathy through which she summons Soledad, as well as the appearance and eventual exorcism of the ghosts function as sign of warning about patriarchal domination (cf. Sandlin 2013: 92). At a later point, Soledad discloses that Olivia's warning, "*I need to see Soledad [...] She doesn't have much time before Manolo gets her too*" (153-4), comes too late; she remembers the sexual abuse when her father "became a drunk" and "took a nap with me and Flaca" (191). Also, Olivia cannot

379 "the moment in which Olivia's experiences become an experience shared also by the artist Soledad, so, therefore, the fate of the two characters, the past and present, are intertwined by this transgenerational trauma" [my translation].

380 In *Breath Eyes Memory* it is the trauma of rape and nightmares that function as transnational connection and link the diasporic space, here it is the ghost of sex work that is revived in the metropole. Her being haunted by a yet unprocessed past indicates that Olivia may indeed be traumatized. A further indicator is that the details of Olivia's past are recounted by Soledad as Olivia may still be unable to access the memories in a coherent manner. Whether the appearance of the ghosts to Soledad means a transgenerational traumatization is debatable.

381 The authors further argue that "ghosts reveal pain that emerges when a society attempts to bury traumatic events" (Kröger/Anderson 2013: xiii).

save her daughter from the uncanny vision of the past that Soledad conjures up. By means of her strong imagination she thus discloses her mother's well-kept secret.

The appearance of the ghostly men, however, provides Soledad with a chance for action and revenge. Similar to her mother who 'archived' all these men in her tin box, who secretly engaged in the sex trade, in her tin box, and who kept evidence for the succeeding generation, Soledad documents their existence on canvas.[382] She does this, however, primarily to detect the paternal lineage. "I study the men and try to find a resemblance. With my sketch pad I try to capture their features" (205). While drawing she realizes a resemblance in each of the men, such as their eyes, ears, or cheekbones. In this strange semblance lies an uncanny experience for Soledad; here, she encounters something *unheimlich*, which means she encounters the familiar while at the same time she is confronted with the threatening unknown within the realm of the intimate. What follows is a metaphorical castration scene, which may be read as a comment on her own sexuality but also as a projection of her rage against the men and against the threatening presence of the phallus. As she continues to draw the men and phalli, "[e]very line on paper that captures their physical essence makes that part of them disappear. It's so amusing to see them dismembered [...] that I can't help but be completely evil and draw their penises" (205). In an attempt to torture them she "rip[s] the drawings into tiny pieces" (205). Although this act of destruction does not obliterate neither men nor their ghosts, it certainly is a performative act of punishment and emasculation. Considering the ghosts as symbols not just of the past but as continuity of heteropatriarchal influence and gendered forms of oppression, the scene, despite its symbolic brutality, marks a moment of resistance and self-empowerment.

Soledad's desperate search for her father, which is also a fundamental quest of origin and belonging – two concepts that are volatile in hundreds of years of Caribbean history of displacement –, is ultimately dismissed by Gorda: "What is a father anyway? A role. That's all. A parent is someone who makes sure you're fed, and have a place to live, who loves you until the day you die. You have that and more. You have all of us, mi'jita. You don't need any of these men to be your fathers" (200). Her plea to Soledad is to cherish the emotional richness her family already provides and the nurturing aspect of the community (which resonates with the generic feature of the coming-of-age novel). In the issue of unresolved fatherhood, the symbolic castration, and ultimately in Gorda's statement, the novel implicitly questions not the importance of the father

382 That way, she transfers imagined, symbolically charged bodies into a material dimension.

but rather traditional family constellations and allocated roles. The novel in this instance functions as womanist intervention to readjust the focus on a family model that departs from the nuclear family and ceases to be supportive of a destructive masculinity.

Hence, on the surface, *Soledad* not only reproduces but also reifies gendered binaries and stereotypes. Olivia and Gorda eventually break out of this binary to realize they are better off without men. Despite its generally heteronormative notions of gender, the novel remains skeptical of the traditional Western concept of the nuclear family and eventually foregrounds women-centered familial constellations which is not uncommon for ethnic, minority literatures with a feminist or womanist impetus. If we consider Dominican history and gender roles to be of ongoing relevance in the diaspora, then, I argue, at this point, Angie Cruz questions the valence of dictatorial discourses of masculinity. Trujillo's self-fashioning as the *Padre de la Patria Nueva* continues to influence political discourses of the succeeding generations in the Dominican Republic and the diaspora communities as more recently demonstrated by Rafael Hipólito Mejía Domínguez, the country's president from 2000 to 2004, whose electoral slogan for presidency in 2012 "Llegó Papá" ties in with the paternalistic semantics of the *Trujillato*. The novel's questioning of the role of a father figure in the family is also implicitly challenging to the patriarchal authority of the nation. The reconsideration of the role of the father as suggested by Cruz urges to overcome this kind of machismo as formative of both male and female subjectivity and identity in the diaspora.[383] Soledad, in symbolically castrating the men who could be her father, and Olivia, in burning the list of these men, both extinguish the paternal lineage. In this denial of the 'Law of the Father' we can read a symbolic eradication of the patriarchal discourse of machismo and masculine oppression. Interestingly enough, the Taíno name for the Dominican Republic, still in use today, is *Quisqueya*, the Mother of all Lands (cf. Higman 2011: 33), to which Soledad and Olivia turn to in their recovery.

383 For an in-depth discussion of how the U.S.-occupation and Trujillo have shaped masculinist ideology and gender politics in the postcolonial and post-dictatorship Dominican Republic and how these are challenged by the literature of the twenty- and twenty-first century, see Maja Horn's insightful book *Masculinity After Trujillo* (2014).

7.7 Coming of Age and the Un-/becoming of the Subject

So far, the analysis has focused on practices and politics of the body as well as gender performances and relations which inform subject development and the construction of Dominican diaspora identity. As in the three preceding analytical chapters, the final section, too, is concerned with genre matters. In the following, I pay attention not only to the novel's communal or relational form, the incorporation of various generic elements, or to how the diaspora is evoked through a fragmented narrative of multiple perspectives and back-and-forth movement. I also consider the ways the novel reconstruct the coming-of-age process via the body through the narration of physical change and symbolic corporeal dissolution.

If the body is permeable, the coming-of-age genre, too, is characterized by an openness to incorporate aesthetic elements of other genres, blurring strictly defined genre boundaries. Cruz interweaves aspects of the *Künstlerroman* in the depiction of Soledad's coming of age and attempt at becoming an artist as well as her confrontation with her family in her paintings. Moreover, associated with the boom of Latin American fiction is the emergence of magical realism. Likewise, fiction under the *latino* label is associated, too, with magical realism. The title Cruz has chosen for her novel makes explicit intertextual reference to the novel *Cien años de Soledad* by Gabriel García Marquéz, the prime example of magical realism. The parallel to García Marquez is established already in the blurb and on the book cover where it says the novel is "teeming with raw beauty, danger, and magic;" it is a "real yet often magical novel" full of "myth and mysticism" and "tinted with the magical realism of Gabriel García Marquéz." The magical elements are usually included to describe that what cannot be grasped and put adequately in words and provides alternative forms of knowledge. "U.S. Latino writers [...] embrace this narrative technique as a way to distort and confuse the readers' understanding of what is true and what is magical and to cause them to question their sense of reality [and] to shake up certain ideological beliefs, stereotypes, and misconceptions" (Christie/Gonzalez 2006: 11).

With *Soledad*, Angie Cruz has written a story of adolescent female development and subject formation. For this reason, literary scholars label the novel as *Bildungsroman* – without however engaging in a more detailed analysis of the implications and features of the genre itself – and emphasize the diasporic element in the text which manifests itself on the level of content as well as aesthetically. Brüske, for example, analyzes the politics of space, trauma, and

memory in the novel; she reads the text as a *Bildungsroman* which, according to her, deals with cultural conflicts and the search for identity between two worlds: the United States and the Dominican Republic (cf. Brüske 2013: 89). In *The Tears of Hispaniola*, Lucía M. Suárez considers whether we could talk about the emergence of "a new genre of Dominican diaspora women's bildungsromans" (2006: 163). The novels of this "new genre," among which she also counts *Soledad*, deal with "women's struggles for self-affirmation – social, sexual, political – against a backdrop of illiteracy, machismo, and racism. Thus they stress women's possible paths to personhood: self-acceptance, self-esteem, education, financial independence" (ibid.). But when we speak of a new genre, as Suárez does, should we still retreat to an old-fashioned term and genre? While I depart from their use of terminology, this genre is unmistakably diasporic. Cruz, too, contrasts her portrayal of New York inner-city life and (Latina) ethnic experiences with snapshots of a coming of age in the Caribbean: The novel deals with the immigrant experiences of Dominicans in the U.S. and with diaspora community belonging with a focus on the effects that the migration experience, economic marginalization, and attempts of integration and assimilation may have on the subject, while also being concerned with the affiliations to the island. This is explicitly expressed in Doña Sosa's 'two-placed attachment': Her "head is in the campo and [… her] heart is in love with Americanisms […]. My grandmother is split between ideas, countries, her dreams and what's real" (11). In addition, whereas Soledad's observation of the surroundings of the Washington Heights neighborhood conveys a sense of Dominican diaspora life,[384] the dream sequences of Olivia provide insights into their life in the Dominican Republic.

Of the four novels considered in this study, *Soledad* may offer the most 'conventional' form similar to the *Bildungsroman* plot in terms of movement, adolescent search for independence, and a seemingly linear development of the subject.[385] For instance, the main characters both leave or rather escape from the family home, moving either from the Dominican countryside to a more

384 Dominican flags and newspapers mark the neighborhood as Dominican. The reader is made to feel the thick humidity of the 164th Street, smells onions and cilantro, and hears the merengue blaring through the streets (cf. 3).

385 Rishoi describes the motif of movement and development in the traditional *Bildungsroman* thusly: "The boy's search for his true vocation is the outward manifestation of his simultaneous search for selfhood, usually requiring him to leave his family and home at a young age to find his own path as an individual. Moving from a rural, protected home to a dangerous urban setting brings about the most significant educational experiences of his life, leading first to self-doubt, but ultimately to a reconciliation with the world" (Rishoi 2003: 59). What is important to note is that the home space in Cruz' novel does not provide Soledad and Olivia with safety.

urban, touristy area and then to metropolitan New York or from up-town to down-town in their attempts to break up parental connections and seek education and better living conditions. However, the textual structure and the novel's narrative strategy – the use of multiple embedded story lines, memory fragments, and flashbacks that integrate the past as relevant part of the present – defy any linear logic breaking up a teleological quest plot. In addition, Soledad's return to the maternal home in Washington Heights as well as the journey to the Dominican Republic that mother and daughter undergo at the end of the novel with the aim of re- and self-discovery – and here the novel imagines a kind of rebirth – create a circular movement. The expression "It's all one big cycle of events" (90), uttered by Gorda, who is addressing Soledad in order to soothe her niece's anger towards her mother Olivia emphasizing the intergenerational relationship between mothers and daughters, hinting, as well, at the journey to selfhood, may be understood as emblematic for the construction of identity and subject development that is not straightforward but a circuitous route.

As the narration shifts from one perspective to another, from past to present, from New York to Puerto Plata, a sense of diasporic fragmentation and dispersal is created. In departing from the portrayal of a linear process of *Bildung*, the novel transcends space and merges different temporal levels as it intermingles the plot lines of multiple coming-of-age or coming-to-consciousness stories. Whereas Olivia's episodic flashbacks are in a chronological order starting with the painful memories of her young adulthood in the Dominican Republic progressing towards the present, Soledad's reluctant process of remembering runs not only antipodal but also in a disorderly manner. The initial narrative distance reflects the emotional distance between mother and daughter, best illustrated in the image of two "repelling magnets" (7), as Soledad describes their relationship. From its beginning, the narrative present – Olivia's breakdown, Soledad's return, and their trip to the Dominican Republic – is interrupted by the memories of the two protagonists – sex work, migration, Soledad's birth, domestic violence, Manolo's death, and Soledad's moving out (cf. Brüske 2013: 94).[386] These two levels are eventually intermingled when Soledad invokes the ghosts of the past which initiates first Soledad's break-down and then Olivia's and Soledad's parallel re-awakening. The frequency of the occur-

386 The motif of return is one aspect of the diasporic genre. Return is never permanent for the protagonists but nevertheless often a necessary process in order to obtain peace of mind and closure of unresolved issues. In the case of Soledad, indeed, "to complete her cycle, she needs to recover some kind of ancestral home by coming going [sic] back to the Dominican Republic" (Cruz/Torres-Saillant 2003: 126).

rences of the flashbacks increases towards the end of the novel alternating with Soledad's point of view up to the point where they are synchronized.

Moreover, the choice of the title might suggest that the novel moves away from the communal and collective character of Caribbean coming-of-age fiction, seemingly placing the individual story of one young Dominican-American woman in the center of attention. The title and the eponymous heroine hint at social isolation, loneliness, and withdrawal rather than an overt celebration of community belonging and (interethnic) solidarity typical for migrant fiction. This is undermined, however, by the two major intertwined plot lines pertaining to Soledad and Olivia as well as multiple sub-plots which, taken together, form a community. The strong presence and significance of the community, despite the title, are reflected also in the narrative situation by means of the plurality, even cacophony, of voices and different entangled perspectives. The different characters who inhabit the *barrio* are granted a voice to tell their stories. Neither Olivia nor Soledad are 'characters of dissent,' because they distance themselves only temporary from the community, the socialization therein, and their family. This is the most obvious in Soledad's return to Washington Heights. As a matter of fact, all characters rely on the supportive structure of the family maintained mainly by women. Not surprisingly, hence, the triadic constellation of grandmother, mother (and sister), and granddaughter is of substantial importance just like in the three novels discussed previously.

Christy Rishoi's work on women-authored coming-of-age narratives notes that in this genre, a preoccupation with the body and affirmation of "the embodiedness of identity" is of crucial importance (2003: 12). *Soledad*, too, is obvious in its juxtaposition of the coming-of-age genre with the body. Correspondingly, what stands out is the concern with body matters and use of body metaphors to illustrate development and to display the un-/becoming of the subject. The naming of the characters is telling in itself, referencing either body parts or physical appearance such as Gorda (fat), Flaca (skinny), Pito (tiny), Toe-Knee, Ciego (blind), or Pelao (bald). This also serves the purpose to include Spanish speech and describe the characters as belonging to the Hispanic minority, as embodiments, or rather personification of an ethnic identity. Noteworthy, too, is the naming of persons in correspondence to their skin color especially in the case of Olivia and Caramel. By means of such description, Cruz explicitly marks the Latina body as non-white, different to Soledad, nor black or *morena* like Flaca's Haitian friend Caty or Victor's girlfriend Isabel.

The pivotal moments in the protagonists' coming-of-age processes are staged on their bodies and thus made comprehensible for the reader. This refers to the adolescent 'discovery' of sexuality as well as to the spiritual baptism and

renaissance of mother and daughter, which means both the liberation of the body and the unification of body and spirit in a magical moment of renewal. In the final scene, for example, in a rather reductive equation of the female body with nature, the nurturing safety of the life-giving womb is evoked, symbolized by the mysterious lake in the Dominican Republic from which mother and daughter emerge healed and with new found strength (cf. 223-227).

Furthermore, Cruz uses the images of fruits and plants in order to illustrate the transformation and transience of the female body. The teenaged Flaca, for instance, "*believes in love and passion [...] her life as a garden about to bloom*" (102). In this quote, youth and the adolescent female body in particular are associated with the fertility of flowers and the unspoiled nature of the bud. Coming of age and the awakening of adolescent sexuality is projected on the imagery of the garden obtaining a sensual, luscious note with a spark of curiosity (a similar image is applied in Silvera's novel in the characters Petal and Rose, who are emblematic for sexual emergence, as well as Molly's affinity for gardening). In stark contrast to a pure and blooming adolescence, one may assume, stands the aging, maternal body that apparently has passed its prime. It is especially Olivia's social and psychological withdrawal that translates into bodily decay, which is likewise described in botanical terms. In fact, in her apathy Olivia experiences her body as "*hard and stiff like an old fruit rind*" (25); and Soledad takes note of her mother's "fingers open like flowers ready to die" (9). This image of the withering flower, different to the lush fertile garden, is, however, not meant to dissociate maternity and adult womanhood from an active sexuality; it rather describes a sick, unhealthy body that is fading away.

The bodily decay of Olivia is made even more explicit in Gorda's observation: "Olivia hides behind the beautiful face but is rotting inside, smelling like stale water" (108). The 'decomposing' state of the female body defines it as close to nature and simultaneously lays open its dysfunctional materiality (or flesh). In this naturalization of the body and abjection, the subject is reduced to a rotten corporeality and marginalized from social interaction. It is an imperfect body perceived by the self as a source of disgust: "*My own sweat repulses me. When I'm touched I want to scream*" (25). Having learnt that the body fluids emanating from the female body are socially coded as unclean, the subject experiences its own body as repulsive and painful.

Corporeal feminists investigate the cultural signification and representation of body liquids and point out how "women's corporeality is inscribed as a mode of seepage" (Grosz 1994: 203). Grosz furthermore argues that "[b]ody fluids attest to the permeability of the body [...]. They affront a subject's aspiration toward autonomy and self-identity. They attest to a certain irreducible 'dirt' or

disgust, a horror of the unknown or the unspecifiable [...]. In our culture, they are enduring; they are necessary but embarrassing" (1994: 193-4).[387] Not only does the improper, soiled body signify contamination, which leads to the de-subjectivization of "fragile Olivia" (155), but the leaking body also implies its own uncontrollability.[388] This underlines the fragility of the apathetic body, the apparent weakness of the female body, and its subsequent self-alienation. An ultimate stage in the dissolution (or unbecoming) of the subject is indicated when Olivia is found "asleep like a corpse" (134).[389] In her symbolic death comes forth not just an incompletion but a split of the subject in which the deathlike body is separated from a hyper-active mind and wandering spirit. The split of the subject is also indicated by the circumstance that Olivia's "body is doing what it needs to survive [...], but her spirit is somewhere else all together [sic]" (57). The dualism indicated here is thus unhealthy because the interaction of body and mind is inhibited and the unity of the two disrupted. She moves (or 'de-emerges') from having and being a body to losing that body.

Whereas Molly, Mona, and Sophie encounter their selves either through a look in the mirror or photographs (seeing either themselves or their mothers), the mirror stage in this novel, implying at the same time both the recognition of the subject *and* an alienation from the self, is evoked narratively through a doubling or mirroring of mother and daughter: Soledad experiences a similar coming-of-age process as her mother, which in the novel is first a process of bodily 'unbecoming' followed by emotional healing and rebirth.

The novel opens with an epigraph reflecting Olivia's thoughts. Therein she imagines a blood-red orange and that she wishes "*to squish [her]self inside a tangerine and sleep among the seeds.* [...] *I want to let myself die and live in dreams*" (n.p.). This should not to be mistaken as a death-wish, but rather as an expression of the need to rest and be free from societal pressure. The fruit imagery and the retreat into sleep are mirrored on to Soledad: "I dropped and cracked just like a ripe pomegranate. My skin broke and my soul spilled out like pomegranate juice onto the floor" (205). Soledad's own disposition throughout the novel, the sentiment of loss of consciousness, passivity, and bodily dissolution, increasingly resembles Olivia's. Apparently, the longer she stays at her mother's home and the more time she spends investigating and

387 Her argument is based on the works of Julia Kristeva on the abject in *Powers of Horror* (1982) and Mary Douglas' *Purity and Danger* (1966) (cf. Grosz 1994: 192-197).

388 In this uncontrollability lies the danger of the female body which is perceived both as an impure entity and as threat to patriarchal rule.

389 Kristeva distinguishes between different categories of the abject. One of these categories is abjection towards bodily waste and the horror of the corpse (cf. Grosz 2014: 193).

confronting her past, the more she retreats into sleep and dreams; she does so up to the point when she "can't tell whether [she is] dreaming or awake" (188). Soledad, too, seems apathetic: "I'm tired and I finally give into the weight of my body that sinks deep into the mattress" (186). Heavy with the burden of her body she, like her mother, "want[s] to fall asleep forever" (191). Olivia and Soledad both need to resolve existential issues and they use their bodies to do so. Mother and daughter are connected in their pain and bodily reaction to it: "I feel a burning hole inside my belly" (188). The hole stands in for an absence or defect: They are trapped inside their own bodies, which they have come to experience as defective and defined by limiting ascriptions.

Despite Olivia's performance of corporeal decay and Soledad's fall into numbness, the narrative reverses these processes by staging the awakening of both women. In the scene in which Victor takes his sister inside from the open window and puts her to bed, Olivia returns to a quasi-embryonic stage as she "folds over into a fetal position covering her head" (45). Also, the epigraph quoted above indicates Olivia's longing for the safety of the womb symbolized by the tangerine and its seeds among which she would like to rest. Her "scream" (226), when Soledad is about to drown in the lake in the attempt to save her photograph from the water, then, marks not only the moment of her awakening but also the pain of labor and partum. One may argue that her finding and using language again is a return to the symbolic order or the law of the father (Lacan). Soledad's rebirth as well as the strong bond between mother and daughter are illustrated in the following quote:

> And when I surrender to the warmth of the water, I feel the past, present and future become one. My mother becomes the ocean and the sky, wrapping herself around me. […] I can hear the high pitch of my mother's scream. It makes the water lift itself into a wave. […] See the world […]. And when I find myself washed up on the rocks, I lie down to catch my breath. When I open my eyes, my mother is holding me. (227)

In this final scene, in Soledad's return to the maternal womb, the novel not only imagines a cyclic process of becoming woman. It also fuses the temporal dimensions of past, present, and future which constitute at the same time in its synthesis the unity of identity, the biography of the subject. With all that one is, with everything one was, one is all that what one will be in the future. The subject in various facets is – at the same time – always the same and ever changing.

7.8 Concluding Remarks

Angie Cruz' novel integrates a somewhat philosophical subtext in its negotiation of identity formation and a mind-body-dualism, which is especially hinted at in Olivia's apathetic state, her immobile body, and wandering spirit. The quest for a wholesome subjectivity, women's emancipation, and self-love, indicated, for instance, by Olivia's wish for her daughter to "find[...] comfort in her own skin" (68), is accommodated in the coming-of age plot of the novel. Olivia's resistance in her sleep and refusal to speak is her self-imposed choice of voicelessness in contrast to the one imposed by colonial domination, patriarchy, or American mainstream culture.[390] Also, we can read this state as her refusal to act as the representative of the family or even her ethnic community. Although she remains silent throughout almost the entire novel, meaning she refuses to verbally interact with her surrounding, her 'voice' is privileged through italicized script and the epigraph dedicated to her thoughts. The reader is granted access to her thoughts. Olivia's interior monologue provides insights into a troubled mind that is far from being incarcerated in an inactive body.

In spite of the allegation that immigrant Latina/o literature displays an apolitical tendency, voiced in particular by Juan Flores (cf. 2001: 174; see 7.3), *Soledad*, which I count among a Caribbean diaspora literary tradition, takes a critical oftentimes political stand. The novel makes reference, although superficially, to the political void after Trujillo and the economic situation that forced many Dominicans to leave the country (cf. 167), as well as the local dependency on remittances sent from abroad (cf. 97). Cruz takes issue with sexual labor and tourism in the Caribbean along with the colonial continuity of bodily (s)exploitation and persisting power structures of neo-colonialism which makes obvious the vulnerability of postcolonial citizenship, especially for working class women. Olivia's story emblematizes the sexual exploitation of Caribbean working-class women by wealthier men from Europe, North and South America – but also from within the Caribbean – who travel to the Caribbean for sex tourism. The novel deciphers the psychological consequences on part of the sex worker and different forms of bodily violations along with the position of the Black and Latina body in a power matrix of the global and the local.

390 Read in the context of the dictatorship and its aftermath, Olivia's silence could be interpreted as being symbolic for both the politics of concealment fostered by the Trujillo regime as well as the silence of and non-interference by the West. Her silence, however, can also be read as emancipatory insofar as it is her own will to remain silent. Olivia's silence further evokes the missing voice of Latina writers, Dominican in particular, from the literary scene at the beginning of the millennium.

Sheller points out the embodied dimension inherent in tourism. She describes the encounter between local people and foreigners as "corporeal relations of unequal power" (Sheller 2012: 210). Here, the sex worker's body functions as projection of racialized desire and domination; at the same time, it may also be regarded as locus of social status, a hope for upward mobility, and ultimately access to civic participation. Inscribed in Olivia's body, however, are hegemonic gender and racial relations that inhibit her exchanging her sexuality for material benefits or a better living. The transaction happens on unequal terms resulting in a recolonization of the body. Being forced into prostitution is connected on the one side with patriarchal domination, and on the other side capitalist interests. The women do not benefit from tourism, although the national economy relies on the productive body of the prostitute, its availability, and serviceability, or as Alexander points out on "women's sexual labor, and the economic productivity of women's service work" (2005: 51). The novel shows that this productivity generated by women's sexuality ultimately benefits foreign interests.

Additionally, Cruz fictionalizes damaging gender roles, patriarchal structures, and machismo as embedded in the everyday life of a Dominican community. The novel negotiates lived experiences while problematizing restrictive body politics on several levels. Reading for the body, race and gender politics discloses the marginalization of subjectivities, frequently in tandem with an implicit or explicit criticism of underlying social values and moral principles. As is the case in *Soledad*, it lays bare the boundaries of gender and desirable patterns of masculinity and femininity.

The novel takes further issue with belonging, thereby raising questions of ethnic identity, community membership, and assimilation. Different to the postcolonial impetus embodied by the character Caramel along with her affirmation of a pan-Latina identity and solidarity – which Cruz deliberately establishes by intertextually referencing Sandra Cisnero's *Caramelo* (2002) – Soledad, by leaving the *barrio* of Washington Heights, refuses for a moment to take on the role as cultural translator and to act as representative of the ethnic community.

Indeed, moving beyond the fictional level of the novel to the socio-cultural level, migrant experiences and the diaspora position may lead to the creation and occupation of in-between spaces. Angie Cruz confirms this by her own experience admitting that she "was never American enough in this country or […] never Dominican enough over there" (Torres-Saillant 2003: 126). In this context of uncertainty, of partial belonging and sometimes silence, what gains importance are writing and memories. One sentence in the novel, Gorda, hints

exactly at this: "There is a certain power to words, memories, ideas when one writes them down" (196). In conclusion, and here I build on the arguments of Ifeona Fulani (2005) and Elena Machado Sáez (2015), one may read this as a plea to the diaspora writer to raise her voice; one may also read this as acknowledgement of Caribbean literature in the reading market and its political functioning in the literary field of the mainstream.