

LIVING IN LIMBO: CREATING TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES IN
LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

LIVING IN LIMBO: CREATING TRANSNATIONAL IDENTITIES IN LITERATURE

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This thesis examines the ways transnational identities are created in three works of fiction: Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), and Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness* (2000). I base my analysis on Stephen Clingman's articulation of the nature(s) of transnational literature: that is particularly concerned with boundaries and their navigation; Benedict Anderson's concept of the *imagined community*. Putting these theories into play with each other, I look at various transnational identities the protagonists of these texts create—how they must imagine themselves to be members of multiple, sometimes conflicting, nations, and how they learn to navigate the boundaries between these nations. I also examine which characters “benefit” from their transnationalism and why, based on their various nexuses of race, gender, ethnicity, class, and location in temporal and historical space. Antonio Benítez-Rojo's theory of the *repeating island* serves as the backbone for my concluding thoughts, in which I posit the idea that what distinguishes transnational literature from other literatures is its distortion and interruption of chronological time. Throughout the work, I incorporate concepts from outside the world of literary theory in order to emphasize the fact that, although this thesis deals with literary texts, the identities created within the texts also exist, and are of primary importance, outside literature.

CHAPTER ONE
NAVIGATING BOUNDARIES: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE
TRANSNATIONAL

When asked, “Where are you from?” some people answer without conscious thought: their birthplace, where their family is located, wherever feels like home. This seemingly innocuous question is quietly loaded, however, revealing in its innocent query a primary building block of the way we construct our identities. “Where are you from?” asks the inquiree not only to identify a physical location (often singular) of origin but also to—at least partially—construct one’s identity in relationship to that physical location. Thus “I am from ____” becomes a way in which we identify ourselves as well as a way for others to identify us. And just as for some the answer to this question is simple, for others it is anything but. These “others” are the subject of this exploration, in part because their status as “other” is, like so many things, a construction that falls apart under scrutiny, and not just in a transnational context. To say that being in some sense transnational—that is, belonging to or identifying with more than one “nation” (a term that merits its own deconstruction)—is “other” than the “norm” is to ignore the world as we now know it, and yet identifying with a singular physical location is still a primary way in which we orient ourselves to the people around us. I wish to explore the creation of transnational identities in three works of literature spanning time and place—three works that, to borrow Caryl Phillips’s phrase, address the “vexing question of ‘belonging’” (xiii): Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, published in 1966, Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, published in 1991, and Zakes Mda’s *The Heart of Redness*, published in

2000. Each of these texts is, at its core, a search for identity and belonging, and each text addresses this search in a way that helps illuminate what it means to live in a transnational environment.

It may be helpful first of all to define some terms. Why transnational, and not postcolonial or global? The choice is deliberate, and one especially relevant to this grouping of texts. Ania Loomba et.al. argue that texts like Rhys's, Alvarez's, and Mda's require a unique awareness of the past and its impact on the present, and as such it is important "that we make explicit why we write, and to what institutional and ideological purposes" (14). Let us then begin with *postcolonial*: this term's usage ranges from a temporal space—the time after colonization's official end—to an ideological viewpoint—resistance to and struggle against the forces of colonization. In order to understand transnationalism, one must almost necessarily borrow both the temporal and ideological frameworks of postcolonialism. The term *postcolonial*, however, has a finality to it that is uncomfortable, and this finality asks us to question whether we are actually living in a postcolonial age. To address this question, some theorists distinguish further between *colonial* and *imperial*. Edward Said, for example, defines *imperialism* as "the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan center ruling a distant territory" and *colonialism*, "which is almost always a consequence of imperialism," as "the implanting of settlements on distant territory" (9). In this sense I can agree with Said's claim that "In our time, direct colonialism has largely ended" (9). The caveat to this statement, Said points out, is that imperialism "lingers where it has always been, in a kind of general cultural sphere as well as in specific political, ideological, economic, and social practices" (9). If *colonialism* as Said defines it is indeed

over, then we live temporally in a *post*-colonial age—however, rather than colonialism as a “consequence” of imperialism, these theories in practice seem to function in reverse: imperialism has become the ideological legacy of colonial domination. Elleke Boehmer identifies this situation as *neo-colonialism*, a term she borrows from economic theory that “signifies the continuing economic control by the West of the once-colonized world” (9). Boehmer describes this neo-colonialism as a “less overt, some might say more insidious, form” of the colonialism of the past (9). If we blend Said’s and Boehmer’s definitions, we arrive in a space in which imperial powers no longer need to implant settlements in order to dominate; instead, rule is enforced and encouraged through cultural ideologies that establish all things Western as the pinnacle of world power and culture. Antonio Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony explains this phenomenon as one in which a ruling class (in this case, the “West”) establishes and maintains dominance over other classes (“nations”) by justifying, to put it simply, the way things *are* as the way they *should be*. In neo-colonial cultural hegemony, the West maintains its place of power by (arguably more or less effectively) convincing the rest of the world that it *deserves* said power. One need only think about the location of the headquarters of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to begin to consider the way the global economy is shaped by these neo-colonialist forces. Thus, in order to grapple with transnationalism, one must first grapple with postcolonialism. But what does this have to do with literature? This question brings us back to defining our terms.

It no longer seems useful to describe contemporary works of literature as only *postcolonial*, if only because many of these works are marked by much more than simply their origination in a previously colonized place—as though these texts and their authors

must necessarily be forever defined by their previous relationship to the colonizer. But what alternatives are there in defining a text, other than by what has come before it? A seemingly popular alternative, both in literary criticism and general usage, is the term *global* in its various manifestations. In his theoretical exploration of transnationalism, *The Grammar of Identity*, Stephen Clingman somewhat unintentionally articulates the most basic issue with this term: that to think of the world as global or globalizing can sometimes lead to “naïve celebrations of hybridity or the multicultural” (6). In other words, choosing *global* instead of *post-colonial* may in fact be a turn too far in the other direction, toward a view of the world that, in its attempt to define the world by something other than its past, runs the risk of glossing over historical legacies entirely. Loomba, et. al., sum up the problem in the introduction to *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*:

The popular rhetoric of globalization suggests that the world is becoming a better place to live through an intensification of economic interdependence, technological interconnectedness, and cultural linkage. The demise of state power, according to the boosters of globalization, has led to a positive diffusion of authority, while technological advances have enabled a more mobile and pluralistic sense of cultural and political identity. These would obviously constitute salutary developments were it not for the fact that they remain available only to a tiny and privileged minority. (76)

This rhetoric of globalization is first of all based on the subjective assumption that the world is an increasingly pleasant place to be, and that the heightened connectivity of economies, technologies, and cultures has contributed to this pleasantness. This interpretation of course asks us to query: pleasant for whom? Perhaps for select world

citizens with access to money and resources, but anyone would be hard-pressed to argue that much has changed for a large portion of the world. This theory of globalization likewise depends upon the “demise of state power,” which is again an arguable point. Perhaps the “state” as we may think of it (sometimes interchangeable with *nation*, sometimes as a sort of *sub*-nation) has lost power in a global context, but the borders between states and nations have not lost their power to define and circumscribe who belongs where, and why. As Loomba et.al. emphasize earlier in the introduction, “although the borders of nation-states have become increasingly porous with the emergence of global politics and the spread of free-trade zones, national governments continue to exercise a great deal of power in planning and shaping the ways in which their countries are globalized” (71). What is important to note in this analysis is that political ideas and money are traversing through these borders with increasing ease, which may contribute to what Loomba et. al. describe as a “positive diffusion of authority,” yet the fact remains that the governments of nations and states remain in control of the extent to which these globalizing factors play a role in the reality of life in said nation or state. I will concede to Loomba et. al.’s final claim that advances in technology may have led to a “more mobile and pluralistic sense of cultural and political identity,” at least for those who have access to the cultural and political choices provided by technology; the most vital piece of the puzzle, however, is that only a “tiny and privileged” minority have access to the features that enable this particular theory of globalization to function. Loomba et.al. acknowledge: “While national borders may no longer impede international trade and global economic transactions, they do nonetheless matter greatly when it comes to human subjects whose movements are carefully

regulated” (73). Again, in the “globalized” world, money moves freely, while people often do not.

The “rhetoric of globalization” does not seem like a viable descriptor for the reality of contemporary life or literature any more than *postcolonial* does; while the latter seems to sometimes ignore the ways the world has changed in recent history, the former refuses to acknowledge the ways in which neocolonialism still very much affects people. The option I prefer instead is the term *transnational*. As a theoretical lens, *transnational* recognizes the still-strong presence of nationalistic borders and ideologies while also acknowledging the increasing mobility available to particular individuals in our contemporary age. In other words, transnationalism recognizes the need to understand history and historical legacy without defining peoples solely by the past, while simultaneously recognizing that the world has been marching onward despite attempts to categorize and define it, and that new understandings are needed of how imperialism and colonialism together constitute one, albeit vital, layer in the creation of the modern global environment. Thus I will refer to the works of literature I have chosen for analysis as *transnational* texts, meaning that their existence speaks to the fact that borders are always simultaneously in the process of being created and of being crossed.

To call something *transnational*, however, requires defining first of all of what a *nation* is. Crafting this definition takes us first to Ernst Renan’s 1882 lecture at the Sorbonne. In the address, succinctly titled “What is a Nation?” Renan posits his theory of civic nationalism, the idea that nationality is built upon something other than ethnicity or race (which were the popular concepts of nationalism at the time). Renan argues that nations are a relatively recent historical phenomenon; according to him, a nation is a

“spiritual principle,” not based on “race, language, material interest, religious affinities, geography, and military necessity” as his contemporaries believed, but instead on “the possession in common of a rich legacy of memories” as well as “present-day consent, the desire to live together, the will to perpetuate the value of the heritage that one has received in an undivided form.” Thus Renan’s argument is an early conceptualization of the idea that what makes a nation may have more to do with the mental processes of *choosing* an allegiance to a particular constituency than with any physical space delineated by geographic boundaries. This concept of civic nationalism underpins the first key element of the theoretical framework that undergirds this analysis: that of Benedict Anderson’s definition of the nation as an “imagined political community” (6). Published in 1983, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* Anderson defines the nation slightly differently than Renan: “imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6). The texts that serve as the cornerstone of this analysis do not and cannot meet Anderson’s criteria exactly, although the concept of an *imagined community* is at the heart of what it means to be transnational. On a very literal level, these texts defy Anderson’s definition on two primary points: first, these texts and the characters within them deal with the transitional nature of being transnational—that is to say, transnationality at its core is an exercise in fluidity, or transition between and among nations. As such, what does it mean to by necessity need to imagine oneself as a member of multiple, sometimes contradictory, nations? The texts under consideration ask whether it is even possible, or beneficial, to “buy into” the limitation or the sovereignty of multiple nations at the same time. Secondly, the term “transnational” implies a definition of the self in opposition to or difference from the other. Much the way *post-*

colonial defines its status in relationship to an era, *trans-national* defines its status in relationship to the nation. As a prefix commonly denoting the ideas of across, beyond, or opposite to, *trans*-national becomes by definition the state of being outside of, in between, across, or beyond nations. This second point further complicates Anderson's concept in that one must first imagine the nation(s) one is then across, beyond, or opposite to, and then imagine oneself across, beyond, or opposite to it/them.

The second key concept to my exploration is Stephen Clingman's description of the grammar(s) of identity—the ways in which literature is both a reflection of the world and a world unto itself—and the idea of navigation in relationship to the various boundaries present in these worlds. As Clingman puts it, transnational literature asks us to “rethink the nature of boundaries, whether within or between individuals, within or across nations, or as a defining characteristic of the transnational” (2). Clingman's theories thus build on Anderson's: if the nation is an imagined community, transnational by implication means membership in multiple imagined communities. Thus one of the projects of transnational literature and its criticism is reimagining the shape and scope of these nations and the boundaries between them. As Clingman says, “navigation occurs not despite but because of the boundary” (21); it is the boundary itself that allows for the navigation inherent in transnational literature. Literally speaking, if there were no boundary, what would there be to navigate?

Rhys, Alvarez, and Mda each navigate these boundaries in unique ways, and yet their literature shares a few common threads: in each work, transnational identities are defined and created in relationship to the orientation of the text in space and time as well as various characters' participation and affiliation with cultural markers and relationship

to key historical moments. In the spirit of much postmodern fiction, these works distort and disorient chronological time, interrogating the way history is structured and shaped. This temporal play is a crucial feature of these texts, so much so that I incorporate Antonio Benítez-Rojo's ideas of Chaos and repetition to argue, in the conclusion, that time is *the* critical element of transnational fiction. Physical location is also still key, although perhaps less crucial than the term "national" might imply; instead, characters understand their physical location as *one* factor in the construction of their identities, rather than *the* factor. Each text likewise reveals an ambivalent relationship to language—whether through conflicts with naming or an in/ability to speak a mother tongue. Finally, each text revolves in some way around a central historical event that shapes and informs various characters' movements throughout the work.

Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, originally published in 1966, is considered a cornerstone of postcolonial literature in that it reimagines Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) from the perspective of Bertha Mason, the infamous madwoman in the attic. In Rhys's text, Bertha becomes Antoinette Mason, a white Creole girl living in Jamaica in the wake of the Emancipation Act of 1833, which promised eventual freedom to all slaves living in the British colonies. I use Rhys's work as a foundation for my analysis because *Wide Sargasso Sea* exemplifies the traits of transnational literature as outlined in the theoretical underpinning of this analysis: namely, the characters within the text must imagine themselves to be members of multiple nations and from there must learn to navigate the boundaries between those nations, and must do so within a non-linear temporal framework. Thus Antoinette, instead of being a colonial subject broken by the rigid boundaries between who she is and who she is not, can be read as attempting to

discover and assert her identity in the fluid spaces *between* nations. Antoinette must first learn to navigate what it means to be white Creole in Jamaica in the mid-1830's; she is later required to navigate what it means to be repatriated to a land she does not fully believe exists. She navigates these boundaries by consistently reimagining the nations: what is Caribbean, what is British. I read Antoinette as a Third Culture Kid, or TCK, defined by Gene Bell-Villada and Ruth Hill Useem as a child “raised in a country other than their passport country. Their culture is considered ‘Third’ because it combines elements of both the host nation(s) and his/her own nation of citizenship, without necessarily belonging to either of them” (412). The never-named Rochester must likewise consistently reimagine England as he struggles to understand the Caribbean around him. Both Antoinette and Rochester are put in their respective positions by the central historical event of the novel—the emancipation of the slaves of the British colonies—and both manipulate the text in various ways as they construct their respective identities. The structure of the novel itself destabilizes Antoinette and Rochester’s identities: the narration is split between these two characters, and, despite a general chronological progression, the novel may also be read as an illogical dream sequence as well as self-consciously meta-fictional—both requiring and denying association with its “master” narrative, Charlotte Brontë’s classic 1847 novel *Jane Eyre*. My analysis focuses on the ways Antoinette learns to navigate her identity in relationship to her mother and her husband in the three spatial locations within the novel: Coulibri, Granbois, and Thornfield Hall.

Julia Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, published in 1992, tells the story of the García family’s transition to the United States from the Dominican

Republic in the 1960's. The central historical "event" in the novel, of wider scope than Jamaica's Emancipation Act, is the Trujillo dictatorship, which ruled the Dominican Republic from 1930 until 1961. A ruthless dictator, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina was known for silencing dissidents; the García family's emigration is the result of the father's involvement in oppositional movements against Trujillo's regime. The Garcías are immigrants, aliens—identities that, unlike Antoinette's status as a TCK, are tied to a particular action, not inherent with birth. Katarzyna Marciniak articulates, "one becomes an alien when one crosses the border of a nation that then readily identifies the crosser as the non-native: a foreign-born person who wishes to become a resident" (9). Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, this novel asks the characters to imagine themselves as members both of the Dominican Republic and of the United States, and thus to navigate the boundaries between the two nations. The four daughters must navigate the boundaries of their identities within concentric circles: each girl as an individual, the girls as a unit within their immediate family, and their extended family in the context of the relationship between the Dominican Republic and the United States. As they spiral within these circles, the girls grapple with issues of language, economic status, and sexuality that must be negotiated not only in their adopted country but in their "homeland" as well. Unlike Antoinette and Rochester, however, there is no element of repatriation in this text; despite the father's visits to the United States prior to their emigration, when they finally move they are quite literally strangers in a strange land. The novel itself moves backward through time in three sections: Part I from 1989-1972, Part II from 1970-1960, and Part III from 1960-1956. As the novel progresses backward chronologically it simultaneously makes a return journey from the United States to the Dominican Republic; in doing so it

seems to emphasize Dominican identity while destabilizing said identity with the reader's knowledge of the families' "future" journey.

Zakes Mda's *The Heart of Redness*, published in 2000, features the most explicitly transnational character: Camagu, born in South Africa but educated and residing for an extended period of his adult life in the United States. I read Camagu as fitting Norma McCaig's paradigm of a "global nomad"—a broader, looser term than either TCK or immigrant/alien, referring to a rather malleable "internationally mobile" experience (51). Unlike Antoinette and the García family, Camagu chooses to leave his birthplace to travel abroad semi-permanently; the construction of his transnational identity is perhaps all the more complex for that choice. The central historical event in the novel is the Xhosa Cattle-Killing of the mid nineteenth century, in which the Xhosa people slaughtered hundreds of thousands of cattle in order to fulfill the requirements of a prophecy that promised the revitalization of their land, resources, and culture, independent of colonial rule. Mda's text circles back to join Rhys's in its involvement in colonial history; however, the text is set simultaneously in two temporal spaces: the time of the Cattle-Killing and the time following the end of apartheid in the 1990s. As the two times interweave and overlap, characters within the novel blend, separate, and blend again. Camagu's identity construction is a political act, rooted in the politics of capitalistic exchange as exemplified by his relationship with the neocolonial trader John Dalton, and the politics of desire, as revealed by his relationships with NomaRussia, Xoliswa Ximiya, and Qukezwa, three women connected to his adopted home of Qolorha-by-Sea.

A final caveat: analyzing these disparate texts side by side in no way implies that transnational experiences are the same across boundaries—that there is *a* transnational experience. Just as the nation is imagined, so too the *trans*-national is imagined, and each author imagines this experience differently. Likewise, historical, political, and cultural factors vary so greatly between nations that it is all but impossible to overlay experiences and expect identical results. The grammar(s) of identity are such that each author constructs transnational identity in a unique way; what I hope to do by putting these works into conversation with each other is to explore the process of navigation—understanding that it is the process of navigation, the construction of identity, that ultimately is the bedrock of what it means to be transnational.

CHAPTER TWO

“WE WERE NOT IN THEIR RANKS”: THIRD CULTURE IN *WIDE SARGASSO SEA*

Any discussion of Jean Rhys’s 1966 novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a transnational text would be remiss not to pay attention to Jean Rhys’s own transnational identity. Rhys was born in Roseau, the capital of Dominica, in 1890 as Ella Gwendolen Rees. Her father was a Welsh doctor and her mother a white Creole woman of Scottish ancestry. As Susheila Nasta points out, Rhys herself was considered white West Indian Creole. Martina Schellhorn-Ghosh helps define the term:

“Creole,” from the Spanish “*criollo*,” was originally a designation for the children of Spanish settlers in South American colonies. Later, its referential scope was extended to include the descendants of the French and Spanish migrants to Louisiana, those of European settlers in the West Indies, as well as the mulattoes. This latter usage was probably instrumental in stigmatizing the term of reference as applied to those who were “not quite right” due to a possible contamination of “pure” European blood. (179)

As Schellhorn-Ghosh’s summation indicates, Rhys’s status as white Creole carried a powerful stigma—per the mandates of British colonialism, Rhys was considered “English” (read: white) by virtue of her parentage. However, the modifier *Creole* denotes those English born outside of England, and in Rhys’s day created an aura of suspicion, based on ideas of racial purity and directed at those to whom the term applied.

Expatriates in the colonies understood their “homeland” as the colonizing country; it was almost universally assumed that their offspring would likewise adopt the

parents' homeland as their own. Yet the very term *Creole* is evidence of the fact that these offspring would never quite be considered colonial *enough*, despite the colonial mission being the reason behind their birth in the colony. The need for a unique term to denote the status of these "outsiders" indicates that they would never be able to fully cross into "insider" status—that is, they would never be fully white or English. Erica Johnson asks, "Did the child of European background, born and raised in the colonies, 'belong' in the land of her birth—in which case home was lost upon her repatriation to metropolitan Europe? Or did she belong in the unfamiliar reaches of Europe—in which case she could only desire a sense of belonging unavailable to her in the land of her birth?" (17). Rhys's own biography falls into this ambiguous category of belonging. Johnson points out that Dominica "remained under English control" until 1977, two years before Rhys's death, and that after she left the island in her teens, she returned only once for a short visit in 1936 (34). Thus the vast majority of Rhys's life was spent away from her birthplace, and despite the fact that she was legally considered British by birth and by heritage, "it is clear that she neither relinquished her Caribbean identity nor came to think of Europe as her home" (Johnson 34).

Rhys's biography vexes the colonial concept of the motherland in significant ways, not the least of which is the sense of alienation present in many of her works. Johnson notes, "In her most powerful novels and stories, Rhys conveys her sense of dislocation as a colonial migrant welcome in neither Dominica nor England; she expresses her yearning for a place to call home, as well as her realization that such a place can exist only at an angle to her lived experience" (34). It is tempting to assign the Creole subject an identity aligned with the place of birth—in other words, to say that

Rhys did not fit into or identify with England because she was Dominican at heart. Ann Morris and Margaret Duncan make this assumption when they argue that as “the fiction and poetry of West Indian writers makes clear, it is Dominica or Jamaica or Barbados or Antigua that is truly the homeland, the motherland” (219). In Rhys’s case, however, and arguably in many other narratives written by repatriates, there is in fact no satisfactory “motherland,”—and indeed, no satisfactory mother—as the birth country is no more welcoming than the so-called ancestral homeland.

The difficulty in assigning Rhys to a category of belonging lies in the fact that she is, as many (most) other transnationals are, not quite one thing and not quite fully another. This ambiguity is present in much of Rhys’s fiction, notably in the 1966 work *Wide Sargasso Sea*. As Laura Niesen de Abruna points out, “Although critics have recognised the aesthetic merits of her fiction, Rhys has not been fully accepted as a West Indian writer because she was a white Creole whose family came from the planter class” (259). Rhys’s dis-located status is meta-represented in her literary heritage; where Rhys was not fully accepted in Dominica for her whiteness and not fully accepted in England for her *Creolité*, her fiction cannot be categorically identified as West Indian or English either (despite the fact that England has, in the advent of “post-colonial literature,” done its best to claim her for its own). The publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea* displays many of these concerns; Carine Mardorossian notes that *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published “just four years after Jamaica’s independence,” and the “decades during which Rhys worked on the novel witnessed the development of the (lower-class) black Creoles’ challenge to the dominant cultural system of white bias and their increasing and positive identification with blackness” (1086). It is important to note that in Rhys’s oeuvre there is relatively

little direct link to the Caribbean; one can of course read the Caribbean into her earlier works, but as Johnson notes, *Wide Sargasso Sea* indicates the “resurgence of the Caribbean” in Rhys’s work (23). Johnson attributes this resurgence to the fact that the Caribbean independence movements (Mardorossian’s “challenge to the dominant cultural system”) during the time Rhys was writing the novel made Rhys aware that, “for the first time in her life, her mostly European readers may be open to a more ‘Caribbean’ novel” (23). In other words, the time was ripe for Rhys to directly explore the relationship between the place of her birth and her ancestral motherland.

And so Rhys crafted *Wide Sargasso Sea*, a novel that at its core examines the many ways identity may be constructed, beginning with the imperial project as a whole. The historical context of the novel revolves around the Emancipation Act of 1833, in which England followed through with the promise begun by the official abolition of the slave trade in 1807. The 1833 Act introduced the Apprenticeship System, in which slaves were indentured to their former masters (with a semblance of rights) for a certain number of years. This post-emancipation Jamaica is the world of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and the inevitable racial and economic turmoil set in motion by abolition, emancipation, and indenture are the crux of the novel. Antoinette, arguably the main character of the work, is, like Rhys herself, white Creole—the daughter and granddaughter of former plantation owners—and she and her mother and disabled brother live on the former plantation estate of Coulibri. Lee Erwin provides an excellent alignment of Antoinette’s relationship to the historical context of the novel: “if she [Antoinette] is nearly seventeen in 1839, as the date in an embroidery suggests, she would have been born in 1822 or 1823, well before the Emancipation Act, which did not go into effect for another year after its enactment in

1833 and even then decreed from four to six years' further service for slaves (now "apprentices") before they were to be "full free." (209). Thus Antoinette is born into a colonial world in which the balance between colonizer and colonized is already disrupted by abolition; the Emancipation Act therefore coincides with her coming-of-age. Antoinette's story overlaps with Rhys's own biography in critical ways, and Rhys's treatment of Antoinette's ethnic heritage arguably reveals Rhys's ambivalence toward her own background; Vivian Halloran argues that the novel suggests that "social demarcations between English and Creole cultural identities are artificial because they ultimately depend on chance—on the geographical accident of a given person's or character's place of birth" (88). Like Rhys herself, Antoinette is not "fully" Jamaican simply by virtue of being born on the island—neither is she English, however, and the tension between these two identities, born out of the historical context of English colonial control of the Caribbean, drives Antoinette's search and struggle to construct a viable identity of her own.

As a white Creole in Jamaica, Antoinette fits into the framework of a Third Culture Kid, or TCK. Gene Bell-Villada defines the term, originally coined by Ruth Hill Useem in the 1950s, as specifically designating "children raised in a country other than their passport country. Their culture is considered 'Third' because it combines elements of both the host nation(s) and his/her own nation of citizenship, without necessarily belonging to either of them" (412). The concept of a "passport country" may seem a bit of an anachronism when applied to the historical context of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, yet Bell-Villada clarifies that the experience of being a TCK has its roots "in great measure as a

result of colonialism” (4). Antoinette’s cultural heritage is a direct result of colonialism, as Bell-Villada explains:

The British and French empires, as a matter of policy, had encouraged sizeable numbers of European citizen-settlers to populate and “civilize” their overseas outposts. Many of these voluntary expatriates would in turn have offspring, who grew up as what we might today consider TCKs, [and thus] colonialism, in a sense, first created Third Culture Kids, along with the conditions and the settings for a TCK literature that chooses to take on such themes. (5)

So the anachronism of the term lies only in its specificity: remove the idea of a “passport” country, and Antoinette’s (and Rhys’s) experiences fit the framework of an identity continually mediating between a host country and a motherland. Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of hybridity speaks to this constant mediation. Bhabha emphasizes the hybrid’s power to unsettle the very meaning of colonial authority; he clarifies that hybridity “is not a third term that resolves the tension between two cultures” (156). Instead, the space “in between” becomes a site of power in and of itself, a space in which colonial power is interrogated, displaced, and subverted, revealing the “ambivalence at the source of traditional discourses on authority” and enabling “a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention” (154). In other words, the hybrid does not form a bridge between two cultures; instead, the hybrid space is “a dialectical play of ‘recognition’” in which concepts such as *home* and *identity* ultimately challenge rather than uphold the norm. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Antoinette’s character best exemplifies the TCK “themes” Bell-Villada alludes to: in this case, the search for “home” and identity that exhibits a

continual sense of fragmentation, duality, and/or liminality. These fragmented characteristics of Antoinette's search for belonging are found in the correlation between the most significant temporal and spatial sites of the novel, as well as the relationships Antoinette has with her family, most notably her mother and her husband. Antoinette orients herself within the context of each of these relationships and temporal/spatial sites in order to finally claim her identity—not as a victim of colonialism's mandates, but as a citizen of a viable Third Culture.

As stated before, *Wide Sargasso Sea* is set in 1830s post-emancipation Jamaica, and the novel, in general, is narrated in chronological order, beginning with Antoinette's life at Coulibri in Jamaica and ending with her incarceration at Thornfield Hall in England. The temporality of the novel is more complex than chronology, however; first of all, it is clear from the beginning that Antoinette narrates the sequence of events from some point beyond their occurrence. Foreshadowing and flashback interrupt the flow of the narrative, creating a sense of time that, rather than being linear, weaves backwards and forwards—indicating that the past cannot be left behind and the future has already happened. From her narratorial vantage point, Antoinette uses foreshadowing to link her story to its ostensible sequel, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and flashback to reveal the ways in which her individual story is the product of Jamaica's colonial history.

Interestingly, Rhys also dis-places *Wide Sargasso Sea* temporally in relationship to *Jane Eyre*—Rhys's text, while arguably a prequel to Brontë's classic work, is actually set about thirty years after the events of Brontë's novel. Three specific locations orient the story spatially: Coulibri, the Cosway family estate, Granbois, the honeymoon house, and Thornfield Hall, Rochester's ancestral inheritance. In each of these locations, Antoinette

struggles to articulate her position in her unique Third Culture, caught between birthplace and motherland. As Johnson notes, “the politics of location in the novel revolve not only around fixed geographical locations, but the process through which characters struggle to anchor their narratives and identities within particular locations” (89). In other words, each of these locations coincides with a time in Antoinette’s life when she is required to reconfigure her identity (beginning with Coulibri), Antoinette’s struggle to identify with her mother, and her awareness of her own implicit role in Jamaica’s fraught history.

Johnson carefully delineates Coulibri’s symbolic importance to the text and is worth quoting at length:

In the first part of the novel, which Antoinette narrates, she carefully places herself, both historically and geographically. Coulibri, the site of her childhood, appears as a deeply historicized and diachronic space, inscribed as it is with not only the history of the Cosways, but with the history of slavery, in which the family is implicated as former owners. The estate is marked, both physically and in terms of the social relations among its inhabitants, by reminders that the days of slavery are barely behind the characters of the novel. The house is architecturally structured on the basis of a slave economy, surrounded by outbuildings from which slaves, and later a few servants, run the house. In the wake of emancipation, the estate languishes quietly, cut off from other communities by treacherous and fast-disappearing roads . . . a testament to Jamaica’s historical reliance on slave labor and to the volatile, transitional moment in which the novel is set. (91)

As a white Creole in post-emancipation Jamaica, Antoinette's identity is insidiously related to Coulibri's decay; as she grows up, she becomes more aware of her place in Jamaica's history and her sense of her own self becomes more and more tenuous.

Antoinette does not mourn Coulibri's decay, as she "did not remember the place when it was prosperous" (11); she nonetheless displays a pervasive sense that any sort of stable identity she might be able to forge is dependent upon a delicate balance that requires conditions to stay exactly as they are: "When I was safely home I sat close to the old wall at the end of the garden. It was covered with green moss soft as velvet and I never wanted to move again. Everything would be worse if I moved" (13). Antoinette intuits that her Creole identity has already been radically destabilized by emancipation, and that her grasp of her own identity will be forever shattered if she is forced to leave her home.

Antoinette's "friend" Tia most vividly highlights Antoinette's precarious role when she tells Antoinette, "Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (14). Tia recognizes that Antoinette's place in Jamaican social hierarchy is dependent more upon her economic status than her race. To Tia, "real" white people "got gold money" and do not eat "salt fish" or live in leaky houses (14).

Antoinette, then, is not a "real" white person, but neither is she black; instead, her existence can only be calibrated in terms of the liminal space between these races, the space constantly (re)defined by the colonial obsession with "racial purity." In other words, Tia recognizes what Antoinette cannot let herself articulate: her identity has already been fragmented, deconstructed by the changing social and economic landscape. As Fiona Barnes states, "The old plantation owners inhabit a liminal, tenuous position in the postemancipation Jamaican social hierarchy, because their poverty condemns them to

a rank that the black Jamaicans obviously gleefully consider lower even than their own rank” (154). Whereas perhaps Antoinette’s *Creolité* and thus her link to England may have afforded her a higher social status than the slaves pre-emancipation, now that the slave trade has officially ended, it is common knowledge that *Creole* means little in Jamaica’s social hierarchy. Thus Antoinette’s identity is from the outset bound up in Jamaica’s history; as the hierarchy of Jamaican society is foundationally rocked by emancipation, Antoinette’s personal identity is fragmented by the alienation she experiences as a result of this historical change.

As discussed earlier, a crucial part of Antoinette’s inability to form a stable identity is directly related to her physical upheaval; however, these physical changes are accompanied by corresponding changes in her formative relationships, beginning with her mother and Christophine. Antoinette opens her story with a description of her mother’s ostracism in Jamaica’s social circles: “They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks. The Jamaican ladies had never approved of my mother” (9). Rank in this case refers to the striation of Jamaican social hierarchy, based partly upon economic status but also upon race. The “ladies” are implicitly white, while Antoinette and her mother, as Creoles, are racially suspect. Antoinette instinctively knows that her own social position is the result of her mother’s own identity, but she desires closeness with her mother more than social acceptance. Much of the literature on Third Culture children mentions the importance of strong familial ties in a TCKs identity formation—the general idea is that a lack of stability in terms of geography may be compensated by stability within the family unit. Despite Antoinette’s attachment to Coulibri, her position there has never been

guaranteed; perhaps if Antoinette's family were stable, she might have coped better with being white Creole in post-emancipation Jamaica—yet there is no way to be certain, since Antoinette's memory of Coulibri does not include its success. Her father long dead, Antoinette's primary relationships are with her mother Annette and her mother's housemaid and former slave, Christophine. These two women serve as mother-figures for the growing girl, yet neither one of them can provide the kind of emotional stability Antoinette, as a TCK, might need: Annette is preoccupied by her family's unstable social position and her young son's illness, and Christophine, despite her closeness to the family, is separated from them by race and status. Liliana Meneses argues: "Third Culture Kids are frequently unsure about who they are or where they belong. It stands to reason, then, that they would depend on others to confirm their identity" (284). At Coulibri, Antoinette looks to her mother and Christophine to find out who she is and where she belongs, but quickly admits: "I got used to a solitary life" (10). Her isolation is compounded when her mother marries Mr. Mason, whose arrival changes life at Coulibri forever. Antoinette visits her Aunt Cora while Annette and Mr. Mason honeymoon; when she returns, she notes: "Coulibri looked the same when I saw it again, although it was clean and tidy, no grass between the flagstones, no leaks. But it didn't feel the same" (18). Antoinette's final attempt to orient her own identity in relationship to her mother fails after Coulibri's destruction; when Antoinette visits her mother, she cannot bring herself to say that Pierre, her younger brother, has died. Instead, she tries to confirm the importance of her own existence: "But I am here, I am here,' I said, and she said, 'No,' quietly. Then 'No no no' very loudly and flung me from her. I fell against the partition and hurt myself" (29). Annette verbally and physically rejects her daughter's very

existence, severing any chance Antoinette might have had to form a stable identity within her biological family unit.

It is tempting, in Annette's absence, to assign Christophine the role of surrogate mother. Her importance to the text cannot be overstated; as Gayatri Spivak points out, she "is the first interpreter and named speaking subject in the text" (252). Spivak's argument hinges on the idea that Christophine is already always positioned as the unknowable Other, simply by virtue of her appearance in the rewriting of a colonial text. Indeed, her voice, so strong in the early part of the novel, disappears after she stands up to the nameless husband in defense of Antoinette; her last words to him reinforce her exclusion from his world: "Read and write I don't know. Other things I know" (97). Once Antoinette leaves Granbois, Christophine has no way of staying in touch with her—at least not in any way the husband would recognize. As the narrative progresses toward Antoinette's inevitable repatriation, Christophine's existence in the world of the novel must by necessity be phased out—for where there is little room for white Creole identity in England, there is no room for black Caribbean. Thus Antoinette cannot rely on Christophine as a barometer of her own identity any more than she can her birth mother.

Her stay at Coulibri, interestingly, is the time in Antoinette's life when she is most physically separated from England; one might then understand the progress of the novel as a slow process of repatriation. From the outset of the novel Coulibri is established as a liminal space between the economic authority of the plantation estates and the decimation of those estates post-emancipation—a physical reminder of what the Cosway family has lost both personally and economically: "All Coulibri estate had gone wild like the garden, gone to bush. No more slavery—why should *anybody* work?" (11). Antoinette is not at

“home” in this space—she does not *belong* there, despite being “native” by birth. As Ruth Hill Useem explains, despite the fact that TCKs “have grow up *in* foreign countries, they are not integral parts *of* those countries” (18). Antoinette lacks, to borrow Elaine Neil Orr’s term, a “native” self—a self that belongs in the physical space it inhabits. Instead, her sense of self is always that of an outsider, someone for whom Phillips’s “vexing question of belonging” cannot be answered with any physical location. Orr explains, “TCKs are never intended to stay in the country in which they grow up or sojourn, and often this means they are not allowed even to stay with themselves” (401). When Antoinette runs to Tia as Coulibri burns, she emphasizes her similarities to her friend: “We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river” (27). Identifying these similarities as her last ties to Coulibri, Antoinette thinks, “I will live with Tia and I will be like her. Not to leave Coulibri” (27). But Tia rejects her, throwing a rock that cuts Antoinette’s face. Both girls seem shocked by Tia’s action: “We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass” (27). Antoinette’s identification with Tia is suddenly marked by fragmentation; instead of similarities, their separate identities are marked by differences: the blood on Antoinette’s face, the tears on Tia’s, the daughter of the colonizer and the daughter of the colony. In other words, Antoinette must fragment her identity in order to lay claim to Coulibri—she must separate the self that identifies with the colony from the self that identifies with the colonizer. Orr describes this fragmentation as the creation of a “double-ness or dual identity, in which, eventually, one part of the self becomes ‘the stranger’” (391). Orr argues that this duality is a common thread in TCK narratives, and the existence of this “stranger” is not of necessity a cause for fear or alarm—only when

“the child or young adult is asked to forget or deny ‘the stranger,’ does this identity become troubling” (391). At Coulibri, Antoinette can navigate, however painfully, the boundaries inherent in a white West Indian Creole identity. Once she marries Rochester and moves to Granbois, however, her increasing psychic proximity to England begins to require that she forget and/or deny the “stranger” within herself—the part of her that identifies with the Caribbean colonized.

The second major location in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is Granbois, called the “honeymoon house” in the text. This shift in location coincides with Antoinette’s marriage, both instances of upheaval. As Norma McCaig points out, a TCK’s identity is almost always in flux, and each “significant (or subtle) life transition,” such as marriage, may force the TCK to reconfigure her or his identity (53). The move to Granbois begins Part Two of the text, and is the first time that the narrative is narrated not by Antoinette, but by her new husband. Part of Rhys’s genius lies in the meta-commentary on Antoinette’s new social status in this section of the novel. In marrying Antoinette, the nameless husband effectively inherits all of her familial wealth, leaving her at his mercy both economically and socially. By beginning the story of their marriage with his narrative, Rhys textually subjugates Antoinette to her husband’s narratorial power just as she is subjugated to his economic power. It is important to note that Rhys never names this character, nor does he ever explicitly reveal his own name. One effect of this omission is to complicate the relationship between Rhys’s narrative and Brontë’s text; readers may “know” that Antoinette’s husband is Brontë’s Rochester, but *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not in itself make this connection clear. Without a specific name, Antoinette’s husband has the potential to be read as colonization personified, his behavior toward

Jamaica and toward Antoinette representative of the colonial treatment of the colonies. When read this way, the shift in narrative voice further fragments Antoinette's identity by calling into question her reliability as a narrator; to borrow a phrase from Judie Newman, this section of the text "brings into sharp focus the question: whose story is it?" (24). The husband's narration begins after he and Antoinette are married; after his visit to Daniel Cosway, Rhys returns some of the narrative reign to Antoinette, but the damage has been done—he has, in recounting "his side" of the story, reinforced Antoinette's *Creolité*, her inadequacy in English terms. By countering Antoinette's version of Jamaica with his own, "quite unreal and like a dream" (48), the husband effectively highlights what Johnson calls "the ways in which Creole subjects are blocked from narrating their own histories by historical and social discourse within the context of empire" (37). His place in the historical context of the novel is secured by his birthplace, and this security gives him the authority to undermine Antoinette's narrative.

As with her mother and Christophine, Antoinette also attempts to assert her identity in relationship to her husband, with devastating consequences. Barnes introduces him as "a second son with no immediate prospects of inheritance, who marries Antoinette Mason for the colonial fortune that will later help to finance Thornfield Hall" (155). The husband's own description of his marriage to Antoinette is no less unsavory. He begins his narrative in Part Two with the statement: "So it was all over, the advance and retreat, the doubts and hesitations" (38). He views his marriage to Antoinette first as a rather mystifying occurrence beyond his control, and later as a conniving trick played by his fellow Englishmen. As he wrests the narrative from Antoinette's hands, he speaks of his wife as though she is a scientific specimen, taking care to point out what separates her

ancestry from his own: “Long, sad, dark alien eyes. Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either” (39). Rather than as an agent of his own life, the husband sees himself as a victim in a game of chance, set in motion partly by England’s colonial legacy and partly by the law of primogeniture that, in his mind, forced his hand. Marriage further alienates Antoinette from her “stranger” self; as her husband becomes increasingly convinced that he has been tricked, his treatment of Antoinette begins to write her into the role established for her by Brontë’s master narrative. He begins to call his wife Bertha, which Antoinette recognizes as colonialism’s most drastic attempt to erase her identification with the colonized; she tells him, “Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name” (88). Due to Antoinette’s loss of economic power, however, she has become his “Marionette, Antoinette, Marionetta, Antoinetta,” a puppet that he believes he can mold into the image he has created for her (92)—and crucial to this image is her complete subjugation to colonial and patriarchal control. Barnes articulates the change: “The most obvious sign of Rochester’s destruction of Antoinette Cosway’s Jamaican identity is his renaming of her as Bertha Mason” (156).

The husband thus renegotiates the boundaries that Antoinette has struggled to navigate throughout her life by refusing to let her narrate her own story, much the way Mr. Mason renegotiated the boundaries of Coulibri when he married Annette. Where Antoinette sees Granbois as rich and lively, Rochester feels overwhelmed and suffocated by the richness of the island—it is “wild,” “menacing,” and excessive: “Too much blue, too much purple, too much green. The flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger” (41). Antoinette’s husband reframes Granbois,

and by extension Antoinette, in light of his own idea of the way things should be. Johnson articulates: “As the boundaries of first Coulibri, and then Granbois, come to be defined by different people, Antoinette’s sense of herself shifts dramatically in anticipation of her residence at Thornfield” (88). In reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* as partially “about” Antoinette’s forced repatriation, Granbois becomes the halfway point between her birthplace and the motherland. Of course, any reader familiar with *Jane Eyre* knows what awaits Antoinette in England, and so her ability to narrate her own life is again usurped by colonial control. Interestingly, Antoinette seems to know what awaits her as well, and at times seems almost optimistic about repatriating: “I will be a different person when I live in England and different things will happen to me . . .” (67). Yet when Antoinette seeks Christophine’s advance in the face of her failing marriage, Antoinette reveals her underlying fear of finally moving to England: “For I know that house where I will be cold and not belonging, the bed I shall lie in has red curtains and I have slept there many times before, long ago. How long ago? In that bed I will dream the end of my dream” (67). Antoinette knows that there is no space for the Creole in England, no room for Bertha Mason in Brontë’s colonial text. Thus, before they leave Granbois, the husband rewrites Antoinette’s identity to fit Brontë’s description of the madwoman in the attic—a “stranger” in every sense of the word.

Yet despite such drastic fragmentation, Antoinette does not give up on her search for herself. In the third and final location, Rochester’s ancestral home of Thornfield Hall, Antoinette is scripted into the role readers recognize as Brontë’s infamous Bertha Mason. If “Bertha” is the madwoman of Brontë’s text, Antoinette is the “stranger” self, denied not only to herself but by the world around her. Interpreting Rhys’s “version” of the end

of Antoinette/Bertha's story therefore requires the reader to make a choice. Anne Brown and Marjanne Gooz  clearly articulate the options:

On one hand, the characters follow a path leading to a self-defined identity where the self can be fragmented and yet enriched. In these instances, fragmentation is synonymous with fluidity of identity...When it lives under the sign of fluidity, fragmentation connotes self-empowerment and successful resistance to oppression . . . On the other hand, fragmentation also results in failures to develop a self-defined subjectivity and, in the most severe instances, leads to madness and self-destruction. (xv)

Crucial in this choice is how one interprets the ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea*, especially in light of Bertha's end in *Jane Eyre*. The question is not just whether one reads Antoinette's implicit suicide as an act of resistance or an act of defeat, but whether one reads the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as indicative of Antoinette's death. Rhys's text is slippery enough to entertain either interpretation. Certainly, by the time she leaves Granbois Antoinette has been alienated from all that she once held dear, including the physical locales that tethered her to her *Creolit *. Once at Thornfield, she becomes an unwillingly repatriated colonial object, stigmatized not only by her supposed madness but perhaps more so by her association with the Caribbean. Rhys's text, however, asks the reader to question every aspect of the narrative, including Antoinette's apparent death, in relationship to its larger context.

To return to an earlier concern, the complexity of *Wide Sargasso Sea*'s temporal and spatial navigation is further compounded by its relationship to what could be called its catalyst text. If read as the prequel to *Jane Eyre*, the base reliability of *Wide Sargasso*

Sea is called into question by the very existence of Antoinette's narration. Put simply, if she jumped to her death, as *Jane Eyre* tells us, then how is she voicing the narrative? Readers familiar with the Brontë text know that Bertha Mason dies in the destruction of Thornfield Hall, yet the ending of *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not provide as neat a solution to the problem of her existence. Schellhorn-Ghosh questions what she reads as Rhys's choice to uphold the sequence of events as set forth in *Jane Eyre*: "Why must she, of necessity, be held captive in her preordained role as the sacrificial lamb . . . Or, in other words, we could ask why Antoinette is doomed to 'repeat,' . . . the fate which Charlotte Brontë has charted for Bertha Mason" (177-78). Indeed this is a valid question: *if* Rhys upholds the sequence of events that leads to Jane Eyre's position as Rochester's wife, what message does she send about the fate of the white Creole in relationship to colonial England? Reading Bertha's suicide into the end of Antoinette's narrative relies on the reader's familiarity with *Jane Eyre*, which in turn implies a greater familiarity with the narrative of the colonizer than the voice of the colonized. Spivak argues that Antoinette "must play out her role, act out the transformation of her 'self' into that fictive Other, set fire to the house and kill herself, so that Jane Eyre can become the feminist individualist heroine of British fiction" (251). Reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* through a postcolonial lens may indeed lend itself to an interpretation of the text as one in which the colonized Other is, true to life, subjugated in service to the colonizer. Of course, critics have also argued that Antoinette's death serves as the ultimate rebellion against the colonial forces that establish her identity as Other, but I tend to agree with Schellhorn-Ghosh's interpretation that these readings do not "seem to pay too much attention to the fate Rhys chooses for her protagonist" (177): again, there is no textual evidence that Antoinette actually *dies* at

the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Instead, to return to the idea of the transnational, I argue that Antoinette's *survival*, not her death, may be read as the ultimate rebellion of the white Creole against the restrictions of colonial identity. The text does not end with Antoinette's death; instead, Antoinette acts out the ending of her dream: "Now at last I know why I was brought here and what I have to do. There must have been a draught for the flame flickered and I thought it was out. But I shielded it with my hand and it burned up again to light me along the dark passage" (112).

Until this point, Antoinette has lacked the vocabulary necessary, and a space in which it would be permissible, to articulate and explore her identity as a transnational citizen. Antoinette reveals this lack of vocabulary in her self-orientation in relationship to her family, most notably with her mother and her husband. It is tempting to say that the further Antoinette's identity fragments, the more powerless she is to resist the fate that awaits her at Thornfield Hall, and yet there is an alternative interpretation of her "suicide"—as Brown and Goozé noted, fragmentation may be a destructive force when caused by alienation from others, but the same fragmentation may be read as "self-empowerment and successful resistance" when read as a sign of fluidity or survival. Crucial in this interpretation is Antoinette's recurring dream sequence.

The third time Antoinette has her dream is the only time she sees the ending: "I saw the grandfather clock and Aunt Cora's patchwork, all colours, I saw the orchids and the stephanotis and the jasmine and the tree of life in flames. I saw the chandelier and the red carpet downstairs and the bamboos and the tree ferns, the gold ferns and the silver, and the soft green velvet of the moss on the garden wall" (112). In the dream sequence, she has returned to Coulibri before its destruction. Mary Lou Emery notes dreams play a

pivotal role in the identities of marginalized characters in Rhys's work: "Seemingly passive victims, they resist social violence and degradation—through dreams, hallucinations, memory, and madness" (419). Antoinette utilizes dreamwork, memory, and madness to reassert her identity as a citizen of a Third Culture, returning in whatever way she can to Coulibri, the only place where and time when she could live collaboratively with her "stranger" self. In Rhys's text, however, Antoinette has another, perhaps more powerful tool with which to finally reject Rochester and Brontë's depiction of her identity and to firmly establish her own: that of narrative, of telling her own story.

Without the stability of family or geography, Antoinette resorts to narrative in order to depict her fluidly fragmented identity. Meneses argues that "identity integration is not really possible during the experience of living in a Third Culture; it is only when the individual is able to look back and reflect on his or her experience that the issues of identity development are integrated" (287). In a sense this is what Antoinette is doing as narrator *Wide Sargasso Sea*—attempting to integrate her identity by telling her story. From her illogical vantage point, she can weave foreshadowing and flashback into the present tense as a way of asserting her own power over the story; even Rochester's interruption does not ultimately destroy her control over the narrative. Meneses goes on to say "as the adult TCK constructs and retells his life story, he is simultaneously describing how he is perceived by others (image), as well as how he perceives himself in the story (identity). This is one of the ways in which one comes to understand oneself and one's identity. Narrative—constructed through language—integrates our emotions, our image, and our identity, thus satisfying the needs of our psyche to bring these all together" (287). In this way we might read Rochester's interruption as, in fact,

Antoinette's decision to allow another person to describe their view of her specific Creole identity. When read as an act of defiance, Antoinette's waking dream at the end of *Wide Sargasso Sea* reclaims her agency from Brontë's text—the reader is of course aware that Jane Eyre is the protagonist of the Brontë work, yet Rhys's choice to end *Wide Sargasso Sea* with Antoinette's survival ultimately frees her from the confines of Brontë's ending. It is possible that what Antoinette *has* to do is subvert the reader's identification with the "master" narrative—that is, to forever alter the interpretation of *Jane Eyre* as a romantic or fully feminist text (of course, *Wide Sargasso Sea* stands on its own, as a narrative rebelling against colonial and patriarchal control; however, layering it on top of the Brontë text provides an added layer of interpretive possibilities). Antoinette thus gains power in her assertion of her own identity, conflicting, contradictory, and malleable as it may be. As Emery eloquently states, "She finds this power in her ability to act where she actually is—in the midst of two worlds and in a new fictional reality" (428-29).

CHAPTER THREE

“UN DOMINICAN-YORK”: IMMIGRANTS AND ALIENS IN *HOW THE GARCÍA GIRLS LOST THEIR ACCENTS*

Like Antoinette in Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the fictional characters in Julia Alvarez's 1992 novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* are in between worlds—in this case, navigating the boundaries between the Dominican Republic and the United States. As a white West Indian Creole, Antoinette can (albeit anachronistically) be read as a Third Culture Kid as defined by Gene Bell-Villada and Ruth Hill Useem, embodying elements of both her birthplace and her imagined “motherland” and ultimately finding power in the ambivalent space between these two places. Antoinette can never quite identify with either Jamaica or England, and so lives in a transnational space between the two locales; the García family's relationship to their respective locales is equally ambivalent. Alvarez inverts the chronological structure of the narrative, beginning with Yolanda García de la Torre's account of returning to visit her relatives in the Dominican Republic as an adult and ending with Yolanda as a child narrating an early memory of life in the de la Torre compound on the Island. Alvarez thus leads the reader on a journey into the past, and whereas for Antoinette laying claim to her transnational identity may be read as an act of power, for the García family it is less clear whether this identity is a source of power or a site of irreconcilable fragmentation. The García family, the four daughters in particular, must learn to navigate concentric circles of familial identification: each girl's identity as an individual, the four girls within their immediate family framework, and the whole family within the larger scope of the relationship

between the Dominican Republic and the United States. Within these circles, issues of language, particularly naming and speechlessness, economic status (or lack thereof), and sexuality intertwine as the family struggles to negotiate its place within various spaces. In other words, each family member seeks to figure out, as Antoinette does, “who I am and where is my country and where do I belong” (61).

Just as Jean Rhys’s personal biography provides a crucial backdrop to understanding *Wide Sargasso Sea* as a transnational text, Julia Alvarez’s background likewise provides a framework for reading *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* as a work of transnational fiction. In her short autobiographical essay, “An American Childhood in the Dominican Republic,” Alvarez orients her identity in relationship to the Dominican Republic as well as the United States: “Although I was raised in the Dominican Republic by Dominican parents in an extended Dominican family, mine was an American childhood. Technically, I am American, for I was born in New York City and lived there for three weeks before my parents returned ‘home’” (71). Birth granted Alvarez United States citizenship, regardless of her brief sojourn in the country; what for her parents was a return “home” thus became, for the three-week old, her first trip to “foreign” soil. This moment of repatriation is similar to Antoinette’s arrival in England in Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*, in that what is considered by others the “homeland” is, for this particular individual, a new and unfamiliar place. Alvarez’s background is compounded by the fact that her status as a United States citizen imbued her with “a sense of the honor and privilege the certificate conferred on [her]”—in other words, she and her family considered being legally American a gift of sorts. Her family’s complex relationship to the United States is illustrated by her mother’s pet names for her four

daughters: “My mother referred to her first two daughters as her *Americanitas* and to the last two as *criollas* (home-made)” (71). With these nicknames Alvarez’s mother not only draws a distinction between her “American” and “Dominican” daughters, but also establishes a boundary between *home* (the Dominican Republic) and *not-home* (the United States). Further complicating the Alvarez family’s personal complexities was the Dominican Republic’s own turbulent relationship to the United States.

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, known as El Jefe or Chapita, came to power in the Dominican Republic in 1930. Michael Hall notes that when he took power, Trujillo was then “the leader of the U.S.-created National Guard” in the Dominican Republic, indicating that the history of the Dominican Republic must necessarily be understood in the context of United States intervention. Trujillo’s legacy is as complicated as it is horrific—Hall continues:

Ruthlessly suppressing all opposition to his regime, during the Great Depression Trujillo was faced with governing a poverty-stricken nation with an empty treasury, a huge foreign debt, and a capital city destroyed by a hurricane. Within two decades, Trujillo had paid off the nation’s foreign debts, developed a national infrastructure, and laid the groundwork for economic development by promoting industrialization. (14)

In her autobiographical essay, Alvarez references this “Era of Prosperity” that marked the first two decades of Trujillo’s reign and remarks on the United States’ involvement in this period of development: “American businesses and shops were cropping up all over Ciudad Trujillo, as the capital had been renamed in honor of El Jefe, our dictator. The shops catered to a growing community of American advisors, businessmen, and fortune

seekers who had been drawn to the country by the cheap labor and tax breaks offered by Trujillo to his good friends up north” (75). This economic Americanization, however, was not enough to overshadow the cruelty and violence that marked Trujillo’s reign, and the people living under El Jefe’s thumb began to resist his dominance—Alvarez’s own father included. Alvarez points out that her family’s relationship to the United States was a crucial part of their survival under Trujillo’s reign: “What kept my father from being rounded up each time there was a purge . . . was his connection with my mother’s powerful family. It was not just their money that gave them power, for wealth was sometimes an incentive to persecute a family and appropriate its fortune. It was their strong ties with Americans and the United States” (80). Afraid of losing the United States’ support, Trujillo did not actively pursue Alvarez’s father and others like him with American connections; in this way, Alvarez notes, the “obsession with American things” that marked her childhood in the Dominican Republic “was no longer merely enchantment with the United States, but a strategy for survival” (80).

The United States’ overall involvement with the inner workings of the Dominican Republic’s government can be understood as a form of neo-colonial control; Carlos María Gutiérrez notes that, despite having helped Trujillo come to power, Trujillo’s final successful assassins “were some of his own aides, advised directly by the CIA” (9). Having helped Trujillo come to power, the United States also helped usher him out. Alvarez succinctly delineates United States’ involvement: “South America was going the way of democracy, and the United States wanted to be on top of it” (82). The fact that this “development” toward democracy came at the expense of Dominican and Haitian lives seemed to matter little to those involved. The Dominican Republic’s fate after

Trujillo's assassination also seems of little concern; Bernard Diederich notes that after Trujillo's assassination, the United States "occupied for a bit," but Joaquín Balaguer, president after the assassination, "regained the presidency and held on to it for [twelve] years," during which time the Dominican economy crumbled and "Dominicans whose savings evaporated protested and were met with violence." Many of these Dominicans fled to the United States; Diederich states, "by the end of 1990, [twelve percent] of the Dominican population had moved to New York." The family featured in Alvarez's 1992 novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is an early part of this mass emigration.

Like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* disrupts the traditionally chronological order of a novel. Where Rhys seems to collapse time towards the end of her novel, however, Alvarez tells the entire story of the García de la Torre family's emigration to the United States in reverse chronological order, beginning in 1989 and ending in 1956. The novel thus encompasses the last five years of Trujillo's reign and the economic turmoil that followed his assassination. Also like *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Alvarez's novel contains more than one narrator, providing varying insights into the García family's experiences. *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* is structurally divided into three sections, each section containing five vignettes. Every member of the immediate García de la Torre family is featured as a narrator among these fifteen stories: the four girls together narrate two stories, the family as a whole narrates one, and the parents and Yolanda, the second oldest daughter, together narrate another. Carla, the oldest, narrates two vignettes on her own, Sandi, the next oldest, narrates another two individually, and Sofia, the youngest, narrates only one snapshot by herself. Yolanda seems to carry the weight of the narration, with six vignettes told from her point of view.

Throughout these varied stories, the García family members struggle to construct their identities within a framework of concentric circles: the family's relationship to the Dominican Republic and to the United States, the García daughters' relationships to their immediate family, and individual girls' relationships to themselves.

Like Antoinette, the García family must come to terms with their “stranger” selves—as defined both from within and from without. Katarzyna Marciniak argues that Alvarez's novel is in many ways “about strangers”; the family not only learns to see the strangers within themselves but also to orient themselves as strangers in a strange land. In order to do so, they must grapple not only with defining home and homeland, but also with their grasp of the multiple languages, shifting economic statuses, and cultural codes presented in both of their countries. Although there are a great many overlaps between Alvarez's biography and the history of the García family, it is important to note that, unlike Alvarez, each of the four girls is born in the Dominican Republic; they are, like their parents, legally *dominicanos*. Like Alvarez, however, their cultural identity on the Island is complicated by their economic status: their father is a prosperous doctor, and their mother the daughter of a prominent Dominican family, descended from the Conquistadores who came to the Caribbean so many years ago. Like Antoinette, the de la Torre family is inherently connected to the colonial conquerors; unlike Antoinette, however, the de la Torres have maintained their ancestors' economic status. The de la Torre family's wealth protects them from a great many dangers, but behind their economic independence is the knowledge that one side of their ancestry wreaked havoc on the Island in thrall to greed. Their feelings toward the Dominican Republic are thus a mix of pride and shame; when Laura, the mother, first learns that she and her family will

be fleeing to the United States, she has just been thinking of the Island as “this crazy hellhole” (202). Upon learning the news, however, she notices the “glorious light” shining into the room: “She thinks of her ancestors, those fair-skinned Conquistadores arriving in this new world, not knowing that the gold they sought was this blazing light. And look at what they started,” Laura thinks, “looking up and seeing gold flash in the mouth of one of the *guardías* as it spreads open in a scared smile” (212). Laura recognizes her own potential complicity in the events that unfold in her family’s story; she realizes that Trujillo’s greed and terror are but one recent thread in a web of violence that encompasses the Dominican Republic’s history. Yet the family’s money nevertheless protects them. It gets Carlos, the father, a “fellowship” in the United States that saves him from torture and execution and keeps his family out of jail. The de la Torre’s ancestral wealth is therefore a Janus inheritance— a blessing and a curse, simultaneously the thing that condemns and the thing that saves.

The extended de la Torre clan lives on a sprawling compound in Santo Domingo, each family in a separate household among which the child-cousins play without fear— and also without a clear understanding of the difference between them and other residents of the Island. One of the workers in the García family household is a woman called Chucha, a “real Haitian” with “blue-black” skin, not “Dominican *café-con-leche* black” (218). Implied in this distinction is a racial hierarchy; Chucha is a “real” Haitian, from the other side of the island, and her skin proves it. By contrast, the Garcías’ Dominican skin is a lighter “black,” that of coffee and milk. Chucha is a survivor of arguably one of Trujillo’s most despotic acts of terror. One of the daughters explains: “Chucha had just appeared at my grandfather’s doorstep one night, begging to be taken in. Turns out it was

the night of the massacre when Trujillo had decreed that all black Haitians on our side of the island would be executed by dawn” (218). The García daughters therefore grow up with a woman who is a living testament to the horror of their dictator’s tyrannical rule, yet the narrative does not even reveal this woman’s given name: “‘Chachas’—she always called us that, from *muchachas*, girls, which is how come we had ended up nicknaming her a play echo of her name for us, Chucha” (220). The girls’ ability to rename this woman as an echo of their own nickname is a function of their heightened economic status; they have access to her story as the granddaughters of the man who took Chucha in, but her individual name is not as important as her social and economic place within the hierarchy of the de la Torre compound. Her own act of collectively nicknaming the four girls is thus mirrored and halved—she becomes Chucha, not even *muchacha*—a diminutive foil against which the girls’ importance is reflected and magnified. Harbored in the bosom of their immediate and extended family, in this particular place—their compound on the Island—the de la Torres themselves are not strangers. Their compound is the mainland, and all other arrivals are immigrants on their shores.

The García family becomes strangers, both to themselves and to their larger cultural context, with the act of emigration. In her analysis of the concept of “alienhood,” Marciniak delineates: “aliens have been historically defined in relationship to a specific national territory. In other words, one does not inherently and organically occupy the position of alienhood; rather, one becomes an alien when one crosses the border of a nation that then readily identifies the crosser as the non-native: a foreign-born person who wishes to become a resident” (9). Whereas Antoinette is a Third Culture Kid by birth, the Garcías’ “immigrancy” is a label attached to a specific physical act. By leaving

the Dominican Republic for the United States with the intention of residing in the States (semi)-permanently, the Garcías go from being natives of one country to aliens in another, legal “others” in their new place of residence. As Silvia Schultermandl explains, “only after experiencing American culture in the United States can immigrants become aware of their foreignness. Furthermore, this sense of foreignness becomes especially acute through immigrants’ acquisition of labels that denote their identities and locations in the United States” (6). Whereas the name *de la Torre* meant something in the Dominican Republic, in the United States it means nothing, and the family must relearn their place in a new society and does so through identification with various labels placed on them by the citizens of their adopted home. Their identities are fragmented along economic and social lines; wealth and status in one country do not necessarily equate to wealth and status in another. As a part of that eventual twelve percent of emigrated Dominicans, the García family thus becomes part of a diaspora. As R. Radhakrishnan muses of his own experience, “Clearly, I wasn’t always of the diaspora . . . But with my diasporic displacement, there is a ‘now’ and a ‘then’ to my life, underwritten by a ‘here’ and a ‘there’ . . . historicizing in the diaspora becomes doubly complicated, since we now have to deal with discontinuity both in a temporal and a spatial-locational sense” (xiv). In other words, the García family’s move to the United States necessitates the negotiation of new identities, marked not by their boundaries within an existing social system but by their intrusion into a space in which they may or may not be welcomed.

The status of *immigrant* carries a wealth of connotations, each of which is intended to differentiate between the “native” and the “foreigner.” Pauline Newton likewise emphasizes the “need to distinguish . . . between a ‘migrant,’ someone who

might move from community to community such as from Puerto Rico to the U.S. American mainland or from one ethnic and insulated U.S. mainland community to another, and an ‘immigrant,’ someone who requires a visa or papers to emigrate from one country to another” (3). The García family is of this latter group, needing appropriate documentation in order to reside legally in the United States. This documentation, granted by the United States government, is a form of permission—recognition that these “others” wish, and are granted permission to, live on United States soil. Critically, permission must also be given from the Dominican government; in the novel, an American undercover CIA agent delivers the news that the family’s “papers have received clearance from the head of Immigration,” indicating that both governments have officially approved of the family’s move to the United States (211-12). This implicit collusion between governments echoes the García family’s complicated mix of Dominican- and American-ness; their ties to the United States help them leave a dangerous situation on the Island, but the dangerous situation itself likely would not have existed without the help of the government of the very place in which they seek refuge.

Their status is further complicated by the fact that they are in essence political refugees. Potential repatriation surfaces several times in the novel, and for a time the girls are sent back to the Island every summer. In one of the vignettes narrated by the four girls together (indicated by all four of their names under the title as well as the use of the subject pronoun “we”), they recall their father’s “final” decision not to move back to the Island:

For three-going-on-four years Mami and Papi were on green cards, and the four of us shifted from foot to foot, waiting to go home. Then Papi went down for a trial

visit, and a revolution broke out, a minor one, but still. He came back to New York reciting the Pledge of Allegiance, and saying, “I am given up, Mami! It is no hope for the Island. I will become *un dominican-york*.” So, Papi raised his right hand and swore to defend the Constitution of the United States, and we were here to stay. (107)

The parents being “on green cards” signifies their immigrant status, not fully citizens in their new country, yet also not having given up on the possibility of moving home. When life on the Island does not seem any more hospitable than it was when they initially fled, Carlos accepts his diasporan identity, claiming himself to be “*un dominican-york*,” an identity specific to the large population of Dominican immigrants living in New York City. It is significant that Carlos says *he* will become *un dominican-york*; however, he does not go as far as to rhetorically claim the same identity for his wife or his daughters. Néstor García Canclini argues, “migration is not an individual decision but a family strategy” (25); but in this case, what becomes a family strategy is effected by Carlos’s individual decision.

The family as a whole fits the framework of what Canclini calls “native foreigners”: “those who must live in exile from their countries, who have been persecuted not necessarily by dictatorship but also, often, by a society in which they live at odds . . . or those who leave and feel disorientated when they return, because the society to which they have returned shows only scattered signs of the one they knew before” (29). Mami and Papi fall into the first category, albeit in a complicated way, given their elite economic status. As a dissident in the Dominican Republic, Carlos lives at odds with the reigning government—he is persecuted by Trujillo and the Servicio de Inteligencia

Militar (SIM), and chooses a seemingly self-imposed exile as the solution to his family's perilous situation. The daughters, however, fall into the second category in Canclini's definition of "native foreigners," but again with a twist—their palpable disorientation with each return visit to the Island seems to come not from the changes to the society they once knew, but because of changes within themselves. As Ricardo Castells points out, while the parents are immigrants, the daughters are part of a unique formulation Ruben G. Rumbaut terms the "1.5 or one-and-a-half immigrant generation," that group of "young refugees who were born abroad and raised in the United States, and who therefore find themselves stuck between the first and second generations of American immigrants" (34-35). If Antoinette's identity as a Third Culture Kid is the result of being caught between cultures, the García girls' identities as members of the one-and-a-half generation are the result of being caught between generations. The García daughters are young when the family first moves to the United States—none of them have yet hit puberty—and so their childhoods are effectively divided, as R. Radhakrishnan observes, between the "before" of the Dominican Republic and the "now" of the United States. This one-and-a-half generation, like their parents, have the option of becoming naturalized U.S. citizens by receiving the appropriate legal documentation, but they are, as Castells notes, members "of an intermediate generation that is not fully part of either its native or its adopted country" (36). Being born in the Dominican Republic and spending a portion of their childhood there gives them roots, in a sense, on the Island, but spending the rest of their youth and the majority of their adult years in the United States does its part to replant those roots. Just as the García family as a whole has to renegotiate its identity in relationship to the Dominican Republic and the United States, the García

daughters must negotiate their identity, both as individuals and as “the García girls,” within the family framework.

Alvarez’s novel places a great deal of emphasis on the García girls’ solidarity, whereas Antoinette’s disorienting experiences in *Wide Sargasso Sea* are compounded by her familial isolation; her brother, Pierre, is younger than she and sickly, and his death drives Annette to shun her daughter. In contrast, the García girls are close in age and affection, enough so that their mother devises some rather analytical strategies for managing them as children: “The mother dressed them all alike in diminishing-sized, different color versions of what she wore, so that the husband sometimes joked, calling them *the five girls*” (40). If the girls and their mother are taken as a single unit, the daughters are essentially fragmented pieces of their mother’s personhood—Laura even devises a color code for her daughters’ clothing and then buys “rainbow clothes for herself so none of the girls can accuse her of playing favorites” (66). Yolanda’s relationship with her mother, in the novel’s telling, is the most complicated; Laura constantly fragments Yolanda’s name, often calling her “Yo,” a diminutive of Yolanda but also the Spanish word for “I.” In doing so, Silvia Schultermundl argues, “Laura unmistakably claims Yolanda as part of herself and, by logical extension, as her own” (9). Yolanda’s struggles to distinguish herself as an individual take the form of insisting upon the importance of her whole name—whereas nicknames are perhaps thought of, in the West and potentially elsewhere, as pet names, signs of affection, for Yolanda they are verbally representative of her fragmented identity, the defining of her self in relationship to her mother and to her family as a whole. In one of the vignettes narrated by all four daughters, they recall, “With four girls so close in age, she couldn’t indulge identities”

(41), and indeed, Laura views her daughters, more often than not, as a single unit with interchangeable parts: “the mother confused their names or called them all by the generic pet name, ‘Cuquita,’ and switched their birthdates and careers, and sometimes forgot which husband or boyfriend went with which daughter” (42). To establish a semblance of individuation, she nevertheless “had a favorite story she liked to tell about each one as a way of celebrating that daughter on special occasions,” but it is in the day to day details of life that the García daughters are regularly considered pieces of a larger whole (42).

Given their near-constant collective identification by others, it follows that, as Julie Barak notes, the “sisters’ stories are bound to repeat themselves like islands clustering in the archipelago; throughout their lives the same issues and complications arise” (175). Indeed, on the Island they are regarded as but four members of a massive de la Torre clan; in one of the early (1960-1956) vignettes, Yolanda describes the dynamics of growing up in the de la Torre compound: “Back then, we all lived side by side in adjoining houses on a piece of property which belonged to my grandparents. Every kid in the family was paired up with a best-friend cousin” (225). On the Island, then, surrounded by extended family, the girls experience a measure of independence from each other, if not from their extended family—rather than being considered a unit of four, they are each individually paired with a cousin close in age. In the vignette immediately following Yolanda’s, Sandi recalls what it was like to be a member of the vast de la Torre clan: “I was born to die one of the innumerable, handsome de la Torre girls, singled out only when some aunt or other would take hold of my face in her hand and look intently at it, exclaiming that my eyes were those of my great-aunt Graciela, that my mouth was Mamita’s exactly!” (241). The children’s individual identities are defined as

(re)constructions of their various relatives; in the Dominican Republic, then, as in the United States, the García daughters are patchwork creations. When Sandi breaks her arm, she tellingly notes, “The cast was signed by several dozen cousins and aunts and uncles, so I seemed a composite creation of the de la Torre family” (253).

As patchwork girls, the García daughters not only need to establish their own identities in relationship to their physical location but also within their familial social structure. If they are defined by their reflection of various de la Torre characteristics, however, the question becomes how the girls learn to define themselves without the vast phalanx of cousins, aunts, and uncles to mirror their identities back to them. In moving to the United States, the girls lose the constant identification with their extended family and begin instead to be identified more specifically in relationship to one another—and to their mother. While in the Dominican Republic Carlos is the head of the family, in the United States, family dynamics change: Sandi notes that “Mami was the leader now that they lived in the States. *She* had gone to school in the States. *She* spoke English without a heavy accent” (176). The struggle to individuate themselves both from their extended and from their immediate family marks the daughters’ most intimate method of constructing their individual identities in relationship to both to the Dominican Republic and to the United States; despite their mother’s attempts to classify and categorize her daughters, the individual García girls begin to distinguish themselves from their family, and from each other, almost from the beginning of their life in the United States. Their identities are shaped by their awakening sexuality, their (dis)abilities with language, and their own interpretation of their “belongingness” in both the Dominican Republic and the United States.

Several critics have commented on the interlocking roles of gender, sex, and sexuality within the novel; Barak argues that the process of negotiating shifting conceptions of their own identities is “even more complicated *because* they are girls, and growing up is more difficult for girls as they mature and come face-to-face with the double standards and demeaning cultural myths about women’s bodies and women’s roles in a patriarchal society” (160). It is interesting to note that Alvarez gives us four different female interpretations of growing up as a member of the one-and-a-half generation, but the reader does not have access to a comparable experience from a male perspective (it is important to note here as well that there is little, if any, space in the novel for an exploration of how this particular type of transnational experience would be different for an individual who did not identify with this heteronormative framework). Likewise, the girls experience a disconnection in the very way they orient themselves through speech; Schultermandl argues that this “dislocation in language” is a “common experience” of the one-and-a-half generation (6). The novel’s temporal logic provides another layer of (dis)orientation for the girls’ respective identities; as the novel progresses it moves backward in time, meaning that the reader meets the García girls in the United States and travels with them backward through time, through memory, to their childhoods in the Dominican Republic. To repeat Liliana Meneses argument: “identity integration is not really possible during the experience of living in a Third Culture; it is only when the individual is able to look back and reflect on his or her experience that the issues of identity development are integrated. In other words, as the adult TCK constructs and retells his life story, he is simultaneously describing how he is perceived by others...as well as how he perceives himself in the story” (287). Like Antoinette, each García girl

must thus navigate the boundaries of her individual and collective identities through narrative reconstruction, by diving through memory.

The girls' individual narratives echo similar concerns with sexuality, language, and where/how they "fit" in the Dominican Republic and the United States. As a whole, the García daughters' sexuality is intricately linked to silencing and trauma—in essence, the inability to negotiate what is a new facet of their identities, due to a lack of the appropriate language to categorize their experiences. Yolanda's awareness of her own sexuality is directly affected by her struggles with the English language. In "The Rudy Elmenhurst Story," she recounts her first significant romantic relationship in the United States. At this stage in her life, Yolanda recalls, "English was then still a party favor for me—crack open the dictionary, find out if I'd just been insulted, praised, admonished, criticized" (87). Yolanda's relationship with Rudy is a series of sexual encounters, each thwarted by the couples' inability to speak each other's language. Yolanda cannot bring herself to think of sex in Rudy's terms, as "in the sack, screwed, balled, laid, and fucked" (97). For Yolanda language is essentially the key to her sexuality—she refuses Rudy because "His vocabulary turned me off even as I was beginning to acknowledge my body's pleasure" (96). Rudy's vocabulary is gendered; the words he uses to describe sex are assertions of what a male body does *to* another (female) body—and, implicitly, what the gendered male colonial body does to the colonized.

It is not that Yolanda cannot speak the "native" language—in fact, the one and only time Yolanda meets Rudy's parents, they compliment her "accentless English" (100). Instead, as Yolanda learns in this recollection, her ability to speak the language does not by necessity mean she is accepted in other ways—instead, it plants her firmly in

a liminal space, desirous of exploring her sexuality, but only able to if the words are “right.” Marciniak argues that the root of Rudy’s parents’ comment is an implicit “reliance on the dichotomous thinking that privileges, even glorifies, the notion of speaking like a native over accented speech” (64). If Yolanda can speak like a native, the implication is that she is one step closer to actually being native—which, in the novel, is not necessarily a desirable outcome. Marciniak argues however, “To lose an accent...does not necessarily mean to accelerate the desired acculturation. In Alvarez’s novel we are confronted with subversive resistance to the metaphoric idea of losing an accent because to lose it means to obliterate the culturally and historically specific position marked by exile and to instantiate the idea of a full American whose uneasy, un-American differences have been successfully appeased or erased” (66). It is tempting to then read the “loss” of an accent as a metaphorical representation of the loss of a “native” identity, yet Marciniak cautions that such a simplistic reading is also not necessarily supported by the text. Yolanda does not have an accent, but neither does she quite have the vocabulary necessary to begin negotiating the boundaries surrounding her sexuality. As Joan Hoffman observes, “Words are inseparable from Yolanda’s identity: it is absolutely crucial that she choose the accurate and appropriate word, that she constantly and properly identify, describe, define, redefine, and name everything from mere objects to relationships, even to herself” (23). Without the “perfect” words, Yolanda cannot bring herself to engage sexually, and therefore remains in a liminal space, torn between her Dominican upbringing and the expectations of United States’ 1960’s sexual culture. In denying Yolanda access to these “perfect” words, however, the novel questions what those words might be, that would allow a woman in Yolanda’s particular nexus of

identification—female, immigrant, educated, wealthy—to express her sexuality. Perhaps, the novel indicates, these words do not exist.

This lack of vocabulary is echoed in “Trespass,” arguably the most disturbing of the stories dealing with any form of sexuality. Carla narrates this particular vignette, in which she encounters a sexual predator on her way home from school. She begins her narrative on the “day the Garcías were one American year old,” linking the trauma to come with a concrete symbol of her separation from the Dominican Republic. Carla wants nothing more than to go “home,” back to the Dominican Republic, but she recognizes that this “seemed a less and less likely prospect,” as her parents were “sinking roots” in the United States. When Laura registers the girls for school, Carla winds up attending a different school than her sisters—the first time she has been differentiated from the others. She enjoys the opportunity for some measure of individuality, the ability to “come home with stories of what had happened that day and not have a chorus of three naysayers to correct her” (154). But Carla’s enjoyment of her newfound individuality is dampened by daily torment from a group of “blond, snotty-nosed, freckle-faced” neighborhood boys (154). They taunt Carla for her accented English as well as her developing body, creating a link in Carla’s mind between the shame of speaking differently and the embarrassment of a body that she feels is betraying her. One particular incident cements this connection; one day, as Carla walks home alone from school, a “grownup American man about her parents’ age” beckons her from the inside of his car. Carla is afraid he will ask her for directions, and she dreads her inevitable response: “‘I don’t speak very much English,’ she would say in a small voice way of apology” (156). Admitting her limitations with the language feels like failure, proving “no doubt, the boy

gang's point that she didn't belong here" (156). Instead, however, the man has beckoned Carla for an entirely different reason—Carla realizes as she leans into speak to him that he “had tied his two shirtends just above his waist and was naked from there on down” (157). Carla's shock renders her speechless: “Not one word, English or Spanish, occurred to her” (157).

Anticipating shame regarding her difficulties with the English language, Carla is instead introduced to a new kind of fear—a distorted, perverted kind of sexuality that becomes inextricably linked to her liminal status in the United States. When the police come to question her, Carla cannot find the right words to describe what she saw; the vignette instead ends with what will become, for Carla, a recurring nightmare: the boy gang's faces “perched at the foot of her bed, a grim chorus of urchin faces, boys without bodies, chanting without words, ‘Go back! Go back!’” (164). The singular trauma of her encounter with a sexual predator is thus upstaged by the repetitive trauma she experiences on her walks home from school, and in linking the trauma of her encounter with the predator with the boys' repetitive taunting, Carla interprets the sexual inappropriateness of the experience as another indicator that she does not belong in her new environment. As Juan Pablo Rivera notes, “trauma in Alvarez's novel is often downplayed, especially as it pertains to sexual violence. Readers are entertained by the approximation of a wound, a gap, but then the narrative retracts” (131). Instead of her encounter with the predator taking center stage in this narrative, Carla fixates on the boys' taunts—the novel thus, as Rivera claims, dances away from acknowledging the pain of the wound it has revealed. Carla is doubly traumatized, as Barak notes, by her

inability to tell the police what she has seen: “She feels violated not only by the flasher, but also by the police who insist that she speak what she cannot” (170).

Like Carla, Yolanda also experiences forms of aphasia in the novel, most critically in the opening vignette, “Antojos.” Having gone back to the Dominican Republic after an extended absence since her last visit, Yolanda decides that what she wants more than anything are *guayabas*, guavas, and that she will travel by herself to the country to get some. This vignette establishes/echoes many of the themes that thread throughout the novel: the disconnect brought on by the family’s economic status, the daughters’ conflicted relationship to their “homeland” and the United States, and, most crucially, the role of language in constructing their identities. When her aunts admonish her to speak Spanish while she is there, Yolanda reflects on the way reverting to one language seems to supplant the other: “when she returns to the States, she’ll find herself suddenly going blank over some word in English or, like her mother, mixing up some common phrase” (7). What is unknown to the extended family is that Yolanda has not decided whether or not she will return to the States—but as it becomes clear, neither has Yolanda fully anticipated the complications that might arise from a decision to remain in the Dominican Republic. When she blows out the candles on her welcome home cake, Yolanda wishes “Let this turn out to be my home,” and her next thought is of the “maids in their quiet, mysterious cluster at the end of the patio” (11). Her thoughts fuse the idea of “home” with the image of the maids, a domestic scene that romanticizes what home in the Dominican Republic might hold for her. Yolanda continues to romanticize her wished-for “home” as she drives through the country searching for guavas; she sees “Here and there a braid of smoke rising up from a hillside—a *campesino* and his family

living out their solitary life. This is what she has been missing all these years without really knowing that she has been missing it” (11). The irony of Yolanda’s imagination is that this solitary existence has never been hers to miss—one of seemingly innumerable cousins, she has never been solitary, and the de la Torre name means she has never been anywhere close to a *campesino*’s economic status. Yolanda thus misses what she has never had; as Castells puts it, “It is important to note that in reality Yolanda feels nostalgia for a countryside that is not a significant part of her personal or family history” (36).

Indeed, even as Yolanda comes as close as she has possibly ever been to the realities of life for the majority of Dominicans, it is not quite real to her: “It is hard to believe the poverty the radio commentators keep talking about. There seems to be plenty here to eat—except for guavas” (13). Significantly, Yolanda sees around her everything except the one thing she wants most. In order to satisfy her desire for guavas, she stops at a cantina and finds a group of boys who are willing to guide her to a guava grove. The way there is difficult, however, and her car gets a flat tire. As Yolanda tries to decide what to do, two men step out of the grove, “one short and dark, and the other slender and light-skinned. They wear ragged work clothes stained with patches of sweat; their faces are drawn. Machetes hang from their belts” (19). From their appearance, it is safe to assume that these men are *campesinos* like the one Yolanda earlier imagined living a solitary life with his family in the countryside. A real-life encounter with one of these workers, however, is an entirely different experience than imagining their existence. Yolanda immediately interprets their presence as a threat and experiences classic symptoms of fear: “her legs seem suddenly to have been hammered into the ground

beneath her” and “her tongue feels as if it has been stuffed in her mouth like a rag to keep her quiet” (19-20). Finally, when Yolanda does not respond their inquiries, the taller man seems to have an epiphany: “*Americana*,” he says to the darker man, pointing to the car. “*No comprende*” (20). He has sized up the situation himself and determined that Yolanda does not respond because she cannot understand what they are saying. Adding her silence to the fact that she is driving an expensive car on a deserted country road, he comes to the conclusion that she is American. The smaller man is not convinced—“¿*Americana?*” he asks her, as if not quite sure what to make of her” (20). Of course, Yolanda has understood everything the men have said to her; as Castells points out:

Although the scene is filled with racial and sexual tension for Yolanda, the two men merely ask if they can help her, but she is too scared to answer them. Her formerly imperfect Spanish gives way completely as she responds to the *campesinos*’ offer of assistance with absolute silence. Curiously, although as a child in the Dominican Republic Yolanda could use Spanish perfectly to invent excuses and avoid punishment... as an adult she has completely lost this power with words. (37)

It is significant that Yolanda has lost power over *Spanish*, however, because her response to the men’s realization is “a great flood of explanation” in English, “how it happens that she is on a back road by herself, her craving for guavas, having never learned how to change a flat” (20). In the face of her torrent of English, it is the two men who are silenced—only when she mentions the name Miranda, the distant relatives who live nearby, do their “eyes light up with respect” (20-21).

The implication in this passage is that the de la Torre connections and wealth have saved Yolanda from a potentially dangerous situation—yet it is unclear that the men had any ill intentions to begin with. Instead, as Castells argues, Yolanda’s interpretation of the scenario is scripted by her wealth and by her relationship to the United States:

“Although she has returned to the Dominican Republic in search of a place to call home, her linguistic shortcomings and her cultural awkwardness suggest that she is as much out place in the land of her birth” as she has been in the United States. “Unfortunately, this babbling encounter does not mean that she fully belongs in the United States either, as silence—or the inability to communicate—plagues Yolanda and her family throughout their years in their adopted home” (37). The economic disparity between Yolanda and the men adds another layer of complexity to this encounter; the men actually change Yolanda’s flat, even going as far as to “lift the deflated tire in to the trunk and put away the tools” (21). In return, Yolanda ignores their refusal of the money she offers them and “stuffs the bills” into the pocket of the taller man, an assumptive gesture that cements her elevated economic and social status (22). Despite her earlier wish to be able to call the Dominican Republic home, in this vignette Yolanda latches onto English as a way out of a potentially volatile situation, displaying her conflicted sense of identity; as Marciniak claims, Yolanda’s “inability to choose whether she is Dominican or American dramatizes her hyphenated, hybridized sense of selfhood and reveals her liminality” (69).

The youngest García daughter, Sofia, known as Fifi, also struggles poignantly with the liminality of her own identity in relationship to both the Dominican Republic and the United States. In the second section of “The Blood of the Conquistadores,” Sofia observes: “I’m the one who doesn’t remember anything from that last day on the Island

because I'm the youngest and so the other three are always telling me what happened that last day" (217). Later (in time, earlier in the novel), Fifi takes full responsibility for a baggie of marijuana found in the girls' bedroom, and her punishment is either "staying on the Island for a year at Tia Carmen's or going back to the States, but not to her boarding school. She would have to live at home with Mami and Papi and attend the local Catholic school" (116). Her sisters are shocked when she chooses a year on the Island, and Fifi defends her decision: "I wanna try it out here. Maybe I'll like it" (116). The sisters have at least a passing understanding of Fifi's reasoning: "As the youngest of the four, she had had the least chance to bond to the Island before our abrupt exile" (116). Barak argues,

Fifi feels different from her sisters because she has only this one memory to help her (re)construct her bicultural, bilingual self. Though this lack of memory makes her the least divided of her sisters in many ways, (she is, for example, least troubled by struggles with language), in other ways her lack of memory also makes her the most disturbed, the most rebellious against her circumstances.

(165)

Of the four girls, Fifi perhaps fits the framework of a Third Culture Kid more so than that of an immigrant, although differently than the way Antoinette fits the TCK framework. With the least memories of the Island, Fifi has had the least opportunity to develop a strong sense of a cultural heritage or homeland other than in the United States, and therefore is conflicted about where she is even supposed to identify as "home." In her sisters' opinion, Fifi's stay on the Island has disastrous results; she becomes involved with a domineering, machismo man who pressures her to have sex despite her lack of contraception. Carla, Sandi, and Yolanda therefore stage an intervention: "a coup on the

same Avenida where a decade ago the dictator was cornered and wounded on his way to a tryst with his mistress” (127). In the García daughters’ revision of this particular historical event, Fifi’s boyfriend takes on the role of Trujillo and Fifi herself the unnamed mistress. When the family discovers that Fifi and her boyfriend have been alone together, outside of the family-enforced chaperone system, Fifi is sent back to the United States with her immediate family. She is furious, but the other three daughters claim, “She thought she could be all Island. We know better” (131). In essence, Carla, Sandi, and Sofia force Fifi to re-emigrate; they “know” it is impossible for any of them to be entirely Dominican, implying that it is impossible for them to have a unified identity, since from previous experience they know that they cannot be “all American” either. As each girl’s identity echoes and repeats the others, Barak argues, “Fifi comes close to spinning out of the orbit of the cyclone created by their bilingual, bicultural experiences; she almost returns to their island past, but her sisters pull her back into their swirling present” (167). Barak’s argument is insightful, but limited: Fifi is not the only daughter to express a desire to return to her “homeland”—Yolanda does the same in “Antojos.” Furthermore, what Barak’s analysis fails to acknowledge is that there is no actual temporal dislocation between the United States and the Dominican Republic. In other words, these two physical locations exist at the same time; referring to the Dominican Republic as “past” borders on a narrative of development that privileges Western cultures as “ahead” of any others.

It is just as important, however, in taking care not to privilege the United States, to also take care not to romanticize the Dominican Republic. This is the pitfall Yolanda falls into in “Antojos”; the Island she has created in her imagination, pieced together

from memory and story, does not exist. The Dominican Republic, like the United States, exists in the here-and-now, not in a mythical, idealized place in the past. The very concept of a transnational identity often runs a similar risk—as Radkkrishnan points out, it is tempting to want to ask, “Which is the real self and which is the other? How do these two selves coexist and how to they weld into one identity?” (204). In truth, there is no “real self,” no “two halves” that somehow, through work or therapy or heightened awareness, merge into a singular, unified identity. Indeed, as Marciniak cautions, “although the concept of transnational positionality seems to embrace—even at times celebrate—the idea of border crossings, it is important to acknowledge that for many exiles such crossings are extremely problematic, risky, or sometimes not possible at all” (xiv). The García family is a case in point—despite their ties to the United States, the family as a whole initially chose to stay in the Dominican Republic. It is political turmoil and the potential threat of physical danger that makes them seek refuge in the United States; crossing the border in this case is less a liberating, emancipatory act than a survival tactic. The developed ability to operate in multiple locations, in multiple languages, to tell their stories in their own words, is a crucial element of the García family’s survival in the United States. Manuela Matas Llorente notes that “Language, storytelling, becomes essential as a means of exploring one’s past and coming to terms with one’s present for being an insider and outsider in two cultures allows now the necessary distance for a new perception of both” (74). It is unclear, however, whether Alvarez’s novel supports an interpretation that grants the Garcías a “new perception” of both of their cultures. Instead, Stuart Hall reminds us, “Silencing as well as remembering, identity is always a question of producing in the future an account of the past, that is to

say it is always about narrative, the stories which cultures tell themselves about who they are and where they came from” (5). The narrative structure of *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* troubles a celebratory reading of the García family’s identity formation; the novel opens with Yolanda’s inability to repatriate to the Island, and ends with a chilling recollection of “some violation that lies at the center” of her art (290). Hall continues, “Identity is not in the past to be found, but in the future to be constructed” (14); by inverting the chronological sequence, Alvarez effectively guides the reader on a journey into the García family’s past—the future remains beyond the scope of the novel, denying the reader, and by extension the García family, a chance to construct their identities as members of a transnational Dominican diaspora.

CHAPTER FOUR

“IT IS THE PRESENT”: THE GLOBAL NOMAD IN *THE HEART OF
REDNESS*

Just as with Rhys’s and Alvarez’s texts, Zakes Mda’s 2000 novel *The Heart of Redness* displays striking overlaps between the fictional main character of the novel and Mda’s own personal biography. Like Camagu, arguably the central character in the novel, Mda himself spent a significant amount of his life away from his birthplace. Unlike Camagu, however, Mda and his family were locally involved in the fight against apartheid as well as connected to their Xhosa ancestry. In an interview with Elly Williams, Mda reveals that in his youth he was sent to live with his grandmother in a “rural area in the Eastern Cape, which is where [his] father originally came from (65). There he “continued to write” in his “own indigenous African language, Xhosa” (65). Mda goes on to articulate his family’s position in South Africa at the time:

my father was arrested because he was a political activist in the underground political movement fighting against apartheid. He escaped and went into exile in a neighboring country called Lesotho, which was then a British colony. A year later I joined him, so I also became a refugee, initially not because of my own political activities but to be with him. My family joined us later, and we were in exile ever since (65).

In the same interview, Mda notes “I only went back to South Africa in 1994 after our first democratic elections” (65). Like the four García girls in Alvarez’s novel, Mda’s refugee status was not an inherent part of his identity, but a label earned through his move to

Lesotho; also like the García girls, Mda's move was not a personal choice but a family decision. Like Mda's, Camagu's return to South Africa coincides with the official end of apartheid: "He remembers how in 1994 he took leave from his job and came back to South Africa to vote, after an absence of almost thirty years" (29). Camagu returns to find himself a stranger in his birthplace, however, and quickly realizes how detrimental his extended absence will be to his attempts to negotiate the boundaries of his identity in post-apartheid South Africa: "He was in his mid-forties, and was a stranger in his own country" (29). Like Antoinette and the García girls, Camagu must grapple with this stranger self in order to construct his particular version of a transnational identity. Politics are at the heart of Camagu's conversion from stranger to integral member of a community—he returns to South Africa at a critical political and historical moment, and he establishes his identity through the politics of capitalist exchange, marked by race and represented by his relationship with John Dalton, as well as the politics of desire, marked by gender and illustrated in his relationships with NomaRussia, Xoliswa Ximiya, and Qukezwa. Camagu's negotiation within the boundaries of these various relationships ultimately displays the value of a transnational identity to the viable future of the village of Qolorha-by-Sea, and, by implication, to the viable future of a new South Africa.

Also like *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, *The Heart of Redness* de- and reconstructs time and space—and in doing so, interrogates history and historical legacies not only in order to expose but also to reimagine how concepts of identity and belonging are constructed in post-apartheid South Africa. While Alvarez's novel could be described as a series of flashbacks, the structure is still oriented rather firmly in reverse chronological order. Mda's novel is perhaps then most like *Wide*

Sargasso Sea in its temporal organization, as it ultimately collapses the boundary between present and past. *The Heart of Redness* is oriented in two temporal spaces, both located predominantly in the village of Qolorha-by-Sea. One timeline contains the events surrounding the Xhosa Cattle-Killing of 1856-57; the other contains the contemporary account of Camagu's life in Qolorha-by-Sea. Mda almost exclusively borrows J.B. Peires account of the Cattle-Killing for the historical timeline, so much so that in 2008 Andrew Offenburger published an article in *Research in African Literatures* accusing Mda of plagiarizing the text. Peires writes that the Xhosa Cattle-Killing was the result of a series of prophecies made by Nongqawuse, a young girl whose conversations with prophetic messengers instructed the Xhosa to "kill their cattle and destroy their corn which were contaminated and impure" (311). If the Xhosa met all the requirements of the prophecies, all of the evil things in the world, including the British colonials, would be eradicated and "Peace, plenty, and goodness would reign on earth" (Peires 312). Those who followed Nongqawuse's instructions became known as Believers; those who rejected her prophecies, Unbelievers. This distinction, established by allegiance to the young prophetess, carries over into the contemporary timeline, in which the Believers still blame the Unbelievers for the fact that the Nongqawuse's promises did not come to fruition. The timelines are not clearly delineated, effectively fusing "past" and "present" into one continuous narrative stream.

Richard Samin argues that the narrative's structure, shifting back and forth seamlessly between past and present, "destabilises the reader's perception," as ultimately the narrative blurs the line between what is historical and what is present-day (194). Heather Williams points out that this temporal collapse, which might for the Western

reader be destabilizing, actually reflects the traditional Xhosa conception of time: “Unlike western time, there is no forward progress in time. Instead of looking to the future for promised events, the Xhosa people of South Africa focus primarily on what has already taken place” (11). Further destabilizing the boundary between timelines is the fact that Mda recycles names throughout the text; indeed, Camagu is the only name that is used *only* in the contemporary timeline—all the others feature in both. Like the García girls’ patchwork identities, the characters in *The Heart of Redness* thus at times seem to be composite constructions of historical and present-day people—another element of the novel that may destabilize readers accustomed to a more traditionally linear Western narrative construction. Mda’s work in general is characterized by this destabilizing tendency—a way of deconstructing ideas of what it means to live in the “new” South Africa, just as *Wide Sargasso Sea* and *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* deconstruct what it means to live in their respective transnational spaces. Also like Rhys’ and Alvarez’s texts, *The Heart of Redness* revolves around a central historical event. It is significant to note that all three of these texts utilize the historical event as a catalyst for the specific events of the respective novel, but do not make the historical event the central focus of the narrative. In *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the Emancipation Act of 1833 serves as the historical marker from which point Antoinette must renegotiate her Creole identity; in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, Trujillo’s dictatorship is the driving force behind the García family’s immigration. In *The Heart of Redness*, however, the narrative’s relationship to history is slightly more complex.

Whereas it is tempting, and arguably necessary in some ways, to read Mda’s novel as a post-apartheid text, Hilary Dannenberg observes that in *The Heart of Redness*

the “apartheid period is only referred to obliquely...and is not the focus of the text” (171). In *The Heart of Redness* Mda chooses to split the narrative into an account of the historical events of the Xhosa Cattle-Killing and the story of Camagu, a present-day émigré to Qolorha-by-Sea. In doing so, Mda deliberately omits an account of what he terms the “Middle Generations,” those people who survived the debilitations of the Cattle-Killing and its aftermath and then suffered through apartheid itself. Instead, Mda centers the narrative around Camagu, who, as Danneberg observes, “advocates an orientation to contemporary Xhosa culture, so the novel itself focuses on issues facing contemporary South Africa and Africa as a whole within the wider historical and cultural context of colonialism, as opposed to the specific history of apartheid” (171). Just as trauma in Alvarez’s novel is approximated by a gap, or a wound, through the omission of the Middle Generations, *The Heart of Redness* becomes not a “novel about apartheid,” but a novel that refuses to bind South African history within the limits of the history of apartheid. In many ways, the novel is itself about nationhood—the destruction of the Xhosa nation and the remaking of the “new” South Africa. In other words, Mda’s text explores the idea that questions of what it means to belong in South Africa were not answered by the end of apartheid, but merely compounded by the renegotiation of boundaries in the postapartheid space.

Camagu’s transnational experience as displayed in *The Heart of Redness* is perhaps the most vague experience of those found in the three texts analyzed thus far. If Antoinette is a Third Culture Kid and the García girls are aliens/immigrants, Camagu may be read as a *global nomad*, perhaps a more malleable reference to what Norma McCaig offhandedly refers to as an “internationally mobile” experience (51). Although

Camagu was born in South Africa, he spent a large portion of his life outside of his birth country, and when he returns, finds that he does not quite fit in. Unlike Antoinette, however, Camagu does not wrestle with the weight of being *born* into conflicting cultural identities, and unlike the García girls, he does not return to visit or attempt to repatriate until he is an adult, when he returns to South Africa by choice, ostensibly to participate in post-apartheid democratizing efforts. Similar to the García girls' experiences with attempted repatriation, Camagu finds that his transnational experiences have altered his identity in significant ways: he does not speak the language, is not well-connected within the new controlling hierarchy, and, despite his involvement in antiapartheid movements around the world, cannot perform the *toyi-toyi*, the ubiquitous freedom dance that marks those who "bore the brunt of the bullets" and is arguably *the* indicator of who "belongs" and who does not in the South Africa of the novel (32). Once the dance that "the youth used to dance when people were fighting for liberation," the freedom dance is now inextricably linked to capitalistic success (28): at his first job interview after his return to South Africa, Camagu "heard them comment, 'Who is he? We didn't see him when we were dancing the freedom dance'" (29). Camagu slowly realizes that the freedom dance has become a symbol of the anti-apartheid movement, but that, like many symbols, the dance itself has lost much of its revolutionary power. The end of apartheid did not bring with it an end to the economic disparity in the country—instead, select black citizens were chosen for certain jobs as "paragons of empowerment" and were never expected to excel at their work (30). As Melissa Myambo phrases it, "postapartheid does not, and cannot, translate to postinequality, *materially* speaking" (94). Equality in this case seems to mean a sort of forced colorblindness that does not address the lingering concerns of

material inequality. Mda spends a large portion of the beginning of the novel explicitly addressing the presence of this inequality in modern South Africa, specifically the fact that, as Busuyi Mekusi notes, “nothing has actually changed, other than the fact that the operation of the machinery of the state has moved from the white minority to another minority group: a few privileged blacks and their white collaborators” (589). Camagu refers to this “changing of the guard,” to borrow a phrase from Chijioke Uwah, as a relationship between “inexperienced” black workers and the white “consultants” who essentially run the show from backstage. Camagu makes note that “No one cared if they [the black workers] ever got to grips with their jobs or not. All the better for the old guard if they did not. That safeguarded the old guard’s position” (30). John Dalton, the white trader whose family has lived in Qolorha for generations, belongs to this old guard.

Mda navigates the boundaries of identity and belonging in the new South African space primarily through the contrast between the characters of Camagu and John Dalton. Camagu is a black umXhosa man, born in South Africa, who went to the United States as a teenager and spent thirty years there, returning in 1994 to vote in the new democratic elections. By contrast, Mda describes John Dalton as a “white man of English stock,” who “looks like a parody of an Afrikaner farmer. But he is neither an Afrikaner nor a farmer” (8). Instead, Dalton traces his lineage in the specific geographical area back to his great-great-grandfather, a soldier and magistrate in the British army who was stationed in Qolorha. Unlike Camagu, Dalton “has never left South Africa” and speaks isiXhosa better than Camagu would ever be able to (57). Although Siphokazi Koyana theorizes that “differences in leadership or management styles” primarily differentiate Camagu and Dalton, Mda juxtaposes the men not only based on their ideas for the future

of Qolorha-by-Sea but also by their degree of “belongingness” to the native community. It is tempting to define a sense of “belongingness” primarily with a “right” to the land granted either by cultural heritage or by birth. In this sense, both Camagu and Dalton “belong” in South Africa—they are both “natives” by birth. However, Marita Wenzel warns that a primarily geography-based understanding of identity may be outdated: “The main consensus about contemporary culture and the formation or construction of identity seems to be that it can no longer be associated with an area, but that it relates to various aspects of a person’s ‘place’ in the world (class, education, language, etc.)” (318). In other words, in today’s world one’s identity has less to do with a physical place and more to do with cultural markers. In Camagu and John Dalton’s case, their respective races, economic statuses, and ancestral ties to the land are markers that indicate not only their place within the colonial legacy of South Africa but also their place in relationship to the future of Qolorha-by-Sea.

In contrast to Camagu’s struggle to find work wherever he goes, Dalton is an entrenched member of the Qolorha-by-Sea community as the owner of the Vulindlela Trading Store. The problem with this, as Koyana points out, is that “the atrocities of the past have ensured Dalton’s unfair economic advantage over the villagers” (57); indeed, as Reneé Schatteman notes, there is a direct link in Dalton’s case between “colonial exploitation and neo-colonial self-interest” (286). Dalton’s economic position results from the fact that his namesake profited from the Xhosa cattle-killing; when King Sarhili asks local traders to sell candles to the Believers in preparation for the day of darkness, the earlier Dalton takes his candles out into the streets, “peddling candles the entire day. That was the beginning of his trading empire” (210). Although the government under

which present-day Dalton does business has officially ended apartheid, the entrenched material inequality between white and black residents of the new South Africa is evident in Dalton's position in the community. He controls the flow of capital in Qolorha-by-Sea with his control over the *ityala* books, effectively becoming the emissary of a never-ending "vicious cycle of debt" (45). His capitalist enterprise marks him as a member of the ruling elite Mda so vociferously condemns—despite the official end of apartheid, the legacies of inequality maintain a power imbalance that allows Dalton to continue to economically exploit the residents of Qolorha-by-Sea.

Camagu returns to a South Africa in which the legal system of racial inequality has been abolished—but the law does not always change the realities of day-to-day life. As Daniel Gover observes, "Mda shows us that while the government changes from white to black, the kind of cutthroat capitalism that continues in South Africa represents individualism at its worst" (75). The juxtaposition between individualism and a community-oriented consciousness is what ultimately defines Camagu and Dalton's present-day identities—Dalton runs the debt-inducing capitalist machine at the trading store, while Camagu eventually establishes a cooperative society with NoGiant and MamCirha, two women of Qolorha. The cooperative society connects Camagu to the community in a way that Dalton's capitalist enterprise cannot. Indeed, conversations between the two men are rife with the implications of each man's version of "work" for the community: Camagu argues that the villagers "should be part of the whole process. They should be active participants in the conception of the project, in raising funds for it, in constructing it. Then it becomes their project. Then they will look after it" (179). The difference between what Dalton and Camagu offer the community is the difference

between capitalist individualism and a community-oriented approach; this difference is clarified perhaps most stringently in each man's vision for the future of Qolorha-by-Sea. Whereas Dalton wants to build a cultural village in which various aspects of Xhosa history will be on display for the benefit of (white) tourists, Camagu envisions a collective backpacker's hostel, built in the style of traditional Xhosa dwellings and run cooperatively by the entire village. These plans exemplify each man's own conception of his relationship to the community as a whole and his understanding of his place in South Africa's fraught history.

Camagu and Dalton's respective "belongingness" in Qolorha-by-Sea is also calibrated in relationship to the critical historical event of the novel, the Xhosa Cattle-Killing, and their affiliation with either the Believers or the Unbelievers. This long-standing divide marks most aspects of life in Qolorha-by-Sea, and Camagu and Dalton's respective positions are indicative not only of their place in the community but of their ideas regarding the future of the community. Dalton, as discussed earlier, continues to benefit economically from his ancestor's involvement in the Cattle-Killing, and seems to align with the side of the Believers, descendants of those who believed Nongqawuse's prophecy. Dalton's involvement with the Believers causes consternation among the other citizens of Qolorha-by-Sea, and their speculation regarding his motives is directly linked to their estimation of his "belongingness" in the community. Some believe that Dalton is "just like all the other selfish white people," unconcerned about the welfare of the community (68), an interpretation that holds up Dalton's race as what separates him from the "true" citizens of Qolorha-by-Sea. Others believe that Dalton opposes "progress" because "Inside he is a raw umXhosa who still lives in darkness"—in other words, he is

holding on to belief in Nongqawuse's prophecy and in the vitality of the past (68). This interpretation of his motives displaces race in favor of other markers of "belongingness," such as Dalton's ancestral ties to the area and his involvement in the community: "Dalton belongs in this community. He lives here permanently. So have his fathers before him. He was at the same circumcision school as my elder brother. He is the man who has organized the village water-supply project" (68).

Interestingly, several critics seem to side with Dalton's advocates, and have read his role in *The Heart of Redness* in an entirely favorable light. Koyana claims that, in contrast to Camagu, Dalton is "so immersed in the place, in his land of birth, that he speaks isiXhosa fluently, partakes in Xhosa customs and understands the local traditions, foods, and rituals [such as circumcision]" (58). This reading, however, fails to take into account that Camagu, despite his inability to speak isiXhosa, is also circumcised and, according to the novel, despite spending many years abroad, "remembers the culture of his people very well" (72). Koyana goes on to say that as a "member of the community and a shopkeeper, [Dalton] has personal relationships with many villagers whom he knows intimately" (58); again, despite the fact that Dalton runs the trading store and claims to know all the families in the area, it is Camagu who ultimately marries into a local family (Dalton has married an Afrikaner from another village) and has a child that further ties him to the community. Koyana's final argument is that "by identifying so strongly with Africa and her people, Dalton epitomizes the 'new' African white man who genuinely engages with the spirit of the place of his birth" (58). Camagu's involvement with the community is equally motivated by identification and engagement with the area and its people, however, and he is equally tied to South Africa by birth. The elusive

concept of *authenticity* is ultimately at stake here: these men are both South African by at least by birth, yet they are so different, one black, one white, one capitalist, one community-oriented. What ultimately distinguishes Dalton from Camagu are his race and the fact that he has lived his entire life in the same physical location; the problem with labeling him the “authentic” citizen of Qolorha, and excluding Camagu, is the bare fact that Dalton’s plan for the community’s future involves an outdated, historically fixed, and utterly *inauthentic* representation of the community’s people.

Similar to Koyana, Jana Gohrisch argues that *The Heart of Redness*

offers a new role to the white male represented by John Dalton, the local trader.

He atones for the crimes of the past his predecessor committed by securing

governmental protection of Qolorha as a national history site. Thus the former

colonizer finally saves the black community . . . A new kind of shared history is

envisaged here – one based on transcultural identity, rather than on division. (243)

The problem with this reading is twofold: first of all, there is little textual evidence to support that Dalton in any way “atones for the crimes of the past.” It rather seems that Dalton is unwilling to consciously associate himself with his ancestral history. At one point Bhonco asserts that Dalton “is a descendant of headhunters. Yet no one holds that against him,” to which Dalton, “flushed with shame,” shouts “It is not true! It is not true!” (168). Such a direct denial in the face of overwhelming textual evidence to the contrary does not indicate that Dalton has atoned for or is even willing to acknowledge his forebears’ part in Xhosa history—in other words, Dalton is unwilling to acknowledge his implicit role in South Africa’s fraught history. Likewise, Gohrisch’s reading of Dalton’s character is problematic in its conception of Dalton as the white savior of the

black community of Qolorha-by-Sea. Such an understanding reads uncomfortably like the British colonizers' own beliefs regarding their presence in South Africa, exemplified by the original John Dalton's explanation of Sir George Grey's actions as the "gift of British civilization" (123). The modern-day Dalton's attitudes toward the Xhosa people amount to little more than a proprietary sense of familiarity and ownership. Dalton's neocolonial attitude is best exemplified by his sense of betrayal when Camagu defends the Believers. He thinks: "It is fine to humor these people sometimes, to go along with their foibles before putting them on the right path" (245). It is interesting to note that whereas Camagu never *claims* himself to be a member of the Qolorha community, Dalton frequently refers to the community as *his* people: "Those are my people, man. I know them. They know me. I grew up with them. I am one of them" (246). Dalton therefore sets up an ever-present distinction between himself and the Xhosa: they are *his* people, but they are nonetheless an "other" that needs guidance and a firm hand. Dalton's language suggests a sense of ownership over the people of Qolorha-by-Sea that is itself a neo-colonial attitude leftover from colonial domination.

In contrast to Dalton's emphatic assertion of his own "belongingness," Camagu's journey toward acceptance as a member of the Qolorha community occurs from the outside in—that is, the community accepts him, he does not assert himself as a member. Koyana refers to this process as *immersion*, a metaphor that accurately describes Camagu's gradual envelopment in the workings of the community (54). Whereas Dalton seems to waver between siding with the Believers and the Unbelievers, Camagu stalwartly refuses to exclusively align himself with either, despite the fact that both factions continuously attempt to categorize him, and his unaffiliation allows him to

consider Qolorha in its present-day situation instead of as a cultural artifact stuck in a frozen past. What finally separates these men are their respective beliefs about what the future of Qolorha-by-Sea should look like; these opinions themselves are the direct results of each man's interpretation of his own role in the community, which itself is influenced, if not determined, by his race and economic status. In addition to managing the trading store, Dalton chauffeurs tourists around the area; among other things, he has partnered with two women whose "work is to display *amasiko*—the customs and cultural practices of the amaXhosa—to the white people who are brought to their hut in Dalton's four-wheel-drive bakkie" (96). Dalton wants things in Qolorha to stay the way they are, as Bhonco observes, because he makes a profit off of Qolorha's Xhosa heritage. As Paul Jay observes, "Dalton's project, in seeking to preserve and respect Nongqawuse's story, seems committed to preserving indigenous traditions and practices. However, Mda is careful to connect such preservation of "native" practices to colonial domination" (144).

By contrast, Camagu describes his vision for the future of Qolorha-by-Sea as a way of encouraging growth: "I am interested in the culture of the amaXhosa as they live it today, not yesterday. The amaXhosa are not a museum piece. Like all cultures, their culture is dynamic" (248). Whereas Dalton's idea of a cultural village would effectively lock the amaXhosa into a repetitive performance of the historical past, Camagu's vision allows the Xhosa to celebrate their history while continuing to live and grow in the present. As Schatteman notes, Camagu "has an independence of mind and free agency that speaks of the need to transcend the polarities that dominate contemporary discourse...between tradition and modernity" (284). Camagu's own transnational background is what enables him to see Qolorha both from an insider's and an outsider's

perspective, and his refusal to participate in the polarizing discourse between the Believers and Unbelievers, proponents of progress and civilization in its various forms, enables him to theorize a solution for Qolorha's future that both honors the past and respects the future.

The key aspect of Camagu's vision for Qolorha's future is his unwillingness to succumb to an essentialized understanding of Qolorha's history. Whereas Dalton tries his best to distance himself from his unsavory colonial background, displaying a Western belief that the past is the past, Camagu iterates the Xhosa concept of time: "'It is not the past,' says Camagu emphatically. 'It is the present'" (169). As an alternative to Dalton's cultural village, Camagu proposes a type of ecotourism: "The villagers must come together, and using the natural material that is found in the village, the very material that they use to build and thatch their houses, they must build a backpacker's hostel in Qolorha" (239). For Camagu, as Njabulo S. Ndebele observes, "The future, at this point, is perceived as being possible only with the contribution of the oppressed themselves as decision makers . . . One of the central tasks of an alternative ideology, in this situation, is to provide, among other things, new ways of thinking about the future of the country" (64). In other words, for Camagu, the future of Qolorha, and by extension of South Africa, is inextricably bound up with the agency and efficacy of grassroots movements. While Camagu's relationship with John Dalton is predicated on the politics of capitalist exchange—capitalistic individualism versus community-consciousness—it is important here to note that desire also plays a key role in establishing Camagu as an integral member of the community of Qolorha-by-Sea. Indeed, it is desire that drove Camagu to

Qolorha in the first place, and desire that eventually leads him to Qukezwa and to an understanding of his place in Qolorha and in South Africa.

As stated before, Camagu moves back to South Africa in 1994, after a thirty-year absence; Mda introduces him into the narrative four years after that, on the evening that Camagu has packed his bags for his “second exile,” discouraged by the politics of greed in postapartheid South Africa that leave him un- or underemployed (27). On his last night in Hillbrow, he finds himself at a wake for a person he does not know, listening to a “young woman of hearthly beauty” singing hymns (25). Camagu is drawn to this woman, to the “secret joys she harbors under her wifely habit” (25), but he pointedly contrasts the attraction he feels to her from his usual “unquenchable desire for flesh” (28); instead, he thinks of her as “a spirit that can comfort him and heal his pain. A mothering spirit” (28). Camagu’s desire for this woman, sexual or not, prompts him to talk to her after the ceremony, and she reveals to him that she is from Qolorha-by-Sea, the infamous homeland of the young prophetess Nongqawuse. Instead of returning to exile, Camagu decides to go to Qolorha and find this mystery woman; in this way, desire becomes the driving force behind Camagu’s journey toward an acceptance of his transnational identity. Camagu’s desire to find NomaRussia dominates the early days of his life in Qolorha, even as he meets the other two women who are crucial in his development: Xoliswa Ximiya and Qukezwa, daughters of the leaders of the Unbelievers and Believers, respectively. Xoliswa Ximiya has just become the principal of Qolorha-by-Sea Secondary School (4); she is well-educated, with a “B.A. in education from the University of Fort Hare, and a certificate in teaching English as a second language from some college in America” (5). She romanticizes her international experience and dreams

of working for the Ministry of Education in Pretoria, an idea that scandalizes her family (12). By contrast, Qukezwa works as a cleaner at Dalton's trading store; she too daydreams about moving to the city, perhaps to be a clerk, but is nonetheless more intimately connected to the land around her, speaking in whistles with her father and emotionally attached to their horse, Gxagxa (46-47). As the possibility of finding NomaRussia begins to dwindle, Camagu finds himself torn between Xoliswa Ximiya and Qukezwa; the former desires him because of his international context and his connection with the United States, while the latter treats him more ambivalently, alternately mocking him and taking the time to educate him about the indigenous natural world around them.

Camagu eventually "chooses" Qukezwa, although perhaps "choice" is not quite the right word. He is drawn to her, much the way he was drawn to NomaRussia. While he finds Xoliswa Ximiya beautiful, and initially spends so much time with her that the villagers begin to hint at the possibility of a proposal, Qukezwa continually disrupts the development of this relationship. Like Camagu and John Dalton, despite their similarities, Xoliswa Ximiya and Qukezwa represent opposing possibilities for the future of South Africa. As Paul Jay notes, "Qukezwa's is a vision of life in Qolorha calculated in every way to be diametrically opposed to Xoliswa's, and the fickle Camagu, torn between the arguments of the Believers and Unbelievers, becomes torn between his desire for Xoliswa and his desire for Qukezwa" (151). Camagu's agency is in a way subverted by his desire, as his eventual acceptance in the community is based in large part on his choice between the two women. Jay observes that the two women "embody the terms of the village's debates about modernization": Xoliswa Ximiya idolizes the West, stridently arguing for progress and development, while Qukezwa believes in eradicating non-

indigenous wildlife from Qolorha and argues for the importance of maintaining the Xhosa connection to history (149). As men, Dalton and Camagu have the power to make the official decision regarding Qolorha's future, but the politics of desire in the novel are such that the choice between Qukezwa and Xoliswa Ximiya becomes the crux upon which that future hangs. As Jay argues, "If, in the end, Camagu sides with Qukezwa, vowing to marry her, it is because she embodies—literally, for his attraction to her body is key here—a kind of synthesis of the poetic and the rational, of history and the present in an ecological vision whose integrity and balance trump anything Xoliswa or Dalton have come up with" (152). In this way *The Heart of Redness* may be read as a novel about choices: between exile and repatriation, capitalism and community-consciousness, ahistorical modernization and integrative development.

Camagu's idea is predicated on what he has learned from Qukezwa—essentially, as Adrienne Rich says, "if it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth" (214). In an early encounter with Qukezwa, Camagu is affronted at her gratuitous destruction of what he thinks are "beautiful plants that have nice purple flowers" (90). Qukezwa quickly corrects him: "Nice for you, maybe. But not nice for indigenous plants. This is the inkberry. It comes from across the Kei River. It kills other plants . . . Each berry is a prospective plant that will kill the plants of my forefathers" (90). In this way Qukezwa opens Camagu's eyes to the importance of indigenous grassroots decision-making for the future of Qolorha. Dalton's proposed solution is a call for a return to a mythic and monolithic "precolonial" identity, a solution that Camagu questions at its core: "When you excavate a precolonial identity of these people . . . a precolonial authenticity that has been lost . . . are you suggesting that they currently have no culture . . . that they live in a

cultural vacuum?” (248). Neither does Camagu advocate allowing outside influence to shape Qolorha’s future, effectively turning the community into a resort town. Instead, Camagu’s solution, influenced directly by Qukezwa’s understanding of Qolorha’s history, accepts the ever-changing nature of culture and proposes a solution that allows the Xhosa to celebrate their heritage while refusing to lock themselves into history.

In fact, through his involvement with Qukezwa, Camagu learns that the Xhosa themselves are a transcultural people, borrowing and adapting elements from other native cultures, such as the Khoikhoi. As Gohrisch points out, “Despite the warfare between the Khoikhoi and the Xhosa, long-term assimilation and transculturation occurred,” exemplified by the clicking sounds the Xhosa adopted from Khoisan languages (242). It is thus Camagu’s own transnational identity that ultimately provides the support necessary to bridge the gap between Qolorha and insidious outside influence. Camagu’s suggestion to build a backpacker’s hostel in the traditional Xhosa fashion combined with his excited suggestion to use solar energy instead of government electricity is a perfect example of the way such transnational experience could benefit the community of Qolorha-by-Sea (239). Instead of Paul Mukundi’s understanding of the forces of globalization as the new colonialism, in which “poor nations are forced to adopt foreign social, political and economic policies” (5), Camagu’s identity and his ideas suggest alternative understandings of globalization, in which cultures are encouraged to employ technological advances as they make decisions for themselves. On the other hand, Camagu has one thing that only two other characters in Qolorha explicitly have: the gift of literacy. In this light, Camagu’s contribution to Qolorha could be just as insidious a form of “salvation” as John Dalton’s, albeit with a black face instead of a white one. It is

also important to note that of the other two literate characters, Xoliswa Ximiya and John Dalton, Camagu is the only character with extensive knowledge of and experience in the Western educational system. In short, when it comes to forces of Western hybridization and globalization, Camagu has an advantage in that he already knows how to play the game. Mukundi points out, however, “the irreversibility of certain colonial effects is crucial to understanding the postcolonial identities of former colonies” (148): central to this argument is the effect of a colonial education. Mukundi goes on to say:

Since the former colonies inherited Western legal and educational systems, Western education is necessary for one to express and defend oneself in the postcolonial era, and for one to survive in the contemporary world, which is rife with such concepts as globalization. Moreover, language and formal education are inevitable because they are the tools through which formerly colonized peoples will re-assert their identity as non-Westerners, and re-write the histories that were distorted during colonization. (54)

In this light, Camagu’s educational background, so harmful to his success in the job market upon his initial return from exile, can be read as a crucial facet of his identity in this new South Africa. As Paul Jay argues, “Camagu has the kind of international experience South Africa needs as it emerges from apartheid and seeks to join the international economic community” (140). Unlike the essentialist, neocolonial John Dalton, Camagu is poised to bridge the gap between the West and Qolorha-by-Sea in such a way as to ensure Qolorha’s survival and growth by utilizing the tools he has picked up through his extensive education. It is literacy, therefore, and Camagu’s connection to Qukezwa, that is most important—not the freedom dance. Mukundi sums it

up nicely: “Mda portrays literacy as a necessary means of fighting oppression” (42). It is a fact that in the current globalized economy, “literacy” necessarily means English literacy; however, Camagu’s refusal to return to either the United States or to Johannesburg, and the community’s acceptance of his desire to settle permanently in Qolorha, leave room for hope that such literacy will only increase the dynamism of Qolorha and the Xhosa people, in all their multitudinous identities.

It is critical to note as well, however, that as a black man in postapartheid South Africa, Camagu’s transnational identity is constructed along lines of power unavailable to the protagonists of the other novels in this analysis. *The Heart of Redness* features arguably the sole male protagonist of the three texts under analysis; while Rochester plays a large part in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, he is nonetheless not the center of the narrative, and in *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* Carlos, like the other men in the story, is a secondary character. Directly linked to this important distinction is the fact that Mda’s novel offers the most hopeful finale of the three texts: as a man, Camagu has power that Xoliswa and Qukezwa simply do not, and as a black man, his power is uniquely situated to the particular historical moment in which he returns to South Africa. His experiences in Qolorha offer him a chance to be an integral member of a community, valuable precisely for the insight his transnational experiences bring to the table. Antoinette, as a white West Indian Creole *woman*, is never afforded the same chance at synthesis, and can only integrate the warring elements of her identity through dreamwork and madness; similarly, the García *girls* are continuously trapped between the conflicting gender roles demanded by their Dominican upbringing and their move to the United States, and are considered “too” Hispanic in one context and “too” white in the other. Camagu is thus the

only protagonist for whom a transnational identity really *works*, and the possible reasons behind this realization merit further consideration.

Like Rhys and Alvarez, however, Mda does not provide a clear-cut understanding of the acceptance or efficacy of the transnational individual. Instead, like Antoinette and the García girls, Camagu's experiences, while potentially benefitting the community he has been accepted into, will forever mark him as different from those among whom he now lives. Additionally, there is no guarantee that the backpacker's hostel, that fusion of loco-cultural and transnational ideas, will be the most effective or long-lasting solution. Camagu himself ponders at the close of the novel: "Those who want to preserve indigenous plants and birds have won the day here. At least for now. But for how long?" (277). In raising this question, Camagu implicitly queries his own acceptance and "belongingness" in Qolorha—as Norma McCaig observes, global nomads experience their identities on a sort of continuum, in which their place is never fixed. As Kathleen and Rebecca Gilbert explain, transnationals "live in a perpetual liminal [sic] state in which they sit, perched on a threshold of 'in-betweenness.' They are between culture, between worlds, between identities" (256). In this light, perhaps Camagu's role in Qolorha-by-Sea is not as the savior of the community, nor as the bridge between Xhosa tradition and Western economics. Perhaps in the end, the task of transnational identities is instead, to borrow Yogita Goyal's phrase, to imagine the many "possibilities of contemporary life" (147)—to negotiate a new form of politics out of the framework of capitalistic exchange and desire in which he has been scripted to operate—in other words, not to arrive at an identity, but to constantly negotiate and reimagine the many communities and identities possible.

CHAPTER FIVE

WHAT IS AND WHAT CAN BE: TEXTS AND THE WORLD(S) BEYOND

The negotiations and navigations the protagonists of these novels undertake support Benedict Anderson's argument: "The reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long prophesied, is not remotely in sight" (3). Instead, Antoinette, the García girls, and Camagu must all imagine themselves into a heretofore unimagined space—between Jamaica and England, the Dominican Republic and the United States, the South Africa of the past and the possibilities for a "new" South Africa. Their respective identities are, as Stephen Clingman phrases it, "different versions of the transnational": a Third Culture Kid, immigrant/aliens, and a global nomad (24). Contrary to the sanguine nature of the contemporary rhetoric of globalization, the potential power of these varied identities is circumscribed by race, gender, and economic status, reminding us, as Ali Behdad does, that "the uneven flow between nationalism and globalization depends fundamentally on context and that while transnational circuits are appearing throughout the world, their formations are always sociohistorically contingent and culturally specific" (74). By orienting their narratives firmly in the context of historicocultural upheaval, Rhys, Alvarez, and Mda each in their own way refuse to romanticize their respective transnationalisms, and point the reader toward the ways in which individual identity is always already shaped by its social, cultural, historic, and temporal milieu. Indeed, Boehmer reminds us:

Postmodern notions of meaning as arbitrary, or identity as provisional, are hardly relevant to the lives of those—women, indigenous peoples, marginalized ethnic,

class, and religious groups—for whom self-determination remains a political imperative. For them, the signifiers of home, self, past, far from representing instances of discursive contingency, stand for live and pressing issues. (248)

Reading these texts means accepting that transnational experiences are not inherently pleasant or preferable experiences. Neither are they singular—there are a wide variety of experiences that may classify as transnational, some by birth, and some by choice. These experiences require, as Clingman articulates, “recognizing the painful side of displacement, pre-eminently as it affects those for whom the ‘transnational’ is not a matter of choice” (25). It is crucial here to note that of the protagonists featured in this analysis, only the male, for whom transnationality has been largely a matter of choice, manages to achieve something like stability at the end of his narrative. Even Camagu, however, experiences what we may alternately consider the fallout or the advantage of transnationalism, in that it becomes literally impossible to return to the same place you left. For all of the protagonists, repatriating or returning “home” is a non-issue, for, as Caren Kaplan points out “there is no possibility of staying home in the conventional sense—that is, the world has changed to the point that those domestic, national, or marked spaces no longer exist” (7).

Despite their characters variety in terms of race, gender, and class, the texts in this analysis unfold in critically similar way: through the temporal dislocation and disorientation of a traditionally linear Western narrative construction. Boehmer argues, “It is of course in the nature of things that a transnational aesthetic will itself be a hodgepodge, a *bricolage*” (234), and Clingman agrees: “there is something quite profound in the notion of a disruption of time” (77). In some ways these temporal

structures point to the ways in which transnational individuals experience time—it is possible, for example, to instant message a friend in another time zone and receive an immediate response, or to fly halfway around the world and arrive at your destination before you left. What the texts in this analysis reveal, however, is that the boundaries of time are just as impermeable as the boundaries of nations; as Antonio Benítez-Rojo points out, “Time, then, becomes an extremely important category, since its passage produces irreversible changes” (263). Regardless of how easily it is for the physical body to move between and among contemporary time zones, it is impossible to “return” in any sense to the past, to go home again in any way other than nostalgically. The narrative itself may then be a homecoming of sorts. Wendy Walters notes that “literature still carries the weight of cultural capital, and as such it represents an important location for the staging of resistant identities” (x); in this way, the texts in this analysis are directly connected to the real-world individuals, families, and cultural groups they signify. The importance of paying attention to transnational literature in an increasingly transnational world cannot be overstated; as Clingman articulates, “In foregrounding fiction in this way, there is an implicit claim: that literature—in its mysteries, in its indirections—can be a guide, can provide counsel for story that is still in the process of unfolding” (247). Finally, Elaine Neil Orr, herself a TCK, argues, “Literary texts may be one of our most fecund sources for scholarship on TCK experience because in them writers can imagine not only what was but what can be” (409).

The question is thus not why to produce scholarship on transnational experiences, but how, acknowledging that such work runs the risks of anachronism, essentialism, and neocolonialism. I would like to propose *a* method, a metaphor, oriented in time and

space, borrowed from Benítez-Rojo's repeating island and the Chaos that implies.

Benítez-Rojo argues, "for the reader who is attuned to Chaos, there will be an opening upon unexpected corridors allowing passage from one point to another in the labyrinth" (3); perhaps we may borrow this image of a labyrinth, perhaps an ever-widening narrative spiral, in order to begin to understand the ways transnational texts (and by extension people) are oriented in time and space. If the Western canon has proposed a timeline that is necessarily linear, that follows from point A to point B, perhaps the transnational canon follows a different trajectory, one that loops and twists upon itself, where point A might lead to point B but might just as easily lead to point 8 or Q. At the heart of this metaphor is a crucial self-reflexivity related to the political imperativeness of transnational agency; in other words, transnational texts propose in their very structures viable ways of reading, interpreting, and being that do not follow a Western hegemonic script. Benítez-Rojo argues, "we're dealing with a text here that is conscious of itself and communicates to us that those things that we might take to be truths are, rather, arbitrary decisions made to shape the strategy of the discourse" (154). If the discourse is the nation, it is possible that transnational texts fundamentally renegotiate the boundaries of this discourse, revealing in their spiraling, labyrinthine constructions revolutionary ways to imagine and construct identities in the world outside the text.

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